

TRANSLATING DECISIONS IN WEBSITE LOCALIZATION

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Abstract

Web localization is not merely to translate the content or information contained within a website, but also how to customize it to make it acceptable and readable for the target audience. In doing so, translators need to recognize the preliminary aspects such as website type or purpose, target audience, and client's instruction. On these bases, translators must then make translation judgments, whether certain elements should be translated. This article is qualitative descriptive research which expounds the reasons behind translators' decision to translate or not to translate parts of text in website localization process. The data were taken from 4 English source websites and their Indonesian versions. The findings show that the translators decide to translate parts of the source text to adapt to the source website type and the target audience. The translators decide not to translate some parts of the text due to some factors: website type or purpose, target audience, client's instruction, and space availability. Therefore, it is suggested that those aspects must be heeded by any website translators so as to make their translation have better readability among the intended readers.

Keywords: *translatability, website localization, client instruction, audience, translator's decision*

Abstrak

Pelokalan web tidak sekadar menerjemahkan konten atau informasi dalam sebuah situs web, tetapi juga menyesuaikannya agar dapat diterima dan mudah dipahami oleh audiens sasaran. Dalam melakukannya, penerjemah perlu mengenali aspek-aspek awal seperti jenis atau tujuan situs web, audiens sasaran, dan instruksi klien. Berdasarkan aspek-aspek tersebut, penerjemah kemudian harus membuat keputusan apakah elemen-elemen tertentu harus diterjemahkan atau tidak. Artikel ini merupakan penelitian deskriptif kualitatif yang menguraikan alasan di balik keputusan penerjemah untuk menerjemahkan atau tidak menerjemahkan bagian-bagian teks

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dalam proses pelokalan situs web. Data diambil dari 4 situs web sumber berbahasa Inggris dan versi Indonesianya. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa penerjemah memutuskan untuk menerjemahkan bagian-bagian teks sumber supaya menyesuaikan dengan jenis situs web sumber dan audiens sasaran. Penerjemah memutuskan untuk tidak menerjemahkan beberapa bagian teks karena sejumlah faktor, yaitu jenis atau tujuan situs web, audiens sasaran, instruksi klien, dan ketersediaan ruang. Maka, disarankan agar aspek-aspek tersebut diperhatikan oleh setiap penerjemah situs web agar hasil terjemahannya lebih dapat diterima oleh pembaca yang dituju.

Kata kunci: keterjemahan, pelokalan situs web, instruksi klien, audiens, keputusan penerjemah

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's economic globalization, localization has never been more important. Its use has helped numerous products and services originating from one particular country successfully introduced to and accepted by people from all over the world. With localization, things like software, mobile phones, mobile apps, news websites, multimedia contents, and many more can be enjoyed by millions of people who speak different languages. Thus, it is true that localization is not merely to translate the content or information representing a product or service, but also how to customize it for a 'local' audience, making it linguistically, technically, and culturally appropriate to the target locale where the product or service will be used or sold (Esselink in Sin-wai, 2003: 347). However, to make a product/service suit the target audience, translators need to make the right decision on how to render any information element of the product or service being promoted to make sure that their translation is comprehensible to target audience.

However, localization is not always as easy as it seems. A study by De la Cova (2023) set forth those certain aspects of localization projects (i.e. source file formats, translation tools or project specifications) could become an obstacle to achieving the ultimate goal of localization, and may give rise to errors. Using a corpus of online help pages of web

applications, this study identified and described potential translation problems caused by the adaptation of international variables (i.e. date and time formats, numbering, currencies, colors) in localization projects. Despite providing suggestions in localizing such international variables, De la Cova (2023) did not explain more about the importance of why the suggestions provided are to be applied.

This article attempts to expound on the underlying reasons behind the translator's decision for making certain elements in source-language websites translated or not translated. By recognizing the motive, what makes a good website localization result can be discovered. By presenting such a phenomenon, this research encourages us, particularly those specializing in website localization, to be more aware and critical in making the right decision when translating or leaving any information element of a website untranslated.

