Internationalize or localize ?

CHAPTER 3

Doing Business and Crossing Borders in Translation

People won't buy what they can't understand.

—Donald A. DePalma,
American author and global business adviser

The Minimalists: Starbucks and Apple

Companies work hard to create brands that are recognizable throughout the world. For many, the quest for international recognition can even extend beyond just their products and into their corporate logo. Take Starbucks, for instance. For the company's fortieth anniversary in 2011, it removed all traces of text from its logo. Namely, it got rid of the words *Starbucks Coffee*. (The current logo is actually the fourth version. The first logo was created in the 1970s and included the words *Starbucks Coffee, Tea, and Spice*.) Creating a wordless logo for a brand that was already well-known made it easier for Starbucks to move into other countries—especially the ones whose languages do not rely on Latin characters.

How do global brands in other sectors handle this issue? One of the best examples comes from outside the food and beverage industry, in spite of its name. Apple, known all over the world for its

simplicity of design and advertising, has managed to come up with creative advertising campaigns that require only the bare minimum of translation work. When the iPod Shuffle came out, the company launched a campaign based around just two words. The marketing initiative featured the tiny mp3 player held between two fingers and flanked by the words *small talk*. Just two basic words. Easy to translate, right?

Actually, those two seemingly innocent words present plenty of translation challenges. Think about it. If you had to describe the phrase *small talk* to someone who did not understand it, what words would you use? Chances are, you would discuss the importance of exchanging pleasantries. You might describe asking someone about the weather. Basically, you'd be describing something superficial, and perhaps unimportant. How would that translate exactly, and would your explanation of the concept reflect well on Apple?

Obviously, many languages don't use the words *small* and *talk* in the same way that English does. The phrase, while catchy in English, needed to be adapted significantly for most other markets. In fact, to have the most impact, it had to be adapted differently even for countries that speak the same language. So in Latin American Spanish, the message Apple used was not *small talk*, but rather *mira quién habla*, which means "look who's talking." In Spanish for Spain, the phrase was *ya sabe hablar*, which has a double meaning—it's the phrase a proud parent would use to say that their child "is already talking" or more literally, "already knows how to talk." In France, the phrase used was *donnez-lui de la voix*, which means something like "let him speak." However, head to French Canada, and the message was *petit parleur, grand faiseur*, which means "says little, does much."

Minimizing the text in your branding and marketing can be an effective technique, but it does not necessarily make translation easy or simple. In cases like Apple's, an entire atmosphere of content must be translated to support those customers who speak other languages and want to know how to use their products. Just think of all the online help information that must be translated—not to mention the product literature that ships with any Apple product. Starbucks isn't exempt from translation either, in spite of having a product that requires little explanation and a brand with no words. The words *Starbucks Coffee* might no longer appear on the coffee cup itself, but visit the company's website, and you'll see that this phrase appears on each of its international web properties, most of which have an array of translated content.

When Mistranslations Cost Millions

Banking and financial services giant HSBC had a popular *Assume Nothing* campaign, but the phrase was mistranslated as "Do Nothing" in several countries. How to repair the damage done to the brand? A $10 million rebranding initiative soon followed.[1]

IKEA's Danish Doormats

It's easy to see why IKEA is so popular all over the world. The Scandinavian retailer is known for its streamlined self-assembly furniture with modern designs at affordable prices. The company's simple style even extends into its branding and marketing, for which it

relies very little on text. Compared to many retailers, the company employs just the bare minimum of text to tout its wares, relying more on images.

IKEA depends heavily on catalog sales and invests significantly in this printed medium, which consumes a reported 70 percent of its annual marketing budget. In 2011, the company published nearly two hundred million catalogs in sixty-one editions and twenty-nine different languages.[2] Mirroring its catalog, the company also favors image-based description on its forty country-specific websites. IKEA offers more than twelve thousand products, and translates its packaging and labeling into as many as thirty languages, depending on the product in question. For a market like North America, labels are typically translated into English, French, and Spanish. (Of course, even IKEA has a blooper of a product name from time to time, such as the Fartfull and Jerker computer desks, which the company sold in 2005, much to the amusement of English speakers.)

