

A PacTranz publication

How to produce
great

multilingual desktop publishing materials, painlessly!



A practical guide
for **business clients**
and **designers**

This publication provides the information
clients need to produce
top quality multilingual materials.

Part A is for business clients

It covers:

- your need-to-knows
- how to choose your providers
- the steps to take to get best results from your projects

Part B is for design and print professionals

It covers:

- designs that won't work for other languages, and how to avoid them
- key typesetting considerations by language groups

Produced by Pacific International Translations

This is the print version of our [blog article](#).

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Part A: The clients' 4-step guide to stress-free multilingual dtp outcomes

In these 4 steps and you'll learn how to:

- set things up so your projects run smoothly
- choose providers that will do a great job
- streamline your work flow and reduce your project management time
- avoid the common mistakes others make.

All of which means your foreign language materials are much more likely to be a resounding success in your target market!

Step 1. Learn the basics: what every client needs to know about multilingual dtp

To start, let's be clear what we're talking about.

1 Multilingual desktop publishing defined

In its broadest sense, multilingual dtp simply means using software to produce documents and publications in different languages.

That could be anything from a simple Word document through to high quality digital or print publications.

But there is a narrower, more common meaning:

Converting and adapting an existing graphic design document or publication into other languages.

An example would be converting your company brochure into other languages. Or your business cards. Or your marketing or product materials.

This is the scenario we're referring to in this guide.

Graphic design programs are used to create brochures, books, posters, packaging, branding, and more – in fact just about anything that combines text and images.

Tip: if your materials have graphics or images and are not Word documents, they are very likely to be graphic design files.

2 What programs are used for multilingual dtp?

These days Adobe products rule the roost, typically:

- **InDesign** for multi page publications
- **Illustrator** for more graphic-dominated, generally single page materials, or
- **Photoshop**.



QuarkExpress, which once dominated the market, is still preferred by some designers.

Hot tip: The File, Properties, Description menu in Acrobat will often show you what program a pdf was created from.

3 What does multilingual dtp involve?

Converting existing materials into other languages will typically involve 3 steps:

1. **translating** the text into the required languages
2. **typesetting** those translated texts
3. producing the required **output** (digital or print)

Typesetting

is the process of arranging and correctly formatting text in a graphic design file.

4 Who does it?

Projects will typically involve:

- the graphic designers who produced your original document, and
- a translation and typesetting services company (like us!).

Your **graphic designers** will generally start and finish a project:

- they'll prepare and forward the files to the translation company, and
- produce the final output.

In between, the **translation company** will:

- translate the text(s) into the required languages
- typeset those translations in the designers' file(s).

Variations

- Occasionally clients will use different companies for the translation and typesetting steps.
- Some clients have their own translators, with the translation house doing just the typesetting.
- And sometimes clients will want an independent review of the translations added to the process.

5 Why you need experts every step of the way

Don't even think about using amateurs for your multilingual dtp projects – it's a recipe for disaster!

The success of your materials depends on everything being done well.

In fact, done **very well**.



Here's why you need to use professionals for each step:

Professional translators will ensure your foreign language texts are fit for purpose. That means translations that are accurate, well-worded and convey the message in an appropriate way. You can [read here](#) why most bilinguals don't make good translators. And if you need more convincing, here is [the process pro translators know to use](#), but amateurs generally don't. On top of that, there is the [additional QA steps](#) quality-focused translation companies like us carry out as standard practice.

Experienced multilingual typesetters will ensure all foreign text displays correctly and page layout is appropriate for the target cultures. In Part B we cover the mistakes typesetters unfamiliar with a language typically make – and have no idea they've made. How the text is presented on the page has a huge impact on how readers respond to a publication, and therefore how successful it is. So don't take a risk with someone who might do a poor job because they don't know what they don't know!

Design, print or pre-press professionals will ensure the output is exactly right. Output can be surprisingly tricky, with many different settings to get right. Translation companies generally don't have designers or pre-press experts in house, only multilingual typesetters. So for most projects it's best to leave the output processes to your designer or print specialist.

Typesetting

Step 1a. Knowing a bit more about typesetting will help too

1 What multilingual typesetters actually do (in broad terms)

The typesetter's job is to:

- correctly arrange the foreign language texts in the design files
- ensure the end result is appealing to the target readers.

They will first **import** the translation into the design file, then **adjust** and **re-format** the text so it:

- displays correctly
- fits the available space
- follows the rules and conventions for that language
- looks good and can be easily read.

They'll also make sure:

- overall page layout is appropriate and attractive
- there is consistency of style across the publication.

The final step is to print out the new language versions and **proof** them thoroughly. This is a vital part of the process and generally involves more than one person.

Often the translator will be required to sign off the typesetting before delivery.

