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Christine Uber Grosse
Seaharp Learning Solutions

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Christine Uber Grosse
Seaharp Learning Solutions

WEB-BASED COMMUNICATION OF GLOBAL COMPANIES: DO LANGUAGES AND CULTURE MATTER?

ABSTRACT

This project studies the use of language and cultural adaptation of Web sites of forty-one Global Fortune 500 companies from the developed world and emerging markets. Companies were selected from the Big Five (France, Germany, Japan, UK, US) and BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India, and China). The study investigates the extent to which English is the language of the Web for global companies, and the role that other languages play on the corporate Internet. Although English is recognized as a key language of business, clearly it is not spoken everywhere.

The study also examines the cultural adaptation of Web sites, which relates to the standardization versus localization debate in Web design. For the purposes of this article, localization deals with how companies adapt country-specific Web sites to the local culture.

Major findings of the research show that language plays a major role in Web site communication and that the native language of the country dominates. English is often a second language on the Web. Most companies in the study preferred standardization of global Web sites. However many did have some degree of cultural adaptation of their international sites. This adaptation occurred through customized content, text, photos and video, and design.

INTRODUCTION

Is English enough to do business internationally on the Web, or do other languages play key roles as well? What roles do culture and localization play in the adaptation of corporate Web sites for business in different nations? These questions address the relevance of adapting global Web sites through language and cultural artifacts. Christine Uber Grosse (“Competitive Advantage”) studied the importance of language and culture in the careers of Thunderbird alumni. Would it be as important in corporate Web-based communication? Her other work looked at e-communication strategies of companies (“E-communication”) and global strategy for developing cross-cultural competence through corporate training (“Global Strategy”).

The issue also relates to the long-standing debate in Web-based communication of customization versus standardization (Szymanski, Bharadwaj,

and Varadarajan). Customization of Web sites refers to the adaptation of the site to a specific audience, to appeal to individual tastes, needs, and interests. Standardization refers to the trend of branding, making global Web sites reflect the overall brand of the firm. Companies such as UPS prefer standardization in order to ensure that all their Web sites internationally reflect the company image and that a customer in Vietnam knows where to find the functions she has used in France or the USA (Grosse, *Global E-Commerce*). Like many companies, UPS uses a blend of standardization and localization on its global Web sites. Its standardized sites may make some local concessions by adding an occasional graphic such as a flag, photo of local people, tourist site, or factory.

The Amway company insists that the content of its over seventy global Web sites be multicultural as well as multilingual. The sites also must reflect local laws, customs, and dialects. According to Edward Cove, “localization will be an issue for thousands of companies worldwide, and should become a \$1 billion market.” Aberdeen Group analyst Tom Dwyer reported that companies spend from \$15,000 to \$2 million to customize their Web sites. The price varies according to the number of languages, sites, and depth of adaptation to the local culture. It would seem obvious that Web sites that make the customer feel comfortable and at home would increase profits (Upton). Customization involves offering special content for specific countries, putting price lists in local currencies, and providing local customer service.

Michael Anobile, director of the Localization Industry Standards Association, reports that the localization and translation services industry generates around \$26 billion in revenue globally (Downey). The localization depends on translation, subject matter, colors, and design. Three companies have succeeded in partially automating the translation process through software. These are Trados, based in Sunnyvale, CA, SDL International in London, and ATRIL in Barcelona.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions are addressed in this project.

- (1) What languages are used on the Web sites of major companies in the Big Five (France, Germany, Japan, UK, US) and BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China)? Why?
- (2) To what extent is English the language of business on the Web? What other languages do major companies use to communicate on the Internet?

- (3) How do companies adapt their country-specific Web sites to the local culture?
- (4) What do companies miss out on by not having their Web site materials in other languages?

METHODOLOGY

Initially, nine companies' Web sites were studied for ways that they used language and culture on their home page and international sites. The large companies chosen for the study were based in the Big Five and BRIC nations, and included British Petroleum (UK), Toyota (Japan), AXA (France), Citigroup (USA), Siemens (Germany), Braskem (Brazil), Gazprom (Russia), Reliance Industries LTD (India) and China Petroleum & Chemical Corporation (China). The preliminary review of these companies' Web sites was used to develop a template for the study, to keep track of the languages and cultural influences of the forty-one companies subsequently chosen for the research project.

