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User-Centered Translation in Website Localization

Overall Usability of the Finnish Country Site of Hotels.com

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ABSTRACT

Nykyajan globalisoituvassa maailmassa yritysten on tärkeää tarjota Internet-sivut kotimaisten asiakkaiden lisäksi kansainvälisille markkinoille. Tämä tarve korostuu erityisesti matkailualan yrityksillä. Jotta sivusto tavoittaisi asiakkaita mahdollisimman kattavasti ympäri maailman, pelkkä englanninkielinen sivusto ei riitä, vaan tarvitaan myös lokalisoituja eli kohdekieleen ja -kulttuuriin kotoutettuja versioita, maasivustoja. Lokalisointi kattaa useita eri toimintoja kuten tekstin kääntämisen sekä muiden elementtien muokkaamisen kohdekulttuurin vaatimusten mukaiseksi. Menestyksekkään lokalisoinnin taustalla on käytettävyyden huomioiminen joka vaiheessa.

Tässä pro gradu -tutkielmassa arvioitiin globaalin matkailualan brändin Hotels.comin Suomen maasivujen kokonaiskäytettävyyttä. Erityisesti tutkittiin Suomen maasivuston käännöksiä Tytti Suojasen, Kaisa Koskisen ja Tiina Tuomisen hiljattain kehittämän käyttäjäkeskeisen kääntämisen (UCT) näkökulmasta, mutta myös erilaisten kulttuuristen elementtien kotouttamista sekä sivuston yleistä käytettävyyttä. Tutkielmassa sovellettiin Jakob Nielsenin alun perin teknisen viestinnän tarkoituksiin kehittämää heuristista arviointia, joka on myös yksi UCT-metodeista. Materiaalia tarkasteltiin heuristisesti nettisivujen globalisoinnin, lokalisoinnin, käännösten sekä yleisen käytettävyyden näkökulmista. Jokaiselle näkökulmalle luotiin omat heuristiikat, jotka pohjautuvat John Yunkerin verkkoglobalisoinnin parhaat käytänteet -listaan, mm. Bert Esselinkin, Minako O'Haganin ja Carmen Mangironin näkemyksiin lokalisoinnista, Suojanen ym.:n käyttäjäkeskeisen kääntämisen konseptiin sekä Nielsenin perustavanlaatuisiin näkemyksiin käytettävyydestä.

Ennakko-oletuksen mukaisesti heuristinen arviointi osoittautui hyödylliseksi nettisivujen käännösten arvioinnissa. Heuristiikkojen avulla löydettiin todellisia käytettävyysongelmia sekä käännösten että muiden tutkittujen aspektien alueelta. Löydetyt käytettävyysongelmat olivat pääsääntöisesti melko pieniä, vain muutama oli vakavuusluokitukseltaan suuri ja vaatisi pikaista korjausta. Suomen maasivusto osoittautui siis kokonaisuudessaan käytettävyydeltään hyväksi sivustoksi. Löydetyn kaltaiset ongelmat voitaisiin kuitenkin välttää käyttämällä heuristiikkoja jo lokalisoinnin alkuvaiheessa. Niiden käyttö iteratiivisesti puolestaan mahdollistaa ongelmien korjauksen päivitysten yhteydessä. Tutkielman tuloksista on hyötyä paitsi Hotels.comin lokalisoinnista vastaaville tahoille myös muille matkailualan maakohtaisia verkkosivuja lokalisoiville.

1 INTRODUCTION

In this Master's thesis, I will study and assess the overall usability of the Finnish country sites of Hotels.com, which is one of the world's largest companies offering reservation services online. It is also the second largest provider of localized websites supporting altogether 39 languages (Yunker 2014). My research questions are: 1) Are there usability problems in this language version? 2) If there are, how serious are they? and 3) How serious are the problems related to translations in particular? I believe that the tools of the recently developed theory *user-centered translation* (UCT) can help achieve better quality translations on websites, also in this case. Therefore, I hypothesize that "The means of *user-centered translation* (UCT) offer a way to avoid translation problems in the localization process of websites". The results of this thesis will show whether the hypothesis is valid in this case or not.

Today there are hundreds of companies offering travel services, as well as other products, online directly to customers. This means that consumers no longer need to consult travel agencies when they are planning a trip but, instead, they can themselves search and book travel services online. In 2014, for instance, 91% of Finns booked the flights for their overseas holiday online, while the corresponding percentage for online accommodation bookings was 76% (Official Statistics of Finland 2015). Consequently, providing online services is nowadays essential for travel companies, or any company for that matter. However, in order to actually gain profits from the online services, companies need to pay close attention to the *usability* of their websites and online booking system. In other words, companies need to make sure that their websites are easy to use and follow the conventions of the target culture. Consequently, conducting both translation and localization of websites professionally, with extreme care and consumers' or users' needs in mind, is vital. This is where usability engineering comes into the picture or in the case of translations, user-centered translation.

Usability is a concept which has previously been used mainly in the field of technical communication and technical documentation but in the last couple of years it has entered the domain of translation as well. The theoretical background of my study

regarding usability and usability engineering will be based on Jakob Nielsen's views and theories on the named subjects. Nielsen (2012) has defined usability as "a **quality attribute** that assesses how easy user interfaces are to use". Usability consists of several components, the main five quality components or usability attributes are *Learnability, efficiency, memorability, error* and *satisfaction* (Nielsen 1993: 26). All these attributes contribute to the usability of a user interface or a website, or a translation for that matter.

One very obvious aspect of usability is the language. These days, when English is the *lingua franca* of the world it could easily be assumed that providing websites and online services in English would be the most important thing for companies regardless of their field. This is true to some extent. Jakob Nielsen (2011) points out that it is indeed important for companies to always have a so-called internationalized website which caters for all users around the world, a website in English that is. However, it is also essential to provide localized country versions of the websites for the most important markets (i.e. countries) of the company (Nielsen 2011).

Tytti Suojanen, Kaisa Koskinen and Tiina Tuominen (2012)[1] have introduced a new theory of *käyttäjäkeskeinen kääntäminen* or *user-centered translation* (UCT) to Translation Studies. The theory draws from usability engineering and its English name is parallel with *user-centered design* (UCD) in usability engineering (Suojanen et al. 2012: 9, 24; 2015: 3). The aspiration of user-centered translation theory is to raise the *user* (or more traditionally in Translation Studies the target reader) of the translation to the front in every stage of the translation process, starting from the very beginning. (Suojanen et al. 2012: 24)

Another aim of UCT is to provide translators with different kinds of tools and methods which help them keep the user's needs in mind during the whole process (Suojanen et al. 2012: 9; 2015: 1). These tools include mental models (personas, intertextual reader

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[1] I hereby would like to extend my warm thanks to the authors Suojanen, Koskinen and Tuominen for allowing me to have access to parts of their work *User-Centered Translation* (Suojanen et al. 2015) already before its publication.

positions and audience design), user testing (think-aloud protocol, eye tracking, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, ethnography) and heuristic evaluation. Although some of these methods, such as user testing, have been widely used in translation research already, some are new arrivals from usability engineering. (Suojanen et al. 2012: 54, 69, 98) One of the latter mentioned is heuristic evaluation, which is a method developed by Jakob Nielsen and Rolf Molich in 1990, in which one or more experts use a list of heuristics, i.e. predetermined quality criteria, to evaluate the user interface (or translation etc.). (Nielsen 1995a). The aim of heuristic evaluation is to track usability problems in order to be able to correct them and enhance the user experience. In this thesis, I will concentrate mainly on heuristic evaluation. In my mind, it is the most relevant and suitable tool for this research, because of its inexpensive and rather time-saving nature (Nielsen 1993: 160; ibid.).

Translating websites is part of a larger process called *localization*. Localization consists of "the translation and adaptation of material for foreign-language markets" (Whalen 2014a). The main aim of localizing a website, or any other product for that matter, is to produce a version that is both culturally and linguistically appropriate for the target market (Mazur 2007: 346). When the localization has been conducted professionally and properly, the result should be a usable country site. Localization is part of the GILT industry which comprises four intertwined processes: *Globalization, Internationalization, Localization* and *Translation*, which further cover several processes themselves (Mazur 2007: 344; Munday 2012: 280). I will present all these briefly since it is essential to realize the tight connection between these concepts in order to understand the nature of the industry. Localization is also tightly connected with usability which makes it a natural choice for a theoretical framework for this thesis.

My personal interest in this very subject lies in my previous career of over ten years in the field of travel and tourism. During those ten years, I first worked in a travel agency in the early 2000s and later in a tourist office. I was then able to witness the tangible development of technology in the field first hand. Travel agency trade, for example, is a business which heavily depends on IT technology in the form of tens of different

computerized reservation systems used daily by the employees. When I started in the field in 2002, there were customized, tour-operator-specific software programs for the sales and reservations of their own products (e.g. Tjäreborg's ESS system, Lomamatkat's LoMa system) and individual reservation systems within one software (e.g. Aurinkomatkat, Viking Line and VR were all in Amadeus). During the next couple of years, however, the tour operators began to employ web-based reservation systems. One of the first was VR (Finnish national railway company), which transferred all its reservation actions from Amadeus to a web-based system SoNet in 2004 (VR-Yhtymä Oy 2005: 17). During the past ten years, most tour operators have moved on to web-based reservation systems, as well as to online sales systems.

Also in the field of internal tourism[2], the same tendency can be observed. The actual everyday work in a tourist office, the main task of which is basically promoting local tourism services, was not, in earlier years, as dependent on the reservation systems as in a travel agency. However, today, reservation systems are an integral part of tourist offices tools as well. I worked as a sales secretary in a tourist office in 2004–2012. During those eight years, this specific tourist office went from having mere basic websites to developing a common reservation system for local service providers and providing an online reservation and sales channel for customers.

One can certainly argue that it is less expensive for a service or product provider, be they tour operators or other companies, to develop a web-based reservation system with two distinct platforms (one for professional use and one for consumers) than maintaining two completely different systems: software for professionals and a web-based system for consumers. The other reason for developing online sales and reservation systems for consumers has obviously been to increase sales by enabling the consumers to purchase services themselves whenever and wherever they are, without having to consult a professional (travel agent or tourist information officer).

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[2] Internal tourism comprises "domestic tourism" of residents of a given country and "inbound tourism" of non-residents to that country. (Official Statistics of Finland 2014)

Having used tens of different reservation systems, both software programs and web-based online reservation systems, on a daily basis in my previous career, it is rather interesting to take a closer look at them from a researcher's point of view. Web-based systems aimed at consumers are usually rather easy to use and many of them have somewhat similar basic functions. However, the quality of these online booking systems varies greatly. Shortcomings in the functions and/or the language used in these systems may have a crucial impact on the sales of the company. If a reservation system does not work as it is supposed to, or if there are inconsistent or illogical features in it, an employee in a travel agency has no choice but to keep on using the reservation system the agency has chosen, even if it slows down the working pace and adds extra pressure into an already hectic working environment. However, when a consumer who is using an online booking system faces difficulties in the system, s/he will most likely move on to another site which is easier to use. Hence, in order to keep the customers, it is of utmost importance to pay attention to the usability of online booking systems.

In the following two subchapters, I will discuss the material and methods used in this study. In chapters 2 and 3, I will present the theoretical frameworks of this thesis: usability and user-centered translation are discussed in chapter 2, whereas chapter 3 concentrates on both localization and web globalization. In chapter 4, I will present the in-depth analysis of the Finnish country site of Hotels.com and introduce the findings, and finally, the conclusions are presented in chapter 5.

1.1 Material

One of the world's largest companies, which offers reservation services online, is Hotels.com LP, which is an affiliate of Expedia, Inc. (Hotels.com 2014). Hotels.com supports 39 localized websites. According to Lionbridge, the world's leading localization company, Hotels.com is the second largest provider of localized websites after Booking.com that provides 41 language versions (Yunker 2014). I chose Hotels.com to be the object of my study for the following reasons. First, I think it represents well all websites that offer travel services worldwide online, which are

numerous today. Second, in 2014 it ranked second, and in 2015 fourth, on Byte Level Research's "Best Global Websites" list (Byte Level Research 2014; 2015) which makes it interesting and, in my opinion, worthwhile to examine how it has been localized and whether it actually is as usable as one could assume from the above rankings. Third, I have used Hotels.com myself to book accommodation for my travels; thus, I am at least to some extent familiar with it. Fourth, I believe that Hotels.com is rather well known among the general public, not least for its constant TV ad campaigns and the slogans "Hotels.com – Wake up happy" and "Hotels.com – Se selkeä valinta" [The obvious choice][3].

Since Hotels.com, like any website, is an endless source of material, and although it was my aim to assess its usability rather comprehensively (i.e. taking translation, localization, globalization and general usability into account), I had to restrict the amount of material somehow. Therefore, I decided to take screenshots of the pages that a casual user, searching for a hotel and booking one, is likely to visit. These pages included the *front page* and the pages and/or the browser windows behind the headings (links) of the *main menu bar*. Additionally, in order to get useful information on the usability of this online booking system, it was crucial to assess the very steps a user needs to take in order to make a reservation or a purchase. That is why I also chose a random destination (Edinburgh) and hotel (The Balmoral Hotel; henceforth Balmoral), to which I made a reservation (as far as it was possible without actually booking anything). I took screenshots of each step and evaluated their contents as well.

After the decision to restrict the material to a manageable quantity for an MA thesis, I was left with altogether 127 corresponding screenshots of the US and Finnish country sites of Hotels.com.[4] It should be noted here that I considered the US country site screenshots to be the source text (ST). As a consequence, the research material consisted of 69 screenshots from the US site and 58 from the Finnish site. The reason

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[3] My translation.

[4] Initially, I gathered corresponding material also from the Swedish country site. However, in the course of the process of analyzing the material it soon became evident that I had to narrow down the amount of material, in order to keep the analysis within the limits of a Master's thesis. That is why I decided to leave the Swedish material out. Nevertheless, I used the Swedish material on some occasions in my analysis as a background material for the sake of comparison whenever I felt it relevant.

why there were more US screenshots is that for culture-specific reasons, such as different product ranges for different target groups, there were no corresponding parts (pages/browser windows) available on the Finnish site. However, since both the adaptation of cultural elements and the match between ST and target text (TT) were features to be examined in this study, the country-specific parts of the ST that were omitted from the TT were included in the material.

The actual screenshots were partly complete screen views but also smaller parts of pages. Some of the screenshots were, for instance, sections of pages, individual menus and search windows or groups of advertisements. Regardless of their size or extent, all screenshots contain vital information for a user; hence, they were deemed relevant to this study. The contents of the screenshots were mainly textual elements but in some cases also images and symbols.