2. TRANSLATING DECISION

During the process of translating, a translator has to make a series of translating decisions including, among others, the decision to translate or not to translate particular words or expressions. According to Wilss (1994: 131), the process of making decision is influenced by four main factors: (a) translator's cognitive system, (b) linguistic, referential, sociocultural, and situational knowledge bases, (c) the task specification; and (d) the text-type-specific problem space. The first factor includes the translator's mental processes and capabilities. In the second factor, there are four types of knowledge base. Linguistic knowledge refers to the translator's bilingual mastery. Referential knowledge refers to the translator's knowledge of the world or the topic being translated. Sociocultural knowledge is identical with bicultural knowledge. Finally, situational knowledge is related to the specific context in which the translation is done. These four types of knowledge bases are needed for good decision-making.

The situational context, however, is not to be confused with macro-context and micro-context (Wills, 1994) which are basically linguistics. Macro-context is related to the text as a whole, its communicative purpose, the content implications, and the intended readership. Therefore, the translator needs to be familiar with text functions, e.g., representational, appellative, expressive (Reiss, 2000: 16). In addition, the translator also needs to know the micro-context or the elements within the texts, including words, phrases, expressions, syntax, and rhetorical strategies.

The third factor is task specification, including the purpose of the translation, the intended audience, and any specific instructions provided to the translator. This is also called translation brief. The last factor is text-type-specific problem space. This includes the genre, style, and the challenges related to the particular nature of the text. These four factors help translators understand the problem before they finally make decisions to solve the problems.

3. TRANSLATABILITY

When localizing a foreign website, in this context the linguistic (verbal) elements, translators must make sure that the translation adequately conveys the intended message or meaning of the original. Such capacity of message or meaning to be transferred from one language to another without undergoing fundamental change is called translatability (Palumbo, 2009: 121). Hence, translators need to make a good decision in employing translation strategies so that the translation they produce transfers the message or meaning accurately. In other words, translatability can be referred to as the extent to which it is possible to translate from one language to another (Hatim and Munday, 2004: 352). So, translatability and its negative counterpart, i.e. untranslatability, are related to the possibility of translating any linguistic item from one language to another.

In practice, this is not as easy as it seems. Translating (localizing) website does not merely translate verbal elements found on the website into Target Language (TL). There are factors on which the translation task depends, including the purpose of the localization intended to aim by the client (the website owner) and target audience (Hatim and Munday, 2004: 15). The second factor is then manifested by the translation brief provided by the client as the guideline for translators in performing web localization. In addition to that, there is also a case when a translator chooses not to translate part of the text for specific reasons, for example, after considering the type of text or the purpose of the translation (Reiss, 2000: 33).

Taking note of those factors above, adaptive approach or flexibility is needed in localizing website. It means that translators need to recognize the aforementioned factors (i.e. website type or purpose, target audience, and client's instruction or translation brief) when performing localization of a website. This consideration might lead to the decision to preserve, to a certain degree, elements of the original website by leaving them untranslated. This does not necessarily mean that they cannot be translated. Some portion of the content indeed may not be translated or localized either because of some considerations such as the absence of corresponding referent in the TL, acceptability of the source term for the target audience, or instruction in the translation brief by the client to preserve the source term (Hariyanto, 2017: 42). Hence, the translation strategy to be applied is borrowing, where translators consciously choose the same word in the localized website as it is found in the original. So, instead of translating it, translator's decision not to translate it allows comprehensibility to exist, thereby allowing the localized website to be accessible and transparent enough in conveying the original website message appropriately (Hatim and Munday, 2004: 336).

4. WEB LOCALIZATION

Web localization arises as the implication of globalization as well as further development in translation industry. The demand for globalized marketing of products and services prompts companies to display their websites, particularly their contents linguistically, in a way that is more acceptable and understandable for wider audiences across the globe. The main purpose of localization is therefore to maximize the understandability and usability of a product or service being offered so it can be used or enjoyed in different parts of the world with optimum effectiveness (Sin-wai, 2013: 347).

Web localization is not solely about translating textual contents contained on a web page, but also involves adapting computational, cultural, economic, and legal aspects within. On this issue, Jimenez-Crespo (2024: 19) maintains that there are four key components in localization process: linguistic, cultural, physical, and technical components. Thus, localizing website is a complex process where translators need to consider not only linguistic aspects (such as the semantic meaning of a string of words), but also make sure that the output of the localization (i.e. translation) conforms to all the related aspects that support the website's ultimate goal. For example, we need to adapt the currencies, time and date formats, unit of measurement, command buttons, user guide, to copyright and personal data protection, which may differ between one country and another.

