

# Translation of Corporate Websites and the Changing Role of the Translator

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## 1. Introduction

An increasing number of businesses today see the need to have their company information available on the World Wide Web, accessible not only to a domestic public, but to a global audience. The whole world is a market, for big multinational companies as well as for relatively small local enterprises. Consequently, more and more businesses have their websites translated, and web translation has become an important market for translators. In Norway, English is the preferred language for businesses wanting to communicate worldwide, and the translator is here instrumental in the communication process. Traditionally, the translator has been seen as a mediator between *two* languages, for instance Norwegian and British English, and *two* cultures, as language is closely linked to culture. However, when working on texts for the World Wide Web, the translator's role may be seen as changed into the transfer of texts through an electronic medium between *two* languages and *multiple* cultures in a global environment. The question is whether, and if so in what ways, this new situation calls for a redefinition of our conceptions of the process and nature of translation.

This issue will be discussed with reference to some of the features of the new environment in which translators work, and linked to aspects of the theory of science. Examples will be drawn from the websites of two Norwegian enterprises, chosen from the yellow pages, one for a law firm ([www.almostad.com](http://www.almostad.com)), and another for a pharmaceutical company ([www.weifa.no](http://www.weifa.no)), both of relatively small size. The choice of a law firm was mainly based on the aim to find an enterprise with operations closely linked

to Norwegian culture, and a pharmaceutical company due to its export-oriented activities. The material on which my findings are based is of course limited, but should nevertheless be indicative of a trend.

Company websites might be divided into two categories, corporate and marketing websites, of which the first carries information about the company, and the second is intended to make customers purchase the company's products (Nielsen 2002:7). This paper will focus on the first type.

Almost all of the content on the Alkestad website has been translated into English, with the exception of the news. In the case of Weifa, the pages in English vary in content compared to the Norwegian version, with some of the English pages having longer texts than the corresponding Norwegian ones. It is, however, difficult to say whether these longer pages are translations of Norwegian texts prepared especially for translation, or whether they were written originally in English. The English text is nevertheless rooted in the Norwegian version, and this kind of adaptation to a global audience may be considered a natural part of the translator's task as the role of the translator is changing along with the development towards increasing globalization and the need for enterprises to be present on the World Wide Web.

## **2. Globalization**

The concept of globalization may be defined in various ways, and there is disagreement between theoreticians as to what is understood by the term (Cronin 2003:77). One might say that globalization “means homogenizing on a world-wide scale” (Usunier 1993:169). This definition is based on the assumption that globalization implies homogenization, and is thus linked to the argument that globalization leads to a loss of cultural diversity and to cultural imperialism, particularly the spread of Western capitalism and culture (Barker 1999:38). In a wider definition, suggested by Barker, ‘globalization’ is seen as “increasing multidirectional economic, social, cultural and political global connections and our awareness of them including the global production of the local and the localization of the global”. The term is, moreover, often associated with “the institutions of modernity and the time-space compression or the shrinking world” (op.cit.173). Here, globalization is seen not as a one-directional but as a dialectic process, including both homogenization and diversity. It takes into account the distinction between ‘internationalization’, i.e. designing a product to facilitate adaptation to the global market, and ‘localization’, i.e. tailoring a product to the needs of one particular local market (Sprung 2000:xvi-xvii). In addition, the technological developments that make instantaneous global communication possible are included. From a translation perspective, ‘globalization’ covers both translations into English for a global audience

(internationalization), and multilingual translations geared to local cultures (localization). This essay will focus on translations from Norwegian into English; in other words on internationalization of Norwegian websites for receivers in a potentially wide range of cultures in different countries all over the world.

