Über Grenzen gehen –
Kommunikation zwischen Kulturen und Unternehmen

Crossing Borders – Communication between Cultures and Companies

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Theo Schewe

Multilingual Communication in the Global Network Economy

Summary[1]

The Internet is becoming the dominant medium in global marketing communication. Using the World Wide Web, even smaller companies can promote their products with low cost all over the world. As the world is still a multicultural and multilingual market place, global marketers have to decide whether to adapt to different national languages or to standardise marketing communication by using English as the global language. Based on empirical investigations of Norwegian and German data, this study analyses how international companies, by using the new communication technology, solve the core decision problem in strategic international marketing: the question of standardisation versus adaptation of marketing communication. The results indicate that companies in both countries choose different solutions, using different languages in their web sites. Company resources, as well as target markets characteristics, type of industry and the company's overall internationalisation strategy affect the choice of language strategy on the web.

Globalisation and network society

Globalisation is a fundamental process of change in world society. It is both a consequence of political and technological changes - and a driving force for further political and technological changes. Thus, globalisation is reinforcing itself, creating the "new economy" and "the network society" (Castells 1996).

The most important constituent in the network society is the Internet. From its creation in 1983 it grew rapidly into an increasingly commercial and popular

[1] I want to thank my colleague Terje Grydeland and my son Henrik for helping me find a lot of useful company web sites on the Internet in order to conduct the empirical work for this study. I am also grateful to Jutta Eschenbach and Bjørg Hellum for their many helpful comments and suggestions. All data research was done in the spring of 2001. Since the World Wide Web is not static, some web addresses (URLs) cited in this article and the web sites' content may change quickly and therefore become unavailable for the reader.

medium. Today, millions and millions of computers, owned by private people, commercial enterprises and public organisations, are connected together by the Internet as the universal communication network.[2]

In 2000 there were about 7.4 million web sites with an annual growth rate of more than 50%.[3] Over 300 million web pages and 500 million files were counted on the web in 1999. In 2000 the number of people "online" has passed 400 million; about 113 million in Europe, 2.2 million in Norway. [4]

English as the global lingua franca?

Globalisation has an economic, a political, a cultural and a technological dimension. However, common to all globalisation is extended communication between people across national and cultural borders. This benefits the increasing role of English as a global language, as a "lingua franca" (Crystal 1997). Today, English is the international language in international diplomacy, in international media, television, movies, popular music; in global advertising, in international travel and international safety; in education and communication (ibid.). Therefore, preserving plurilingualism in the global society has become a political issue in several countries and international organisations, as in the European Union (Pool & Fettes 1998).

Basically, the Internet is a completely new and extraordinarily diverse medium. It offers a home to all styles in written language and to virtually all languages in the world.

But there is no doubt that English is the dominant language on the web, "the chief lingua franca of the Internet" (Crystal 1997). In the global domains ".com", ".org", ".net" and ".edu", covering together about 80% of all hosts in the web,[5] more than 95% of all web pages are written in English. Totally, about 80% of all web pages are written in English. More than 70 % of all web sites have English-speaking countries as countries of origin (Lavoie & O'Neill 1999). But this quota is decreasing, due to the fact that more and more people from other parts of the world are supplying and accessing information on the web (ibid.).

English is the favoured web language for technical reasons, too, since almost all software is written in English (Bourbonnais & Yergeau 1996).

But can we draw the conclusion that English will become the global language? Will other national languages vanish from the WWW?[6] The fact is that "the Internet cuts both ways" (Press 2000). The Internet favours language

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2 Internet Society (www.isoc.org/internet). Figures collected from online sources on the Internet were updated in June 2001.

3 Online Computer Library Center (http://wcp.oclc.org/).

4 NUA Internet Surveys (http://www.nua.ie/surveys/).

5 Internet Software Consortium (http://www.isc.org).

6 According to Juliane House, there is no need for creating a dichotomy between English as lingua franca and linguistic diversity and the survival of local languages (House 2001).