Things to bear in mind is that any website is published for some purposes (Hariyanto, 2017: 43). Hence, any translator who intends to deal with web localization must try as much as possible to create a localized website which preserves the function/purpose of the source website. For instance, if the source website is intended to offer a product, the target website needs to perform the same way. Likewise, if the source web is an encyclopedia, then the target website should be presented accordingly. Such a purpose then also determines the type of audience it aims to reach. For instance, when the source web is a

dating website intended for young or teen audience, then it should be localized relevantly, like using informal, more casual language.

In doing so, translators must make sure that they do not merely translate the web contents or find the exact equivalents, but also maintain that the result is comprehensible for the audience and invoke similar responses from them. That is why it is possible that the contents of a website is not fully translated by taking into account the factors mentioned in the preceding section: the intended function/purpose, target audience, and the website publisher/owner's instruction. So, the key here is how to maintain comprehensibility. Any translation strategy may be applied as far as it conforms to the factors above to retain the comprehensibility of the information contained.

In terms of acceptability and marketability of localization, Zhu (2021: 107) affirms that if a piece of technical translation wants to improve its acceptability and marketability, the needs of targeted audience and the communication purpose should be given full attention. The solution is then by making a translation that targets or fits the choice of words, syntactic patterns, and language tone understood by the audience.

In summary, when it comes to localizing websites, a translator considers two aspects: (1) type of website (defined by what function/purpose it serves and to whom it is published) and (2) client's instruction (as pointed out in the project brief). There is a situation where literal translation may be a better option while, in another case, borrowing proves to be a better translation strategy.

5. METHODOLOGY

This study is descriptive qualitative research primarily by making comparison between linguistic elements of source-language (English) websites and target-language (Indonesian) websites. Those linguistic elements—taking the forms of word, phrase or sentence—are then

explored to seek understanding regarding the reasons why the linguistic elements of source-language websites are translated in such ways.

The data comprises of 8 pairs of source text and target text taken from four different websites or web applications: Scribd, Tinder, Gmail, and Spotify. The source texts originated from the English version of those websites while the target texts are from the Indonesian version. The data are of various linguistic units, from a single word to a full sentence.

The analysis goes through the following sequence:

1. Identifying the source text elements on the original websites with the corresponding elements in the Indonesian versions.
2. Identifying translated and untranslated source elements.
3. Identifying the translation technique for each pair.
4. Analyzing the reason or motive behind the translatability or untranslatability decision by considering the website's characteristics.
5. Drawing conclusion about how motive in localization can help translators deal with translatability-untranslatability issue.

6. FINDINGS

From the discussion in the preceding sections, it is clear that the translator's decision to translate or not translate parts of the source text in web localization is not simple. If a particular content or segment of a webpage is linguistically seen as a single text (inseparable unit of meaning), sometimes the translator leaves parts of it (lexical elements, phrases) untranslated, or on the contrary, translates the whole text. Based on the cline above, different parts of contents of a website may be positioned at different points on it. In other words, the decision to translate or not is governed by the variables mentioned earlier, i.e. website purpose, target audience, and the owner's instruction.

The findings and analysis will be grouped on the basis of the website where they appear. Therefore, the first analysis will be the data found in Scribd. Take a look at the following snaps of two versions of Scribd's home screen (the original and localized version).



Figure 1. English version of a Scribd page



Figure 2. Indonesian version of a Scribd page

Scribd is a company based in the US providing reading subscription service, including e-books, audio books, podcasts, magazines, etc. See Figure 1. Data 1 appears at the top left corner of the original home screen (right below the brand name Scribd), a slogan *Read or listen anytime, anywhere* appears. However, in the localized home screen, this slogan is not only untranslated but is completely omitted (see Figure 1.). From the localization viewpoint, this might not happen by mistake. It is worth noting that web localization is not only about translating contents. It also needs to consider the space available and the whole website layout. There are times when translators need to

compromise with the limited space by truncating the content length in order to fit the space.