5 things a multilingual typesetter will typically need to adjust:

- **fonts** – especially for languages written in other scripts
- **text box sizes** – because translations are invariably of different length to the original text
- **text point sizes** – so it fits optimally into the available space
- **line spacing** (called “*leading*”) – for visual appeal, neither cluttered nor overly spaced out
- **text styles** – existing ones re-defined or new styles created for each language

2 The 5 requisites for multilingual typesetting

i. Software/Fonts

- standard English design and word processing software
- a range of quality fonts for each language
- specific programs or plug-ins for certain languages – e.g. the Middle Eastern version of InDesign is needed to handle right to left languages such as Arabic



Multilingual dtp requires a range of different font styles and weightings in each language to be typeset

ii. Design program expertise

- familiarity with industry-standard layout and output techniques and processes
- expertise in formatting text - multilingual dtp often requires significant adjustment of the original text settings to fit translated texts into the available space
- how to use the World-Ready Composer



iii. Knowledge of the language(s)

- to confirm all text is displaying correctly

iv. Knowledge of language-specific text conventions

- which fonts are appropriate and when
- the dos and don'ts for layout and design that need to be followed

v. Language-specific layout techniques and workarounds

- The unorthodox typesetting techniques and solutions needed for the tricky scripts and languages

Step 2. Choose the right providers - and you'll get a dream ride

1 Your design/print professionals

It's always best to involve the designers of your existing materials in any multilingual dtp project.

That's because they

- have all the required files
- are familiar with the design, and so
- are best placed to work with the multilingual typesetters to produce the other language versions.

If that's not possible, you'll need to get all the files from them. Failing that, the materials will need to be recreated.

Note: If you are producing a new design (don't have existing materials), make sure your designers know it's for a multilingual project. As we explain in Part B, this may affect aspects of their design.

2 Your translators & typesetters

There are several advantages to using a single company for both translation and typesetting steps. It will:

- reduce project complexity
- reduce the chance of mix ups between different parties
- simplify your project management requirements
- probably result in a faster turnaround
- likely be cheaper.

With less chance of error and a simpler project structure, we recommend a single provider unless you have compelling reasons not to.

In choosing your provider, make sure you're happy they:

- can translate into all the project languages
- will produce translations of high standard
- have typesetting/dtp expertise in all the languages
- will be easy to deal with and work well with your designers.

Three cases where you might decide *not* to use a single provider:

- If you have great faith in your current translation company but they don't do typesetting.
- If you have great faith in your translation company but they don't handle certain languages.
- If you have your own translators that you're convinced will do a better job. This will generally only be for complex technical materials where they have specific technical knowledge or in-depth knowledge of your systems or requirements. Take care here though – technical experts are often great at the technical side of things, not so good at the other aspects needed to produce top quality translations.

Important:

If you opt for separate or multiple providers, it's crucial the translators provide their texts how the typesetters want them.

They may have preferences for certain file types, layout, even fonts in certain languages.

Supplying something different could result in additional typesetting time, and therefore cost. In a worst-case scenario, the translation files may not be usable.

2 FAQs:

Can't the designers just typeset the languages themselves?

For some simple projects in European languages, maybe. But it generally isn't advisable, as typesetting can be quite complex and laying out a language you aren't familiar with is decidedly risky - see Part B.

Can't the translation company also provide the output files?

For anything beyond pdfs, it's risky. The pre-press process requires specialised knowledge, so it's best left to the experts.

Key points:

- Involve the designers of your original materials in your project.
- Use a single trusted provider for both translation and typesetting, unless there are strong reasons not to.
- If using your own translators, take special care their translations are complete, accurate and well-worded, and in the format the typesetters need.

Step 3. Sort these 3 essentials before you begin - to nip potential issues in the bud

1 Make sure your text/document is really ready for translation

Please don't do what some clients do!

Send through a project without first reviewing the texts to confirm they are 100% relevant and appropriate for the target markets. Pretty obvious – but easy to overlook.

Here's a partial list of things to look for:

- Are there sections or references that won't apply to foreign clients/markets?
E.g. contact details, regulations, other services/products.
- Any culturally specific text or wording?
This may be lost on foreign language readers, or elicit a different response than intended.
- Any jokes/puns/play on words?
These seldom translate easily or well, so rewording is recommended.
- Any product names?
The translators will need to know what name these are sold/marketed under in the target market.

You may want to consider "internationalising" your text before sending it for translation.

i18n

Internationalisation is the reviewing of text-based materials prior to their translation to remove location-specific references and ensure more generic content relevant to all markets.

2 Confirm your project time frames are realistic

Many clients underestimate the time needed for a multilingual desktop publishing project.

We can very quickly tell you how long we will need, so just ask!

And our quotes always include our time frame.

Our guide to [realistic translation project times](#) might also be helpful.



Important:

It's wise not to try to [squeeze reasonable time frames](#)!

Doing so means the project will have to be rushed, which greatly increases the chances of mistakes being made. And that will affect the quality and effectiveness of your materials.