The forty-one companies were selected from the Global Fortune 500 2005 list (March 2006). *Fortune* magazine compiled the list of international companies using data filed for the fiscal year that ended on or before March 31, 2005. Many companies have holdings in a number of industries. However, Global Fortune 500 includes them in the industry that represents the largest amount of their revenues. To appear on this list, companies must publish financial data and report it as well to a government agency. Private US companies that fill out a 10-K are included on the list as well. The profits that are shown in the list are after taxes.

To get an overview of language and cultural adaptation of global corporate Web sites, the top five companies of the Big Five and BRIC nations were selected. The Big Five countries represented the developed world, while the BRIC nations represented important emerging markets. Presumably, these two groups of companies would give a representative sample of corporate Web practice at the largest companies in the developed world and emerging markets. These companies would have the means, and perhaps the motivation, to launch cutting edge Web sites.

Of the BRIC countries, China and India had five or more companies on the Global Fortune 500 list. Brazil and Russia had three each. Thus the final list of companies in the study consisted of forty-one firms in nine countries (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
FIVE HIGHEST RANKING COMPANIES
IN THE GLOBAL FORTUNE 500
FROM THE BIG FIVE AND BRIC NATIONS

France:	Total, AXA, Carrefour, Peugeot, BNP Paribas
Germany:	Daimler-Chrysler, Allianz, Volkswagen, Siemens, Deutsche Telekom
Japan:	Toyota Motor, Nippon Telegraph and Telephone, Hitachi, Matsushita, Honda Motor
UK:	British Petroleum, Aviva, HSBC, Vodafone, Tesco
USA:	Wal-Mart, ExxonMobil, General Motors, Ford Motor, General Electric
Brazil:	Petrobras, Banco Bradesco, Banco do Brasil,
Russia:	AO Gazprom, Lukoil, Unified Energy System of Russia
India:	Indian Oil Corporation, Reliance Industries, Bharat Petroleum Corporation, Hindustan Petroleum, Oil and Natural Gas.
China:	Sinopec Corporation, State Grid Corporation of China, China National Petroleum Corporation, China Life Insurance, China Mobile Communications.

Many of the forty-one companies had a global Web site, in addition to country-specific ones. The global Web site was typically the first site examined in the study. From there, the home country Web site was checked. Either the global Web site or home country site had dropdown menus or links to country sites. Only sites for the Big Five and BRIC countries in the project were examined. Only a few companies had Web sites for all nine countries. Some companies, particularly those from the BRIC, had a Web site for just the home country.

To compare language use and cultural adaptation, a standardized template was developed for the evaluation of Web sites (see fig. 1). The template kept track of languages used, as well as design, symbols, photos and other graphics. The Web sites were examined in Winter 2005-2006. Since designs change over time, this study reflects the Web sites of that time.

Country	Language		Cultural Adaptation		
	English	Native Other	Graphics	Colors	Design Symbols
Company					

Fig. 1. Template for Language Use and Cultural Adaptation

FINDINGS

Research Question 1: What languages are used on the Web sites of major companies in the Big Five (France, Germany, Japan, UK, US) and BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China)? Why?

The findings of the study show that language plays a major role in Web site communication. The native language dominates, while English often is used as a second language on the international sites. I found that gaining access to international sites is not always easy from the home page in the home country. Some companies especially in the BRIC simply did not have international sites. Many companies had a global site. English was almost always the language of the global site, with a version available in the native language too.

The country-specific Web sites of most companies almost always appeared in the native language of the country. Regional differences were noted. For example, in Asia, companies frequently used both the native language and English in their Web sites. In Europe, the trend is to use the native language only. Companies from the sole Latin American country represented, Brazil, used a mix of native language only, and native language plus English. The US Web sites rarely used Spanish, and even less often, Chinese. The Indian sites always used English, and occasionally had a version available in Hindi. Sometimes the Russian sites appeared only in English. Maybe the Russian versions were simply not accessible through the English-only site.

Research Question 2: To what extent is English the language of business on the Web? What other languages do major companies use to communicate on the Internet?