Central concepts used in this study include:

- **website/site** the entire website consisting of different elements such as pages, browser windows etc.
- **FI site/US site** the Finnish / US country site of Hotels.com
- **web page/page** a part of a website open in a browser window e.g. *search results page* or *hotel page*. Consists of several screen views, needs to be scrolled down in order to see the whole content
- **screen view** the part of a web page visible on the screen at a given time
- **screenshot** a part of a page cut with the snipping tool and saved for research purposes; can be anything from a whole screen view to a small piece of a page

1.2 Method

The research I conducted for this thesis can be classified as a qualitative case study. It can also be considered an autoethnographic study since I am relying on my own observations in my capacities as both a professional of the travel and tourism industry and a Finnish user (i.e. customer) of Hotels.com (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011).

Conducting a scientific research always requires a method. The method can be considered a whole, which comprises both choosing a research strategy, a data collection method and an analysis method and complying with them. (Koppa 2015) As mentioned above in the Material section, my material consisted of screenshots. I gathered the screenshots by cutting the relevant parts of both the US and the FI site with the snipping tool. This was done during 12th–17th March 2015. However, it soon became evident that it was not possible to evaluate the sites solely based on the screenshots, but it was essential to return to the actual sites time and time again to check, for example, the functionality of the links and the pathways behind them. It appeared that every time I visited the sites something had changed. Website localization is indeed an ongoing process, with constant updates, as e.g. Esselink (2000) has pointed out, so this was to be expected. Due to personal reasons, I was able to start analyzing the material only during the summer of 2015. By then, some of the relevant screen views had changed radically compared to the ones gathered in March.[5] However, in order to be able to examine a website, the situation, or in fact the pages, must be "frozen". Therefore, although there were several apparent and rather major changes during the whole research process, I analyzed the material gathered in March 2015 as a rule. Whenever I deemed an updated page extremely relevant, I mentioned it in my analysis.

In order to assess the general usability of the features under study, such as the functionality of the links and the emergence of the pop-up windows, evaluation must be conducted by browsing and testing the actual system. I carried out this part of my analysis during September 2015. Again, some things on the sites had changed, but the changes were not major compared to the situations in March or July 2015 when the initial and the updated materials were gathered.

To be able to conduct a heuristic evaluation, which was my main analysis method, I had to choose an existing set of heuristics or create a new one. As mentioned previously, Nielsen and Molich have developed a list of 10 heuristics, which is generally referred to as Nielsen's list. The 10 general principles or heuristics of Nielsen's list are specifically

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[5] Of these new screen views, I gathered screenshots (during July 2015) whenever I felt the changes were of such extent that they would affect my analysis. In the end, they were not used in the analysis.

designed for inspecting user interfaces (Nielsen 1993: 20). Vesa Purho (2000) has modified Nielsen's list to better suit technical documentation. Furthermore, Anni Otava (2013) has used both of the above-mentioned lists as a basis to create a heuristics list specifically suitable for studying the usability of translations. However, as Otava herself mentions, some parts of her list were not applicable for analyzing the usability of translations and therefore further refinement of the list is needed (Otava 2013: 70). Suojanen et al. (2015: 90) have in their turn developed a heuristics list specifically for the purposes of UCT. Since my study concentrated on both the translations, as well as other aspects of usability, I decided to create my own heuristics.

My list of heuristics for the overall usability of the FI country site of Hotels.com covers the four key aspects of this study: **1) globalization aspect, 2) localization aspect, 3) UCT aspect** and **4) general usability aspect** (see Appendix 3). I created the heuristics with the help of Yunker's (2014) list of Web Globalization Best Practices, e.g. Esselink's (2000) and O'Hagan & Mangiron's (2013) views on localization, Suojanen et al.'s (2015: 90) list of usability heuristics for user-centered translation and Nielsen's (1995b) list.

I conducted a heuristic evaluation on the translations of the FI site myself. I considered my own evaluation as the professional view because of my expertise in the field of travel and tourism. More specifically, I went through each screenshot meticulously relying on the list of heuristics that I had created and listing all the points which I felt violated the heuristics. I compared the US and the FI versions of the screenshots in order to determine the localized, adapted and translated elements. Furthermore, I tabulated all the violating elements, i.e. the usability problems, into categories according to the above-mentioned four aspects. As mentioned before, translation and localization are intertwined processes and usability is an aspect that can be regarded as inherent in both. Accordingly, several of the elements that I considered usability problems violated more than one heuristic and/or aspect. In such cases, I categorized the elements under the aspects which were, in my opinion, violated the most. To be able to determine the overall usability level of the FI country site, I also rated the discovered usability problems with the help of Nielsen's (1995d) severity rating scale (see section 2.1).

As Nielsen (1993; 1995a) points out, in order to get reliable results, the ideal amount of evaluators performing a heuristic evaluation is 3–5 persons. This being the case, and since I was not able to find other expert evaluators, I initially decided to organize a user test as well. My intention was to recruit people from different age groups to evaluate the website and test the booking process on both the US and Finnish country sites, and to videotape the test situations. Their comments together with the results of my own heuristic evaluation would have provided valuable and more extensive information on the researched areas. However, after I had conducted my own in-depth heuristic evaluations for all the four aspects, it became evident that carrying out a user test, providing even more data, was not sensible within the scope of this study. Therefore, it had to be left out for now, but it does suggest an intriguing starting point for my possible research endeavors in future.

As mentioned above, user-centered translation is a very recent theory, which means that it has not been applied, let alone tested, much yet. It was, therefore, extremely interesting to conduct a research which might potentially provide further empirical and valuable data to test the feasibility of the theory. Furthermore, both UCT and usability engineering are very practical approaches. Having combined them with my previous professional experience in the field of travel and tourism trade was fascinating. It is my hope that the results will prove valuable to the industry.

2 WAYS TO ASSESS THE USABILITY OF WEBSITES

In this chapter, I will first present the concept of usability based on Jakob Nielsen's views on the subject. I will also introduce perhaps the most famous method of usability testing, which is, as mentioned earlier, the most relevant method for this research, i.e. heuristic evaluation. In the second subchapter, I will discuss the theory of user-centered translation (UCT) and the tools that the theory provides for translators.

2.1 Usability

Usability is a concept with roots in usability engineering and technical writing. Jakob Nielsen, who is sometimes referred to as the guru of usability, defines the concept as follows: "Usability is a **quality attribute** that assesses how easy user interfaces are to use. The word "usability" also refers to methods for improving ease-of-use during the design process" (Nielsen 2012) [original emphasis]. Usability consists of many different components and it comprises five usability attributes, also called quality components: 1) learnability, 2) efficiency, 3) memorability, 4) errors and 5) satisfaction. (Nielsen 1993: 26; Nielsen 2012)

Learnability simply means that the system must be easy to learn. The easier the user learns to use the system, the faster s/he can utilize it. (Nielsen 1993: 26) If the user finds the system, or a website, difficult to learn or to use the first time around, it is very likely s/he will change into another which is easier to learn (Nielsen 2012). Hence, learnability can be considered the most important usability attribute.

The second attribute, **efficiency** means that after having learnt to use the system, the user should be able to make the most of it, i.e. use it efficiently and productively (Nielsen 1993: 30). Indeed, in the case of online travel reservation systems, both learnability and efficiency are of major importance. The basic functions needed to book a service (e.g. a flight, accommodation), such as search options, information on the product, availability, booking and paying, should all be easily found and easy to

perform. If these functions strike the user as too complex and difficult, s/he will move on to another of the numerous, corresponding and competing sites.

The third usability attribute is **memorability** which means that a casual user should be able to return to a system after a period of time without difficulties. Therefore the system and its functions need to be easy to remember. (Nielsen 1993: 31) The memorability of functions is a good way to keep the customers coming back. If a user has learned the basic functions of an online reservation system and managed to book for example a hotel room rather easily, it is probable that s/he will return to the site when s/he needs to do that again. If s/he has found the system easy to use, it is likely that s/he will memorize the most important functions without major difficulties when needed.

The attribute of **errors** refers to the rate of errors the users make when using the system. The system's error rate should be as low as possible. If the users make errors, they should be able to bounce back from them quickly. Errors can be divided into minor and catastrophic ones. According to Nielsen, an error occurs every time when a user is not able to perform a function so that s/he reaches the desired goal. Errors are considered minor when the user is able to recover from them easily, perform the function correctly and continue the use. Catastrophic errors refer to situations when the user can recover from them with great difficulty or not at all. In other words, if performing a function leads to a result which is plain wrong or which causes damage to the user's work, the error is severe and demands attention immediately. (Nielsen 1993: 32)

A catastrophic error in an online travel reservation system, such as Hotels.com website, could be for instance a situation where the user has completed a reservation of a hotel room, but never receives the promised confirmation and voucher to his/her e-mail account. Consequently, the user is forced to contact the customer service in order to find out whether the room has really been booked or not. Another good example would be a situation in which the user receives an error message on the screen after clicking "book" or "confirm" button, and is not able to get back to the previous page by clicking "undo" or "previous page". The user is then left with a choice to either start the booking process from the beginning and hope that s/he has not booked the room twice or again contact

the customer service. Errors of this sort are crucial and catastrophic indeed: they demand extra effort from the user who has sought ease of use and, hence, s/he might choose to use some other company's system instead the next time.

Satisfaction, the fifth usability attribute, refers to the pleasantness of the use of the system. It particularly refers to the subjective experience of the user. Satisfaction as an attribute is sometimes considered to bear more significance in the context of systems that are used in leisure time compared to the ones used in a working environment. The reason for this is that those systems are used voluntarily; in other words, the user has chosen to spend time playing games, surfing the Internet etc. (Nielsen 1993: 33) It should be noted here that when consumers book travel services online for independent travel, they do it on free time. Thus, user's subjective satisfaction is of major importance in connection with online reservation systems.

Fulfilling the five above-mentioned attributes or quality components is vital for a system, or a website for that matter, to be usable and consequently it to be used at all. If these attributes are ignored or not paid enough attention to in the development process, it is highly likely that users will leave and find a corresponding website which is easier to use. We all know from our own experience that this is true: we will move on and will probably not go back. Therefore, in order to keep the customers, the companies should always make sure their systems and websites are developed with users' needs in mind. On that account, investing in usability testing is essential. In the following subchapters, I will present the method of usability testing most relevant to this study: heuristic evaluation.

2.1.1 Heuristic Evaluation

One of the most affordable and time-saving ways to assess usability is heuristic evaluation. It is a usability inspection[6] method in which one or more experts evaluate a

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[6] "Usability inspection is the generic name for a set of methods that are all based on having evaluators inspect a user interface." (Nielsen 1995c) In addition to heuristic evaluation, there are seven usability inspection methods: heuristic estimation, cognitive walkthrough, feature inspection, standards inspection,

user interface, or a product, with a list of predetermined quality criteria, i.e. heuristics. (Nielsen 1993: 155; Korvenranta 2005: 111) The experts can be either experts of usability, or of the interface/product which is being evaluated, or ideally double experts (Korvenranta 2005: 114). However, as Nielsen (1993: 20) points out, heuristic evaluation conducted by nonexperts, or novices, can also reveal usability problems and therefore they should not be ruled out entirely as evaluators.

According to Nielsen (1993: 156; 1995a), the recommended number of evaluators performing a heuristic evaluation is 3–5. It is completely impossible for one person to find all usability problems. Based on his research, Nielsen has estimated that one evaluator can find only 35 % of usability problems and his research has further proved that different persons find different problems. Therefore, in order to achieve better results, or to find more usability problems, there should be at least three evaluators. (Nielsen 1993: 156; 1995a) In this thesis, however, I am the single evaluator, in a dual role of an expert, based on my work experience in the travel and tourism field, and as a user. Nevertheless, finding more than a quarter of the usability problems in the material under study can be considered sufficient within the scope of an MA thesis. As stated by Nielsen (1995a), five evaluators typically find approximately 75 % of usability problems. He mentions also that more evaluators can reveal even more problems but it is not guaranteed, which is why he considers five to be the ideal number of evaluators. Obviously, the number should be decided separately in each case after a careful cost-benefit analysis. (Nielsen 1993: 156; 1995a)

Each evaluator performs the evaluation alone to ensure that others have not influenced the findings. In the evaluation situation, the evaluator inspects the user interface by going through it at least twice. S/he pays attention to the dialogue elements of the interface and compares them with the heuristics list to find out whether the design violates the usability principles or not. The evaluator must make notes of all problems s/he notices and mark clearly all instances with references to the violated principles. The result is then a list of all usability problems found by one evaluator, which will be

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pluralistic walkthrough, consistency inspection and formal usability inspection. The aim of all these methods is to reveal usability problems in the user interface design. (ibid.)

combined with other evaluators' lists after all have finished the evaluation. Another way to collect the comments and observations of the evaluators is to use an observer in the evaluation situation. This means that the evaluator comments on the interface aloud to the observer, who in turn makes notes. (Nielsen 1993: 157–159; Nielsen 1995a)

As mentioned above, the outcome that heuristic evaluation produces consists of the lists of problems and violated heuristics produced either by the evaluators themselves or by the observer. In order to get valuable and usable data, the evaluators must be fully aware of what is expected of them: the notes they make must be precise, each problem must be mentioned separately and the reason why it is a problem must be explained with reference to the usability principle it violates. To get further input from the evaluators, it is possible to organize a debriefing session after the actual heuristic evaluations. In such a session the evaluators, the (possible) observer and the members of the design team discuss the interface in an informal manner. In addition to discussing the usability problems of the interface as well as other problems of the design, this method provides a way to find out those aspects that the evaluators consider positive. (Nielsen 1993: 159–160; 1995a)

The aim of heuristic evaluation is to find problems related to usability so that they can be corrected during the design process of the user interface. Therefore, the evaluation should be conducted iteratively, i.e. repeatedly in different phases of the design process. (Nielsen 1993: 155). Ideally then, the usability problems found can be attended to and remedied before the launch of the interface. However, heuristic evaluation can, and should, be conducted on a ready product as well (Suojanen et al. 2015: 5, 78).

Jakob Nielsen and Rolf Molich developed a list of 10 usability heuristics in 1990 and Nielsen further modified it in 1994 (Nielsen 1995b). The list, usually referred to as Nielsen's list, is one of the most used heuristics in the field of technical communication, but it is often also the basis for other heuristics developed for other fields (Suojanen et al. 2012: 102). Nielsen's list of 10 usability heuristics, with specifications, is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Nielsen's (1995b) revised set of heuristics

1. Visibility of system status	The system should always keep users informed about what is going on, through appropriate feedback within reasonable time.
2. Match between system and the real world	The system should speak the users' language, with words, phrases and concepts familiar to the user, rather than system-oriented terms. Follow real-world conventions, making information appear in a natural and logical order.
3. User control and freedom	Users often choose system functions by mistake and will need a clearly marked "emergency exit" to leave the unwanted state without having to go through an extended dialogue. Support undo and redo.
4. Consistency and standards	Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing. Follow platform conventions.
5. Error prevention	Even better than good error messages is a careful design which prevents a problem from occurring in the first place. Either eliminate error-prone conditions or check for them and present users with a confirmation option before they commit to the action.
6. Recognition rather than recall	Minimize the user's memory load by making objects, actions, and options visible. The user should not have to remember information from one part of the dialogue to another. Instructions for use of the system should be visible or easily retrievable whenever appropriate.
7. Flexibility and efficiency of use	Accelerators -- unseen by the novice user -- may often speed up the interaction for the expert user such that the system can cater to both inexperienced and experienced users. Allow users to tailor frequent actions.
8. Aesthetic and minimalist design	Dialogues should not contain information which is irrelevant or rarely needed. Every extra unit of information in a dialogue competes with the relevant units of information and diminishes their relative visibility.
9. Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors	Error messages should be expressed in plain language (no codes), precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution.
10. Help and documentation	Even though it is better if the system can be used without documentation, it may be necessary to provide help and documentation. Any such information should be easy to search, focused on the user's task, list concrete steps to be carried out, and not be too large.