3 Ensure the typesetters see the layout early on

Texts typically expand in translation (see Part B), often significantly.

This means it can sometimes be difficult for typesetters to fit translated texts into the space available in the design file.

Identifying this early will **provide time** to adjust the layout or design. These tweaks can make a big difference to the overall quality of the other language versions, and reader response to them.

Conversely, you don't want to discover any issues in the final (typesetting) phase when the pressure is generally on to finalise the project. The project would either have to be delayed, or the typesetters would have to just do what they can knowing the result isn't ideal.

It's just a matter of the designer sending the typesetters a **pdf of their artwork** at the start of the project so they can assess the layout.



Step 4. Adopt the right work flow – and you'll make life much easier for yourself

1 Our recommended work process - a single provider

Using a single provider for both translation and typesetting makes for a very efficient and streamlined work process.

And because translation companies like ours are used to coordinating with designers, your work in managing the project is reduced to a minimum. You simply:

- get our quote
- give the go ahead
- potentially answer queries that arise
- get progress reports if needed
- receive the final files.

This process gives the **fastest turnaround**, and of course **minimises the chances of error** and complication that inevitably arise with more parties involved in the project.

Here are the steps in the process:

Step 1. Client gives go ahead to Designer and Translation House

Step 2. Designer forwards files to Translation House

Step 3. Translation

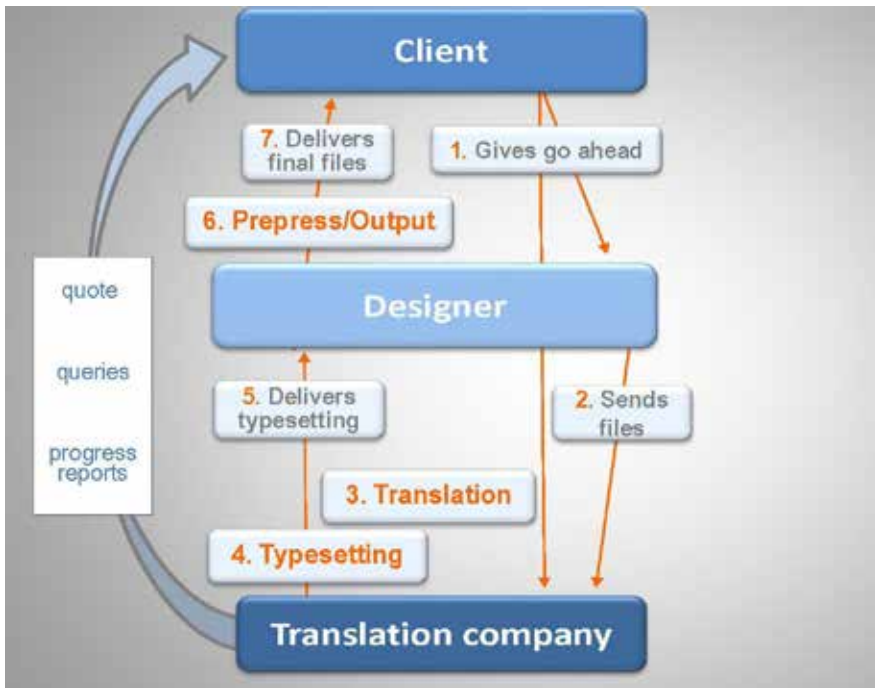
Step 4. Typesetting

Step 5. Translation House sends typeset files to Designer

Step 6. Designer checks files, produces output

Step 7. Designer delivers final artwork to Client

Schematically:



2 Alternative Processes

i. Separate translation and typesetting providers

Using different providers for translation and typesetting **adds some complexity**.

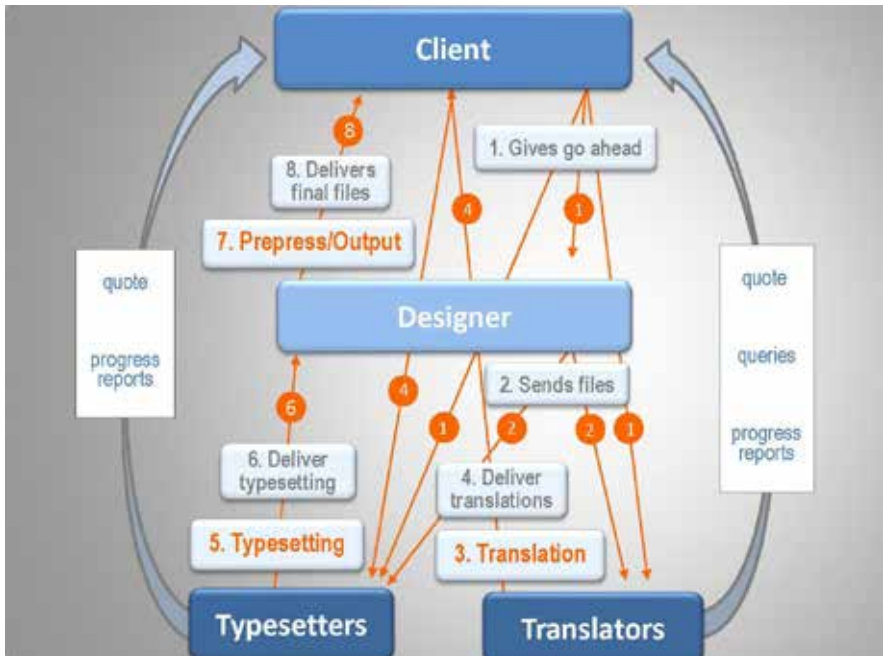
There will be an additional company to deal with, so you'll need to make sure everyone is on the same page as to who is doing what and when.

