

ITC SIG Frequently asked questions

Assembled by Ann L. Wiley

Members were encouraged to join the International Technical Communication Special Interest Group (ITC SIG) email discussion list to post inquiries. **This page summarizes inquiries received by the ITC SIG manager and inquiries answered on other email lists.**

Abbreviation for number

An STC member asked about the correct abbreviation for number in communications to be distributed internationally, recalling that No. and # are used primarily in the United States.

2004 SIG manager Charlene Nagy consulted a translator familiar with many languages, who responded that No. is fine for English in the United Kingdom as well as the US. French uses N^o; Spanish often uses Núm., but sometimes uses the degree sign like French, depending on the country. German uses Nr., and so forth. The # is becoming more common in languages other than US English. It is important to be sure the # cannot be confused with the weight measure "pounds." Posted May, 2004.

Accent marks in type

STC member Gail H. Shea (Berkeley Chapter) inquired about use of accent marks in type on the Lone Writer list in December, 2002. Gail summarized the response and her research as follows.

There was no consensus on this list as to how to handle use of accent marks in type. No individual or organization seemed to have a firm policy regarding use of accents. So I called the Head Librarian at one of the engineering libraries I use and asked him. My original intention was simply to save myself a trip to the library and ask him to see what other journals in the field did. But he had an answer ready: USE ACCENTS. People in other countries do not appreciate the Anglicizing of their language (this is a valid point), and many academics insist on use of accents. So I wrote down my accent policy and sent it to all team members:

- When Peru is used in a title, such as "Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú" we will use the accent mark on Perú. Otherwise, we will use the unaccented word, since Peru is a common geographic name.
- Names of places and other foreign words will be accented appropriately and consistently across all chapters.

- Names of people will be accented as per their request or by their example.

One caveat my librarian told me about is that international character coding recognizes an accented letter as separate and distinct from the same letter unaccented. A search for Peru will not turn up Perú. One of the authors on our current report specifically asked me to accent his first name, but leave accents off his last name, even though it was incorrect in Spanish--because a search for his last name does not turn up any matches in academic databases if the accents are used. So, to accent or not to accent seems to be an individual policy. The academic community prefers accents on foreign words, but perhaps if it affects the search function, accents should be left off. Posted January, 2003.

Books, magazines, and links to web sites

What books, magazines, and web sites have information about international communication?

Please refer to the International Technical Communication SIG Resource List.

Date and time

What is the correct way to write the date, the time, and the time zone in communications distributed internationally?

ITC SIG member David Stamm contributed the following information. The international authority for time keeping is the Bureau International des Poids et Mesures (BIPM) in Sevres, France. The BIPM is also the international authority for the Système international d'unités (SI), the international system of units of weight and measure.

Markus Kuhn has posted a full explanation of the international standard for numeric representations of date and time. The standard is ISO 8601 and the page is www.cl.cam.ac.uk/~mgk25/iso-time.html.

The international standard date notation is: **YYYY-MM-DD**.

The international standard notation for the time of day is: **hh:mm:ss**, where hh is the number of complete hours that have passed since midnight (00-24), mm is the number of complete minutes that have passed since the start of the hour (00-59), and ss is the number of complete seconds since the start of the minute (00-60).

Without any further notation, the date and time as written above are assumed to be in the local time zone. In order to indicate that a time is measured in Universal Time (UT), also known as Greenwich Mean Time (GMT), you can append a capital letter **Z** to a time: **23:59:59Z**. For

more information on Universal Time, visit the Time Service Department of the US Navy: <http://tycho.usno.navy.mil/frontpage.html>. Posted May, 2004. US Navy link updated February 2015.

Documentation

What is the average time required to create a simple "job aid" for a computer system?

Our experts say four hours a page for a basic treatment with minimum artwork. Posted May 2002.

English language for international communication

A non-member inquired if there is a generic form of English used in international communications.

Carolyn Luttrell advised there is a generic South American Spanish and many translators use it. Since British and American English are very different in many respects, and merging the two would be unsatisfactory on both sides of the Atlantic, Carolyn's company sends documentation written in the United States to the European offices and they have someone turn it into British English. At that point, it is considered ready for translation for European Union countries, as Europeans and many countries in Asia learn British English. Another approach is using a controlled vocabulary, such as Kodak International Service Language. Posted March, 2003.

Indexing for translation

How do I prepare an index for a book that will be translated into several languages?