As we can see, Nielsen's heuristics list covers all five usability attributes or quality components discussed in section 2.1: learnability, efficiency, memorability, errors and satisfaction. Even though these heuristics are rather broad in nature they can be applied

to all sorts of interfaces as such, or, alternatively, more specific rules can be developed based on them (Nielsen 1995b). Vesa Purho (2000), for instance, has developed a heuristics list for evaluating the usability of documentation (see Appendix 1). He based his list on Nielsen's 10 heuristics, which he combined with the general features of "good" documentation and modified the list to fit the purposes of documentation evaluation. (Purho 2000)

As mentioned, Purho's (2000) list is specifically aimed at evaluating technical documents. Consequently, it differs from Nielsen's list in one important aspect; Purho's heuristics deal with texts instead of interface design. Indeed, in both Anna Harju's (2008: 17) and Anni Otava's (2013: 25) opinion, Purho's heuristics can, with a few alterations, be applied to translations as well. This brings us one step closer to the field of translation, and user-centered translation in particular. In subchapter 2.2 I will present the theory of UCT, as well as the tools it provides translators with, including usability heuristics for translations.

2.1.2 Rating the Usability Problems

As mentioned before, the result of a heuristic evaluation is a list of usability problems of a specific product. However, the list alone is not enough. It is extremely important to rate the severity of the discovered usability problems as well so that the most catastrophic problems can be tackled first (Nielsen 1995d). For that reason, Nielsen has developed the following severity rating scale (Table 2):

Table 2. Nielsen's (1995d) severity rating for usability problems

0	I don't agree that this is a usability problem at all
1	Cosmetic problem only: need not be fixed unless extra time is available on project
2	Minor usability problem: fixing this should be given low priority
3	Major usability problem: important to fix, so should be given high priority
4	Usability catastrophe: imperative to fix this before product can be released

It is recommended that the rating of the problems is conducted after the actual evaluation situation with the help of a compiled list of all the usability problems discovered. As with the actual evaluation, the rating also needs to be performed alone by each evaluator. The mean of all evaluators' ratings determines the actual severity of the usability problems. According to Nielsen, the mean of three ratings can be considered valid. (Nielsen 1995d). It must be noted here that since I am the single evaluator in this study (the reasons for which being the vast amount of data gained through my evaluation and the limited scope of an MA thesis), there is only one set of severity ratings as well. Although the recommended number of evaluators is more than one, in order to get valid data, my ratings can be deemed reliable and valid since I have considered their severity in my capacities as both an expert and a user.

2.2 User-Centered Translation (UCT)

In this subchapter, I will discuss the theory of user-centered translation (UCT). I will first introduce the theory and then continue by explaining the method, that is, how UCT can be implemented in the translation process. I will mention some of the tools, such as mental models, only in passing since they are not relevant to this thesis. Instead, similarly as in the usability subchapter, I will concentrate on heuristic evaluation, only this time from the UCT point of view.

2.2.1 The Concept of UCT

User-centered translation (UCT) is a very recent theory in Translation Studies. It was developed by Tytti Suojanen, Kaisa Koskinen and Tiina Tuominen in 2012. The main idea behind UCT is to provide translators with concrete tools which help them take the end-user (i.e. the reader of the translation) into account during every step of the translation process (Koskinen 2014; Suojanen et al. 2012: 9). The aim is to produce a translation that is readable, enjoyable and fits the needs of the target readers, i.e. the end-users, and the target culture conventions; in other words, a translation with excellent usability.

The concept of UCT is parallel to user-centered design (UCD) in usability engineering and draws from it (Suojanen et al. 2012: 9, 24; 2015: 3). In this approach, knowing the end-user is crucial and, for that reason, it is important to acquire as much information about them as possible, already before the beginning of the actual designing process. Collecting data on end-users is, however, an iterative function. This means that it is important to acquire knowledge of the users, not only in the beginning but also during the process, as well as at the end of it. (Suojanen et al. 2012: 54) The iterative nature of data-collecting ensures that the initial information acquired is updated during the process and the product can be altered according to the new data. Similarly, the information gained at the end of the process will help make changes needed before launching the product and will also provide valuable information for future. Traditionally in translation, the end-users, or target readers, have not been systematically capitalized on during the actual translation process (Suojanen et al. 2012: 55; 2015: 1). UCT suggests, however, that the principle of knowing the end-users and keeping them in mind during the whole process can be implemented on translation as well, with slight modifications (Suojanen et al. 2012: 53; 2015: 4)

Figure 1 below illustrates the iterative nature of user-centered translation. The process begins with a need for translation, which leads to a specification, or in other words, a commission. Based on the specification, the translator uses mental models (personas, intratextual reader positions and audience design, see chapter 2.2.2) to create a description of the target group. S/he can also use feedback of previous commissions and results of previously conducted reception studies on similar commissions to e.g. create more accurate personas. Based on all the information the translator has accumulated, s/he then chooses the translation strategy and begins the translation process. Heuristic evaluation, or expert evaluation, and usability testing can both be conducted in different phases of the translation process, as well as at the end of it. The results of the evaluation and tests conducted during the process provide valuable feedback which can be immediately utilized in the ongoing translation process. The results of the tests and evaluation conducted on a finished translation can either be used to further edit and revise the translation if not yet published, or they can be utilized in other, similar commissions. Post mortem, which here refers to summing-up of the whole project, and

reception research, are both conducted after the translation process and provide useful information for future purposes on the process itself and the final translation, respectively. (Koskinen 2014; Suojanen et al. 2015: 4–6)
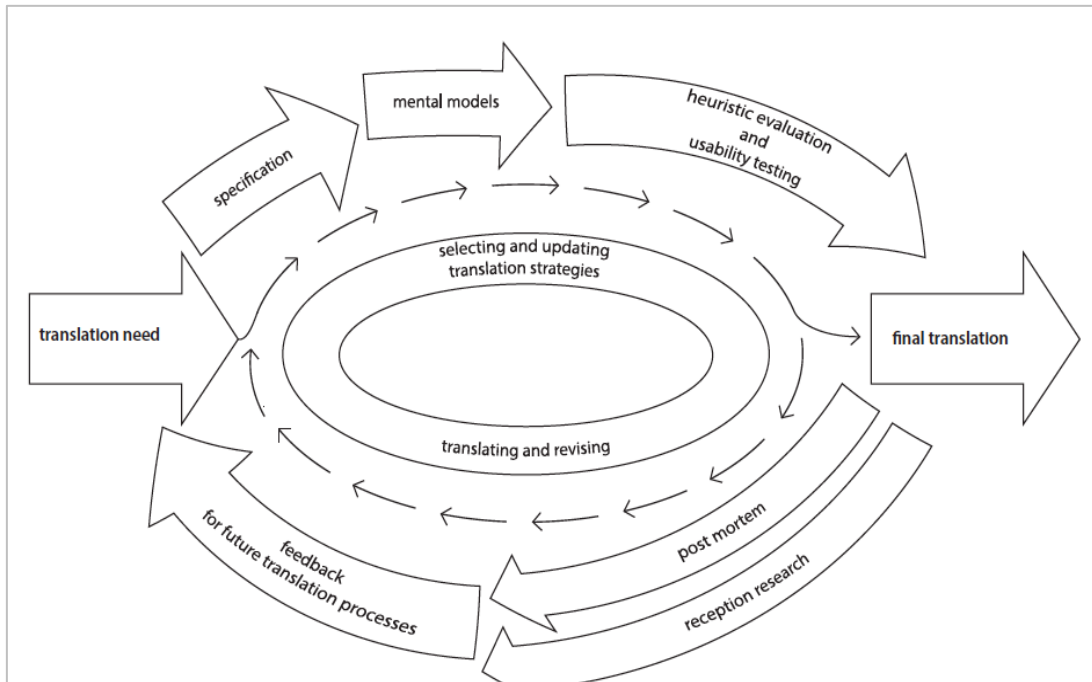
Figure 1. User-centered translation process (Koskinen 2014; Suojanen et al. 2015: 4)

2.2.2 The Tools of UCT

Suojanen, Koskinen and Tuominen (2012: 53) divide the tools and methods of UCT into three categories: 1) mental models, 2) methods for studying real users and 3) heuristic evaluation. With the help of all of these tools, the translator is able to reflect on the target readers' needs already before and during the translation process and hence is able to produce a translation which fits the target users' requirements and is, therefore, usable for their purposes.

The first category comprises the tools that enable the translator to create descriptions of the target readers. These tools are called **mental models.** The methods for constructing

mental models that can be utilized in UCT are *personas*, *intratextual reader positions* and *audience design:* the former has previously been used widely in usability engineering, whereas the latter two are previously familiar concepts in TS. (Suojanen et al. 2012: 54; 2015: 61)

The second category consists of the tools which utilize **real users (or readers) in real user situations** and can again be used both during and after the translation process. Different methods of both usability engineering (e.g. usability testing, eye-tracking and thinking aloud) and reception research in TS (e.g. questionnaires, interviews and focus groups) are such tools. (Suojanen et al. 2012: 69; 2015: 93, 111)

The third category is made up of **heuristic evaluation**, which too can be conducted either during or after the translation process. Heuristic evaluation has traditionally been used mostly in the field of technical writing and usability engineering (see Chapter 2.1.1). However, Suojanen et al. (2012: 105; 2015: 77) argue that it can be a helpful tool for evaluating translations iteratively, just as well as interfaces or technical documents. Other reasons for heuristic evaluation to be considered valuable for assessing translations are its cost-effectiveness and the fact that it can be performed rather quickly (Suojanen et al. 2015: 81). It is rather obvious that in today's hectic world where resources are cut down constantly, low costs and speed are always considered positive. Suojanen et al. (2012: 104; 2015: 81) mention that heuristics can be most useful in the context of vast masses of texts or when the translations are part of the digital content of a product. As examples, they mention modern translation industry and institutional translating (e.g. within the EU) but refer also to user manual translation, localization and audiovisual translation. However, they also point out that all tools of UCT, especially heuristic evaluation, can be applied to smaller scale translation commissions as well (Suojanen et al. 2012: 105; 2015: 81).

Before the translation field can properly utilize heuristic evaluation, a good and concise heuristics list for studying translations must be developed. Indeed, there has not existed any general heuristics for translation before the introduction of UCT (Suojanen et al. 2015: 81). However, there are some translation usability guidelines, instructions and

checklists (e.g. Harju's and Suokas' lists in Suojanen et al. 2015: 82–84) which have been developed for specific cases on the basis of existing heuristics lists (e.g. Nielsen's list).

After the introduction of UCT in Suojanen et al.'s (2012) *Käyttäjäkeskeinen kääntäminen* [User-centered translation], Anni Otava (2013) designed heuristics for translation for her MA thesis *Focus on the Audience: Three Cases of User-Centered Translation.* Otava's list (2013: 45) is very likely the first actual heuristics lists developed for translation (see Appendix 2.). However, as Otava herself mentions, some of the heuristics on her list were not applicable for analyzing the usability of translations and therefore further refinement of the list is needed (ibid. 70).

In 2015, Suojanen et al. (2015: 90) created a list of usability heuristics for user-centered translation (Table 3) for the English version of their work *Käyttäjäkeskeinen kääntäminen* [User-Centered Translation]. Their list is meant to act as a general framework, which can be used as a basis for developing further case-specific heuristics for different translation contexts. Although they have based their heuristics on several already existing lists, their main sources have been Nielsen and Purho's lists, as well as Daniel Gouadec's checklist for translators developed in 2010. (ibid. 89–90) Since Suojanen et al.'s list is fairly new, it has not yet been widely tested in practice. However, since it is the very first "official" usability heuristics for translation, it is safe to say that it will be tested and used extensively in the future, and it certainly will act as a basis and inspiration for many other translation heuristics. Whether it will reach the same kind of status as Nielsen's list remains to be seen.

Table 3. Usability heuristics for user-centered translation (Suojanen et al. 2015: 90)

1. Match between translation and specification	Why is the translation needed and does it fulfil the requirements defined in the specification?
2. Match between translation and users	Who are the users of the translation and how do their characteristics affect translation solutions? Are there possibilities for supporting different kinds of users? Do the textual choices reflect the information needs of the users?
3. Match between translation and real world	Is the translation aligned with its cultural context? Is cultural adaptation required?
4. Match between translation and genre	Does the translation match the conventions of the genre in question? Are the visual, auditory and other multimodal elements appropriate for the new context?
5. Consistency	Is the translation consistent in terms of style, terminology, phraseology and register?
6. Legibility and readability	Do the visual elements of the translation correspond to the reader's physiological capabilities and relevant cultural guidelines? Is the user guided through the translation by using appropriate signposting for the genre in question? Are the user's efforts of interpretation sufficiently minimized?
7. Cognitive load and efficiency	Is the translation well-crafted enough to be easy to memorize and learnable, that is, clear and comprehensible? Do the users need guidance for using the translation and if so, in which format?
8. Satisfaction	Does the translation produce a pleasurable and/or rewarding user experience?
9. Match between source and target texts	Has all relevant source material been translated? Is there unwanted linguistic or structural interference?
10. Error prevention	Have potential risks of misunderstanding been minimized?

In the light of what has been discussed above, it must be concluded that heuristic evaluation is the most suitable method for this thesis and for case studies in general. This is because conducting the evaluation is relatively fast and does not require much money and is, therefore, a good choice for a research of this size.

In the next chapter, I will discuss localization. As mentioned on several occasions above, translation and localization are extremely closely connected concepts and processes. Moreover, Suojanen et al.'s (2015: 22–23) following statement also proves the tight connection both of these processes have with usability: "Localization is where usability factors of the interface and the usability elements involved in written and

visual communication interact to the fullest; it is also a prime example of the inherent existence of culture in the usability of translations." This definition provides an excellent basis for the more in-depth discussion on localization.