The project will likely **take a little more time** than if you were dealing with a single provider, and your project management time will be increased.

Here are the steps in the work flow:

- Step 1.** Client gives go ahead to Designer, Translators, Typesetters
- Step 2.** Designer forwards files to Translators and Typesetters
- Step 3.** Translation
- Step 4.** Translators deliver translations to Client; Client forwards these to Typesetters
- Step 5.** Typesetting
- Step 6.** Typesetters send typeset files to Designer
- Step 7.** Designer checks files, produces output
- Step 8.** Designer delivers final artwork to Client

Schematically:



This scenario makes sense if your preferred translation company does not provide typesetting services.

ii. Using individual translators

The work process here is the same as for two companies, but you'll be dealing with individual translators rather than a single company to produce the translations.

The **big challenge** is how you ensure the translations are high quality. A reputable translation company will use professionally qualified translators and a [proven process that includes a second translator review](#). Will your translators and processes be of similar standard?

Any doubts, and you may want to add an additional Q-A process after the translation step to ensure your translations are complete, accurate and well worded.

Also take care that the translations are provided in the format the typesetters want.

This scenario will mean:

- significantly **more involvement** for you in project management
- a **longer turnaround**
- more potential areas for things to go wrong.

Because it **adds risk**, we suggest considering this structure only where you see clear advantages in using your own translators over a reputable translation company.

And take care that too many cooks don't spoil the broth!

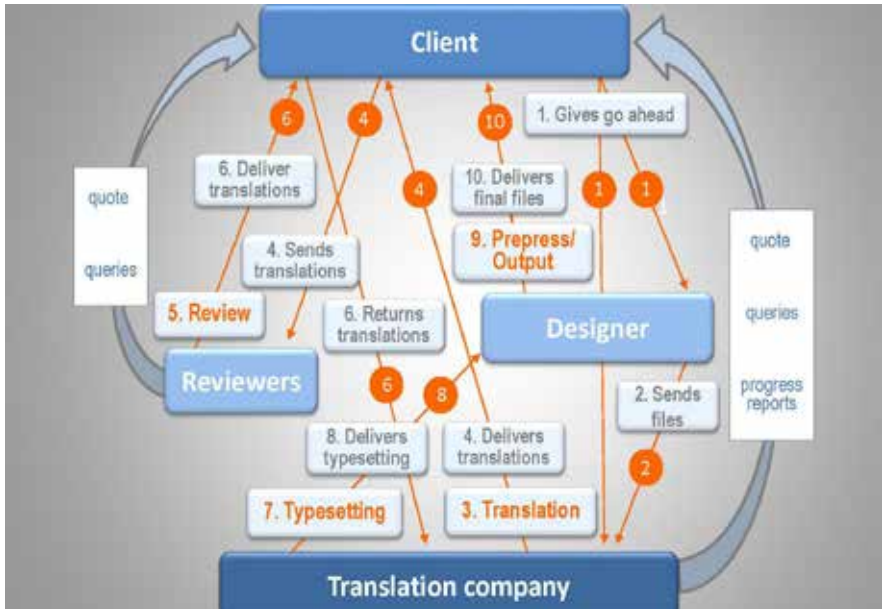
iii. Adding an independent translation review

This is where you use a translation house to do the translations, have these reviewed by third party reviewers, then the translation house completes the typesetting.

Here is the process:

- Step 1.** Client gives go ahead to Designer and Translation House
- Step 2.** Designer forwards files to Translation House
- Step 3.** Translation
- Step 4.** Translation House sends translations to Client; Client forwards these to Reviewers
- Step 5.** Translation Review
- Step 6.** Reviewers deliver finalized translations to Client and Client forwards these to Translation House. (Alternatively, Reviewers provide suggested changes for Translation House to consider and finalize the translations)
- Step 7.** Typesetting
- Step 8.** Translation House sends typeset files to Designer
- Step 9.** Designer checks files, produces output
- Step 10.** Designer delivers final artwork to Client

Schematically:



As you can see, this scenario:

- adds further layers of **complexity**
- will involve you in **more work**
- **adds time** to the project.

And again you'll need to take care that too many cooks don't spoil the broth.

