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# Final Project

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## Introduction

This report analyzes if a document would be effective for Germany. For this analysis I selected a document I created for a software development team. The company used a work-tracking tool called TFS and some of the team members were not familiar with its use. I created a user guide that documented the sections of TFS that the team frequently used. I used one section of the document for this analysis. The original document consists of step-by-step instructions for how to create a User Story in TFS. A User Story is a description of the work being tracked.

## Translation Issues

The original document consists of short instructions and images to illustrate the instructions. To prepare the document for translation, the original document text was translated to German using Google Translate. The German version was then used to translate from German back to English. A comparison of the documents revealed translation issues that required correction.

All decisions for changes to the original document were based on the Global English guidelines (Kohl, 2008):

- eliminating ambiguities that impede translation
- eliminating uncommon non-technical terms and unusual grammatical constructions that non-native speakers (even those who are quite fluent in English) are not likely to be familiar with
- making English sentence structure more explicit and therefore easier for nonnative speakers (as well as native speakers) to analyze and comprehend
- eliminating unnecessary inconsistencies

## Accepted Changes

Throughout the document the word *from* was changed to *in* (“from the Backlog” to “in the Backlog” and *using* was changed to *with* (“using the keyboard” to “with the keyboard”). These changes made the original document easier to understand even in English.

The order of some phrases was changed. For example, “see Boards for the direct link” was changed to “for a direct link see Boards.” Again, this change made the document easier to understand.

The original version did not include the word *you*. To translate to German effectively, it was added for clarity: “When **New Item** is clicked...” was replaced with “When you click **New Item**....” This changed the instruction to a more active voice.

Another change that was made throughout the document was the word *blank* was replaced by the word *empty*. The word blank does not translate well. The German translation according to Google Translate is *leer*. *Leer* is translated back to English as *read*. One definition of *leer* in German is *unfilled*. *Empty* is a better description of the state of a text box being unfilled and translates more accurately.

“From the Backlog view, at the top left, click New Work Item” was changed to “In the top left of the Backlog view, click New Work Item.” This statement is clearer than the original and translates correctly.

## Rejected Changes

German capitalizes all nouns and the US capitalizes only proper nouns. Therefore, some of the words (User Story, Backlog) that were capitalized in the original were not capitalized when the document was translated back to English from German. Because these words refer to specific elements in TFS, the capitalization was restored.

Another change that was rejected was the term *New Item* in English. The German translation changed it to *New Element*. However, *New Item* refers to a specific button labeled as *New Item* in TFS and changing it to *New Element* would not make sense.

## German Culture

According to Ulijn and St. Amant (2000, pg. 222) Germany is a low context culture. In low context cultures information is “explicitly stated” (Hoft, 1995, pg. 79). Because the US is also low context, the original document was already structured in a way that a German reader would understand. The instructions were explicit without extra wording. As discussed above, changes were made for clarity and, interestingly, those changes made the document more explicit in English also.

In addition to the ease of translation due to both the US and Germany being low context cultures, native German speakers write technical documents in English (TECK Language Solutions, Inc., 2017). The original document was written very closely to Global English so only small changes were necessary for translation to German. One could argue, however, that the document did not require translation to German as Germans would expect a technical document to be written in English.

The images in the original document are screenshots of the TFS software. Arrows are used to show the users where on the screen to look for the element mentioned in the instructions. Arrows are used cross-culturally as pointers so the images with arrows as pointers are understood by German readers.

## Conclusion

While there were changes made to the original document to enhance clarity and make it closer to Global English, in its original state it was easily translated to German. After translating the original document to German and back to English, the revised version was not awkward grammatically and only

a few wording and phrasing changes were necessary. With these changes, the document should translate well to German.

## References

Hoft, Nancy L (1995). *International Communication: How to Export Information About High Technology*. United States: Wiley.

Kohl, J.R. (2008). *The Global English Style Guide: Writing Clear, Translatable Documentation for a Global Market*. Cary, NC: SAS Publishing.

TECK Language Solutions, Inc. (2017). *Translating German Technical Documents Takes Special Skills*. Retrieved October 4, 2020 from <https://www.teck-translations.com/translating-german-technical-documents-takes-special-skills/>

Ulijn, J. & St.Amant, K. (2000). Mutual Intercultural Perception: How Does It Affect Technical Communication? Some Data from China, the Netherlands, Germany, France, and Italy. *Technical Communication*. 47. 220-237.