In light of the importance of its catalog sales, the company's light-handed approach to words can be a tremendous advantage when it comes to translation. Most of IKEA's instructions are pictorial in nature—you'll rarely see any words on them, providing a rather universal appeal.

The few words that IKEA does use in its marketing—its product names—hold a unique appeal for its customers. Most of its items are named after places in the Nordic region, so for many of its customers, the product names have an exotic, cool, and quirky feel. People from many countries might even venture to say that some of the terms sound downright charming. Unless you're from Denmark, that is.

No one likes to see their country called a doormat. But that's

what the Danes often deal with whenever they walk into an IKEA store. Many of its cheaper products, including rugs, mats, and other floor coverings, such as Bellinge, Helsingör, Köge, Nivå, Roskilde, Sindal, and Strib, are named after places in Denmark. So, it's understandable that even the Danes, who are ranked by some sources as the happiest people on earth, would not be thrilled to have their country associated with places where people wipe their feet.

Two Danish academics, Klaus Kjöller of the University of Copenhagen and Tröls Mylenberg of the University of Southern Denmark, conducted a detailed analysis of product names used in the IKEA catalog. The findings of their research showed that Swedish names were used for the higher-end products, such as upholstered furniture, bookcases, and storage for flat screen televisions and multimedia devices. Norwegian towns were used for bedroom furniture, while Finnish place names made it into the dining room.[3]

The researchers found that IKEA's naming convention portrayed Denmark as inferior to Sweden. The historic rivalry between the two countries would seem to lend some credence to this argument. Sweden has often emerged victorious over Denmark. In fact, Norway once belonged to the Danes until the Swedes took it away from them. But is IKEA really gloating to Denmark through its product names? Let's put it this way, IKEA didn't drop the Danish-named products. In fact, it continues to sell a toilet seat, Öresund, which is named after a strait of water that separates Sweden from Denmark. Coincidence?

While IKEA has been forthcoming about the fact that it names these items after Denmark, the accusation that it is purposely dissing the Danes has been met with, well, disdain. Officials from IKEA claim that the product names have been around for decades, and

over to Cuba, Puerto Rico, Colombia, and Peru, and *la comida* means supper, not lunch. To confuse matters even further, *la comida* is also the word for food in general. We're not kidding!

Even though Ecuador borders both Peru and Colombia, supper isn't called *la comida* there, but rather *la merienda*. In nearly every other country, a *merienda* is a snack. If you want to talk about dinner in most Spanish-speaking places, you could always use *la cena* instead. Several countries, like Mexico, Panama, Argentina, Spain, Costa Rica, and Venezuela, use *la cena* for the third main meal of the day. *Cena* is understood in other places, too, but often implies a more formal meal (think dinner instead of supper).

Terminological differences can be fun and interesting for sure, but professional translators have to know a lot more than just "how to speak Spanish" to do their job well. Often, knowing just one Spanish is not enough.

Authentic American Cuisine

You might think of beef jerky as something typically American, but the word actually comes from *charki*, a word from Quechua, the language of the Incas, which is still spoken in Peru and Ecuador today. What could be more American than grilling in the summertime? Well, the word *barbecue* also comes from an indigenous language—an Arawakan language of Haiti, from which *barbakoa*, meaning "framework of sticks," was taken. And what about pecan pie? The word *pecan* comes from the Illinois word *pakani*. Squash comes from the Narragansett word *askútasquash*. Several words also made their way into English from Nahuatl, such as avocado *(āhuacatl)*, cocoa *(cacahuatl)*, and chili *(chīlli)*.

Mi Café Es Su Café

Translators aren't the only ones who have to wrestle with the reality of "universal Spanish," the name often given to Spanish spoken by the diverse immigrant groups that make up the Spanish-speaking population in the United States (though the term implies even broader use). Companies spend a lot of time and money fine-tuning their marketing messages to get them just right for this demographic. For example, the Nestlé company, which sells its products in eighty-six countries around the world, is what you might call an old pro at marketing across cultures. Its worldwide brand recognition is due in part to the significant attention it pays to language issues, something that dates back to its very roots.