English is clearly the second language of business on the Web. Its presence on the global Web sites, its use as a second language on Chinese, Japanese, Brazilian, and Russian Web sites, reflects its widespread use. However, the first language of the Web is predominantly the native language of the country. Asian companies' widespread use of English reflects their willingness

to speak the language of their customer. Japanese students studying with the author at a Michigan university in the 1980s told her that they learn the language of their client, no matter what it is. The Web sites reflect that same philosophy today.

The Web sites of the French and German companies generally avoid the use of English on their home country sites. France and Germany routinely used their native language only on their Web sites. This possibly reflects a negative attitude toward the English language, or pride in their own language.

CULTURAL ADAPTATION OF WEB SITES

Research Question 3: How do companies adapt their country-specific Web sites to the local culture?

While most companies preferred standardization of their global sites in order to maintain a brand image and familiar look to each site, many did choose some form of cultural adaptation (Hammerich and Harrison). The main ways that companies customize their sites to the local culture are through (1) customized content; (2) text, photos, and video; and (3) design. Customized content includes products that are available locally, and press releases or articles of local interest. Text, photos, and video appeal to the specific area through depiction of local places, people, and products. The design can also show cultural adaptation through its layout, use of color, and animation. Yunker (*Beyond Borders*) and Singh and Pereira (*Culturally Customized*) offer insight into Web customization strategies used by companies. Robbins and Stylianou (“Study”) have also studied cultural difference in global corporate Web sites.

While companies clearly preferred the unity of standardization of their country-specific Web sites, many still achieved localization through the inclusion of photos of local places, people, events, facilities, buildings, and operations. The Web sites also showed cultural adaptation by the using photos of local people. Naturally, Web site content was adapted to the country with locally available products and services and news releases of interest to the area. Colors of the corporate site also differed occasionally from country to country, reflecting local tastes. Some sites included national symbols such as flags, natural wonders or famous tourist attractions. At other times, the design of the sites showed adaptation to local preferences through placement of links and use of animation.

IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURES ON CORPORATE WEB SITES

What do companies miss by not having their Web site materials in other languages? They reach a smaller market. Members of the linguistic community may feel excluded and alienated when they visit the corporate Web site that is unavailable in their language. This might crimp internal and external sales. The following section addresses the findings from a review of firms from each of the Big Five and BRIC countries.

US CORPORATE WEB SITES

Wal-Mart (www.walmartstores.com) does not make it easy to access its international sites. One has to go to “International Visitors” and then “International Sites.” Each international site is adapted to the culture of the country by use of human models, design layout, and color schemes. For example, the Japanese Wal-Mart site has a red theme, while the Chinese site uses blue. The UK Wal-Mart favors green and blue. Only China uses animation on its site, reflecting the national trend seen on other Chinese sites in this study. China has a definite preference for using animation on its corporate Web sites. And only the Chinese Wal-Mart has a bilingual site, available in English and Chinese.

ExxonMobil (www.Exxon.mobil.com), in contrast, takes a strong standardized, branding approach, which gives a unified feel to its sites. Its global site provides a regional and country orientation in English. It lists country-specific sites that are typically just in the language of the country, such as France and Germany. No human models or photos adapt the sites to a single culture. Only the design differs somewhat from site to site. Interestingly, the global Web site uses place photos on the country pages that are in English, but not on the country-specific Web sites, which are in the native language. The global Web site also shows a globe with the featured country located on it. Country Web sites all have the national flag at the top.

General Motors Worldwide Sites (www.gm.com) are easy to access, just one click off the homepage. The opening page shows a map of the world with different continents highlighted. Alongside the world map is the comment “Please note: not all international sites are available in English. Some sites may ask you to select a language when you enter.” For example, GM China is bilingual, and opens with an elegant slideshow of its cars. The homepage design is the same for Japan and China, with one large slideshow of its automotive models. The European sites are similar, with two models on the home

page with a button below each one and an invitation to click. Sites differ in design by region. The sites of Europe and Brazil are in their native language only, while the Asian sites of Japan and China are in English as well. No cultural adaptation takes place on these web sites.