We would suggest conducting an independent review only if you have a **compelling reason** for doing so. That's because a reputable translation company will **already** have carried out a second translator review of the translations.

This is:

- considered best practice,
- prescribed in various Standards,
- designed precisely to ensure all translations are top quality and fit for purpose.

We refer to it as our "[quality-assured translation](#)" service.

So any additional review will essentially **double up** on something that has already been done by experienced professionals as part of a proven translation process.

If you are considering this process, we strongly recommend you read [this key article](#) before starting – there are things you'll need to think through, key steps to take, and some common traps to avoid.

A poorly structured review can easily add complexity, time and therefore cost, and not produce the result you want.

To avoid that, you need to be crystal clear **what you want the review to achieve, how to go about it**, and closely **manage the process** to get that result.

**Key tip:****Do any review before, not after, the typesetting**

Any changes to text after it has been typeset will involve double handling, delay the project and likely incur additional charges.

See [our article](#) for more information.

It's also possible of course to engage your own translator and independent reviewer in each language, and use a translation house just for the typesetting.

As this would add considerable complexity and involve you in much more work, you'll want to have clear reasons for opting for this process over the simpler and faster options.

Part B: What 90% of all designers don't know about multilingual dtp – but should!

Item 1. Why your wonderful design might be a headache for other languages

There are **four areas** designers should think about when designing materials for multilingual treatment. In descending order of importance these are:

A The battle for Space – the No. 1 multilingual dtp design issue

This is the biggie. In fact, it's **HUGE!** Here's why:

1. Translations almost always expand from the original text

A 10 - 20% increase in word count from English into European languages is normal.

30% or more is not unusual, and some languages expand even more – the Polynesian languages, Vietnamese, and sometimes Indonesian/Malay for example.

Further, a single succinct **caption, heading or title** may require several more and/or longer words in translation.

That may mean needing more horizontal space, or running it over an additional line or lines.

Check out the example on the following page.

2. Many languages need greater leading than European languages

The Latin script we are familiar with is vertically compact, but **most other scripts** aren't.

Almost all Indian languages take up more vertical line space, for example. So too do Thai, Lao and Khmer.

Then there are Burmese, Amharic, Armenian...

And even **Arabic** which looks like it should occupy similar vertical space to English often needs greater leading to avoid lower diacritics on one line overlapping with upper diacritics on a following line.

Check out this Khmer example:



In the heading, the black line marks the bottom of the top row of text, the red line marks the top of the second row.

Replacing the English text without increasing the leading has produced **significantly overlapping lines**.

This is jarring and looks terribly unprofessional to a Khmer reader.

It is the Khmer equivalent of something like this:

**Khmer needs greater leading than
English to avoid overlapping lines**

In contrast, the body text below the heading has appropriate leading and looks fine.

3. Some languages need bigger point sizes

You might get away with 6 or 7 point in an English font, but try that in an equivalent Chinese or Japanese font and the multiple-stroke characters will “fill in” and be difficult to read.

In the image below, the text on the left is hard to read, becoming progressively easier as the point sizes increase.



Generally, the more complex the script (the more lines or strokes it has) the larger your minimum point sizes need to be.

4. Many languages use longer words than English

Classic European language examples are Finnish, German and Russian, but also the Romance languages - French, Spanish, Italian etc.

This can make typesetting **captions and headings** in tight spaces difficult.

It can also be a problem in **narrow text boxes** where hyphenation becomes necessary:

- lots of hyphenation looks harsh and is more difficult to read,
- too little can create a ragged look with varying line lengths and inter-word spacing.

It can be difficult to get the text looking good.

English:	User
Finnish:	Käyttäjä
French:	Utilisateur
German:	Benutzer
Swahili:	Mtumiaji
Malay:	Pengguna
Russian:	Пользователь

The following comparison of Burmese and English artwork epitomises the “space” issues in multilingual dtp.

The design works well for English:



But look what happens when we change out the English for Burmese:



ကျန်းမာရေးစောင့်ရှောက်မှု

ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ဘဝကို သွားသင့်သလို။

1 မိသားစုဆရာဝန်/ ဆေးအာရောင်းဆိုင်/ ဝမ်းဆွဲဆရာဝန်

ဆရာဝန်ကြီးဖြစ်စေ၊ ပြင်ဆင်ပေးမှုရရှိရန်အတွက် ဝန်ဆောင်မှုပေးရန်

- သင့် မိသားစုဆရာဝန် (GP) ခေါ်ပါ
- သို့မဟုတ် သွားဆရာဝန်တွေဆီပါ
- ဆေးရုံဆရာဝန် အစောဆုံး ၄၀ မာကျွန်းဆရာဝန်၊ သင့် လူမှုပတ်ဝန်းကျင် အစောဆုံးဆရာဝန် (pharmacist) သို့မဟုတ် ဆေးရုံဆရာဝန်တွေဆီပါ
- သင့် ဆုံးမိပုံစံနဲ့ဆိုင်ရာ အကြံပေး ဝမ်းဆွဲဆရာဝန် ဖြစ်နိုင်ပါသည်