3 LOCALIZATION OF WEBSITES

This chapter discusses localization. First, I will present the localization industry which is part of the GILT industry and discuss the most relevant terms related to both. Then I will briefly discuss the relationship between translation and localization, which is not as simple as one might assume, due to the differing views of scholars. In the third subchapter, I will introduce the concept of website localization and its characteristics. Finally, in the fourth subchapter, I shall discuss the necessity to localize, as well as the practical localization issues in the context of country sites and internationalized sites. I will also draw a parallel between localization and usability.

Localization is said to be "the fastest growing sector in translation" (Jiménez-Crespo 2013: 7). This is easy to understand since these days we cannot escape the presence of computers and IT, and even though many kinds of products can be localized (cars, magazines etc., see Mazur 2007: 347), it is precisely IT technology and digital world which heavily depend on localization. Indeed, the whole localization industry originates from the late 1970s when US computer companies wanted to reach international markets (Jiménez-Crespo 2013: 7). In order to meet the standards of new local markets, they had to customize their products, both hardware and software, for culturally different clienteles. First, the companies established in-house divisions to take care of the modifications of the products. Later on, in the 1990s, as the number of companies' local markets still rose and the IT industry proved its characteristic seasonal nature, it was no longer profitable to maintain in-house localization divisions. Consequently, the companies outsourced their localization services. (Mazur 2007: 338–339; Esselink 2000: 5) However, the above-mentioned reasons were not the only ones. Some say that outsourcing happened, and still happens, because free trade and neoliberalism ideology make it not only possible but desirable, all in the name of free competition. (Abdallah 2012: 1)

Nevertheless, the companies that provided localization services were generally first "mere" translation agencies. Today, in addition to providing localization services in numerous languages, these MLVs (i.e. Multiple Language Vendors) often offer also

other services such as project management. (Mazur 2007: 339; Esselink 2000: 6) For example, Lionbridge which is presently the largest localization services provider in the world, offers its customers also "online marketing, global content management and application testing solutions" (Lionbridge 2014). Localization companies of today are huge global enterprises which offer their services online (Jiménez-Crespo 2013: 9). Indeed, Lionbridge is a perfect example of such an enterprise, with approximately 5000 employees working in offices in 26 countries and providing services for over 800 brands (Lionbridge 2014).

A good, general definition of localization is provided by The Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA) (no longer operational): "Localization involves taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale (country/region and language) where it will be used and sold." (in Esselink 2000: 3) This definition illustrates well the aim of localization, which is to ensure that people all over the world can enjoy similar products in their mother tongue with slight cultural modifications. Definitions have been offered also by scholars, and the emphasis of their definitions depends greatly on the speaker and the discipline s/he represents. However, what these definitions have in common is that they divide localization into two aspects, translation and adaptation, and that they all emphasize the cultural aspect of localization. Translation scholar Keiran J. Dunne's (2006: 4) definition of localization is perhaps one of the most extensive:

> The processes by which digital content and products developed in one locale (defined in terms of geographical area, language and culture) are adapted for sale and use in another locale. Localization involves: (a) translation of textual content **into the language and textual conventions of the target locale**, (b), adaptation of the non-textual content (from colors, icons and bitmaps, to packaging, form factors, etc.) as well as input, output and delivery mechanisms **to take into account the cultural, technical and regulatory requirements of that locale**. In sum, localization is not so much about specific *tasks* as much as it is about the *processes* by which products are adapted.
> Moreover, localization is but one of a number of independent processes and cannot be fully (or correctly) understood without being contextualized in reference to them. These processes are referred to collectively by the acronym GILT (Globalization, Internationalization, Localization, Translation). (Dunne 2006: 4) [my bold; original italics]

Also Dunne's definition explains rather well what localization is all about: the aim of localization is to provide/enable products developed in one local market to be sold in

other local markets around the world. As we can see from above, Dunne emphasizes the cultural aspects of localization in both translation and adaptation stages. Also Jamie Whalen (2014a) emphasizes the importance of cultural issues in localization. On Lionbridge's website, he states that localization indeed is "the translation and adaptation of material for foreign-language markets". Adaptation in the definition refers to the cultural aspects of the process, meaning that the end product as a whole must fit and work well in the target culture (ibid.) (cf. usability in Chapter 2). According to Whalen (2014b), a properly localized product then "[i]s appropriate for the target locale's business and cultural conventions", "[a]ppears custom built for the end user's cultural and linguistic background" and "[d]oes not change the original intended meaning".

3.1 The GILT Industry

As mentioned above, the emphasis of the general definitions of localization differs depending on who does the defining. Interestingly, there appears to be some confusion as to the relationship between localization and the GILT industry as well. For instance, in the last paragraph of his definition of localization above, Dunne (2006: 4) points out that localization is a part of a larger whole called GILT. The letters of the acronym stand for *Globalization, Internationalization, Localization* and *Translation* (ibid; Munday 2012: 280; O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013: 89), and, accordingly, localization is generally deemed to be a part of the GILT industry. However, Iwona Mazur (2007: 344) suggests that the localization industry and the GILT industry are, in fact, parallel concepts, stating that "[t]he localization industry is often referred to as the GILT industry". This statement is somewhat surprising, but, as such, it illustrates the contradictory views and the confusion regarding the definitions extremely well.

In order to understand the complex nature of localization, it is essential to understand what the above four terms (*Globalization, Internationalization, Localization* and *Translation*) mean because they are very much intertwined. Similarly as above, several different views and definitions exist for these terms as well. In an attempt to make the metalanguage of localization more consistent, Mazur (2007) has suggested generalized

definitions for all of them. In the following, I will present the terms based on her suggestions complemented by some other scholars' views.

In the context of the GILT industry, *Globalization* refers to the situation in which a company pursues international markets by expanding its business and marketing abroad (Mazur 2007: 345). Accordingly, the term refers to all the actual procedures a company executes in order to reach the global markets, such as investing in an internationalized site and country sites (see sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 below). Therefore, it can be stated that globalization comprises both internationalization and localization. (Mazur 2007: 345; Esselink 2000: 4)

Internationalization (also called the *pre-localization process* by O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013: 89) is the process in which a simplified product is developed to ease the subsequent localization. In practice, this means that any culture-specific features of the original product (usually developed in English), be they linguistic or technical, are eliminated and substituted with more neutral, international ones. (Mazur 2007: 346; Esselink 2000: 25) Hence, this internationalized version, or "interlingua version" as Munday (2012: 282) calls it, is the basis for all localized versions of the product. However, in software industry, internationalization may also mean that there is one general version of the product (in English), which has been developed to cater for a company's international customers. (Mazur 2007: 346) Even though Mazur mentions that the term is rarely used for this purpose these days, Nielsen (2011) uses the word *internationalized* in this very sense when he talks about website localization (see 3.4). These differing views prove that there is a great deal of confusion as to the definition of internationalization as well.

As discussed above in chapter 3, *Localization* encompasses both adapting and translating. Furthermore, these two processes cover linguistic, content and cultural, as well as technical issues (Mazur 2007: 347). In the context of the GILT industry, localization is considered to comprise translation. As Munday (2012: 280–281) puts it, localization "refers to the adaptation of the product to the target locale, **which may involve** the substitution of inappropriate cultural symbols and **the translation of text**,

including the need to fit specific space constraints on the screen/page, etc." [my emphasis]. Also in Mazur's suggestion for the general definition of localization, translation is considered a part of localization: "the process of adapting products that are part of global distribution networks to the **linguistic** and cultural **requirements** of a given locale" [my emphasis] (Mazur 2007: 347–348). These definitions clearly emphasize localization being an extensive whole which consists of a wide range of processes.

In spite of translation being a part of localization, the last letter of the acronym refers to *translation*. This suggests that translation is, nonetheless, an important and substantial part of the GILT industry and deserves to be mentioned separately. Also, according to Mazur (2007: 348), it is precisely translation that eats up the major part of the localization budget, which further proves its importance.

3.2 Relationship Between Localization and Translation

As can be seen above, it is not an easy task to define localization, or any other part of the GILT industry, for that matter. Nor is it easy to make a clear distinction between translation and localization. Depending on the background of the speaker, the views on the relationship between localization and translation differ: for some localization is a part of translation, while others see translation as a part of localization.

Within the localization industry, translation is generally regarded as a part of localization. Whalen (2014b) from Lionbridge, for instance, points out that translation is only a "sub-task of localization". The whole process of localization comprises numerous phases (Whalen 2014a; Esselink: 2000: 4; Pym 2006) of which translation is but one. However, in the localization industry, translation is not only seen as a small part of the process but also as a mere "replacement of natural language strings" (Pym 2006). Whalen (2014b), in fact, implies that translation as an independent activity is always word-for-word, but in the context of localization entails also adapting the language. Apparently Esselink (2000: 4), who also represents the localization industry,

appreciates translation slightly more since he admits that translation actually includes also the aspect of paying special attention to "cultural nuance and style". Nevertheless, it is quite evident that translation is not very highly esteemed by the professionals of localization.

Translation scholars Anthony Pym (2006) and Peter Sandrini (2005: 2) both defend translation pointing out that translation theory has existed for centuries, whereas localization industry is a fairly recent phenomenon. They also argue that translators have been performing adaptation of texts and content for ages, which is now emphasized as being the major part of localization. As a matter of fact, according to Pym (2006), the results of several studies have shown that translators have been adapting the content of translations since the very beginning. Those results emphasize the fact that translations do not equal source texts in form, but in fact, they are different in their structure and length, generally due to cultural changes (ibid.). Translating then is much more than mere replacing parts of language with corresponding ones, which seems to be the rather general impression among the professionals in the GILT industry.

Based on the above, it is clear that the views on the relationship between localization and translation differ depending on the background of the speaker. Regardless, all the above definitions and views point out that localization is truly a target-oriented activity. This fact offers a clear parallel between localization and usability since the aim of usability practices is to meet the users', i.e. target readers' needs and live up to their expectations.

3.3 Website Localization

The general definitions of localization are usually considered to cover web localization as well (Jiménez-Crespo 2013: 19). Website localization covers the same features as the other types of localization (video game, software, small device and multimedia localization) do, such as "the digital nature of the text, the presentation on screen, the interactive nature of texts". However, each type of localization has some distinctive

features as well. (ibid. 28) In what follows, I will discuss the features of website localization.

Sandrini (2008: 175) defines website localization as "the process of modifying an existing Website to make it accessible, usable and culturally suitable to a target audience". In order to understand what website localization actually entails, one must understand the concept of a website properly. Sandrini's (2005: 1) definition is as follows: "A website encompasses all web pages which are accessible under a common Web address (domain name)", e.g. www.hotels.com. Furthermore, a website consists of "documents, graphics, programs and so on, each of which is identified by a uniform resource identifier (URI)" (ibid).

Website contents can be divided in different ways. Sandrini (2005: 2), for instance, calls the elements a website contains *assets* and he divides them into four different types: *digital assets, application assets, transactional assets* and *community assets*. *Digital assets* refer to the multimedia elements such as videos and audio but also to text and images. As we all know from surfing the Internet, there are often elements on the websites which require certain software in order to work, such as pdf-files. According to Sandrini (ibid.), such elements are *application assets*. *Transactional assets* are all elements in connection to online purchasing, whereas *community assets* refer to the contents users themselves create on the interactive parts of websites (ibid.), e.g. customer reviews on travel websites. Additionally, as Sandrini (ibid.) mentions, the hypertextual elements are a special feature of websites in particular.

Clearly, Sandrini's (2005: 2) division shows that websites contain several types of elements. However, it also points out rather clearly that textual elements form a large part of websites' contents since all *assets* indeed include texts. Cultural differences that should be taken into account when localizing the textual contents of websites, or any digital products for that matter, are numerous. Such country-specific conventions include e.g. formats of date, time, address and calendars, as well as number formats, such as the use of comma/period as decimal points (O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013: 93; Esselink 2000: 33). Indeed, the ways to present these and other similar elements, such

as currency signs, units of measurements and phone numbers, are dependent on a country, region or culture. If these elements are not presented in a correct manner, they will catch the eye of the user and create a sense of the website not being the original, but an adjusted version. This should be avoided since the user should always have a feeling that the specific version s/he is using is not a 'version' as such but the original (O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013: 95). The only way the feel of such originality can be achieved is by thoroughly adapting these elements to fit the target locale's conventions.

Another culture-specific feature that should be taken into account when localizing texts on websites is the geographical names used on the sites (O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013: 95). This feature is extremely apparent on travel websites. When adapting geographical names attention should be paid not only to the usage of the right equivalent but also to the target country's relations to other countries. There might be historical (or current) conflicts between countries, which may have resulted in a situation where some otherwise common equivalent might not be acceptable (ibid.)[7].

Regardless of the text masses on websites, Sandrini's (2005: 2) division above illustrates also the very fact that it is not merely the text on the websites that needs to be adapted into the target locale conventions. Regarding the online purchasing or e-commerce, for example, the product range may vary across countries, and the accepted and offered payment methods and options may be country-specific as well. In addition, there are laws and regulations concerning e-commerce which vary from country to country. (Esselink 2000: 39) Yet another feature that needs careful adaptation is the advertisements, which are numerous especially on commercial websites. Thought must be put into whether it is enough to only translate the ads into the target locale's language or whether they need to be replaced altogether with ones that fit the target culture better.

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[7] For instance, due to the territorial dispute between the United Kingdom and Argentina, instead of using "Falkland Islands" on the Spanish country sites, the Argentinian equivalent "Islas Malvinas" should be used (O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013: 95).

Yet another challenge typical for website localization is the fact that websites are updated frequently, not only content-wise but also design-wise (Esselink 2000: 13, 37; Sandrini 2005: 3). The aim of the companies that offer multilingual websites is to publish all language versions of updates simultaneously which obviously adds to the challenge. Certain technical solutions, such as translation workflow solutions, provided by localization vendors enable such simultaneous updates (Esselink 2000: 13). Indeed, as Esselink (ibid. 39) points out, it is vital for companies to outsource the update management to professionals with the right tools. Doing so ensures that the customers are able to enjoy up-to-date country sites regardless of their location.

What has been discussed above emphasizes the importance of localizing websites thoroughly, by fully adapting the product's culture-specific features into target cultures standards and conventions, in order to produce usable country sites. However, companies may not always choose to localize all contents of their website for their international markets, but only parts of it. The extent to which the websites are localized depends on the company's strategy and resources (Jiménez-Crespo 2013: 34).

3.4 The Need to Localize

These days, when English is the *lingua franca* of the world, one could easily assume that the most relevant thing for companies is to provide their websites and online services in English. This is true, at least to some extent. Nielsen (2011) points out that it is indeed important for companies to always have an internationalized website which caters for all users globally, i.e. a website in English. However, the fact that out of 2,7 billion Internet users in the world only 20 % speak English as their first language (Yunker 2014), strongly supports Nielsen's (2011) view on the importance of providing localized websites for the most significant markets of the company.

In addition to providing localized websites in order to enter new markets and increase sales, companies may also do so for legal reasons. According to Esselink (2000: 3, 5), in many countries it is a legal requirement that at least the imported products (such as

software, hardware and devices) are in the local language or otherwise their use is prohibited.