Ford Motor (www.ford.com) has a button for global sites at the bottom of its US homepage. There the countries are clearly laid out by region. Six brand sites are linked to the UK and Germany sites. The European sites have the same design, with no cultural adaptation whatsoever. They are monolingual sites—in their native languages. The global site is standardized and in English, and like ExxonMobil, it leads to country-specific brand sites in the language of the country. Only Japan has a bilingual site.

The sites for the Asian countries (China and Japan) have different designs from the European sites, and they incorporate animation. Cars flash and move. China has noticeably different colors. Other than that, there was little cultural adaptation.

General Electric (www.ge.com) has a very attractive site. From its homepage one can easily access GE around the world through a button on the lower left side. This leads to a global site that gives an overview of each country, GE's history, and its businesses there, before one is directed to country sites. The overview page always has a photo of a beautiful local place. Occasionally it has a photo of the local senior manager and a photo related to local business, such as a manufacturing or wind plant.

Attractive local photos adapt each Web site to the area culture. Surprisingly there were no Chinese language links to the Chinese page, and the Indian site had little if any cultural adaptation. The Japanese site was only in Japanese, and was devoid of cultural adaptation. The Japanese and French sites had the same graphic of a paper airplane with an engine logo on it. All country Web sites had a standardized look and feel. The most different one was the Russian, which was also the only bilingual site. Brazil had a similar look with its identifiable statue of Corcovado at top center, but the site was only in Portuguese. In sum, GE had a wide variation of language use in its Web sites, as well as some adaptation to local culture.

JAPANESE COMPANIES' WEB SITES

Toyota's Web sites (www.Toyota.co.jp) are highly sophisticated. To get to Toyota Worldwide one has to click on a dropdown menu. The European sites are all in the native language. Only the German and UK sites have some cultural adaptation. The German site plays a high-tech video, while the UK one has a photo of a car and some British models. The India site opens with

a slick popup slide show of the Corolla model. Then the homepage opens with the tag line “Welcome to the World of Toyota in India.” A slide show of autos fills most of the page. No cultural adaptation is noticeable here.

The Chinese site has considerable cultural adaptation with two popup ads that feature video. It shows photos of Chinese people in Chinese places. In addition, the opening homepage is a video of a car rolling down a road past modern cities. With a lot of animation in the graphics, the site has a lot of movement. The Japanese site also features motion, with a small car rolling from left to right, moving graphics, and a slide show across the top. The cultural adaptation here is in the design. Clearly the Asian sites use movement to appeal to local clients.

NTT Nippon Telegraph and Telephone’s home Web site (www.ntt.co.jp) is not organized by country. Instead it lists all of its corporate components and sub-companies. The site has an incredibly beautiful photo on its home page—of a mountain with fall colors. The Japanese site opens with a scene of falling leaves that fade into autumn colors on the mountainside. The Web site is in English and Japanese.

Hitachi’s Web site (www.Hitachi.co.jp) has a global portal and regional portals, as well as country portals. In addition, it lists all its subsidiaries and affiliates. The French, German, and British sites all have the same photo of a blond model who could be from any of the countries. They also feature a quote from the American educator John Dewey: “Every great advance in science has issued from a new audacity of imagination”; this is odd, because it sounds like a translation of a translation! No cultural adaptation can be found, just brand standardization. The Japanese headquarters site does have two young Japanese women laughing and looking at a camera phone, and English headings that do not lead to any English site. These include: “For your home, for your business, about Hitachi.” Other Asian sites sometimes have English headings.

Matsushita (www.Panasonic.co.jp) has little cultural adaptation on its Web sites. The design is different for Japan, China, and the US, but essentially the same for France, Germany, Brazil, and the UK. The sites are technical and feature mainly their products. Brazil has a small flag, and Japan has culturally relevant models and photos of places as well as animation, while China has flashing graphics. Other than that, there are few cultural differences. Once again the sites have English slogans such as “Panasonic Ideas for Life.” Matsushita does not have particularly interesting or creative Web sites.