homogeneity and a predominance of English as lingua franca. But at the same time, the new medium brings new opportunities to communicate in many other languages different from English. Firms can produce and distribute advertising information via the Internet much cheaper and much faster than via traditional print and broadcast media. David Crystal calls the Internet a "linguistic revolution" and prophesies that the future of the web is in fact "multilinguistic" (Crystal 2001a). He also claims that the dominance of English on the net is decreasing. "The Web offers a World Wide Welcome for global linguistic diversity" (Crystal 2001b). Thousands of small and medium-sized businesses get the opportunity to present their products to a multinational and multilingual market. Companies are able to present a multilingual identity. Machine Translation makes the edition of multilingual web documents cheaper.[7] On the other hand - companies may gain cost advantages by establishing a global identity, developing global products and using a global language in the global market. Thus, English will continue to be the dominating web language, and the Internet will strengthen its 'Anglo-centric nature'. Transnational mergers favour global corporate cultures by using English as lingua franca. Global companies are establishing brands for global customer segments.

However, if the Internet strengthens its Anglo-centric nature in the future, this will have consequences for the companies' use of languages and for the use of languages in higher education. Web-based education, based on English teaching material, will gain high international competitiveness.

But so far, no reliable predictions can be made on the future of multilingualism on the web. In order to make serious and reliable predictions at all, we first have to carry out empirical studies.

Standardisation versus adaptation

Every company selling products on the world market and covering more than one national (home) market is facing the fundamental strategic decision problem in international marketing of standardisation or adaptation. It is about the question whether to market *standardised, global* products in all target markets using standardised communication or to *differentiate* the marketing function, *adapting* both products and communication to each culturally unique market (Buzzell 1968; Yip 1989; Usunier 1996; Cateora 1993). The standardisation-adaptation debate is particularly focusing on Lewitt's familiar hypothesis about the "globalisation of markets" (Lewitt 1983). Global marketing means developing global brands for global market segments with similar tastes, needs and values across national markets, and promoting the brand by using standard-

[7] Selected web resources for machine translation may be found at *iLoveLanguages*, a comprehensive catalog of language-related Internet resources (http://www.ilovelanguages.com/).

ised, global messages. Advocates of standardisation believe that a *global marketing strategy* will lead to increased market potentials and to production economies and higher profits. In some cases this may include *monolingual* marketing communication by using only English as the global advertising language. Opponents of standardisation, however, stress the need to differentiate product design and advertising in order to accommodate to the cultural differences between national markets and to adapt to the specific needs and values of the customers. Reasonably, using *multilingual* marketing communication by using the different national languages in the national submarkets is an important tool of a *multidomestic marketing strategy* of market adaptation. A third group of companies may implement a *domestic market extension strategy* by developing products primarily for the home market and then gradually extending to foreign markets without focusing on market adaptation. However, marketing communication on the web by those companies may often be *bilingual* as web pages addressed to domestic customers are written in the home language and web pages addressed to foreign customers in different foreign markets are written in English as the lingua franca of international marketing.[8]

The role of market entry strategies

Internationalised companies can choose among different *"market entry strategies"* (Root 1994). Many export companies use local agents and distributors when entering the market. Other firms establish their own branch offices or subsidiaries in selected foreign markets, managed by local employees. In this way, the parent company can use local human resources and local skills to overcome language difficulties and other cultural barriers. Local representatives may be responsible for operating local web sites written in local languages. Big multinational enterprises selling global brands all over the world very often use some kind of mixed strategy of global marketing advertising. Both product, brand name and core message are standardised accordingly to serve a "global" target market. Because of the global market's multilingual nature, however, the web advertising is carried out by a number of local web sites written in different languages.[9] Some companies may decide to create and maintain their multilingual web sites by a central staff unit in the main office. In this case, the home office has to make use of foreign language experts at home. Other companies may use a decentralised organisation model where *intermediaries* in the local market (such as local sales agents or local professionals employed in the compa-