### **3. Translation theory**

One might ask whether existing translation theory has taken sufficient account of the global aspect. Translation theory so far seems primarily to have been concerned with bilingual and bicultural contexts, although this is not always made explicit. In a survey of culturally oriented translation studies, Ritva Leppihalme mentions culture-bound translation problems where the *two cultures involved* are not too distant and, further on, how well a translation functions in *the receiving language culture* (my italicizations) (Leppihalme 1997: 2, 3). According to hermeneutic translation theory, the translator is central in the process of transferring meaning *from another world to his/her own world*. The translator must not only understand the text, but bring the content over from *one language, and one world, to another* (my italicizations) (Stolze 1992:46), or penetrate and bring home as expressed by George Steiner (Steiner 1998:314). Moreover, functional translation theory focuses on two cultures, the source and the target culture. Christiane Nord points out that a culture-specific phenomenon is one that exists in a particular form or function in *one of two cultures* that are being compared, and translation “means comparing cultures”. A foreign culture can only be perceived by means of comparison with our own culture, the culture of our primary enculturation (Nord 1997:34). It might be argued that the function of the target text should determine the decisions made by the translator in the process of bringing a text over from one language to another, and hence the global perspective may be said to be covered by functional theory despite the fact that texts on the World Wide Web potentially are read by a multi-lingual audience. However, the translator of web texts is faced with a more complex task than comparing *two* cultures, and the challenges posed by the multicultural aspects are not explicitly taken into account in functional theory. At the same time, translation as cultural transfer has come increasingly into focus in translation theory over the past few decades, starting with the works of Hans. J. Vermeer who saw translation primarily as a cross-cultural rather than pure linguistic transfer (Snell-Hornby 1990:82).

### **4. Multiple cultures**

The multicultural background of the global audience is a central aspect of website translations. According to Collins English Dictionary, culture is i.a. “the total range of activities and ideas of a group of people with shared

traditions, which are transmitted and reinforced by members of the group". The concept refers to "the totality of a people's socially transmitted products of work and thought" (Jandt 2004: 13), and language is an intrinsic part of culture (Snell-Hornby 1990:82). The concept has been defined in many ways over the years, but any further discussion of it should not be relevant here.

The relationship between language and culture is of particular interest in connection with internationalization of websites. When translating from Norwegian into English for a British audience, the translator is expected to be bilingual and bicultural, and be able to make the appropriate adjustments required for adapting the text to the target language and culture. Faced with the task to translate a text from Norwegian into English for a global audience, the translator will have to adopt a wider perspective than British culture. Translations are, according to Lawrence Venuti, always addressed to a specific audience (Venuti 1998:158), and the global audience might perhaps be considered specific. However, the translator is nevertheless faced with special challenges since these readers must be approached through English despite their different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. A translation based on British or American English might of course be a solution, but a Norwegian reality must then be understood in terms of British or American culture, with the obvious danger of misinterpretation by a multilingual audience. One might say that there is nothing new about this situation. Business information in the form of annual reports and a variety of other material, not least tourist brochures, have been translated into English and printed for a wide audience for a long time. However, with the acceleration of internationalization in the business world, the proliferation of websites, and the simultaneous access to information globally, greater awareness is emerging of the special requirements for succeeding in communication on the web.

One way of handling websites aimed at a multicultural audience is to localize by means of multilingual websites. According to a survey made in 2001, a total of 91 per cent of the secure sites on the web were in English, while in fact over half of the world's Internet users were speakers of other languages than English, and this figure is assumed to rise (Cronin 2003:14). One might therefore argue that multilingual web sites, i.e. localized websites where the same information is provided in various languages, would be preferable to sites in English. And for larger companies, with important market shares in specific countries, localization will in fact often be the most advantageous alternative. One example of this is Dell's localised page [www.Dell.no](http://www.Dell.no).

There are, however, various reasons why a company often chooses to use only English when presenting itself on the World Wide Web. One reason

might be that it is simply not worthwhile to have the company site translated into a variety of languages as there will not be enough users in different countries to make localization sensible (Nielsen 2000:315). English has to an increasing degree become a lingua franca. However, there is no *one* standard international English. Peter Trudgill & Jean Hannah (1994) present “varieties of standard English” under the heading of international English. They refer to British, American, Australian, etc. English. Others maintain that a global English is developing alongside these national varieties, which is the language of the global mass culture, “an English that has been broken and invaded by the languages that it has tried to hegemonize” (Cronin 2003:88). This global English might be called a hybrid, without a cultural anchor or standard to which the translator may refer. Our old conception of what ‘English’ is might no longer be useful and might need to be revised. The old concept appears to be insufficient for describing the new linguistic reality we are facing on the World Wide Web. And it may be argued that this new reality should be taken into account in translation theory.

## **5. Language and culture**

English for a global audience, without a natural connection between language and culture, is then quite unusual compared with how we traditionally have viewed these two entities. As the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor points out, “meaning is bound up with the level and type of culture, which in turn is inseparable from the distinctions and categories marked by the language people speak” (1998: 119). And according to the Sapir-Whorf theory of relativity, each individual language represents a separate reality, and reality is perceived and organised differently in different cultures. “All observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated” (Whorf 1956:214).