In contrast, Honda’s Web site (www.world.honda.com) is very different. It was hard to find the World Links connection, since one has to go to the

site map and find “International and World Links” as well as the long list of countries in which Honda operates. Of special note, Honda’s site has the most beautiful and largest photos of country-specific locations—usually famous tourist sights. There, the author clicked on “Brazil” and a fabulous photo of Rio taken from the tram to Corcovado opened up on the homepage of Honda Brazil. The page also gives the current time in São Paulo, with local weather temperatures and forecasts. It features a weather map of South America as well, with temperatures for various cities. The site was exclusively in English, with no Portuguese. A list of subsidiary companies appears below, and these have Web sites in Portuguese.

Honda China opens to a gorgeous color picture of Beijing at night, with time and weather information for that city. It has links to the official Chinese homepage, and warns that the site is in the Chinese language. The global Honda sites follow the model of other companies with general company information in English with links to country-specific sites in the native language.

Honda’s French site opens with an exciting and flashy video, with gorgeous colors and modern music. The screen divides into four products that light up as the cursor passes over them, with a swoosh car sound.

The Indian site for a local dealer named HeroHonda appears with a popup in the local language and English. Its cool design shows little gray motorcycles passing across the middle of the screen. The Russian global site opens with a stunning photo of St Petersburg with its buildings, canal, and sky.

The design of each country’s site is different. For example, the Japanese Honda home page has many small components, giving it a busy appearance to the American eye. The US Honda homepage was the only bilingual one, available in English and Spanish.

BRAZILIAN COMPANIES’ WEB SITES

One Brazilian petroleum refining company and two banks made the Fortune Global 500 list in 2005. Petrobras (www.petrobras.com.br), Banco Bradesco (www.bradesco.com.br), and Banco do Brasil (www.bancobrasil.com.br) have national sites only. However, Petrobras and Banco Bradesco offer their sites in English and Spanish translations, in addition to the native Portuguese. The British flag, rather than the US flag, is used as a button to access the English version of the site. Of these companies, only Petrobras is represented on the New York stock exchange.

CHINA'S CORPORATE WEB SITES

China has sixteen Fortune Global 500 companies, the largest representation of any BRIC nation (see Table 2). The top five Chinese companies on the list are related to the Chinese government and therefore have limited presence

TABLE 2
FORTUNE GLOBAL 500 COMPANIES IN CHINA

Company Name	Rank	Revenues (\$ millions)	City	Industry
1. Sinopec	31	75,076.7	Beijing	petro ref
2. State Grid	40	71,290.2	Beijing	utilities
3. China National Petroleum				
	46	67,723.8	Beijing	petro ref
4. China Life Insurance				
	212	24,980.6	Beijing	insurance
5. China Mobile Telecommunications				
	224	23,957.6	Beijing	telecom
6. Industrial and Commercial Bank of China				
	229	23,444.6	Beijing	bank
7. China Telecommunications				
	262	21,561.8	Beijing	telecom
8. Sinochem	287	20,380.7	Beijing	petroleum
9. Shanghai Baosteel Group				
	309	19,543.3	Beijing	iron and steel
10. China Construction Bank				
	315	19,047.9	Beijing	bank
11. China Southern Power Grid				
	316	18,928.8	Guangzhou	utilities
12. Bank of China				
	339	17,960.4	Beijing	bank
13. Hutchison Whampoa				
	347	17,280.8	Hong Kong	telecom
14. Agricultural Bank of China				
	397	15,284.6	Beijing	bank
15. COFCO	434	14,189.4	Beijing	office furniture
16. China First Automotive Works				
	448	13,825.4	Changchun	automotive

abroad. As a result, none has an international site. China Life Insurance (www.chinalife.com.cn) and China Mobile Telecommunications (www.chinamobile.com) appear only in Chinese. Three have English translations in addition to the main Chinese versions. These include Sinopec Corporation (www.sinopec.com.cn), State Grid Corporation of China (www.sgcc.com.cn), and China National Petroleum Corporation (www.cnpc.com.cn). Of the five, only Sinopec Corporation is represented on the New York Stock Exchange (SNP).

The five companies represent four industries that appear often in this study of Fortune Global 500 companies. Sinopec Corporation and China National Petroleum Corporation do petroleum refining, State Grid Corporation of China is part of the utilities industry, China Life Insurance conducts business in the Life and Health insurance category, and China Mobile Communications falls into the telecommunications industry.