3.4.1 Country Sites

If a company chooses to go global, it is essential that it invests in culturally adapted, foreign-language versions of its websites. *Country sites* are precisely those localized versions of a company's website aimed at its foreign markets. Furthermore, country sites are targeted for specific locales; in other words, they are adapted to meet the target locale's conventions and requirements. Locale does not refer to a country, but in fact to a language area with its own cultural and linguistic conventions (Esselink 2000: 1; Mazur 2007: 346). For instance, Swedish-speaking Finland and Sweden are two different locales.

As mentioned earlier, it is well worth the effort for multinational companies to provide localized websites for their most significant markets. By so doing a company ensures that the most important customer locales get the information they need in their own language. The strategy for choosing the languages which the websites are localized into should reflect the company's market opportunities as well as its aspirations in the long run (Yunker 2014; Sandrini 2005: 3–4). It is also of major importance to be aware of competitors' localization decisions, i.e. which languages their websites support (Yunker 2014). Such knowledge provides the company with an opportunity to see which locales its competitors consider important. Moreover, it enables finding, and thus, entering locales which are not yet crowded with similar services. As a result, the company gains a strategic and competitive advantage.

In order to go global properly, companies should also apply certain well-tried globalization practices to their websites (Yunker 2014). Such practices have been investigated by Byte Level Research ever since 2000. Based on the results, they publish annually a Web Globalization Report Card, listing e.g. leading languages, emerging trends and the best and the worst practices of web globalization. (Byte Level Research 2014) According to John Yunker (2014), the co-founder of Byte Level Research, over

the past ten years or so, some of the listed best practices have proven to be fundamental in globalizing websites[8]. In his article, on Lionbridge's website, Yunker (2014) lists these eight practices that he says every company should adopt when going global. According to him, *Web Globalization Best Practices* are:

- Supporting several languages
- Supporting country codes
- Improving the discoverability of local websites
- Supporting a "universal" global gateway
- Avoiding the use of flags whenever possible
- Supporting local-language social platforms
- Using global design templates
- Treating the world equally. (ibid.)

Obviously, the number of languages a company's websites should support depends on the size of the company. According to the research, most global websites of the 150 companies included support only 10 languages (Byte Level Research 2014; Yunker 2014). The sites that support substantially higher numbers of languages are, not surprisingly, travel companies (see Table 4). In fact, the top ten companies regarding the amount of languages are all travel companies, Hotels.com being the second with 39 languages.

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[8] As mentioned earlier in section 3.1, globalization is considered to cover both internationalization and localization. Esselink (2000: 3) points out that it is precisely when talking about websites, "internationalization, translation, and adapting the content to specific target markets is usually referred to as "web site globalization"." Indeed, Yunker's (2014) list of Best Practices includes features of all mentioned aspects.

Website	Languages
Booking.com	41
Hotels.com	39
KLM	28
Avis	27
TripAdvisor	25
Hertz	22
Air France	22
Expedia	21
Best Western	21
Sixt	20

Table 4. Languages supported by global websites, incl. US English (adapted from Yunker 2014)

According to Figure 2 below, the ten most supported languages by global websites after English are French, German, Japanese, Spanish (Spain and Latin America), Chinese (Simplified), Italian, Russian, Korean, Portuguese (Brazil) and Dutch (Yunker 2014). As can be seen from Figure 2, all these ten languages present the major languages spoken by the world's 2,7 billion Internet users. If a company wants to reach the majority of Internet users, encompassing these ten languages, in addition to an internationalized website in English, provides a rather good starting point for localization. However, by pointing out that "the leading global websites support 30 or more languages" Yunker (2014) suggests rather explicitly that if a company wants to go global properly, its **websites should support considerably more than ten languages**. Indeed, as Figure 2 illustrates, 19% of all Internet users speak some other language than the ones mentioned separately as their first language. Thus, in order to reach and keep such users, the company should support also the smaller languages of its target locales. Therefore, if a company wanted to enter or enhance its position, for example, in the Scandinavian markets it would be advisable to support at least Finnish and Swedish. Scandinavian people can be assumed to know English rather well, but by supporting their mother tongues a company shows appreciation towards its customers.
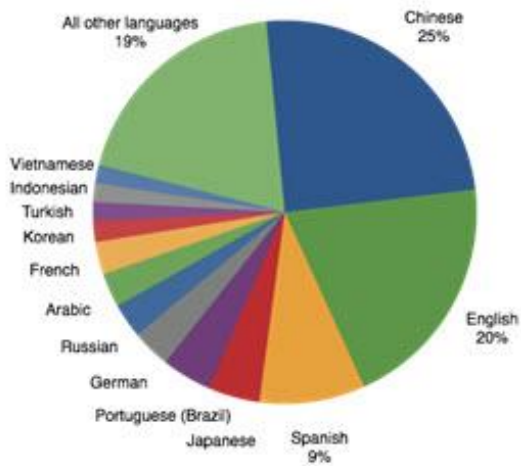
Figure 2. Major languages spoken by the world's 2,7 billion Internet users (Yunker 2014)

Supporting country codes means that the official country code of the target country is used visibly on the country site. The code can be incorporated into the web address (e.g. www.tripadvisor.*fi*, www.tripadvisor.*se* etc., my examples) and/or utilized in company logos. As country codes give a truly local feel to a website, their use is strongly recommended. (Yunker 2014) Another way of bringing the country and the local feel to the fore is to incorporate the entire name of the country into the logo, instead of the mere country code. A good example of this is TripAdvisor who has done exactly that by placing the name of the country in question (e.g. Suomi) under the actual logo, which consists of the image of an owl and the name of the company (see www.tripadvisor.fi). The ideal situation would be that all company's localized websites would support country codes in their web addresses, but in case it is not possible, the ones acquired should be fully capitalized on (ibid.).[9]

The third Best Practice Yunker (2014) mentions is **improving the discoverability of local websites**. By this, he means that on every website there should be a so-called

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[9] Domain names (or web addresses) can be registered, for instance, in numerous online services. However, some of the desired domain names with certain endings, such as country codes, may already be registered by someone else. In such cases, the company can attempt to purchase the domain name from the current owner (WhoIsHostingThis.com 2013).

global gateway, which enables users to choose their local website easily by clicking it. The gateway should preferably be a visual one, such as a globe icon[10], and be placed in the header. (Yunker 2014) It is of extreme importance that this global gateway is available on every page of a website (ibid.; Esselink 2000: 37). It is also possible to direct users straight to their local country site by implementing geolocation. The system then automatically identifies the locale the website is used in and, hence, opens up the localized site of that very locale. Another such technology is language negotiation. It identifies the language the user prefers on his/her web browser and consequently accommodates the website's language to that. But, no matter how handy these means of automatic identification are, they might not always work. Therefore, it is crucial to provide a global gateway as well, to ensure that the user can choose the right country site him/herself. Hotels.com is one of the few websites in Byte Level Research's report which uses both geolocation and language negotiation. (Yunker 2014)

The fourth best practice is tightly connected to the third one. **Supporting a "universal" global gateway** means that the menu which opens up by clicking the gateway icon should always be understandable for all users, no matter what their mother tongue is. In other words, the menu should not be localized but kept "universal" on every country site. (Yunker 2014) "Universal" here means that the names of the countries and/or languages on the menu should be presented in the native language of each local site, for example "Suomi" [Finnish] or "Svenska" [Swedish], and stay the same across all country sites (ibid.; Esselink 2000: 38). This ensures that the user is able to navigate to his/her local website with no trouble when geolocation is not implemented or does not work.

"If you can avoid using flags, do so" is the fifth best practice on Yunker's (2014) list. This best practice has much to do with cultural and geopolitical issues. There are many conflict areas in the world, and the use of certain flags, for example, Taiwan's, may offend certain groups of users. Colorful flags can also make the global gateway menu appear distracting. Instead of supporting flags, a global website can use textual links,

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[10]At the time of writing this thesis, both Radisson Blu and Hilton Hotels, for instance, use the globe icon as the global gateway on their websites (see www.radissonblu.com and www.hiltonhotels.com).

such as "select country/region". According to Yunker, however, The 2014 Web Globalization Report Card shows that many travel websites do use flags. This might have something to do with the fact that e-commerce is said to utilize flags to make users feel comfortable, and travel websites indeed usually support e-commerce in the form of the booking system. The most serious mistake in Yunker's opinion is that flags are used to indicate languages. (ibid.) In summary, it could be said that it is okay to use flags on websites, but one must think carefully about how they are placed, for instance, in the gateway menu, so that the result is not messy. Equally important is to acknowledge that some of the users may be offended and in consequence the company may receive negative feedback and/or lose customers.

When a company goes global, it should also consider other ways to promote its products than merely investing in localized websites. As is well known, social media and networks are nowadays important marketing channels. Yunker (2014) reminds us that it is important to realize that Facebook and Twitter do not cover the whole world, but there are also other, local networks that should be considered. In order to get the most out of social networks, **"local-language social platforms" should be supported** (best practice 6) whenever possible, and they should be advertised on the country sites.[11] (ibid.)

The seventh best practice is **using a global design template**, which enables adding languages and country sites to a website whenever needed. The global template not only guarantees that all country versions are consistent, but it also facilitates the managing of numerous local sites and the execution of global promotion campaigns. Furthermore, the overall consistency of country sites creates a trustworthy image of the company and enhances the usability. (Yunker 2014)

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[11] I conducted a quick search to find out whether travel websites or companies support a local-language page for Finnish users n Facebook. Surprisingly, only one out of eight did (in April 2016). Indeed, Trivago, the world's largest hotel search, was the only one with a Finnish Facebook page. However, the fact that the page is available in Finnish was not advertised anywhere on the FI country site (see www.trivago.fi). (The other websites/companies included in the search were Hotels.com, Booking.com, TripAdvisor, SAS, Lufthansa, AirBaltic and KLM.)

The last best practice on Yunker's (2014) list urges to "**treat the world equally"**. What all global companies should then aim at is providing the same user experience for all their customers regardless of their location. In other words, all country sites should be properly localized and offer the same content, or information and services, for everybody. This practice is closely linked to the previous one since it is the global design template that enables the consistency. However, it may not always be possible to provide fully localized country sites for all the target locales. Then it is advisable to clearly state the situation honestly, for instance by mentioning that certain country sites are abridged. (Yunker 2014)

These eight best practices can be considered as a kind of quality criteria for global websites; hence, they could be called heuristics as well. Following this thought, I will incorporate some of these practices into my own heuristics list (see Chapter 4), which I will later use as a method to analyze the globalization strategy of Hotels.com.

3.4.2 Internationalized Sites

As mentioned above, instead of supporting localized country sites, a company may choose to provide a general, English-speaking website for its entire international clientele (see also section 3.1). Such a site is called an internationalized site (Nielsen 2011). Alternatively, a company may support localized sites only for its most important markets and, in addition, an internationalized site to cater for the rest of the international markets.

Internationalized sites, as well as all other types of websites, should follow certain universal *usability guidelines* (Nielsen 2011). Indeed, according to Nielsen, there are some usability guidelines that are considered equally important all over the world, even though usability can be understood differently in different locales. Firstly, whereas big sites should always offer users search and filter functionalities, on small sites they are not needed since they would only confuse the user. However, providing search functionality is generally regarded essential because of users' universal wish to look up and compare information. (ibid; Nielsen & Loranger 2006: 138) Secondly, regardless of

the locale, website users typically read the pages with a so-called F-shaped pattern[12]. In other words, they read the very first lines of a page and then scan the content column on the left side[13] of the page. Therefore, in order to catch the attention of the user, it is vital to place the most important information to the top part of the page and to provide links in the left column. (Nielsen 2006; 2011)

Additionally, all internationalized websites should, according to Nielsen (2005), fulfill certain minimum requirements, in order to guarantee the usability for everyone. Regarding names and addresses, the minimum requirement is that **an extended set of characters** is accepted. This will enable international users to type their names and addresses correctly in their own language characters without having to think of replacing them. **Measurements** and **temperatures** should always be provided **in all their forms** (the metric system and traditional English units; Fahrenheit and Celcius etc.) to avoid confusion and misinterpretations. The most important thing concerning dates is to provide **the month in spelling** instead of numbers (see also Esselink 2000: 29). The minimum requirement regarding the product information on the internationalized websites is to clearly state **whether there are any restrictions** regarding the use of the product sold (e.g. regional electricity standards) **or not** (i.e. a multistandard product). (Nielsen 2005) Following these few basic requirements provides a good starting point for a usable internationalized website, but obviously, there are several other aspects to consider as well. As mentioned above, people all over the world like to search information on websites. On internationalized sites it is extremely important that the search **accommodates** at least both **British and American English** (Nielsen 2011) because the preferred spelling differs across countries and individuals. Moreover, **overlooking typos** in search function is essential since the users of international sites are non-native English speakers (ibid.).

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[12] The name *F-shaped pattern* is based on the results of an eye-tracking study by Nielsen Norman Group. The study showed that users typically scan the web pages with two horizontal and one vertical eye movement. The movements, thus, form the shape of an F. (Nielsen 2006)

[13] In Arab countries, the content column is placed on the right side of the page since the Arab languages are read from right to left. Interestingly, according to Nielsen (2011), Arab users employ a reversed F-shaped pattern when reading websites.

In the light of the literature review and discussion conducted in chapters 2 and 3, I have attempted to show that both user-centered translation and localization are extremely target- and user-oriented processes. In fact, with the help of these two processes companies are able to provide their customers (i.e. the users) the best possible products they can within the chosen strategy and the limits of their resources. How well Hotels.com has managed to implement the different aspects and features of these processes, as well as the general usability, on their country sites will be dealt with next. Accordingly, in the following chapter, I will present the analysis of the Finnish country site of Hotels.com.

4 OVERALL USABILITY OF THE FINNISH COUNTRY SITE

In this chapter, I shall present the analysis of the research material gathered from both the US and FI country sites of Hotels.com and introduce the findings. The analysis is based on heuristic evaluation. It must be noted here that my findings tell us about the state of affairs during the period when I examined the pages, i.e. the spring of 2015 and September 2015. As mentioned several times before, web pages are constantly updated; therefore, the examined pages may very well have changed since. As a consequence, it is highly likely that several of the screenshots I will present in my analysis do not exist anymore as presented here, but instead, look different. However, this does not undermine the credibility of the analysis since, as pointed out by Nielsen and Loranger (2006: 24), "[t]he principles and guidelines that a screen shot illustrates are relevant long after a site has changed." Some of the changes that I detected during the several revisits to the sites and deemed relevant to this study are mentioned in footnotes.