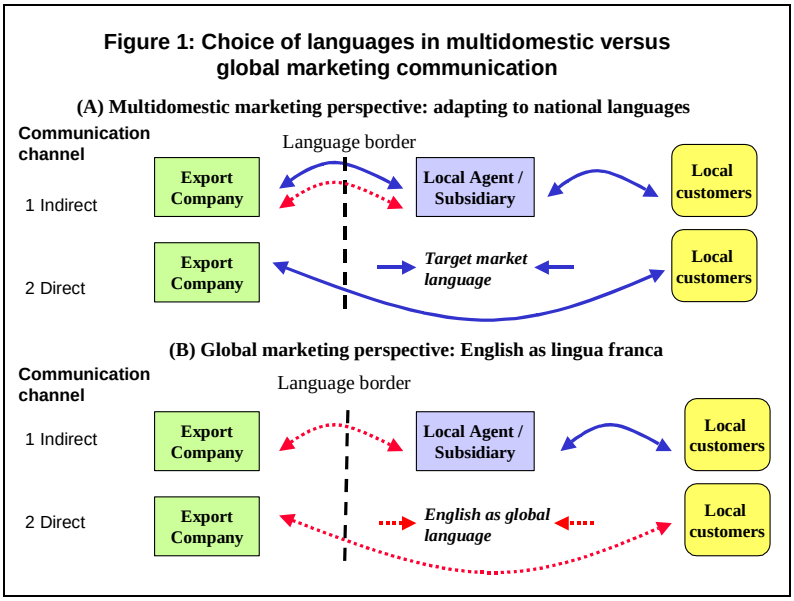
[8] For a more detailed model of strategy choice see my discussion of the empirical results of this study below.

[9] The web design of Coca-Cola Company (http://www.cocacola.com/) may serve as an excellent example of this kind of "multilingual web design" strategy. On the main page, written in (global) English, you can navigate and "Go local" to at least 25 national web sites written in just as many different languages (July 2001).

ny's subsidiary) are responsible for editing the national web sites by using their local language skills. Small and medium-sized export companies with limited resources often use local agents to advertise and sell their products. A lack of skills in foreign languages and insufficient knowledge about cultural differences may be overcome by delegating the marketing communication, particularly the local web advertising, to the local agents.

In these cases, provided that professionals from both the home company and the local intermediary have sufficient skills in English (as the global business language and lingua franca), all communication and information exchange between them and across the language border can be done monolingually in English. The intermediaries will translate all marketing information into the foreign language and thus adapt the parent company's web marketing communication to the local customers. Ideally, in this case there is no need for foreign language skills in the parent company.

Figure 1: Choice of languages in multidomestic versus global marketing communication



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Figure 1 shows the relationship between the choice of strategy in an export company and the use of language in market communication and the need for foreign language skills to create a multicountry and multilingual web marketing design. The export company has to choose whether to use the "customer's language" or "English as lingua franca" as web page languages. Further, the company has to decide whether to use "indirect communication" (communicate with the final customers via intermediaries in the communication channel) or "direct communication" with the customers in the target market.[10] So the model

[10] In this model I have made the following assumption: The export company (parent company) is localised in a non-English speaking country (home country) and

depicted in Figure 1 generates four main alternatives of language choice, due to the strategic decision variables "market entry strategy" and overall "strategy of standardisation/adaptation".

Case examples

Two examples of highly internationalised Scandinavian companies may demonstrate the polar opposite positions in marketing strategy sketched above. Both companies market durable consumer goods in a global but still multinational and multilingual market. The Swedish-based retailer chain *Hennes & Mauritz* sells clothes and cosmetics in at least 14 countries. The company uses a strictly standardised Internet marketing strategy by only using English as the sole global company language.[11] "Advertising is produced centrally in Sweden by H&M's advertising department in co-operation with various advertising agencies. The advertisements are largely identical in all H&M's markets, but the media mix is adapted to local requirements and conditions."[12]

On the other hand, the Norwegian company *Ekornes*[13] produces high quality seat furniture and exports it to many countries. After opening the company's home page on the web, the visitor can choose from a list of 16 countries in order to get into country specific web sites written in eleven different languages and containing exhaustive information. Ekornes' web site design reveals a multi-domestic marketing perspective.[14]

Another interesting example is given by the web sites of *Euro Disney S.C.A.*, a subsidiary of Walt Disney Co. Euro Disney is located in France, managing the theme park *Disneyland Paris*. The corporate web site www.eurodisney.com is bilingual (English and French) and contains a lot of information about the company itself. The target audience of this web site is made up by the company's "stakeholders", including suppliers and distributors, public relations and media professionals and other business professionals interested in the company. There is no need to translate the information to languages other than French (the home language of the corporation) and English (the lingua franca for the global market). But what about the final customers of the theme park in Paris meaning millions of families with children from almost all Western European countries? This target market is much more heterogeneous with respect to selected demographic and social indicators, especially language skills. The company is aware of the fact that the target market of Disneyland Paris makes up a real

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communicates - across a language border - with intermediaries and customers in the target market country speaking another language than English as their native language.