Several sites are markedly sophisticated in design. China National Petroleum Corporation has a very attractive Web site, with entry through a globe. The appealing slogan “Energize-Harmonize-Realize” appears at the portal. The site uses animation, photos of technology, people, and modern buildings, portraying a highly technical and sophisticated company. It lists an impressive array of international partners.

China Life Insurance opens with very beautiful red and yellow floral Chinese paintings on both sides of the screen. It has a video of Chinese people of all ages. One woman sits in a wicker wheelchair with a young child. Although the site is exclusively in Chinese, it has some headings in English below the Chinese, such as “News Center” and “Welcome to Chinese Life.”

The colors and design used by China Mobile Telecommunications are also attractive. The site uses animation that features Chinese Olympic athletes. Some English words appear on an otherwise all Chinese-language site, for example, “China 2008,” “GoTone,” and “VIP.”

INDIAN COMPANIES’ WEB SITES

Four out of India’s five companies in the Global 500 belong to the petroleum refining industry. These are Indian Oil (www.iocl.com), Reliance Industries (www.ril.com), Bharat Petroleum (www.bharatpetroleum.com), and Hindustan Petroleum (www.hindustanpetroleum.com). The fifth company, Oil & Natural Gas ([www.ongcindia.com](http://www ONGCINDIA.COM)), does business in the mining and crude oil production sector. None of the companies is on the New York Stock Exchange.

All five sites focus on India and have no other international sites. The primary language of the sites is English. Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum also offer content in Hindi. Indian Oil, Reliance Industries, Hindustan Petroleum, and Oil & Natural Gas have fairly basic sites. Indian Oil's site is distinguished by scrolling lists and a horizontal moving ticker tape. The others have a minimal degree of moving graphics.

Indian Oil displays a graphic of the Fortune 500 in the upper right hand corner of the homepage announcing its IOC rank of 170. Bharat Petroleum also proudly announces its membership in the Global Fortune 500 on its corporate page.

Bharat Petroleum, however, takes a very creative approach in its Web site. Its slogan is "Energising lives." Its design immediately catches one's attention with two alternating black and white photos of children with captions. One has a young boy smiling and the words "dream . . . envision what might be." Another has a group of young girls in a team huddle with the caption "dialogue what should be . . . design." Then, the right side features the caption "Energising" over a menu that includes "wheels, homes, business, skies and the environment."

Clicking on the corporate logo brings out a popup explanation of the photos and corporate emphasis on "appreciative enquiry." The company explains that appreciative enquiry has been very important. The quote at the top of the page says, "It is because we dream we discover, because we discover we design and because we design we deliver. At BPCL, it's all about dreaming and delivering." The company defines appreciative enquiry as "a methodology for discovering, understanding and fostering innovation through the gathering of positive stories and images and the construction of positive interactions—seeking out the very best of what is to ignite the imagination for what could be."

RUSSIAN COMPANIES' WEB SITES

The three Russian companies in the Global 500 are OAO Gazprom (www.gazprom.ru), Lukoil (www.lukoil.com), and RAO UES of Russia (www.rao-ees.ru). Gazprom is an energy company, Lukoil's business is petroleum refining, while RAO UES (Unified Energy System) of Russia is in utilities. Lukoil and RAO UES of Russia are represented on the New York Stock Exchange. Nevertheless, the three companies have very basic Web sites. Each comes in two languages only—Russian and English. None has an international site.

GERMAN COMPANIES' WEB SITES

The five German companies are Daimler Chrysler (www.daimlerchrysler.com), Allianz (www.allianz.com), Volkswagen (www.volkswagen.com), Siemens (www.siemens.com), and Deutsche Telekom (www.telekom.de). The industries represented are motor vehicles and parts, insurance, electronics, electrical equipment, and telecommunications. All are traded on the New York Stock Exchange. Deutsche Telekom has only one basic site in English and German. It is the same in both languages and follows the practice seen previously.