However, that is not always the case. Sometimes, the clients (web owners) simply ask the translators not to translate or localize certain elements within their websites. As for the Scribd's home screen above, the exclusion of the slogan *Read or listen anytime, anywhere* in the localized website is most possibly because of technical/computational reason that led the web owner to decide to exclude it on the localized home page. While there is still enough space for the slogan, the final localized home screen does not include it. Hence, it must be by the owner/publisher's instruction that this slogan is not translated. Such an exclusion linguistically does not degrade the website's purpose since the target audience would find no difficulties to comprehend what service is offered by Scribd.

Data 2 is the word *podcast*. Although the equivalent for this word in Indonesian already exists (i.e. *siniar*), the translator decided to apply borrowing technique (*podcast*) by apparently seeing the word *siniar* as a term less frequently used among Indonesian audience or not a well-known equivalent in Indonesian for the word *podcast*. In the perspective of website type, the use of such translation technique would psychologically bring the product/service closer to the potential customers in an informative and communicative way, which certainly meets the characteristics of Scribd as a social reading and publishing platform. In the perspective of target audience, it is clear that the motive is to gain more potential Scribd subscribers. Therefore, in order to make target audience aware of the services Scribd offers, it is favorable to leave the word *podcast* untranslated. (See Figure 1 and Figure 2). This audience-driven decision is taken to make the website's purpose/function pragmatically comprehensible.

On the other hand, by doing the opposite (translating *podcast* into *siniar*), its semantic meaning would not be transparent enough for the

audience, which consequently would compromise Scribd's success to promote its service. Data 3 and 4 were taken from the website Tinder, a popular online dating platform. Please take a look at Figure 3 and 4.

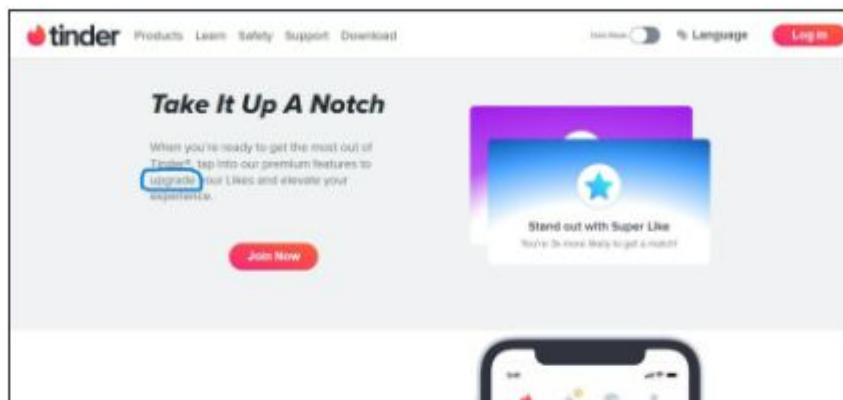


Figure 3. English version of a Tinder page

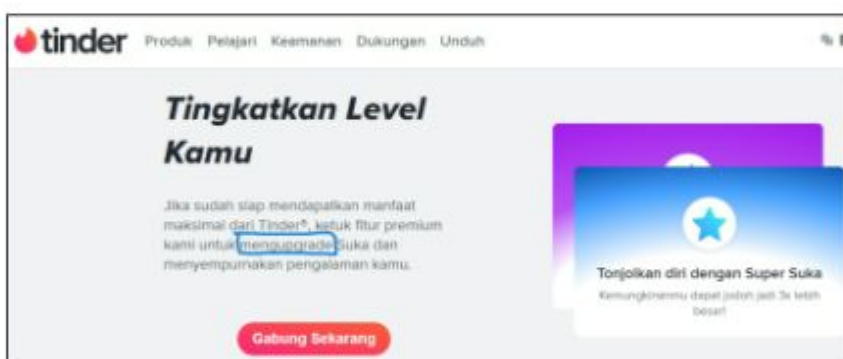


Figure 4. Indonesian version of a Tinder page

From the word choice in its source version (Figure 3), it can be seen that Tinder's website pragmatically has a more easy-going and informal goal. So is the data 3: *Take it Up a Notch*. In this case, it is clear that the translator employs pragmatic adaptation as the translation strategy. While this idiomatic expression is translated unidiomatically, the Indonesian heading remains informal and sounds friendly, indicated by the informal singular second person pronoun, i.e. *kamu* instead of the formal counterpart (*Anda*). Such a strategy is used

to make sure that the message (not only the meaning) of the idiomatic heading reaches the target audience. Also, it is worth noting that Tinder is a dating website. Offering such a service, it would be ineffective and awkward if the translation shifts into a formal tone. As for the heading, it is not translated idiomatically to maintain comprehensibility. Using more idiomatic heading would make it harder for the audience to understand the intended message. So, it would be much safer for the Indonesian version to be more pragmatically straightforward.