2 မတော်တဆဖြစ်ရပ် နှင့် ဆေးဖက်ဆိုင်ရာ ဆေးဝါး (ဆေးဝါးကုသ ဆေးဝါးကုသဆေးဝါး)

သင့် မိသားစုဆရာဝန်ကို သင့် မတွေ့နိုင်သည့်အခါ သို့မဟုတ် စွဲနဲ့ပေးဆောင်ရန်ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ အရေးပေါ်ဖြစ်ပါက ပြင်ဆင်ပေးမှုရရှိရန်အတွက် ဝန်ဆောင်မှု ပေးနိုင်ရန်အတွက်

- သင့်နှင့်အနီးဆုံး မတော်တဆဖြစ်ရပ်နှင့် ဆေးဖက်ဆိုင်ရာဆေးဝါး (ဆေးဝါးကုသ ဆေးဝါး) ကို ဖွဲ့စည်းပေးသည့် မိသားစုဆရာဝန်အား စွဲနဲ့ခေါ်ပါ

3 ဆေးရုံ အရေးပေါ် လူနာဌာန

အပြစ်မရှိသော စုပေးမှုဖြစ်ပါက ဆရာဝန် အစောဆုံးဆရာဝန်မှ လိုအပ်မှု အတွက်

- ဆေးရုံ အရေးပေါ် လူနာဌာနသို့သွားပါ သို့မဟုတ် နံနက် 11:11 ကိုခေါ်ပါ

See how:

- the main heading has expanded from 10 to 19 letters,
- the bottom headings and text need more lines,
- it's hard to fit the text into the tight spaces of the circle image.

The typesetter has managed to get all the text in with some clever juggling, but the result is much less appealing in Burmese than in English.

How to solve these little dilemmas

Multilingual typesetters are adept at manipulating text to fit the available space.

But if a particular language text simply won't fit without things looking cluttered, they'll need to alter your design elements to create more space - or ask you to do it.

That's something best avoided if possible – you won't want your work changed, typesetters know they're not designers, and clients typically want consistency across the different language versions.

If you can design to accommodate greater text volume everywhere, you'll make the multilingual typesetters' job easier and help produce a better overall result in the other languages.

Your checklist

- Ensure there is space for **text boxes** to be enlarged if needed
- Avoid very small **point sizes** and tight **leading** – we may need to increase both for the foreign language text
- Ensure **titles, headings and captions** can expand horizontally, and potentially run to an extra line
- Expect **text in graphics** to need more space in translation
- Avoid narrow text boxes and **columns**

B When your fonts may not be the best choice

Multilingual typesetters will typically have to change a document's fonts for languages in other scripts – Chinese, Japanese, Korean, the Indian languages, several South East Asian languages, for example.

But if possible, they'll want to **keep your original fonts** for all languages that use the Latin (Roman) script.

This provides consistency across language versions and avoids any difficulty matching the style of fonts you've used in the original.

The Problem

However, not all fonts have the **extended character sets** needed to handle the accented and unique letters found in many languages.

Letters like the *ą, ć, ę, ł, ń, ś, ź, ż* in Polish, the glottal stop and stress mark diacritics in Polynesian languages, or Cyrillic and Greek letters, for example.

And bear in mind that if you use particularly **stylish** or **quirky** fonts, these are unlikely to support some languages, so the effect you have created may be difficult to replicate in other language versions.



Our recommendation

Fortunately, **Unicode** and the more **standard Mac and PC fonts** typically cover a wide range of languages. Sticking with these in your documents should avoid any issues and make the typesetters' job easier.

**Did you notice our change of font
for the example Polish letters above?**

**Our body text font Frutiger light doesn't cater for Polish,
so we changed to Arial Narrow.**

4 ways to confirm a font supports numerous languages (so is good for multilingual dtp):

1. the Details tab for a font in [Adobe Typekit](#)
2. the font description in [FontShop](#), eg ⇒

Both of these give a **list of supported languages**.

Our tip: any font that supports Polish, Russian and Greek is likely to be ideal for multilingual dtp.

Another measure is the **number of languages** supported – a hundred odd is good for multilingual dtp, only 50 will mean many important languages won't be supported.

3. a **Google search** for '[font name] font languages'
4. **Key Caps** (Mac) or **Character Map** (Windows) to see what characters a font supports.

Our tip: look for the letter 'ą' (small 'a' with ogonek), if it's there that font is highly likely to support a wide range of languages and be great for multilingual dtp.