I will first present the heuristics that I developed for the purposes of this study. My heuristics are based on Yunker's (2014) Web Globalization Best Practices, Nielsen's (1995b) list, Suojanen et al.'s (2015: 90) usability heuristics for UCT and Esselink's (2000), and O'Hagan and Mangiron's (2013) views on localization. For clarity's sake, and for the usability of the reader of this thesis, I will present the heuristics for each aspect in more detail in the beginning of each section. The full list of the heuristics can be found as an appendix (Appendix 3).

The heuristics are divided into four categories according to the four key aspects of this study: **1) globalization aspect, 2) localization aspect, 3) UCT aspect** and **4) general usability aspect**. Furthermore, each aspect comprises 3–5 individual heuristics (see Appendix 3). The structure of the analysis follows this division; hence, the analysis of each aspect is presented in its own subchapter, consisting of subsections which are based on the individual heuristics of that specific aspect. I will present the findings and rate possible usability problems with Nielsen's (1995d) severity rating scale (0–4), with 0 being no problem at all and 4 the most severe (see 2.1.1), after each heuristic and

aspect. Furthermore, the discovered problems and their severity ratings are presented in table format after each aspect.[14]

As has been previously mentioned, analyzing websites and their usability is, indeed, extremely challenging since the amount of material is endless. In order to be able to properly analyze and determine the overall usability of the FI country site of Hotels.com, I decided that it was essential to evaluate the *general usability* of the site, as well as the *usability of the translations*, separately. Furthermore, since localization of websites and usability are tightly connected, I considered it important to also analyze the measures that Hotels.com has taken regarding issues connected to both *globalization* and *localization*. These four aspects are the basis of the heuristics I created specifically for this study, as mentioned above.

Since this is a Master's thesis of Translation Studies, the reader may wonder why there are so many other aspects analyzed in addition to the actual UCT aspect. One could indeed easily assume it would suffice to analyze the mere text on the websites in order to determine whether the translations are usable or not. Text is certainly an important part of websites, and this being the case translations should be produced by professionals, not with Machine Translation (MT). However, studying only one aspect, the translations, of Hotels.com FI site would not tell anything concrete about the site as a whole. As discussed earlier, websites are very complex in their nature; they consist of many different functions, features and layers, text being only a small part of the whole. To get an overall view on the usability of the FI country site of Hotels.com, as well as on the translations on it, it was essential to analyze also other closely related aspects. My aim is to show that all the examined four aspects are, in fact, connected with translation. I am fully aware of the fact that my analysis is extensive and exceeds the suggested scope of an MA thesis. However, in order to produce results that would prove useful in reality it was, in my mind, necessary to cover all of the aforementioned aspects comprehensively.

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[14] The severity rating (0) is not included in the tables since it indicates something not being a problem. Similarly, the severity rating (4), usability catastrophe, is left out of the tables, the reason being that it refers to such usability problems which would prevent the release of a product which evidently is not the case with Hotels.com.

In the following subchapters I will analyze the FI country site of the popular travel website Hotels.com with the help of my own heuristics, in the following order: 1) globalization aspect, 2) localization aspect, 3) UCT aspect and 4) general usability aspect.

4.1 Globalization Aspect

How well a company's website is globalized, tells a great deal of the company's aims in general and also how important it considers its international customers. Thus, I will begin the analysis by concentrating on the globalization strategy of Hotels.com. I developed the heuristics for this aspect based on Yunker's (2014) list of the Web Globalization Best Practices, presented in Chapter 3.4.2. The first five best practices on that list are very closely linked to usability; hence, I decided to use them as the heuristics for analyzing the **globalization aspect** of Hotels.com. The heuristics are presented in Table 5 below:

Table 5. Heuristics for the globalization aspect (adapted from Yunker 2014)

1. Supporting several languages	Global websites should support English + at least ten other major languages (e.g. the most supported languages French, German, Japanese, Spanish, Chinese, Italian, Russian, Korean, Portuguese and Dutch). The best global websites support over 30 languages, so the more, the better.
2. Supporting country codes	Country codes should be supported in country sites' web addresses. Additionally, or alternatively, the country code, or even the name of a country, could also be integrated into the company logo.
3. Improving the discoverability of local websites	There should be a global gateway on every page of a website. Supporting geolocation and language negotiation are a plus.
4. Supporting a "universal" global gateway	The gateway menu on every country site should be "universal", i.e. understandable for everybody regardless of their mother tongue.
5. Avoiding the use of flags whenever possible	Flags should neither be used for country selection nor to indicate language. If used, they should be placed carefully in order to avoid "messy" effect.

In what follows, I will discuss each of the five heuristics in its own subchapter.

4.1.1 Supporting Several Languages

Hotels.com supports altogether 39 **languages** when both British and U.S. English are counted. As can be seen in Table 4, Hotels.com supports the most languages after Booking.com, according to Byte Level Research. (Yunker 2014) Therefore, it can be concluded that Hotels.com is indeed one of the best global sites regarding the number of languages supported, or, in other words, the amount of localized sites. In sum, there are no usability problems regarding this heuristic.

4.1.2 Supporting Country Codes

It is rather surprising that Hotels.com does not support **country codes** directly. This means that one cannot enter, for instance, the FI country site by typing hotels.*fi* on the server's address line, which would be the most obvious thing to try. (Doing that leads to fonecta.fi site!) Instead, the user must use the *.com* ending. Interestingly, when you use the correct ending, the country site of the user's location opens up and the web address, i.e. hotels.com, changes automatically into *fi*.hotels.com (in the case of the Finnish site). The country code then always emerges automatically in front of the web address and stays there until another country site is chosen. If the user wants to enter the Finnish site another time, s/he can type the address directly in the form *fi.hotels.com*.[15] Moreover, Hotels.com does not utilize the country codes or country names in its logo either. This is most likely due to the fact that the brand name is a web address and the country codes are therefore not part of the country site addresses.

While Hotels.com does not utilize the country codes to the fullest, it has managed to bring a little extra local feel to the country sites with native language slogans (on e.g.

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[15] Interestingly enough, typing the address with Sweden's country code, hotels.*se*, on the address line leads directly to the Swedish country site. Another interesting point is that then the address turns into the form of *sv*.hotels.com. One can only try and guess the reasons why the country code is replaced with *sv*, which seems to refer to the Swedish name of the country *Sverige* [Sweden] or the language *svenska* [Swedish]. However, this change seems illogical since *sv* is not an official country code (CountryCode.org 2014) and there is no other country site which would support the code *se* instead.

Swedish, Spanish, French and German sites). However, as can be seen from Image 2.1 below, on the FI site the slogan is in English. This suggests that the localization of the FI site was a little behind in March 2015 when the material was gathered. (More on the localization of the slogans in section 4.2.2.2)

By not supporting country codes in country site addresses, nor in its logo, Hotels.com can be considered violating this particular heuristic. Nevertheless, the absence of country codes cannot be included in a list of actual usability problems (rating 0) since the brand name Hotels.com is indeed a web address and the customers can be expected to be smart enough to use the very address when wanting to enter the website.

4.1.3 Improving the Discoverability of Local Websites

When entering Hotels.com website in Finland, it is the Finnish country site that opens automatically. On top of the first page, on the *header*, there is the flag of the country the site is used in (see Image 2.1). Accordingly, for example, whenever a user uses Hotels.com website in the US, there is the US flag signaling that the user has entered the US country site (Image 2). When the flag is clicked, a menu of countries opens up which then can be clicked to enter other country sites. The flag icon is thus the *global gateway*, which enables the user to find the wanted country site easily. Hence, it is clear that with these icons Hotels.com truly succeeds at **improving the discoverability of local websites** and there are, accordingly, no usability problems.
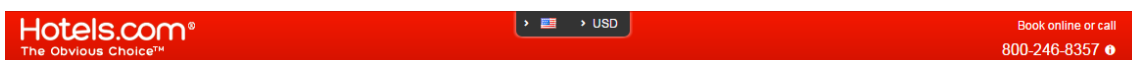
Image 2. The US *header*
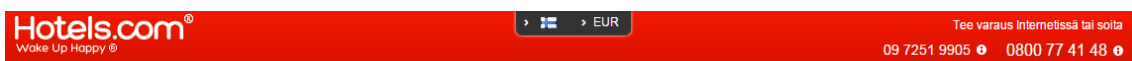
Image 2.1 The FI *header*

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3.4.2, Hotels.com is one of the few websites in Byte Level Research's 2014 report which supports both **geolocation** and **language negotiation** options (Yunker 2014). Indeed, it is precisely geolocation that takes the user automatically to his/her local country site, as explained above. However, if geolocation does not work for some reason, it is easy to click the *global gateway* (the flag icon) and search the country site one wants to enter. In fact, the *global gateway* is present on all pages of the FI site but one, the actual reservation page. This is not a usability problem either (rating 0), since, by the time the user is making an actual reservation, s/he is not likely to want to change the country site. Consequently, there are no usability problems regarding this heuristic.

4.1.4 Supporting a "Universal" Global Gateway

On every country site of Hotels.com, the menu behind the *global gateway* remains the same. In other words, regardless of which country site the user selects, the country names listed are always in the same form. As can be seen in Image 3 underneath, there is first the flag of the country followed by the name of the country.[16] The country names on the list are all in their local spelling forms, e.g. *Suomi* [Finland], *Sverige* [Sweden] and *Österreich* [Austria]. Consequently, other alphabets than Latin are also used, such as Cyrillic script (e.g. Russia's country site) and Chinese characters. Using local forms of country names is indeed essential when wanting to globalize a website menu successfully (see e.g. Esselink 2000: 38; Yunker 2014 in section 3.4.1). If Hotels.com's geolocation did not work for some reason and one entered the Russian or the Chinese country site by accident, there would be no harm done since by clicking the *global gateway* icon, one could easily navigate to his/her local country site with the help of **the "universal" global gateway** menu. The *global gateway* and its *country site menu* on Hotels.com are indeed "universal".

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[16] In case there are several languages used in one country (e.g. Belgium and Switzerland), also the name of the language is mentioned in its local spelling form (see Image 3). Consequently, there are separate country sites for each locale.

Image 3. The *Global gateway menu*, Europe

The menu in Image 3 is the menu for the European country sites of Hotels.com. In fact, there are altogether four similar menus, one for each of the following continents: *Europe*, *Asia and Pacific*, *Americas* and *Africa and Middle East*. To open up the desired menu of countries, the user must first choose the continent from the *continent menu* (Image 4), which appears on the left side of the *global gateway menu* when *the global gateway icon* (the flag) is clicked.
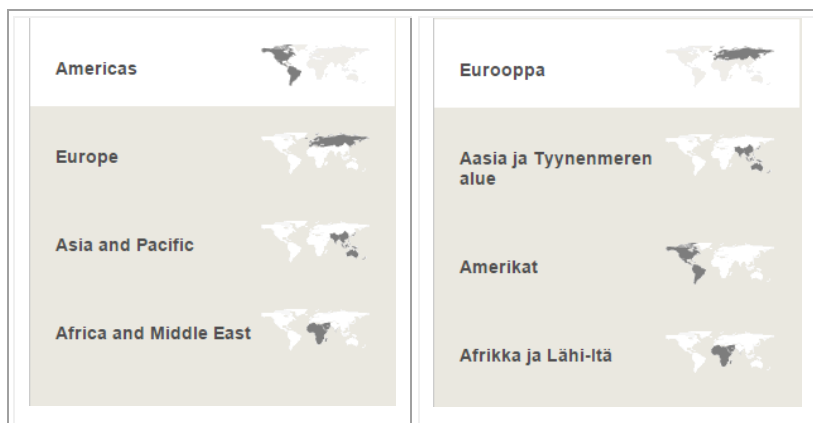
Image 4. The US and FI *continent menu*s

As Image 4 illustrates, in this part of the menu, the language changes according to the country site's language, e.g. when the menu is entered from the FI country site, the

continent names are in Finnish (see Image 4). Thus, this part of the menu is localized, not "universal" like the rest of the menu. This is rather perplexing and illogical. Were it not for the map-like images beside the continent names, it would be difficult to directly choose the right continent and menu, if a user without language skills was lost in another country site than his/her own. In my opinion, the localized *continent menu* is an example of overlocalization and it breaks the heuristic of **Supporting a "universal" global gateway**. However, this problem can be considered only a minor (2) usability problem since the map-like images help navigation and the rest of the menu is, as discussed above, "universal".

4.1.5. Avoiding the Use of Flags Whenever Possible

As mentioned earlier several times, Hotels.com uses flags both as *global gateway icons* on each country site's header and in its *global gateway menu*s. This is not surprising, since, according to Yunker (2014), it is indeed common among travel websites (see section 3.4.1). The aim of the best practice, which urges not to use flags to indicate countries or languages is, on one hand, to ensure that the overall image of the website is clear, not messy; on the other hand, to avoid offending any cultural groups[17] as mentioned in section 3.4.1 (see also e.g. Esselink 2000: 41). In my opinion, Hotels.com manages to provide very clear *global gateway menu*s. The flags do not come across as distracting in any way; quite the contrary, they make the menus more explicit and clear. Without the flags, the mere country names in their native forms would appear both confusing and dull. Furthermore, the fact that there are altogether four menus, *Europe*, *Asia and Pacific*, *Americas* and *Africa and Middle East*, makes the overall image of the menus even clearer, because the amount of the countries listed in one menu is reasonable.[18]

Most importantly, Hotels.com does not use flags to directly indicate languages in the menus, which would be the most serious mistake, according to Yunker (see section

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[17] Without a separate survey, it is impossible to analyze whether the use of flags on Hotels.com websites offends cultural groups or not. Conducting such a survey is beyond the scope of this thesis.
[18] Surprisingly, in February 2016, all country sites were listed in one single menu and the continent menus had been removed altogether.

3.4.1). Instead, the flags indicate the country, as can be seen from Image 3 above. The multiple languages of a single country (e.g. Belgium, Switzerland) are presented with separate entrances providing first the flag of the country, then the name of the country in a specific language and, finally, the name of the language is given in parentheses.

The rather extensive use of flags on Hotels.com websites does break heuristic number 5, **Avoiding the use of flags whenever possible**. However, as discussed above, the flags do not complicate the use of the website; quite the contrary, they enhance the usability of the website. Thus, it cannot be counted as a usability problem (rating 0).

Table 6. Usability problems discovered from the globalization aspect

Globalization aspect				
	Discovered usability problems per severity rating			
Heuristic	Cosmetic problem (1)	Minor problem (2)	Major problem (3)	Total (per heuristic)
1. Supporting several languages	-	-	-	0
2. Supporting country codes	-	-	-	0
3. Improving the discoverability of local websites	-	-	-	0
4. Supporting a "universal" global gateway	-	1	-	1
5. Avoiding the use of flags whenever possible	-	-	-	0
Total (per severity rating)	0	1	0	**1**

As discussed above, the five heuristics of the **globalization aspect** are violated only in four instances. Interestingly, merely one of these violations, namely supporting a localized continent menu instead of a universal one, can be considered a usability problem (see Table 6). Given that it is not a serious usability problem but only a minor (2) one, it can be concluded that the globalization of Hotels.com has been conducted very well.