Bill Collins, manager of the Indexing SIG, forwarded this post by DaveReam (LevTechInc.com) to the Index_L mail list, April 5, 2002. It appears here by permission of Dave Ream.

The couple of situations I have been tangentially involved in suggest that it is not feasible to simply translate an index. I've been told by indexers working on these projects that re-indexing the text once translated is necessary. Obviously, the page numbers would probably all change since the word density and composition styles vary between languages. If you are dealing with an index to section numbers though that would be simpler. I suppose if the index is keyword-based and there are multi-language thesauri available then this correspondence could be used.

Much depends on how idiomatic the headings might be. But often what is a single heading in English may result in a two-level heading, going into French for instance. Or so I've been told. I'm sorry to say I don't have any examples to offer.

Direct transliteration certainly isn't possible. I was told once that the "Islets of Langerhans" (a part of the pancreas) is called something completely different in French so "Iles du Langerhans" would not do. Nor translating "wire transfer" literally into Spanish since there's a different term of art for it in financial circles though I can't recall it. I had a client once who told a story of a Japanese translator taking the English term "hydraulic ram" and changing it (in Japanese) to "water sheep." It's necessary to research indexing for translation carefully before proceeding. Posted May 2002.

Indexes: translation into double-byte languages

Lori Lathrop posted this question on the STC Indexing SIG list, and David Brown responded. This exchange appears by permission of Lori Lathrop and David Brown.

A company is seeking information on translating English HTML indexes in double-byte character set languages. Their international department wants the indexes to be translated and they are not aware of any HTML-indexing programs that will generate other character sets.

One pre-release user of HTML Indexer 4 (www.html-indexer.com (historical URL)) reported one client's satisfaction with the handling of Japanese source files. Based on that information, I (David Brown) assume HTML Indexer should be able to handle other double-byte character sets.

Note, however, that the division of entries into symbols, numbers, and A-Z follows traditional English rules. This means rearranging the results every time you generate the index, so it's by no means a perfect solution.

Localization

What sources of information are available on localization?

The International Technical Communication SIG Resource List includes references and the ITC SIG Localization Reader includes articles and references.

Lifecycle costs, localization, and internationalization

What are the costs over the life cycle of the project of performing internationalization? Of performing localization, with and without prior internationalization? What are the cost penalties of not performing one or the other, or both?

The cost depends a lot on the product, how the initial code was written, and the languages involved. An engineering consultation in internationalization costs between \$80 and \$125 per hour. If a product has not been properly internationalized, it can be extremely costly to do at the end of the project. Michael Klinger, Globalization Manager, InfoTech. Posted June 2001.

Machine translation and online help

Is there a machine translation program for translating online help?

The ITC SIG has heard that Systran is working on support for professional translators of online help. Posted June 2001.

When online help files are translated by means of a computer-assisted translation program, the tags sometimes are corrupted. How does one handle this problem?

Localization services may be able to help with this problem. The ITC SIG is aware that LingoSystems, for example, has knowledge in this area. Posted October 2001.

Numbers, abbreviation for

Refer to Abbreviation for number at the top of this page.

Time notation

Refer to Date and time on this page.

Translation management

How does one get started managing translation?

The International Technical Communication SIG Translation Reader has several articles that address this question. Multilingual Computing is also a useful source: www.multilingual.com. Updated April 2005.

Translation of computer interface terminology

Is there a reference that lists computer interface terminology in various languages, for example, the terms for dialog boxes, property sheets, check boxes and so on?

The ITC SIG has listed the following in the SIG Resource List:

Microsoft online glossary of translated user interface terms:

<ftp://ftp.microsoft.com/developr/msdn/newup/glossary/>. Posted May 2002. Updated link <https://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/goglobal/bb688105.aspx> February 2015.

Translation of RoboHELP files using Trados software

When RoboHELP files are translated with Trados software, codes appear to become corrupted. Can anyone help with this?

eHelp Corporation advises that Lingo Systems, a translation and localization company, has developed code that helps with translating RoboHELP files using Trados. Posted January 2002.

Translation into Hong Kong and Simplified Chinese

In translating maintenance manuals for use in Hong Kong, is it better to translate into Hong Kong Chinese, or Simplified Chinese being taught on the mainland?

Steve Iverson responds: If the users are in mainland China, then certainly you would use Simplified Chinese. If the users will be in Hong Kong, use Traditional Chinese. If the users are in both areas, we would recommend using Simplified Chinese, since chances are that now those living in Hong Kong will understand it. Posted May 2002.