Frutiger Next supports up to 94 different languages such as Spanish, English, Portuguese, Russian, German, French, Turkish, Italian, Polish, Ukrainian, Kurdish (Latin), Azerbaijani (Latin), Romanian, Dutch, Greek, Hungarian, Serbian (Latin), Czech, Kazakh, Serbian (Cyrillic), Bulgarian, Swedish, Belarusian (Latin), Belarusian (Cyrillic), Croatian, Slovak, Finnish, Danish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Slovenian, Irish, Estonian, Basque, Icelandic, and Luxembourgian in Latin, Cyrillic, Greek, and other scripts.

Please note that not all languages are available for all formats.

[View all 94 languages](#)

Buying Options



C Graphics can be great in one culture, grate in others

The challenge here is ensuring your graphic elements will have the effect and appeal you're after in other cultures.

The ideal is to use images with “**universal**” appeal and impact, but that can be easier said than done.

It means avoiding any **culturally specific** subject matter – customs, food, pastimes, sports, etc.

But it also extends to landscapes, fauna and flora - a typical scene in one country may be far from typical in another, and many animals have different connotations across cultures.

And then there are the people in the photos you use – will other cultures relate to those faces in the way you want?

These are all things to bear in mind and potentially discuss with your client. And of course, clients will sometimes be happy to change out photos or images for different language versions.



*The faces in your graphics are important -
how will your audience react to them?*

D Complex design elements - can they be easily unpicked?

Multilingual typesetters will seldom mess with your design – that’s the last thing they would want to do!

However, there is one case where they will need to:

When working with **right to left languages** – Arabic, Farsi/Dari, Hebrew, etc.

These languages read from the right to left – the opposite to English.

This means some elements will need to be flipped, others moved from one side to the other, and most text will become right rather than left justified. For example:



Note: the Middle Eastern version of InDesign has built in functionality for reversing the layout, so leave this to the multilingual typesetters rather than do it yourself.

So how does this affect your design?

Generally it won't, but if you're working with complex design elements bear in mind these may have to be ungrouped and individual elements moved by the typesetter. The easier you can make that, the less chance of error.

Item 2. The designer's deadly delusion: "Typesetting that language can't be hard – I'll do it myself"

It can be tempting to want to typeset foreign language texts yourself.

If you know the language, that's fine. But if you don't, there are some inherent risks.



These are the three most common mistakes we see:

- certain letters/characters **displaying incorrectly**
- using **fonts** that aren't suitable or lack impact
- not following **layout conventions** for that language.

Commit any of these, and you have just killed the effectiveness of the publication on the target audience.

And not knowing the language, you'll be **blissfully unaware** of the mistakes you've made...

That said, not all languages are equal for multilingual desktop publishing. Some are relatively straightforward, whereas others require specialized knowledge.

The following pages detail the areas to watch for different groups of languages we commonly work with.

Greek

The same four issues as above. In addition, be aware of the following Greek punctuation marks that differ from English:

- ; is a question mark (an English semicolon)
- a point above the line (·) is the equivalent of an English semicolon
- quotation marks are « ».



Cyrillic languages

Principal languages using the Cyrillic alphabet

Belarusian
 Bulgarian
 Kazakh
 Kyrgyz
 Macedonian
 Montenegrin
 Russian
 Serbian
 Tajiki
 Ukrainian
 Uzbek

Cyrillic script is used for Russian of course, but also for some 20 odd other languages.

Many of these use additional characters not found in Russian, and some fonts will support Russian but **lack the glyphs** needed for other languages.

So you need to take particular care that all letters are displaying correctly.

It also pays to know how letters change shape when **italicised** - compare the standard and italicised forms of 'д', 'и', 'т' and lower case 'в' in this Russian proverb:

Под лежачий камень вода не течет
Под лежачий камень вода не течет

Key tip:

If you're brave enough to typeset a language you're not familiar with, get someone who does know the language, to check and sign off your typesetting – ideally the translator responsible for that language text.

B Languages needing specific expertise for multilingual desktop publishing

Typesetting any other script or character-based language is more complicated. You'll need to:

- have a **range of fonts**
- know **which fonts are appropriate** for your publication
- understand **text layout conventions** in that language

and you may well also need:

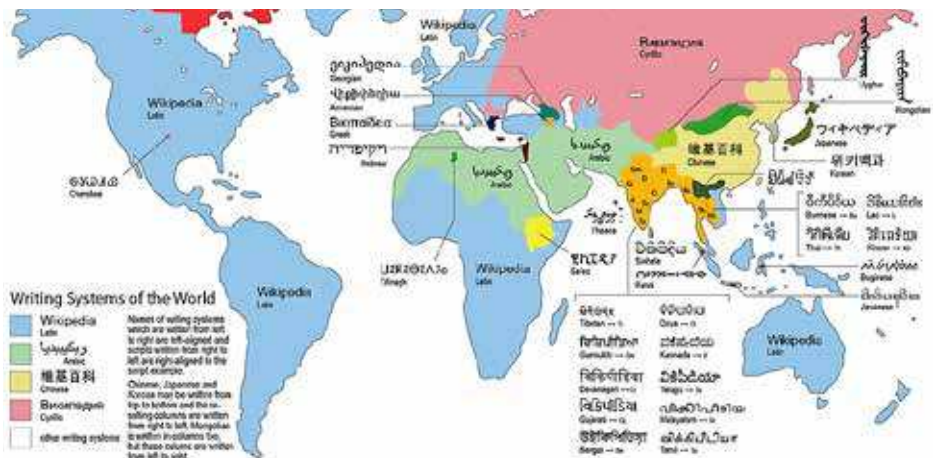
- **specific techniques/workarounds** for known issues in the language
- **additional software.**

It certainly isn't just a matter of pasting in the text, changing the font, and tweaking the layout – that could be disastrous!

