

"Content in local languages is as essential as connectivity. People must be able to create and receive information in their local language and to be able to express themselves in ways their peers can understand." [UNESCO](#).

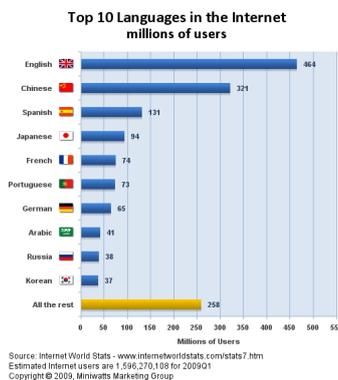
The growing worldwide web and the separation of languages

The content in the Internet is growing exponentially, as the amount of technical information [doubles every two years](#)

. English language content is still dominating the Internet according to Internet World Stats, but what about all the other languages?

[In Africa alone there are around 2000](#)

. Unfortunately, valuable multilingual content is rarely linked online and only a small portion of the content published in the so called "top languages" is translated. Nonetheless through social media and web 2.0 tools, the Internet is offering an increasing linguistic diversity. Still the issue is the insufficient linkages existing between translated content. Such linkages would facilitate the the sharing of concepts, expertise and experiences across cultures.



Voluntary contributions and the availability of an increasing number of free tools and online platforms facilitate the translation of valuable content in a number of languages. There are many examples that can work voluntarily:

- The popular videos of TED – Ideas worth Spreading, have also been recently translated through an [open translation project](#) .

- The blogging platform [Maneno](#) (Swahili for words) targets its blogging service in local African languages and low-bandwidth. " [On a continent with over 2,000 languages, cross-communication is an issue that is often forgotten about. Maneno is a system where multiple language versions for articles can sit atop one another for immediate access](#)

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- dotSUB is a browser based Web 2.0 platform that offers the opportunity for uploading, transcribing, and translating videos subtitles into and from any language. Transcriptions and translations are done on a voluntary basis. The Web2forDev community has been translating

the video [Web 2.0 in Africa - Agriculture and New Technologies](#) into a number of languages. At present the video is subtitled in Dutch, French, Ganda, Swahili, Luo and Spanish.

- A well known and impressive example is Global Voices, an international blogging network, which has now more translators than bloggers. Global Voices translates to the core of its mission with its [project Lingua](#). Their volunteer translators work in 17 different languages, such as Farsi, Serbian, Swahili and Mandarin among others.

Effort for localization of Software in Africa

Translating articles is only one way to connect people to the worldwide information flow. Offering localized software is another. Juliana Rotich states that “ [Localization matters because cultural sensitivity in technology is paramount to designing products that work as well as possible for all communities.](#) ”

The

[African network of localization](#)

tries to support further translation of languages such as Bamum (Cameroon), Bassa Vah (Liberia), Mandombe (Democratic Republic of Congo) or Osmanya (Somalia).

Translation tools

- [TraduWiki](#) recently tried to translate the famous [cluetrain manifesto](#)
- [Google translate widget](#) gets content automatically translated. This service is already operational on this site.
- [Translation Toolkit](#) from Google.

A good alternative is a recent summit attempted to bring together [different projects, an initiative for open translation tools, which has just started](#)

. Ethan Zuckerman reports from the summit that "there was widespread agreement that Google's machine translation tools were far from perfect - and sometimes farcically bad - they've been getting lots better and some participants wondered whether we should be putting the effort into building new social translation systems if they're going to obviate all our work in a few years. Personally, I think it's a bad mistake to stop work because we think Google might be working on the same issues." And

[David Sasacki describes why Global Voices decide to opt for open translation tools](#)

Challenges and Opportunities

There are many challenges towards a polyglot Internet – translation can take a large effort and the capacity is limited although there are many good tools available. Chris Salzberg [points out](#)

[in his study](#)

"Translation and Participatory Media: Experiences from Global Voices" that "Articles assume that readers have background knowledge in areas that non-English audiences may not be familiar with." For example, a term has a different meaning in each language and cannot be easily translated. Voluntary translation can be only one way, therefore website businesses and providers need to see the importance of offering further languages. But, there are clear limitations of interests, as many

[businesses do not seem to find it is profitable enough to invest in translating into local languages](#)

On the other hand online translation offers great opportunities for development organisations in reaching out to their constituencies. Participatory translation animated in the context of multicultural Communities of Practices can foster the sense of achievement and belonging. On DotSUB, short [educational videos produced by Common Craft](#) to promote Web 2.0 applications are now available in on dozens of languages, a case in point being the [video on twitter offering subtitles in 69 languages](#)

... as of the writing of this post.

Authors: Christian Kreutz and Giacomo Rambaldi