11 http://www.hm.com.

12 http://www.hm.com/hm/company/advertising.asp.

13 http://www.ekornes.com.

14 Actually, Ekornes seems to apply a strictly uniform design for all country web sites and therefore produces all web sites by a central staff unit.

multinational and multilingual community. Customers connected to the Internet, therefore, can get all the information they want in their own language by visiting the web site of the theme park and clicking on the respective language button.[15] In fact, the design of the theme park's web site reveals a strategy of adaptation by means of a multicountry, multilingual web communication design.

So far, our preliminary results may indicate that there is no single and unique web strategy to follow for international companies. Therefore we need further empirical investigation in order to find out about strategic factors guiding the firms' use of languages on the Internet.

The data

The primary interest of this study has been to analyse the web language strategy of companies and agencies located in non-English speaking countries and engaged in international trade. In order to separate those "export businesses" from other businesses purely interested in the home market, I chose as an appropriate statistical population the members of the Norwegian-German Chamber of Commerce. Due to the main goals of the chamber, it is safe to assume that all members are concerned with international marketing, with export and import trade, especially between Germany and Norway. Most of the chamber members are private companies, the rest are public agencies in commercial affairs.

In 2000, 620 members were registered, about two third of them Norwegian and one third German. I extracted a random sample of 247 companies from the total statistical population. Then I manually searched the web for the companies' web sites. At least 182 web sites (74%) were found.[16] 65 chamber members (26%) were not at all present on the Internet by own web sites at the time when the empirical investigation was carried out (Spring 2001).[17]

The majority of the companies in our sample belong to the following business sectors: Engineering and electronics (28.6%), consulting and translation (27.5%), wholesale and import (18.7%), building materials & furniture (12.1%), as depicted in Figure 2.

A "*web site"* is defined as "a collection of inter-linked web pages, including a home page, residing at the same network location…"[18]. A *"web page"* is "a

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15 http://2000.disneylandparis.com/.

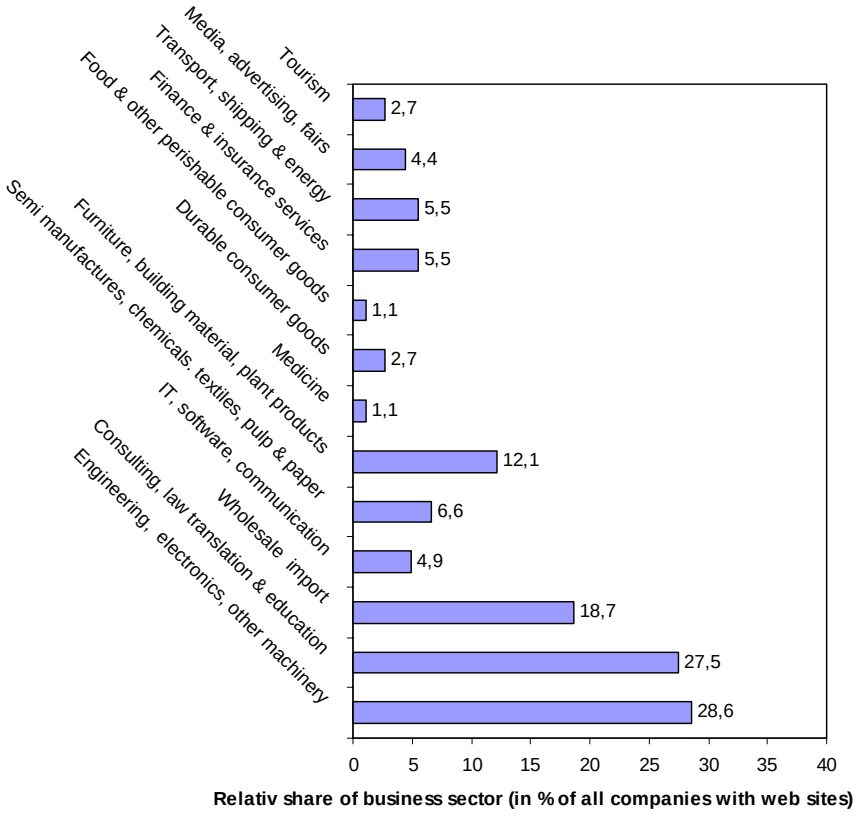
16 The figure includes import agencies and subsidiaries that do not have their own web site but are registered in the parent company's web site.