Back in the 1830s, the company's founder, Heinrich Nestle, changed his own name to Henri Nestlé in order to make it more French-sounding. Heinrich was originally from Frankfurt but felt that an adapted version of his name would make it more suitable for Vevey, the French-speaking region of Switzerland where he started the company, and where it remains headquartered today. So, in many senses, the Nestlé name itself is a translation.

Fast-forward to the present. Nestlé is a popular brand in many countries, but especially in Latin America, where it has operated for nearly a hundred years. "One of the surprising things we've encountered in focus groups with consumers from Latin America is how strongly they believe that Nestlé is a company from their country of origin," explains Juan Motta, head of emerging markets domestic. "When we state that Nestlé is a global company based in Switzerland, they don't believe it, since it's a brand they grew up with."[18] It makes sense. When you think of Nestlé-owned brands like Juicy

Juice, Hot Pockets, and Lean Cuisine, do you envision a chalet at the foot of the Swiss Alps? Chances are that an American household jumps to mind instead.

The company also applies its multicultural expertise within the U.S. market. Motta's division focuses on two main groups: Hispanic and Asian consumers living within the United States. The company takes Nestlé brands that are already popular in the home markets of foreign-born U.S. consumers and brings them into the American market, sometimes with adaptations to reflect a new life abroad.

One example of how this process works is Nestlé's development of a new product for the U.S. Hispanic market based on Nescafé Clásico, a coffee product that was successful in Latin America. Because Latin American coffee drinkers often earn more money when they settle in the United States, the types of products they want to buy also evolve. Their palates may change along with how they view a food item. That's why words cannot merely be taken out of one language and dropped into another. "Coffee in the USA is not the same thing as *café* in Latin America," Motta explains. "The connotations of U.S. mainstream coffee are more functional and focused on caffeine to start your day, whereas in Latin America they are more emotional and related to social interaction." To reflect the position of U.S. Hispanics straddling both worlds, Nestlé introduced a product called Nescafé Clásico Suave, which uses a smoother roast and caters to a milder palate than the original Nescafé Clásico.

In fact, the company recently launched a bilingual and bicultural website, www.elmejornido.com (*el mejor nido* means "the best nest.") The site displays products like Abuelita Almond and La Lechera Condensed Milk. At Thanksgiving, you'll see a recipe not for the traditional American pumpkin pie, but for pumpkin flan

instead. Visitors can easily toggle between English and Spanish, making the approach more targeted to the linguistic reality of the U.S. Hispanic market.

Is there anything about Nestlé that does not get adapted? In its original German, the *Nestle* surname (without the accent) meant "little nest." Throughout the globe, the corporate logo displays a little nest with three birds, which represent Heinrich (later known as Henri) and his two brothers. That stays consistent, no matter what. While products and their names can often be translated and adapted for new markets, brands often remain stable, even when crossing borders.

Bordeaux Without Borders

Translation affects all kinds of tastes. Consider the following:

> *Pale gold in color, this wine smells of white flowers and lemon curd, with a hint of sweet oak. It offers an explosion of crushed wet rocks in the mouth. The tender and beautifully filigreed flavors of tart unripe apples and lemon curd vie for attention. Beautifully bright acidity zips the wine along the palate, leaving a waxy parchment quality in the lingering finish.*

So reads a typical description of a newly launched wine. For those who are not connoisseurs of wine, it might as well be written in a foreign language.

Few and far between are the people whose taste buds are so

mize the risk of mistranslation and make sure you're understood across most languages and cultures, we suggest saying something like the following, "I wish you a long and victorious life, full of health and good luck. Now, bottoms up, and have a great time!"

Internationalize Those Fries

A cup of sodden rice with chicken, ginger, onion, shallots, and chili peppers. A fried patty made of potatoes, peas, and spices, topped with tomatoes and vegetarian mayonnaise. Grilled chicken in pita bread with lettuce, tomato, onion, and tahini sauce. English muffins topped with refried beans, white cheese, and salsa. Breaded chicken covered in guacamole. A deep-fried roll of beef ragout. Lamb wrapped in Arabic flat-bread with shredded lettuce and tomatoes. A sandwich made of grilled salmon and dill sauce.