The relativist position may, however, be countered by a universalist point of view. It might be argued that certain categories are present in all languages, and that communication with others would not take place without an assumption of universalism (Malmkjær 2005:52). Languages might be said not to differ with respect to the content that may be expressed, for all languages can in principle convey all cognitive experience, but with respect to the means by which this content is expressed. There might not be a one-to-one correspondence between terms, but the same content may be verbalised in other ways, for instance by a sequence of word or other semiotic signs (Ditlevsen et. al. 2003:27). This would imply that a message may be mediated to and understood by a global audience without reference to a specific culture.

Another aspect is that the World Wide Web might be considered a culture of its own, without any country-specific content. A comparative analysis of Mexican and US corporate websites suggests that “the Internet may evolve its own transitional cultural matrix with a complex of norms, values, and linguistic conventions that is [sic.] universalistic”. It is pointed out, however, that the “de-terrorialized realm of virtual business will offer immense challenges for companies as they learn to work within the global culture of online business” (Sackmary and Scalia 1999:4).

Some industries are, admittedly, more international than others, for instance the technology sector. It has been argued that with the development of computerised networks a universal, digital language will emerge; notably a digital language and not English (Bielsa 2005:6). Whether digital or not, the idea of the World Wide Web as a specific culture will have implications for our conceptions of the participants in the communication process of translation. The translator has in a way a double context to take into account, first the virtual culture of the web, and secondly the diverse real cultures by which the readers of the translation after all are influenced simply by being members of the societies in which they live. Thus translation in this context might be seen as communication in two steps. And indeed, translation might be seen as communication, and communication theories might be applied. Ernst-August Gutt, for instance, deals with translation in the perspective of communication and relevance (Gutt 1991). Accordingly, translated texts might be described with reference to their relevance with respect to both the culture of the World Wide Web and the global audience. We might thus say that we are faced with a new context for the translated texts, and our conception of the translator as a filter between cultures attains a new dimension in this situation.

One might, with Ken Haas, ask the following question: “If our culture sets the parameters of our vision, then how can we hope to communicate to others whose visions are colored by quite different cultural lenses?” Haas' answer is that cross-cultural interpretation is possible even though absolute translation is an unattainable goal. He maintains:

Those communicating across cultural borders, however, must be prepared for the possible reinterpretation of their work along somewhat different lines. As long as *misinterpretation* is avoided, we should be satisfied when our work speaks back to us with a foreign accent. That is, in fact, how we know that we have been successful; it says to us that we have communicated meaningfully to others on their own terms (Steiner and Haas 1995:vi).

Haas is concerned with designs and works of art, which might be considered text-analogues. Following his line of thought, one might say that a text translated for the web might fulfil its purpose despite the fact that it might be interpreted somewhat differently by people in different cultures. In other words, people might make sense of the meaning of the message in different ways. According to Taylor, “meanings are for a subject in a field or fields; they are, moreover, meanings which are partially constituted by self-definitions, which are in this sense already interpretations” (1998:122). So the sense people make of the meaning is dependent on their self-definition, which again is determined by the interpretations of the community in which they live. For instance, a website of a company advertising holidays in Norway might be interpreted in various ways and make people travel to Norway for various reasons. In what way the site is successful is irrelevant as long as it leads to the desired actions. But the translator must make sure that the target text is adapted to the audience, and this action requires an interpretation of both the text to be translated and the audience. The interpretation thus made will inevitably be dependent on the translator’s self-definition. But this self-definition must also be seen as a reaction to the situation in which the translator is living and working; a response to the receivers of the target text. Consequently, self-interpretations are based on interpretations, and are made through relations and interaction with others. In this way, Taylor’s statement that “we are in an interpretive circle” (Taylor 1998:122) seems relevant in the context of translation. And with web translations, it is essential that translators are conscious of the multi-cultural and multi-linguistic framework within which they work.

The concept of the ‘circle’ relates to hermeneutics; the science of interpretation. It is inherent in the principle of understanding “that the meaning of the part can be discovered only from the context - i.e., ultimately from the whole” (Gadamer 1989:190). Understanding is always a circular movement, from the whole to the parts and vice versa, and the circle is in constant expansion as the context is becoming increasingly larger. “The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding. The failure to achieve this harmony means that understanding has failed” (op.cit. 291). A precondition for the expansion of the circle is, however, that the interpreter becomes aware of his/her prejudices through a continuous process of foregrounding.