17 Chamber members without their own web sites are usually very small companies that are not especially active in serving foreign markets. In part, these are pure import agencies marketing German products on the Norwegian market only; in addition, some are small Norwegian companies in a very early stage of internationalisation.

18 "…'Inter-linked' means that any of a Web site's constituent Web pages can be accessed by following a sequence of references beginning at the site's home page; spanning zero, one,

collection of information, consisting of one or more discrete objects, intended to be rendered simultaneously, and identified by a single Universal Resource Identifier (URI) …" (Lavoie & O'Neill 1999). Most companies and other organisations have one web site containing many different web pages that are connected by links and hypertext language. A company's *"home page"* is "a Web page that is accessed through a URI containing only an IP address or domain name, but no file path" (ibid.). The "home page" may be regarded as the company's virtual entrance hall.

Figure 2: Sectoral disbritution of companies with web sites in the sample (in %)



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International marketing strategy and web language design

Based on our theoretical considerations above and our empirical findings, we define the following four generic web site categories according to the languages applied: (1) A web site is defined as *national monolingual* if all pages are writ-

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or more Web pages located at the same site; and ending at the Web page in question." (Lavoie & O'Neill 1999).

ten in the home language only and if there are no references to other web pages written in another language and controlled by the same company. (2) A web site written in English only with no references to information controlled by the company and written in other language(s), is called *English monolingual*.

(3) Web sites written in both the company's home language and in English are called *bilingual*. (4) Web sites written in either the home language or in English and also containing references / links to other pages on either the same site or other sites which are controlled by the same company and written in other ("third") languages, are called *multilingual*.

Now, the core question is how we can relate different web language design to different strategy choices in international companies?

Results

The main figures of the statistical analysis are presented in Table 1. A total of 39% of all companies having web sites use their home language only (column 1a)[19], and 61% use at least one foreign language. Roughly speaking, two of three internationally oriented business units apply some kind of language adaptation on the web.

A *national monolingual* design is the dominating strategy in the consulting and legal advice sector, in smaller wholesale agencies and in the finance sector. But many smaller firms in manufacturing too do not have web communication in foreign languages. All these firms are regarded as being principally home market oriented.

Not surprisingly, English dominates as the global marketing language and lingua franca in international business. Almost all Norwegian and German companies and agencies that are conducting a *bilingual* web design use English as the first or second language. At all, 27% of the total sample use a bilingual web design, presenting information in both English and the home language (column 2a+2b). This design is widely used in manufacturing sectors (including engineering, furniture and plant products), in media and advertising, in transport and shipping.

9,3 % of all companies reveal a pure "global marketing strategy" by offering only English written web sites (column 1b). *English monolingual* web design dominates in IT-companies (even small units) and in big enterprises producing raw materials and semi-manufactures.

It is most interesting, however, that almost 25% of all companies in the sample use other foreign languages than English in Internet communication (column 3a+3b+3c). In fact, every fourth business unit applies some kind of *multilingual* web design. Multilingual web sites are widely used in the tourism

[19] Please note that the columns in Table 1 are identical with the strategy definitions in Figure 3 that are explained in detail below.

industry.[20] Tourism today takes part in the globalisation process. Norwegian tourism companies are aware of the fact that they are facing a multinational and multicultural market. As a consequence, many of them choose a multilingual web strategy.

Table 1: Use of languages in different business sectors

Sample of 247 Norwegian and German companies and organisations (Relative values in percent of all companies in the sector, 2000)

