

Chapter 4

Breaking Language and Cultural Barriers: A Key to Improve Stakeholder Relationships of SMEs

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes how since successful communication with stakeholders is a vital process for every company, it is necessary to consider language and cultural barriers as external factors to internationalize SMEs, that company owners must consider carefully. The language industry is constantly growing and getting stronger to supply business needs and to support SMEs in their internationalization processes. A survey was applied to a sample of Translation Service Providers in order to analyze the physical, digital and human resources they use in their translation processes. It found that they use different state of the art digital resources, they do not really use physical resources frequently (different from dictionaries) and they include proofreaders and experts in different areas as human resources, in addition to specialized translators, in their processes. As a conclusion, Translation Service Providers are getting prepared to support companies and especially to promote the internationalization of SMEs, by helping them break language and cultural barriers.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyzes the influence of adequate communication between small and medium enterprises and their stakeholders in their internationalization process. It explains linguistic and cultural barriers that can obstacle business relations, when small and medium enterprises want to expand their markets and enter a different commercial environment. Any company having internationalization processes may face communication problems to access new markets, because of the lack of knowledge of linguistic differences of the target culture. As García et al (2016) show about the importance of language in internationalizing companies, sharing the same language reduces a lot of transactions to be made abroad.

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They also consider that language is cultural and historical “bridge” that shortens distances among individuals and countries. Small and medium enterprises opening markets to international environments should consider these differences to reduce unnecessary costs.

When small and medium enterprises are getting involved in international operations, their communications with stakeholders must be as natural and fluent as possible, to project the best image and avoid misunderstandings. As García, Alonso and Jiménez (2016) state: the use of a common language is a decisive factor to know about foreign markets, to reduce the psychological distance between physical barriers and to make businesses closer and more attractive to enter new markets. That is a very strong reason for small and medium enterprises to translate its corporate texts such as website contents, the portfolio of its services and some other specific communications into the native language of its target audience. For this reason, proper semantic translation of documents and general contents of sources of information of small and medium enterprises is a necessary tool, to improve internationalization processes in specific foreign markets.

Opening to new markets implies knowing other cultures and localizing language to be close to customers and in general to all stakeholders. It means communicating in the right way and using the right messages. Adequate, high quality translations enable small and medium enterprises have appropriate communication with stakeholders abroad. Having the website translated into different languages, offering corporate information in the language of customers. Even more, sending everyday messages abroad, not only readable, but also understandable, creates a friendly environment for a company to enter into new markets. Translation becomes a valuable asset to make small and medium enterprises expand abroad.

This chapter also includes the results of a research project that is aimed at determining the trends of the Colombian translation industry, to support the internationalization process of small and medium enterprises. This study identifies different resources including physical, digital and human to translate documents, as a support for small and medium enterprises involved in international environments. In addition, it describes the areas in which companies require more translation services in order to get into foreign markets.

BACKGROUND

The Revista Dinero, a well-known business magazine, wrote about Colombian small and medium enterprises in its edition issued on September 16th, 2015. It stated that Small and Medium Enterprises not only offer 64% of employment in Colombia, but they also contribute with 30% of the GDP and participate with 94.6% of the industry. According to this magazine, they have become into a strong commitment to reach the internationalization of Economy and growth rates required by Colombia to decrease poverty. It means that Colombian SMEs are hardly supported to begin their internationalization processes. Programs like MIPYME INTERNACIONAL are created by PROCOLOMBIA (the Colombian entity that promotes international tourism, foreign investment and non-traditional exports) to encourage small and medium enterprises that have highly demanded products in international markets, to create their foreign trade areas, as specified in the website of PROCOLOMBIA. This program is mainly proposed for business in the agricultural, agro-industrial and manufacturing industry. It means that small and medium enterprises have excellent support and opportunities to expand their markets abroad.

The internationalization process of small and medium enterprises is considered a corporate learning process, as stated by Johanson and Vahlne (1990). It means that companies must follow an international

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