## **6. The medium of the World Wide Web**

The principle of the parts and the whole has a particular significance with respect to the translation of texts to be presented on a screen. The translation of websites should not only be conceived as a process of translating the totality of a linguistic message, but the source text should be seen as a basis

for writing content that is specially adapted to the particular medium and audience of the World Wide Web. A website should be seen in a holistic perspective where organization, graphics, colours, symbols, etc are individual elements integrated in the message and constitute parts of the rhetoric used.

Rhetoric may be defined in various ways, and may be said to “involve the strategies used by a speaker or writer in attempting to communicate with an audience” (Winkler and Cuen 1978:5). The rhetoric on a website should be seen as to encompass all the means employed by for instance an enterprise in communication with a global audience. Within this framework, the translator has to work along several axes, where both text and design are interwoven. The translator’s function as a filter between cultures is no longer limited to linguistic content because graphics, including pictures and symbols, are perceived differently and create different reactions in various cultures. Different colours mean different things to people in different cultures, just as signs and symbols such as a cross or a star may be closely knit to people’s beliefs. This is particularly relevant in relation to marketing texts where the interplay between linguistic content and other semiotic signs often is essential to the whole message. The translator might be required to take a holistic perspective of the text, including all signs and symbols, and to the extent possible make the message culturally neutral in order not to offend readers in certain cultures. To adapt a message to a specific medium is of course nothing new, but making messages culturally 'neutral' is a new aspect which requires a re-thinking of the aim of the translated text.

Also the special features of texts presented on a screen should be taken into account. The usability of the text is important. On the basis of research, it has been established that it is 25 percent slower to read from computer screens than from paper. Moreover, usability tests have shown that people use other reading techniques when searching for information on the screen than when reading from paper. Web pages are scanned for retrieving information as quickly as possible, and only words, sentences and paragraphs of interest are picked up (Nielsen 2002:101, 102). These findings have implications for the structure of web texts, which should be concise and have a scannable layout. Through several usability tests, Morkes and Nielsen have concluded that conventional guidelines for good writing are good also for the web. Elements of good style include careful organisation of the information, use of words and categories that make sense to the audience, and use of topic sentences and paragraphs limited to one main idea (Morkes and Nielsen 1997:3). For websites aimed at an international audience, special emphasis should be placed on a clear and simple language, and metaphors and humour should be used with caution as they may be interpreted quite differently by people in different countries. In addition, the language on the web should be neutral,



not subjective or boastful (Nielsen 2002: 105). This constitutes a new challenge for the translator in the construction of texts for the web, and the target text should be assessed on the basis of other criteria than a text aimed at a culture-specific audience.

Achieving an understanding of the interconnectedness of all these elements and their implications for the translation of a text represents a special interpretative challenge. In this respect, translation for the World Wide Web will have to be conceived of in a different way than for a traditional paper medium. This brings us on to another element of hermeneutic thinking, namely that we have to be aware of the fact that we are working in a tradition, and we understand texts “on the basis of expectations of meaning drawn from our own prior relation to the subject matter” (Gadamer 1989:294). In order to be able to understand the new situation, we should foreground our previous experience and be conscious of the fact that we are affected by history. We must acquire a horizon, which means to learn “to look beyond what is close at hand – not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion” (op.cit. 305). However, the horizon of the present can only be formed on the basis of the past, and understanding can only be achieved by the fusion of these horizons (op. cit. 306). The translator’s task should consequently be interpreted in light of an awareness of the features of the new medium of the world wide web compared with the old one, and our conceptions of it will have to be redefined accordingly.

A failure to see beyond one’s own horizon might have serious consequences. As the example below shows, a company’s ethos might be compromised if the audience’s perspective is not taken into account. The website of the law firm of Almestad is a case in point. Under “Litigation”, the following sentence appears: “We can plead your case before all courts of law and all instances”. The text is about a Norwegian law firm, and the sentence is presented under a British flag. One might ask which law courts the text refers to. In principle, the sentence could be interpreted to mean courts all over the world since the text is available to a global audience. Consequently, this sentence might raise doubt about the firm’s credibility since the translator failed to specify which country’s courts the text refers to.