Language strategy / Industry	Monolingual 1a	Monolingual 1b	Bilingual 2a	Bilingual 2b	Multilingual 3a	Multilingual 3b	Multilingual 3c	*All multilingual 3a + 3b + 3c*	Companies with web sites
Engineering, electronics, other machinery	36,5	3,8	17,3	15,4	0,0	7,7	19,2	*26,9*	100,0
Consulting, law, translation & education	62,0	6,0	10,0	4,0	12,0	4,0	2,0	*18,0*	100,0
Wholesale & import	41,2	5,9	11,8	11,8	0,0	8,8	20,6	*29,4*	100,0
IT, software, communication	22,2	44,4	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	33,3	*33,3*	100,0
Semi manufac-tures, chemicals. textiles, pulp & paper	8,3	41,7	0,0	8,3	0,0	0,0	41,7	*41,7*	100,0
Furniture, buil-ding material, plant products	31,8	4,5	27,3	13,6	4,5	0,0	18,2	*22,7*	100,0
Medicine	0,0	50,0	0,0	50,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	*0,0*	100,0
Durable consumer goods	80,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	20,0	0,0	0,0	*20,0*	100,0
Food & other perishable consumer goods	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	100,0	0,0	*100,0*	100,0
Finance & insurance services	50,0	0,0	30,0	10,0	10,0	0,0	0,0	*10,0*	100,0
Transport, shipping & energy	20,0	10,0	30,0	10,0	0,0	0,0	30,0	*30,0*	100,0
Media, advertising, fairs	25,0	0,0	62,5	12,5	0,0	0,0	0,0	*0,0*	100,0
Tourism	20,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	20,0	20,0	40,0	*80,0*	100,0
Unknown	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
All comapnies	39,0	9,3	16,5	10,4	5,5	4,9	14,3	*24,7*	100,0

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[20] The Theme Park Disneyland Paris, mentioned above, is a typical example. Tourist organisations promoting national and regional destinations on the international market use multilingual web sites in order to adapt their information work to a multinational customer market. The Norwegian Tourist Board, for example, uses a centralised web site design with a common web portal (www.visitnorway.com) where the visitor can choose from ten local pages.

Multilingual web sites, often combined with multi-country web sites, are also very common in large, multinational enterprises selling manufactured goods and semi-manufactures like cars, electronics, chemicals etc.

Concluding our empirical findings so far, we can define six main *web site language design strategies* divided into three categories according to the number of languages used (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Marketing strategies and choice of web design

1 Monolingual web design		**2 Bilingual web design**		**3 Multilingual web design**		
1a Domestic marketing strategy	1b Global marketing strategy without adaptation	2a Domestic marketing extension strategy	2 b International marketing strategy without local adaptation	3a Multidomestic marketing strategy	3 b Global marketing strategy with local adaptation	3 c Global player strategy

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The strategies listed in Figure 3 are defined as follows:

Strategy 1a: A *monolingual* web site, written in the *home language*. This reveals some kind of *domestic marketing strategy*. The company is mainly oriented towards the home market. It is a striking fact that there are almost no German production firms in our sample of chamber members who apply the monolingual home language web site design. This indicates that international oriented companies almost always use foreign languages in their communication via the web.[21]

Strategy 1b: A *monolingual* web site, written in *English only* (as a true lingua franca). Companies located outside English speaking countries will consciously choose this web site design as part of their globalisation effort and a definite *global marketing strategy*. It seems to be a familiar strategy for small, highly internationalised companies in business sectors where English is widely used as lingua franca, i.e. in the information and communication technology sector.

Strategy 2a: *Bilingual* web site, written in the *home language*, but with links to English written pages as part of the same site or linked to a web site on a corresponding URL owned by the same company. This web design may reveal some kind of *domestic market extension strategy*. The primary market is the home country, but the company also has started going international and serving foreign markets.

[21] German chamber members are typically export companies serving a number of foreign markets.

Strategy 2b: *Bilingual* web site, written in *English* aimed at "global" visitors, but containing links to pages written in the home language.[22] This kind of bilingual web design reflects a more "modest" stage of internationalisation where customers in foreign markets have become an integrated part of the company's total market. The foreign market has become at least as much as important as the domestic market. The web design reveals the company's strategy orientation as truly international, but the company's web communication does not adapt to national languages (*international marketing strategy without local adaptation*). This seems to be the most widespread strategy today - and may fit several patterns of internationalisation.

Strategy 3a: *Multilingual* web site. Here, the home page is written in the *home language*. There are links to pages written in one or more languages other than English. The multilingual web design shows that the company desires to adapt its marketing communication to the foreign customers. I would define this design as revealing a *multidomestic marketing strategy*. The strategy is suitable for export companies which serve a limited number of foreign markets, aiming at achieving a larger market share in each of them. Almost always, English is among the various foreign languages applied in order to cover both English speaking markets and other, "miscellaneous" foreign markets not served by special "national" web pages.