4.2 Localization Aspect

While the analysis of the globalization aspect dealt with the "large" elements characteristic for a global website, the **localization aspect** concentrates on the "smaller", more detailed elements. I developed these heuristics, as well as chose the examined culture-specific features, on the basis of Esselink's (2000) and O'Hagan & Mangiron's (2013) views on localization (see section 3.3). While there are only two heuristics for this aspect, as shown in Table 7, they both cover a vast number of features. The heuristics for analyzing the **localization aspect** of Hotels.com are as follows:

Table 7. Heuristics for the localization aspect

6. Cultural adaptation of country-specific features	Have the country-specific features been adapted in a correct way? Have all country conventions or formats of the target culture been followed?
7. Cultural context and preferences	Have the cultural context and the cultural preferences of the target users been taken into account?

In what follows, I will discuss the above heuristics in their own subchapters. For the sake of clarity, these subchapters are divided into several subsections based on the features examined. The examined features which belong under the heuristic **Cultural adaptation of country-specific features** are 1) *Dates, Weekdays, Months*, 2) *Time* 3) *Currency, Prices, Numbers* and 4) *Geographical names*, whereas the heuristic **Cultural context and preferences** covers both *Adaptation of advertisements* and *Localization of slogans*.

4.2.1 Cultural Adaptation of Country-Specific Features

The sixth heuristic (for the complete list, see Appendix 3), **Cultural adaptation of country-specific features**, concentrates on the extremely important issue of country

conventions. It evaluates how the country conventions have been taken into account in the localization of the FI country site of Hotels.com. More specifically, by comparing the corresponding elements on the FI and the US country sites, I examined how successfully the Finnish formats of **date, time, currency, price and numbers** have been implemented. I decided on these specific formats because, in my mind, they represent the most relevant country-specific features for this study. Hence, they bear particular significance for determining how well the cultural features, in general, have been adapted on Hotels.com's FI site. In order to be able to determine the correct or recommended formats of Finnish language, I used *Kielenhuollon käsikirja (2012)* [The handbook of language planning] (henceforth KK 2012) as a reference. Also, the adaptation of geographical names on the site was examined.

4.2.1.1 Dates, Weekdays, Months

The presentation of **dates** varies in several countries. Indeed, comparing the US and Finnish formats of dates on the respective country sites of Hotels.com confirmed to me that the US and Finnish formats of dates are very different. In my material, on the US site, the dates are presented in the typical US way: "03/15/15". The first number refers to month, the second to day and the third to year, and these elements are separated with slashes. Conversely, in the Finnish format day comes first, then month, then year and the elements are separated with periods (KK 2012: 64), e.g. "15.03.15"[19]. My research revealed that the correct Finnish formatting of the date is used consistently to replace the above US date format throughout the FI country site.

However, on some of the researched pages of both the US and FI sites of Hotels.com, the dates are presented in a different manner. On the US *search results* page, the dates hotels have been searched for (i.e. the period of time) are presented as follows: "Fri 3 - Sun 5, July 2015" (Image 5). Image 5.1 below shows that the corresponding Finnish version of the date is "pe 3. heinäkuu - su 5. heinäkuu 2015".

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[19] It is not recommended to use zeros in dates in Finnish (here "03" for March). Nevertheless, since technical systems often require two digits for each element (KK 2012: 65), it is not a mistake to do so.

Image 5. Dates on the US *search results* page

Image 5.1 Dates on the FI *search results* page

Yet another way of presenting dates can be found on the *reservation summary*. There the weekday has been written in its complete form, in both the US ("Friday, July 3, 2015") and the Finnish ("perjantai 3. heinäkuu 2015") versions.

The latter two, somewhat longer formats of presenting dates are entirely legitimate as such. However, on the FI country site, the cultural adaptation has been executed only halfway, since the correct way to express the month in such a longer format would be to use the partitive case[20] of Finnish, *heinäkuuta* (KK 2012: 66). This kind of an error, an unidiomatic expression, may irritate some users, but for others, it may go unnoticed. In any case, it does not complicate the use of the system in any way, thus, it is only a minor (2) usability problem, which can be corrected at some point if so desired.[21]

As illustrated in Images 5 and 5.1, both **weekdays** and **months** have been correctly adapted in the Finnish version, i.e. both are written with lower case letters instead of using the US way of capitalizing the first letters. This applies to all the researched pages and screen views on the FI site.

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[20] The Finnish partitive case in a date (the suffix *-ta* here) expresses the same as *of* in the US date.
[21] Interestingly, when I revisited the site in February 2016, this particular usability problem had been corrected.
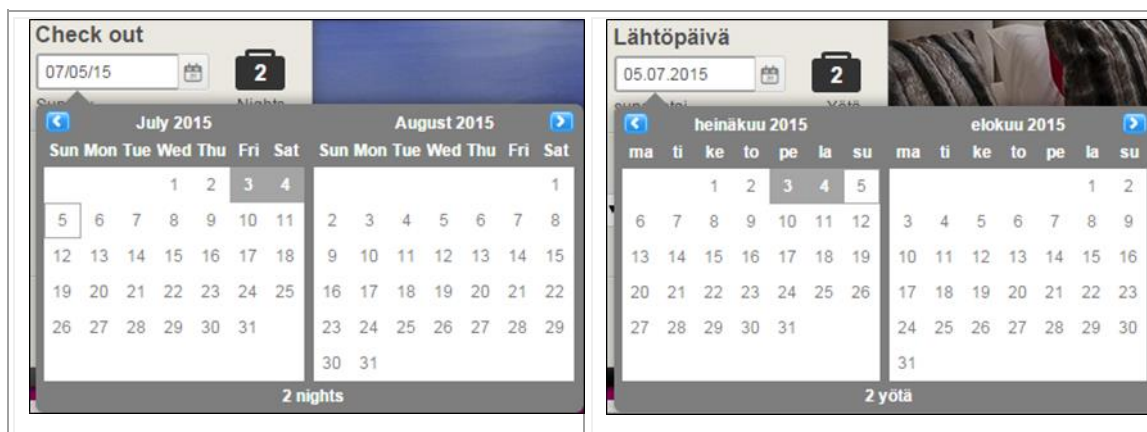
Image 6. The US and FI calendars of the *Hotel Search* window

Also the calendars of *Hotel Search* window (Image 6), on both the *front page* and the *Hotel Deals page*, have been thoroughly adapted. Accordingly, on the FI site, the abbreviations for weekdays and months are written with lower case letters. Even more noteworthy is the fact that in the FI calendars, the week begins from Monday, not from Sunday like in the US version. Thus, the Finnish country convention has indeed been followed and the adaptation of these features has been conducted successfully.

4.2.1.2 Time

Another essential country-specific feature, which must be paid close attention to when localizing websites, is the format of **time**. I discovered that the US and Finnish formats of time are well presented on the researched pages of the US and FI country sites of Hotels.com. On the US *reservation* page, for instance, the time for the latest point for free cancellation is expressed "1:00 PM", followed by the date. To present time with numbers only from 1 to 12, followed by the abbreviation PM, pm or p.m. (or AM, am and a.m., respectively), is typical of both British and American English. Such abbreviations are, however, not generally used in Finnish. Instead, the scale of numbers used for time in Finland is 1–24. Accordingly, for example, the corresponding time is expressed with "13:00" on the FI site. According to *Kielenhuollon käsikirja* [The handbook of language planning] (KK 2012: 46), both colon and period are acceptable in

the Finnish format of time. When I examined the FI site, I discovered that they are used interchangeably. For instance, on the *reservation page*, as well as in all other instances where the customer service office hours are mentioned on the FI site, period is used: "8.30 – 17.30". Nevertheless, it would be advisable to use either one consistently throughout the site. However, in my opinion, this is only a cosmetic (1) usability problem, if even that.

4.2.1.3 Currency, Prices, Numbers

As discussed earlier, Hotels.com is a global travel website which supports e-commerce. Therefore, I considered examining the adaptation of the county-specific elements connected to money extremely important.

Indeed, most countries in the world have their own **currencies**, as well as country-specific formats for presenting **prices**. Currencies are, as a rule, marked either with **symbols** (e.g. €, £ and $) or with **abbreviations** (e.g. EUR, SEK and USD). On the examined US and FI sites of Hotels.com, mainly **symbols of currencies** are used. In the US format of **price**, the symbol comes first and then the amount, with no space between them. This is exactly how the prices are presented on the US site (see Image 7). Conversely, in the Finnish format, the amount always comes first, followed by a space and then the symbol (KK 2012: 36, 46). In this regard, the prices have been successfully adapted to fit the Finnish format throughout the researched pages (see Image 7). Also, it goes without saying that the prices, i.e. the actual amounts, have been localized.
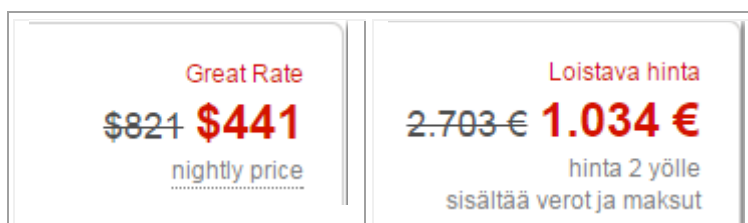
Image 7. Prices and symbols for currencies on the US and FI sites

As can be seen in Image 7 above, the adaptation of Finnish format is not complete, though. In Finnish, it is not common or advisable to use period in prices (KK 2012: 45). In spite of such a recommendation, I discovered that period has been used throughout the examined pages of the FI site. Granted, that is not a major problem nor does it complicate the use of the website. Nevertheless, it is a cosmetic (1) usability problem that should be corrected when the pages are updated.

Abbreviations for currency are used only occasionally on the examined pages of the US and FI sites. The first, and perhaps the most visible instance, occurs on the *header* (see Images 2 and 2.1 in section 4.1.3). By clicking on the abbreviation, a list of all currencies supported on Hotels.com website opens. On this list, there are the abbreviations followed by the actual names of the currencies in the local language(s) of the currently open country site, e.g. on the US site "SEK, Swedish Krona" and on the FI site "SEK Ruotsin kruunu". Another instance of abbreviations occurs in the *hotel information* of a specific hotel, The Balmoral Hotel in this case, where the prices for "Optional extras" ("Lisävaihtoehtoja") are presented. As mentioned above, all prices have been localized into Finland's currency Euro, throughout the FI site. However, on the *Optional extras* section the prices are, in fact, in the currency of the country the viewed hotel is located in, as Images 8 and 8.1 underneath illustrate:
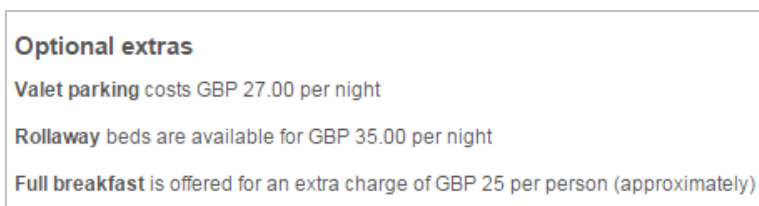
Image 8. Abbreviations for currency on the US site
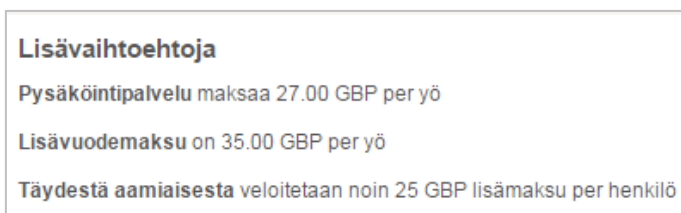
Image 8.1 Abbreviations for currency on the FI site

This is somewhat surprising, but can possibly be explained by the fact that these extras cannot be paid in advance but only at the destination. Nevertheless, it would be not only user-friendly but also more consistent, to present an approximate price in the user's own currency, at least in brackets. In my opinion, this is a minor (2) usability problem, which could be corrected at some point.

As mentioned in section 3.3, the format of **decimal numbers** varies across countries as well. In some countries, a comma is used as the decimal separator, in others, period. When I examined the pages of the US and FI country sites, I encountered only a few instances of decimal numbers, and for the most part, they have been properly localized and adapted. One such instance is the distance between the hotel and the city center/airport (see Images 18 and 18.1 further below). Such information is provided in connection with the basic information of each hotel (on *search results* page and individual *hotel page*s). In each instance, the way the decimal number is presented has indeed been adapted to fit the Finnish cultural convention (comma as a decimal point, see KK 2012: 46). In addition, the distance itself and the unit of measurement are localized as well, e.g. "6.8 miles" on the US site is replaced with "11 km" on the FI site. On the examined pages of the FI site, the only instance where the decimal numbers are wrongly presented (with a period) occurs on the *Optional extras* section on the *hotel page*, illustrated in Image 8.1 above. Since that is the only occasion, it does not count as a usability problem (0) and can, therefore, be ignored.

4.2.1.4 Geographical Names

Since Hotels.com is a travel website, it is self-evident that there are a vast number of geographical names on it. Geographical names too are culture-specific elements; therefore, I considered it essential to examine them as well, in connection with the localization aspect. For many geographical names, such as country names and names of major cities, there are equivalents in different languages. These equivalents must be used whenever possible. However, all geographical names or names of locations, such as sights, do not necessarily have equivalents, or fixed translations, in the target language (TL). In such cases, it must be decided on how such a name is adapted to TL:

Will the original name be used or is there a need for a new translation? No matter what the decision is, the chosen name must be used consistently throughout the localized site. In the following, only the country and city names I encountered when conducting this research are dealt with. The names of sights and other tourism-related locations, however, fall in this study under the UCT aspect (see section 4.3.2.2).

On the examined pages of Hotels.com, the overall adaptation of geographical names from the US versions into their Finnish equivalents appears to have been conducted rather successfully: for instance, "London" has been replaced with "Lontoo", "Nice" with "Nizza" and "United States of America" with "Yhdysvallat". However, I discovered some instances where the existing Finnish equivalent is not used, for some reason. On the s*earch results* page, for example, the basic information of each listed hotel contains the hotel's address. The address appears also on each individual *hotel page*. On the US site, the address of the hotel chosen as an example[22] is presented as follows: "1 Princes Street Edinburgh, Scotland, EH2 2EQ United Kingdom" (see Image 18). Surprisingly, on the corresponding FI site, the address is almost exactly the same: "1 Princes Street Edinburgh, Scotland, EH2 2EQ Yhdistynyt kuningaskunta" (see Image 18.1). It strikes as rather strange that "United Kingdom" has been adapted into Finnish but "Scotland" has not, even though a Finnish equivalent *Skotlanti* exists and is used on all other occasions. The reasoning behind this might be that "Scotland" is considered to be part of the local address, whereas "United Kingdom" points out the country in question. Be as it may, the adaptation of geographical names should be consistent and the equivalent used on all occasions. This problem does not complicate the use of the system. However, the fact that it occurs in several places makes it a minor usability problem which needs to be fixed at some point. Hence, the severity rating for it is (2).