Credibility is in fact linked to the overall quality of a site's content (Morkes and Nielsen 1997:6). Sloppy writing and poor layout on a company website may cast doubt on its products and credibility. The website of Weifa AS is a case in point. The company produces pharmaceuticals and fine chemicals aimed at the world markets, and has its *headquarter* in Oslo, the *capitol* of Norway. Moreover, the company's quality control measures span the whole

production *prosess* (my italizations). These are simple misspellings that would have been avoided by the use of a spell-checker. Grammatical errors are perhaps harder to avoid, such as the correct use of the possessive form in some places, Weifa's, and a mistake in other places, Weifas. These types of mistakes might perhaps cause the reader to question the company's quality assurance system and raise doubt about its credibility. This is hardly a good marketing strategy as the company's products presumably are of high quality despite the weaknesses in language. Again the translator's role may be questioned as the English text here might work against its objective due to the language presented. The same type of comment might of course also be made concerning traditional printed marketing material. However, when the information is presented on a web page that looks as if copied directly from a paper version the effect of the rhetoric of the page as a whole might be questioned. The text could for instance have been broken up by bullet points and made more scannable. This leads to the question of whose responsibility it is to ensure that the ethos of the company is properly presented through the totality of the rhetoric used. A web site is, after all, a dynamic entity where the content can be revised and updated on a continuous basis. Here, the challenge for the translator might be far more complex than in a comparable situation with translation for a traditional printed medium.

As Lawrence J. Prelli points out, already Aristotle noted that "a central means of persuasion is a rhetor's perceived character or *ethos*" (Prelli 1989:48). Prelli's concern is scientific ethos, and he maintains that scientific *ethos* is a rhetorical construction so that opposing qualities may be turned into virtue or vice as the case might be. The same might hold true for the translator. By employing a wrong strategy in the choice of wording, a positive rhetorical element might be turned into a phrase that will harm the perceived ethos of the company. Each linguistic element contributes to the overall impression, and we thus return to the part-whole relationship, and the issue of horizons.

## **7. Change of directions**

The concept of different horizons has another implication with respect to web translations. Within the framework of internationalization, one might say that translation should be regarded not so much a task of "bringing home", as one of "bringing out". Hence, in this respect, the translator and the audience might be seen as not being within the same circle, and consequently understanding between the two will be impossible for, according to Taylor, we have to be "within the circle" in order to understand (Taylor 1998:117).

A consequence of the above might be that translation for a global audience is impossible. In fact, this is not far from what Gadamer says about translation

in general. According to him, translation entails a gap between the “spirit of the original words and that of their reproduction” that never can be bridged. In situations where translation is required, understanding is not achieved between the partners of conversation, but between the interpreters “who can really have an encounter in a common world of understanding” (Gadamer 1989:384). The aim of translation is, however, usually to make a source language text understandable through a target language text. One aspect of this process is the translator understanding the source text, and the other aspect the reader understanding the target text. According to hermeneutic theory, the readers must foreground and appropriate their own fore-meaning and prejudices. “The important thing is to be aware of one’s bias so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s fore-meanings”. A hermeneutically trained consciousness must be “sensitive to the text’s alterity” (Gadamer 1989:269). One might ask, however, whether the reader of a web site necessarily is hermeneutically trained and can be expected to perceive a text's alterity. On the contrary, the translator’s task might be conceived of as to identify the reader's horizon and try to achieve understanding by fusing the horizons existing between them so they both come within the same circle. To fuse the horizons of a multicultural web audience inevitably requires special considerations on the part of the translator.

## **8. Writing and translation**

This brings us back to the particular challenges represented by the multifaceted backgrounds of the global audience. The medium of the World Wide Web might be seen as requiring other linguistic translation strategies than the traditional media. This might be illustrated for instance by the difficulty in many situations of finding terms that can be understood globally. The Alkestad website might serve as an example. The case of a law firm presenting itself globally is illustrative since a country’s legal system is an integrated part of its culture, and the problem of finding terms that will be understood world-wide is particularly difficult. On the Alkestad site, under News, a Supreme Court decision is cited. In Norway, the ‘Supreme Court’ (*høyesterett*) is the court of last resort in the country, but this is not necessarily the case in other countries. In the US, for instance, there are supreme courts on both state and federal levels, according to Black’s Law Dictionary. Another possibility would be to translate ‘*høyesterett*’ by ‘the court of last resort in Norway’, thus explaining the kind of court it is in a culturally neutral way. With terminology, as with culture in general, as mentioned earlier, ‘neutrality’ has come in with the World Wide Web as a new element in translation, requiring the translator to employ other strategies than earlier.