Strategy 3b: *Multilingual* web site. The home page is written in *English* as the "global language". Links to other pages are written in one or more languages others than English or the home language. This type of strategy also includes home pages that contain nothing more than an option to choose - by means of a single mouse click - between three or more languages when communicating with the company via the web. In this case, the company is appearing as a global player and accommodating the different local market environments at the same time. The company is applying some kind of *global marketing strategy with local adaptation*.

Strategy 3 c: *Multilingual* web site. The home page is written in the *home language or in English*. In addition, agents or subsidiaries in the local markets manage their own *local web sites* written in the respective local languages. Sometimes also other visual design elements and textual contents are adapted to local tastes and needs. The web site structure of a real global enterprise is not necessarily hierarchical when offering original home pages for different regional markets, written in different languages. As in the case of strategy 3b, these firms are very often large multinational or global enterprises. The web design clearly reveals a *global player strategy*. This

[22] Strategy 2b also includes a design variant where home pages do not contain specific information but only an option for the visitor to choose (by a simple mouse click) between English and the home language.

strategy is appropriate in industries where local representation and/or local adaptation and accommodation are necessary and suitable.[23]

Finally, I will sketch some other preliminary findings as a result of my research work. I detected two special "variants" of bilingual and multilingual web design (particularly, variants of strategy 2b and 3b in Figure 3). A special variant of the bi- and multi-language strategy is when the home page only presents the option to click on the language preferred. This type of "global web site design" is becoming more and more common in international and global companies. Some typical examples are: *ATB Antriebstechnik AG*[24], *Bolenz & Schäfer GmbH*[25], *Selfa Arctic*[26], *Ernex*[27], *and Color Line*[28].

In fact, more and more firms are designing their web sites as really international sites - either only in English (monolingual), or bilingual / multilingual aimed at the "global" visitor who first has to choose the preferred language on the home page before he can gather more information about the company.

A growing number of firms are "centralising" their web strategy. All web marketing is concentrated under a common web *site*, which may have links to multilingual *pages*. In this way, the web design and the presentation of all information is almost the same in all markets.[29]

The Sweden based engineering company *Boo Instruments* is an example of a *mixed* strategy as its Norwegian subsidiary has its own web site written in English while the other web pages in Swedish, English and Finnish have a common design and are part of the company's main web site.[30] Also the Norwegian cruise ship company *Hurtigruten* has a bilingual site[31], and additionally, a special country site for the German market, which is their most important export market.[32]

On the other side, many big companies oriented towards the global market are using a decentralised web marketing strategy presenting special country web

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23 An instructive example is the German based, but worldwide acting producer of cleaning equipment *Kärcher*. The home page (www.karcher.com) says "Welcome to Kärcher Worldwide" and lets the visitor "Choose your country".

24 http://www.atb.co.at/.

25 http://www.bolenz-schaefer.de/.

26 http://www.selfa.no/.

27 http://www.ernex.no/.

28 http://www.colorline.com/.

29 An instructive example is the Norwegian export company *Stokke Fabrikker* that has changed the web strategy recently. All country information now is concentrated on the company's sentral web site (http://www.stokke.com/).

30 www.boo-instrument.com

31 www.hurtigruten.no.

32 www.hurtigruten.de.

sites for different country markets, maintained by the parent company's local subsidiaries in the respective countries.

Conclusion

The starting point of my investigation was the core decision problem in international marketing strategy: standardisation versus adaptation in the marketing mix, especially in marketing communication. Today, the Internet and the World Wide Web represent the most important medium and channel for interactive marketing communication between companies and customers. A crucial problem for international companies is how to design their web sites according to the question of standardisation versus local adaptation. The companies have to decide what languages and how many different languages are to be used.

So far, my preliminary empirical results clearly indicate that most international companies design their web sites according to their overall internationalisation strategy. But there are several other important factors influencing the choice of web language design such as company resources, type of product, industry sector and market entry strategy.

A large number of companies use bilingual web site designs. Most of the larger multinational and global enterprises have multilingual web sites. A smaller number of both small and large companies use a pure "global", monolingual web design with English pages only. At the moment, it is an open question whether the share of this type of companies will increase in the future. So far, no reliable predictions can be made concerning the future of multilingualism on the web.

The international companies' web communication strategy is not static but will change continuously. The Internet will gain increasing importance as the global medium for advertising, communication and information exchange. In any case, this will bring an increasing demand for information workers with good language skills.

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