Do any of these dishes sound like they could possibly come from the same restaurant? While it might seem unlikely, they actually do. It's the same restaurant chain with locations in different countries. Let's try referring to these menu items as you would order them locally: Bubur Ayam McD (Malaysia), McAloo Tikki (India), McArabia (Egypt), McMollete (Mexico), McPollo (Chile), McKroket (Netherlands), McTurco (Turkey), and McLaks (Norway).

Yes, to the delight of many Americans and to the dismay of many others, the golden arches of McDonald's appear throughout the world. But the menu items vary greatly. Go to a McDonald's in Singapore, and you can order jasmine tea and a Shaka Shaka Chicken, which you create by dumping spice powder into a bag and, with a quick "shaka" of the bag, coating your chicken patty in local

spices. In Spain, you can actually buy the country's chilled soup, gazpacho, at McDonald's, where it is served in a carton. In Brazil, you'll find McDonald's filling that rectangular apple pie crust with bananas instead.

The burgers that made McDonald's famous also vary tremendously by country. Head to Japan and you can order a Koroke Burger, which consists of mashed potato, cabbage, and katsu sauce. In Hong Kong, you'll find a burger that is served not between sesame seed buns, but between rice cakes. In Malaysia, you can order a Double Beef Prosperity Burger, which features spicy black pepper sauce. In Italy, the burgers come with pancetta and usually are on ciabatta rolls. Visit India, where eating beef is against religious rules for about 80 percent of the population, and you won't find any beef burgers on the menu whatsoever.

In Germany, you can pick up a McSausage Burger. In Greece, a Greek Mac. In New Zealand, a KiwiBurger. In Costa Rica, a McPinto Deluxe, with rice, beans, and plantains. In Thailand, a McSamurai Pork Burger. Head to the United Kingdom around Christmastime, and you can order a mincemeat and custard pie for dessert. When in France, you can order Le McWrap Chèvre, a goat cheese wrap. In Argentina, you can have wine with your McDonald's meal; German outlets of McDonald's sell beer; in Israel, kosher food is served; and in Hawaii, you'll be handed Spam with your breakfast. How's that for contrast?

McDonald's is a global company, but it makes most of its money in just a few countries. About 70 percent of its revenue, which normally tops $20 billion annually, comes from restaurants in Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and of course, the United States. While some of its products, such

as its fries (in France, they're called *pommes frites* (fried potatoes) instead of French fries), stay consistent at most of its global locations, the brand is well known for adapting its menu for other countries. Here's the question: If the company introduces new products in different countries to cater to local tastes and sticks with old favorites like fries and soft-serve ice cream whenever possible, what does translation have to do with its success?

Two words: human resources. In 2011, there were 1.7 million people employed by McDonald's restaurants. With thirty-three thousand restaurants in 119 countries, those employees obviously speak a lot of different languages. Aside from management, fast-food employees are typically not looking for lifetime employment or even full-time work. They might only work at the restaurant for a summer, or a year, or on weekends. Yet they have to follow the same processes each time to prepare the food the same way. They need to operate the equipment safely, being mindful of on-the-job safety hazards. All this information has to be communicated to them somehow.

All over the world, there are translators who localize and translate the training software that McDonald's uses to train its employees. From making a green tea McFlurry in Japan to serving customers at a "ski-through" location in Sweden, all of these employees need to be trained in their native language to ensure that they understand how to prepare the food safely and according to company specifications. And before that can happen, their training materials have to be translated. So yes, translators contribute to McDonald's success, far more than you might have suspected. Just don't blame us for the world's expanding waistline.

Green Dots for Meat Shunners

Comedian Andy Rooney once joked that the original meaning of the word *vegetarian* was "lousy hunter," but in Ireland, a little more choice is implied. The Irish Gaelic word for *vegetarian* is *feoilséantóir*, which translates literally as "meat shunner." In India, where more than 30 percent of the population observe a vegetarian diet, all packaged foods are labeled with either a green dot (signifying vegetarian-friendly) or a red dot (not vegetarian-friendly), making words even less necessary.