The Alkestad website has in fact been translated into both English and French, as indicated by the flags of the two countries. The English version of the site is presumably meant for an international audience. However, since the British flag is used, albeit with the text 'English' below, associations are made to the UK as a nation, the British language and the English legal system.

A closer look at the Alkestad site reveals that both British and American terminology and writing conventions are used. Under Practise areas, 'Labour law' is mentioned, written in British English. 'Real estate' is another area, and here 'condominium' is used, which is an American term. Moreover, 'by-laws' is mentioned, with a parenthesis added: '(Statutes Brit Eng)'. Again preference has been given to an American term. On this site, insufficient consideration seems to have been given to linguistic coherence and to the fact that the text appears under a British flag. We are here back to the part-whole relation.

It might be argued that the translator's task is limited to transferring the linguistic message to the target language. All other aspects related to the creation of a website should be handled by others, for instance web designers. Here again, the translator's role might be changing. Instead of a meticulous transfer of all the elements in a source text, the target text might be more functional if rewritten with the source text only providing the basic data to be communicated. It is not obvious that content in Norwegian is equally relevant to and understandable for people of other cultural backgrounds. It follows from this that it might often be sensible to re-write the content of a Norwegian site and add, or conversely leave out, information in order to communicate efficiently to a web audience.

Hence, an interpretation and understanding of the parameters within which translators work in a global environment must inevitably have implications for the way translation is performed. In hermeneutical terms, one may say that the understanding achieved must be applied to the actual translation event. For, as Gadamer points out, "an interpreter's task is not simply to repeat what one of the partners says in the discussion he is translating, but to express what is said in the way that seems most appropriate to him, considering the real situation of the dialogue" (Gadamer 1989:308). In the new situation with a global audience and the medium of the World Wide Web, we should rethink the relationship between source and target text and consequently the process of translation. And this is in fact being done in practice to a certain extent. Translators are increasingly expected to be writers as well as translators. The language professional of the future may be seen as a language engineer who is able both to write original texts and to

translate. It is in fact a growing trend today of a merger of the fields of writing and translation, and the combination of these skills “is being recognized as having a valuable role in the communication chain” (Kramasz 2003:14).

## 9. Conclusion

As has been shown above, translators working with company websites are in a different situation than when translating for an audience in a specific language culture. It might be argued that translation for the World Wide Web is only an extension of translation for traditional media. It follows from this line of argument that the methods of text transfer between languages might be discussed, but that the theoretical frameworks presented up to date are valid also for the new environment. This might hold true in many respects, considering the fact that translation essentially is a process of communicating a message from a sender in one language to an audience in another language. However, the issue seems to be more complex. There is apparently a gap between the traditional situation in which translations are made, and the environment represented by the World Wide Web. The fundamental difference lies in the multifaceted nature of the global audience, which is approached through an English language disconnected from a specific national culture. As shown above, the special situation with respect to language and culture, combined with the specific features of the World Wide Web as a medium, seems to require a redefinition of our conceptions of translation in various respects. Whether this situation may be said to have made present theories inadequate is, however, debatable. Translation theory is a broad and varied field with many approaches. However, relatively little research has been done to date into translation related to internationalization of websites, and only further research into this field will eventually show whether old theories will be applicable in the new situation.

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## ABSTRACT

### **Translation of Corporate Websites and the Changing Role of the Translator**

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An increasing number of businesses today see the need to have their company information available on the World Wide Web, accessible to a global audience. Consequently, more and more websites are translated. In Norway, English is the preferred language for communication worldwide on the web, and the translator is instrumental in the communication process.

Traditionally, the translator has been seen as a mediator between *two* languages, for instance Norwegian and British English, and the *two* corresponding cultures, as language is closely linked to culture. However, when working on texts for the web, the translator's role may be seen as changed into the transfer through an electronic medium of texts between *two* languages and *multiple* cultures in a global environment. The question is whether, and if so in what ways, this new situation calls for a redefinition of our conceptions of the process and nature of translation.

This issue is discussed with reference to certain features of the new environment in which translators work, such as multiple cultures, disconnection of language and culture, the medium of the World Wide Web and convergence between writing and translation. Moreover, the issue is linked to aspects of the theory of science. Examples are drawn from the websites of two Norwegian companies, chosen from the yellow pages, one for a law firm and another for a pharmaceutical company.

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