Moving on to Data 4 (i.e. the word *upgrade*), it is left untranslated. The translator even does not apply the rule set forth in the official Indonesian orthography (*Ejaan Yang Disempurnakan*) when joining loan word with the prefix *meng-*. There should be a hyphen between the prefix *meng* and *upgrade*. Therefore, it should be written as *meng-upgrade*. This rule is ignored since Tinder wants to maintain its friendly tone. Adopting such a rigid rule would make the content look formal. Surely, dating would not become exciting and intimate enough if such formality rule is applied. This example then highlights how target audience also influences the decision to translate or not translate elements of a website.

Data 5 (i.e. the word *file*) was taken from Gmail platform. See Figure 5 below.



Figure 5. An Indonesian version of a Gmail page

While the word *file* can be rendered into *berkas*, it remains untranslated. Apparently, Google wants to make sure that Gmail users are comfortable and familiar with the term. Opting for translating it into *berkas* would possibly sound awkward and make users think harder. Therefore, with the word *file* remains intact, such IT terminology would be more practically comprehensible for more diverse audience.

Data 6, 7, and 8 were found on a Spotify page. Take a look at Fig. 6. It tells about the plan options on the Spotify website.



Figure 6. An Indonesian version of a Spotify page

From Fig. 6 above, it can be ascertained that Data 6, 7, and 8 refer to the types of Spotify plans. They are left untranslated, i.e. *Premium Student*, *Premium Duo*, and *Premium Family*. Surely, such translation does not appear as a result of the decision of the translators but part of the instruction in the project brief provided. In it, the client clarifies any terms that can or cannot be translated, like the product name, special features names, etc. Moreover, insisting on translating those plans would just make them incomprehensible for the users. Therefore, by obeying the project brief, translators can then decide how to deal with

translatability issue in a more accurate and acceptable manner particularly on the client's end.

Finally, regarding the translator's decision to translate or not translate parts of text in website localization, it can be summarized in the following figure.

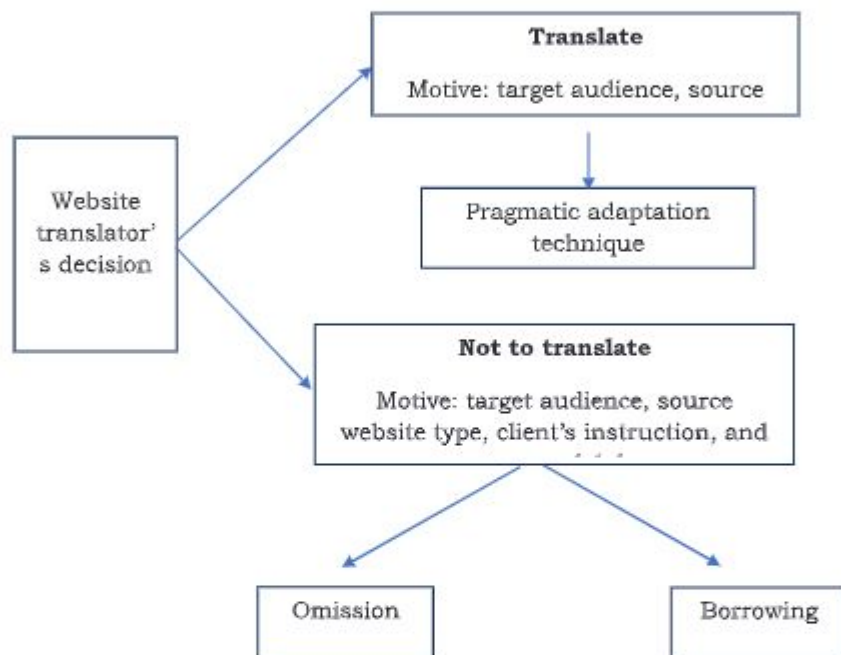


Figure 7. Motive-driven translatability vs. untranslatability framework

The framework above shows that when localizing a website, translators need to have a certain level of preliminary understanding, particularly about what type of website is to be translated, to whom it is targeted, and what the client (website's publisher) expects from the localization. Usually, all this information is provided in the translation brief handed to the translators before the localization process commenced. Sometimes, the brief does not include an exhaustive list. Despite the description of the website types, the details are not available, for instance, the tone of language expected from the

translation, etc. As the motives are recognized, then translators can decide what translation technique/strategy is best applied.