Allianz, Volkswagen, and Siemens follow the practice seen previously of using the native language only for the American, British, French, and German sites and English for Indian sites. These companies also have two languages for the Asian sites: English and the native language for Japan and China. Siemens has a Portuguese and English version of its Brazilian site, while Daimler Chrysler and Allianz each has a monolingual Portuguese site for Brazil. Daimler Chrysler uses English and German on both its US and German sites, reflecting its roots in both countries.

Allianz and Siemens use photos of local people or current events to localize some of their sites. Daimler Chrysler does not localize its sites and keeps the look standard.

UK CORPORATE WEB SITES

The UK companies represented in this study include British Petroleum (www.bp.com), Aviva (insurance, www.aviva.com), HSBC (banks, www.hsbc.com), Vodafone (www.vodafone.com), and Tesco (drug stores, www.tesco.com). Of these companies, only BP is on the New York Stock Exchange.

Although an international company, Tesco's site pertains strictly to the UK and its operations there. BP's global homepage, written in English, gives an overview of operations in each country around the world. It often has multiple brands for one country. However, most of the sites examined are monolingual in the native language, for example, those of France, Germany, Japan, UK, Brazil, and the US. India's site was in English. The company uses English and the native language for China and Russia.

Aviva also favors monolingual sites for the US, UK, France, Germany, China, and India. Japan's site is just English, but a browser problem may not have shown the Japanese language version. This monolingualism may be explained by a disclaimer that pops up every time a user tries to venture into a country's Web site. Without accepting the disclaimer, the user cannot access the site. The disclaimer warns users that the country-specific sites are

intended for residents of that country (see fig. 2). No other company in the study has such a disclaimer.

“Disclaimer

You are now leaving the Aviva plc group website

Please remember that any product information you read on the websites you now enter is intended for residents of that country, such websites are operated locally and the contents and use may be governed by our group companies' terms of use and/or privacy policy and by the laws and regulation of countries other than the United Kingdom. Aviva plc accepts no responsibility for any use of reliance placed by you or any person on the information contained on it. Please read the above warning and disclaimer before going any further. By using this link you will be deemed to have accepted the terms.”

Fig. 2. Aviva Language-Related Disclaimer

The Aviva site for China blends two cultures with a photo of a British man in a bowler hat interacting with a Chinese model.

HSBC has an unusual bilingual approach to its French and German sites, which appear in English and the native languages. The Japanese and Chinese sites are similarly bilingual, while the Russian and Indian sites are available in English only. The tagline for HSBC is “The world’s local bank.” Its US site comes in three languages: English, Spanish, and Chinese.

The global site for Vodafone is available in eight languages, a first for this study. These languages include German, English, Spanish, Greek, Italian, Swedish, Dutch, and Chinese. It has two languages for the US site: (English and Spanish) as well as for the Japanese and Chinese sites (either Japanese or Chinese and English).

FRENCH CORPORATE WEB SITES

The five French companies in the study are Total (petroleum, www.total.com), AXA (insurance, www.axa.com), Carrefour (food and drug stores, www.carrefour.com), Peugeot (www.psa.fr), and BNP Paribas (banking, www.bnpparibas.com). Of these, only AXA is on the New York Stock Exchange.

Total tends toward monolingual sites using the native language for its French, German, and Japanese sites. AXA also favors monolingual sites for the US, France, Japan, and the UK. In contrast, its Chinese site appears in English

and Chinese. Carrefour's sites in France, Japan, and Brazil are monolingual in the native languages, clearly intended for citizens of those countries.

Peugeot's site in France appears in English, French, and Spanish. The Chinese site is in both English and Chinese. The most bilingual of the French corporate sites is BNP Paribas Bank. It uses monolingual sites in the native language for the US, France, Brazil, Russia, India and the UK. It has bilingual sites in English and the native language for Germany, China, and Japan.

CONCLUSIONS

The research findings presented here provide a strong argument for global business to incorporate languages other than English and cultural adaptation in their Internet-based communication. The study investigated trends in language use and cultural adaptation in Web-based communication. The results show that English plays an important role, but not the dominant role, in Internet business communication. It provides evidence that languages other than English, and non-American cultures, have a major presence in Web-based global commerce. One can conclude that American and other global companies need to increase the use of languages other than English and cultural adaptation of Web-based communication in order to be more competitive in the global market.

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