Even if you avoid text errors, you could end up creating artwork that is unappealing, and even off-putting, to the target audience.

We strongly recommend leaving the typesetting of any language that uses a different script to the experts.

The following pages list the key issues for some of the main languages.



Chinese, Japanese & Korean

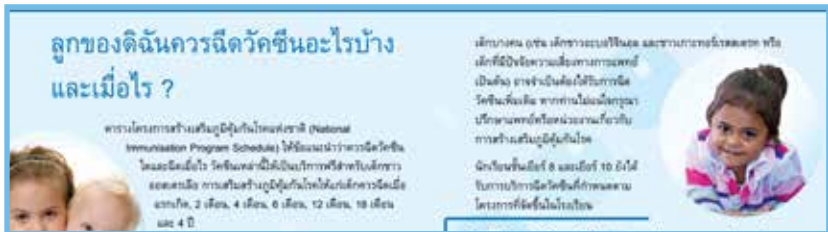
- **Font usage** – having the right style of font is very important in these cultures.
- Using different font **weightings** for effect.
- Alternatives to **italicising** – these languages generally don't italicise, so different strategies for creating contrast are needed.
- General text and page **aesthetics** – what looks good on a page.
For example, Chinese favours neatly aligning text and the effect of white space on the page is important.
- **Line start/end** conventions – certain characters should not start or end a line.



A superb example of Chinese typesetting - clean, bold sans serif fonts; large point sizes; contrast through different text sizes, colour, vertical vs horizontal text; appealing page layout.

Thai, Lao, Khmer

- Correct **display of text**, and especially diacritics – there is a known issue with “floating diacritics” in Thai, for example.
- Appropriate **fonts**.
- Where to **break lines** – these languages generally don’t have spaces between words, but lines must wrap at the end of a word, not mid-word.
- **Point sizes** and **leading** – lines take up more vertical space than European languages so need greater leading. But point sizes can’t be too small or the text will be hard to read.



Arabic, Hebrew and other right to left languages

- Reversal of **page layout** due to text direction.
- **Software** to handle R – L text direction.
- **Justification** – mostly right, sometimes centre, virtually never left.
- Correct display of **numbers** – should it be Arabic or Hindi numerals?
- Correct word order of **English words** included within R – L text.
- Adequate **leading** – so lower diacritics on one line don’t overlap with upper diacritics on the next line.

Right to left languages	
Arabic	اللغة المصرية الحديثة
Dari	دري
Farsi	فارسی
Hebrew	עברית
Kurdish	کوردی
Pashto	پښتو
Urdu	اردو

See our [Arabic translation and typesetting](#) page for further information.

Indian languages

- Getting text to **display correctly** – through World-Ready Composer settings, additional software and specific workarounds for incorrect rendering of certain glyph combinations.
- Appropriate **fonts**.
- Correct display of **numbers**.
- Adequate **leading** – greater vertical space per line is needed in many Indian languages.

Main Indic languages	
বাংলা	Bengali
ગુજરાતી	Gujarati
हिन्दी	Hindi
ಕನ್ನಡ	Kannada
മലയാളം	Malayalam
मराठी	Marathi
සිංහල	Sinhalese
தமிழ்	Tamil
తెలుగు	Telugu

Our [Hindi translation and typesetting](#) page gives further details.



Burmese

Nothing about Burmese is straightforward!

These are the main problem areas:

- Correct **text display** – there are major issues with individual letters and letter combinations rendering incorrectly in graphic design programs.
- **Fonts** are not interchangeable (due to different underlying encoding).
- **Bolding** – few fonts have alternative weightings.
- Fitting text into the available **space** – significantly greater leading than English is needed.
- **Word wrap** and **hyphenation**.



Extend your knowledge!

For further insights, guidance and tips on making better and smarter decisions around your business translation needs, check out:

[the PacTranz blog](#)



[the PacTranz YouTube channel](#)



PacTranz is a quality-focused translation and multilingual dtp company with over 20 years' experience helping clients with their foreign language communication needs.

We would be delighted to **quote for any translation or multilingual dtp project.**

Just:

- [e-mail us](#) the details
- use our [translation quote request form](#), or
- phone +64 9 913 5290 or chat with us.