6. DISCUSSION

Having analyzed how the source texts are localized into Indonesian, the researcher found that only one of them is translated, i.e. Data 3 (*Take It Up A Notch*). Moreover, Data 1 (*Read or listen anytime, anywhere*) was not only untranslated, it was also omitted completely on the Scribd's Indonesian website. Why these occur cannot be considered as solely the translator's decision without underlying factors.

As already pointed out earlier that the possibility of translating different parts of contents of a website may be positioned at different points on a cline considering several factors. In other words, the decision to translate or not is never absolute and may be governed by the functional aspects of the website, i.e. website purpose, target audience, and the owner's instruction as explained by Hariyanto (2017: 43). For instance, why Data 1 is not only untranslated, but also omitted? There are two possible motives. First, space availability and the whole website layout might be considered. There are times when translators need to compromise with the limited space by truncating the content length in order to fit the space. Second, it was based upon the client's instruction. Sometimes, the clients (web owners) simply ask not to translate or localize certain elements within their websites. These motives concur with Jimenez-Crespo (2024: 19) who maintains that localization process is not only about linguistic aspect, but also related to technical, cultural, and physical ones. Here, the motives recognized from Data 1 are related to technical aspect.

Data 2 and 5 (i.e. *podcast* and *mengupgrade* respectively) might be motivated by the importance of making target audience easily comprehend what the website means to say or offer. In accordance with the previous study by De la Cova (2023), international variables such as

date and time formats should be localized in such a way that conforms to audience understanding in order to make them understand web apps more easily. Such notions are confirmed by Data 2 and 5 where the translators left them untranslated to make target audience comprehend easier. The finding of Data 2 and 5 also conforms to Zhu (2021: 107) who maintains that the needs of targeted audience and the communication purpose should be given full attention to make a translation (or localization) more acceptable and marketable.

As for Data 3 (*Take It Up A Notch*) which is the only data in this practitioner research that is translated in a friendly tone, the motive is certainly to make the Tinder website remains informal and friendly-looking for the Indonesian audience. Again, it shows how the website's purpose is heeded, as set forth by Hariyanto (2017: 43).

Last but not least, Data 6, 7, and 8, which indicate that translatability is not possible (due to client's instruction not to translate them) confirms what De la Cova (2023) found that project specification can give rise to errors. Once the translator does not heed the project specification as instructed by the client (for example translating any elements that should be otherwise untranslated), errors will occur. In this present article, Data 6, 7, and 8 indicate that the translators heed what the client expects.

This article's findings also confirm that the decision of translating or not translating verbal elements of a website is not only influenced by internal factors (i.e. translators' cognitive system and their linguistic, referential, sociocultural, and situational knowledge), but also external factors (i.e. task specification and text-type-specific problem space) as proposed by Wilss (1994: 131). In this case, task specification might refer to website purpose, target audience, client's instruction, and technical/computational factor, i.e. space availability. All these information is usually provided in the translation brief given to the translators prior to the localization task commencement. Meanwhile,

the text-type-specific problem space might be represented by the website type. Once these external factors—along with the internal ones—are heeded, translating decision-making in website localization will not be hard to do.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the decision to translate certain elements or otherwise is governed by a number possible reasons: the website type, website purpose, target audience, client's instruction, and more technical issue, i.e. space availability. Once these reasons are identified, it would be easy for translators to decide whether or not certain elements on source-language website are to be translated and what translation techniques are to be used. When it is done properly in such a way, the localization would contribute positively to promoting the website's products/services.

This article is expected to give rise to the sensitivity and thoughtfulness among translators concerning the possible motives being discussed when localizing website. It is hoped that any future study can dive deeper into this area of research by employing more data obtained from more various websites. This way, the localization can be done more perfectly.

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