Another place on the examined pages with a slight problem regarding the adaptation of geographical names occurs on the lower part of the *reservation page*. There, under the

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[22] As mentioned in section 1.1., I considered it vital to examine the actual steps of a reservation process. Therefore, in order to get screenshots of the steps, I chose a random hotel (The Balmoral Hotel) in a random destination (Edinburgh, Scotland) and, as a user, booked a room in Balmoral.

headline *Terms of booking & cancellation policy*, is the deadline (time) for the cost-free cancellation of the reservation, followed by "(GMT) Greenwich Mean Time: Dublin, Edinburgh, Lisbon, London". On the corresponding FI page, the text is exactly the same; "Lisbon" and "London" have not been replaced with their existing equivalents "Lissabon" and "Lontoo". This does break the heuristic in question, but the fact that it appears only in one place makes it a less severe usability problem than the one mentioned above. Therefore, it can be deemed merely a cosmetic problem with a severity rating (1).

It seems to me that the examined culture-specific features on the FI country site of Hotels.com have, indeed, been adapted into the target country's conventions rather successfully. There are some usability problems, but not many. Only three of the problems discovered can be considered minor with the severity rating (2) while the others are plain cosmetic (1) problems.

4.2.2 Cultural Context and Preferences

The seventh heuristic, or the second related to localization, **Cultural context and preferences**, concentrates on evaluating how successfully the advertisements and slogans on the US country site of Hotels.com have been adapted into the target culture on the FI site. I examined such elements and assessed the adaptation in my capacity as a Finnish customer and user of the site.

4.2.2.1 Adaptation of Advertisements

Successfully conducted cultural **adaptation of advertisements** is essential for increasing the sales of a company; hence, the advertisements must fit the cultural context of a target locale. Furthermore, to increase the usability of the ads, the target users' preferences should be observed.

On Hotels.com, there are numerous advertisements (of holiday destinations, hotel chains etc.) which is not surprising, since it is indeed a commercial website and a sales

channel. Whereas on some pages (e.g. *front page*, *Hotel Deals* page) the ads cover much of the screen view, on other pages (e.g. *search results* page) they are placed in narrow columns on either the left or the right side of the page. Interestingly, many ads on the examined pages can be considered general ones in a sense that they are the same on both the US and FI sites and possibly on other country sites as well. In other words, they have been "merely" translated (see Images 9 and 9.1). However, some ads are, quite the reverse, very culture-specific.

The ads on the *Hotel Deals* page provide an illustrative example of how the different cultural context has been taken into account in the localization process of Hotels.com. As can be seen in Image 9, one ad heading on the US page states "Spring Break Sale", whereas the corresponding FI ad says "Kaupungit pääsiäisalessa" [Cities on Easter sale] (Image 9.1). Indeed, spring break is a phenomenon of US culture, which does not exist as such in Finnish culture. However, it is rather typical for Finns to travel somewhere during the Easter holiday, which also takes place during the spring. Hence, the **cultural context** has been taken into account and the ad has been successfully adapted into Finnish culture.

Image 9. Ads on the US *Hotel Deals* page

Image 9.1 Ads on the FI *Hotel Deals* page

The contents of the ads vary according to the season at hand. I discovered this fact when I examined the sites at different times of the year during the course of this research. For example, in September, the previously mentioned ads were replaced with "Fall into savings" (US), *fall* referring to autumn and the phrasal verb *fall into something* hinting that by acting on the special offers the user would save money, and "Syksyn alennusmyynti" (FI) ["Autumn sale"]. These ads are somewhat universal; in other words, there is no cultural distinction between them. Interestingly enough, in September, on the aforementioned pages on the US site, there was not one single ad which could be considered culture-specific (referring straight to a cultural phenomenon), but on the FI site there was one: "Pohjoisen hotellit alessa – lähde katsomaan revontulia" [The hotels of Northern Finland on sale – go and see the Northern Lights]. This suggests that the **cultural context** of Finland has, indeed, been taken into account extremely well, and hence, the cultural adaptation of the ads on the FI site can be considered very well executed.

On both the *front page* and the *Hotel Deals* page of the examined country sites, the mid and lower parts of the page are reserved for city advertisements. On the *front page*, these ads indeed advertise "Popular cities with US travelers" or "Suosittuja kaupunkeja". On the US *Hotel Deals* page, these ads are categorized under the following headings: "Great deals in popular destinations", "Quick escapes" and "Hot Destinations", and on the FI site, "Upeita tarjouksia suosituissa kohteissa", "Pikalomat" and "Kuumat kohteet", respectively. I discovered that the cities advertised for US users include mainly US cities (e.g. New York, Las Vegas, Orlando, San Diego, Denver and Orange County). Under "Hot Destinations" there are also cities outside the US (e.g. London, Paris and Tokyo). For Finnish users, not only European destinations (e.g. Helsinki, Berlin, London, Barcelona, Tallinn and Stockholm) are advertised, but also New York and Bangkok. Under "Kuumat kohteet" the destinations are mostly outside Europe (e.g. Tokyo, Pattaya and Osaka). In short, these ads are definitely culture-specific and clearly reflect the preferred destinations of both nationalities. Therefore, it can be stated that **cultural preferences** have been considered extremely well and the ads have been localized accordingly.

4.2.2.2 Localization of the Slogans

On the Hotels.com websites, the slogan is always placed on the left side of the *header*, right beneath the brand name "Hotels.com" (see Images 2 and 2.1). The Hotels.com's slogan "Wake Up Happy" became familiar for us Finns when the website was advertised on Finnish television during 2014 and early 2015. I, therefore, assumed it was the original and the only slogan there is, and that it would appear on every country site. When gathering the material for this research in March 2015, I was quite surprised to discover that "Wake Up Happy" was used only on the FI site, and on the US site there was a totally different slogan, "The Obvious Choice". For that reason, I then conducted a quick search of a few other country sites (Sweden, Spain, France and Germany) which revealed that the slogans are in each case in the country's native language, e.g. on the Swedish site "Så klart" [So obviously]. Consequently, it felt strange that the FI site did not have a slogan in Finnish but in English instead. However, when I visited the FI site again at the beginning of April, "Wake Up Happy" had been replaced with a localized slogan "Se selkeä valinta", which is a word-for-word translation of "The Obvious Choice". Hence, the initial usability problem of a non-native slogan does not exist anymore.

Even though a slogan of a company or a brand does not directly affect the usability of a site, changing it entirely may well affect a company's image. In fact, I argue that it might take a while before "Se selkeä valinta" will bring Hotels.com into users' minds, the way the familiar "Wake Up Happy" did. Nevertheless, the slogan is now in Finnish, i.e. properly localized, which on the other hand, is very likely considered positive by the users. Accordingly, this is not a usability problem (0).

Regarding the heuristic **Cultural context and preferences**, no usability problems were discovered on the FI country site of Hotels.com. The advertisements throughout the FI site, as well as the slogan, are properly localized, in other words, they have been successfully culturally adapted.

In conclusion, only cosmetic (1) and minor (2) usability problems were discovered in connection with the **localization aspect** on the examined pages of the FI country site, as shown in Table 8 below. The findings, therefore, indicate that the localization of the FI site has been conducted rather thoroughly.

Table 8. Usability problems discovered from the localization aspect

Localization aspect				
	Discovered usability problems per severity rating			
Heuristic *-examined features*	Cosmetic problem (1)	Minor problem (2)	Major problem (3)	Total (per heuristic)
6. Cultural adaptation of country-specific features				
-Dates, weekdays, months	-	1	-	1
-Time	1		-	1
-Currency, prices, numbers	1	1	-	2
-Geographical names	1	1	-	2
7. Cultural context and preferences				
-Adaptation of advertisements	-	-	-	0
-Localization of slogans	-	-	-	0
Total (per severity rating)	3	3	0	**6**

It must be noted here that although the numbers in Table 8 suggest that there are only very few problems regarding this aspect on the examined pages of the FI country site, it is not entirely true. Due to the nature of websites, there may be tens or even hundreds of identical instances of a single problem on the pages of a country site (e.g. the unlocalized "Scotland", discussed in section 4.2.1.4, occurs on the *search results page* in connection with the addresses of all Edinburgh hotels, the total amount of which is 502 on the Hotels.com website). In this study, it would not serve the purpose to count such instances as separate usability problems; therefore, they are counted as one.

4.3 UCT Aspect

So far, I have examined the globalization (heuristics 1–5) and localization aspects (heuristics 6–7) of my material. I will now continue by dealing with aspects connected with User-Centered Translation (heuristics 8–10). The **UCT aspect** concentrates on the language used on Hotels.com's FI country site. More specifically, the heuristics for this aspect evaluate the Finnish translations from the point of view of usability. I developed these heuristics based on both Suojanen et al.'s (2015) *Usability heuristics for UCT* (see section 2.2.2) and on general views on what a good translation is like. As can been seen in Table 9 below, there are only three heuristics for the UCT aspect. However, each of them entails several individual features; thus, they cover this aspect rather thoroughly. The heuristics for the **UCT aspect** are:

Table 9. Heuristics for the UCT aspect

8. Idiomatic language	Is the language of the translation idiomatic and natural? Is there interference? Do mistranslations and/or errors occur? Is the translation readable and comprehensible?
9. Consistency	Have the terms been translated consistently? Are the menus consistent with each other in regard to translation?
10. Match between ST and TT	Has all relevant material been translated? Are there omissions and/or additions and are they justified?

In what follows, I will discuss each of the above UCT heuristics in its own subchapter. As with the localization aspect above, these subchapters are further divided into subsections based on the individual features examined. The features examined with the heuristic **Idiomatic language** are *Interference*, *Word choices* and *Mistranslations and errors*, whereas the heuristic **Consistency** covers both *Consistency of translated terms* and *Consistency of menu translations*. The last heuristic of this aspect, **Match between ST and TT**, concentrates on the possible *omissions* and *additions* on the FI site.

4.3.1 Idiomatic Language

The eighth heuristic, **Idiomatic language**, concentrates on the readability and comprehensibility of the language on Hotels.com FI country site. It is of utmost importance that the language used on a website is natural language that the user can easily understand. Hence, general language with clear and simple sentence structure should be used and specialized terms and concepts should be avoided (cf. heuristic 2 on Nielsen's list). The fact that the FI site is a localized website aimed at Finnish speakers means that special attention must be paid to the cultural aspect of language. The language used on the site should hence be idiomatic, correct Finnish and there should be no interference from the source language. All these factors not only have an impact on how a website is perceived by its users, but also on the credibility of the company the website represents.

The language on the examined pages of the FI site of Hotels.com is in general rather idiomatic. However, I discovered some unidiomatic sentence structures and expressions, which come across somewhat strange to a native Finn. On some occasions, these unidiomatic features seem to derive from the source language; hence, some **interference** can be detected. In other instances, the language is not idiomatic due to rather **strange word choices**, **mistranslations** or plain **errors**. I will present some examples of each type in the following subsections.

4.3.1.1 Interference

An example of **interference** on the FI site can be found on the *front page* advertisements, under the heading "Suosittuja kaupunkeja" ("Popular cities with US travelers")[23]. Underneath the names of those popular cities, the number of people who are searching for a hotel in the particular cities is mentioned. On the US site, this is expressed with: " […] people are looking for hotels today". On the FI site, the

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[23] Henceforth, for the sake of comparison, the corresponding US expressions are presented in brackets when deemed relevant.

corresponding sentence says "[…] ihmistä etsivät hotellia juuri nyt"[24]. As we can see, there is a problem with congruence in the Finnish sentence, which evidently is caused by the US structure. Even though "ihmistä" ("people") is plural, in Finnish the following verb, in this case, should be in the singular form "etsii". Somewhat surprisingly, there are very few problems with congruence on the researched parts of the FI country site and the ones that I detected are minor (2) usability problems.

As to inflections of words, only a few problems were discovered on the FI site. In some instances, though, there are problems with the inflections of the word "yö" [night]. On the *search results* page, under the heading *Welcome Rewards*, expression "Collect nights" has been translated into "Kerää yötä" [collect night]. For some reason, the plural of the original has changed into singular and into a wrong inflected form in this context (the correct one would be "öitä"). Another problem occurs on one of the advertisements on *Hotel Deals* page, where there is a sentence "Yövy 1 yötä niin säästät 65%" [Stay 1 nights and save 65 %]. Even though "yötä" is the singular partitive form, in this context it, in fact, refers to several nights. Instead, there should be the singular accusative form "yö". The rating for such usability problems, which, indeed, are not many on the FI site, is minor (2).

4.3.1.2 Word Choices

On the researched pages of the FI country site of Hotels.com, there are quite a few word choices that can be considered odd. These words are actual Finnish words, but their use in the context that they appear in makes them sound strange to a native Finn. In brief, they are used in an unidiomatic way.

This particular problem is illustrated well in the *menu* of the *Narrow results* column, on the *search results* page. The menu consists of headings such as "Alue" ("Neighborhood") and "Majoitustyyppi" ("Accommodation type"). Furthermore, under

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[24] In February 2016, when I rechecked the FI pages, the expression had been corrected into "[…] ihmistä etsii hotellia juuri nyt". Once again, this proves that web pages are constantly updated.

each heading, there is a list of more specific features, which can be ticked to narrow down the amount of hotels on the search results list.

On the FI *Narrow results menu,* under "Palvelut" ("Amenities"), there are indeed some **strange word choices**. For example, the ST's "Pet friendly" has been translated into "Lemmikeille sopiva" [suitable for pets]. Admittedly, it is guaranteed that every user knows what is meant by this, but a more idiomatic way to express it in Finnish would be "Lemmikit sallittuja" [pets allowed]. Another such unusual wording is "Liitettäviä huoneita saatavilla" ("Connecting rooms available"). Again, the user presumably understands what this means, but "yhdistettäviä" instead of "liitettäviä" would be more idiomatic Finnish. This particular feature, 'connecting rooms', also occurs in the *hotel information* of the example hotel Balmoral. On the US version, it is mentioned twice that "Connecting/adjoining rooms" are available. On the corresponding FI page, this feature has been translated, in the first instance, into "yhdistettyjä/vierekkäisiä huoneita" and in the second instance, into "yhteenliitettäviä huoneita". These translations are understandable, but not idiomatic Finnish in this context. "Yhdistettyjä" means that the rooms have already been combined or connected, which is not the case here; it refers to the possibility of such action. "Yhteenliitettäviä" is a rather good translation, but still, "yhdistettäviä" would be more to the point in this particular context, hence, it should be used on all of these occasions. What is most surprising is that on all three instances different translations occur. In other words, there is no consistency whatsoever in the use of terms. (See chapter 4.3.2.1 for more examples of term inconsistency.)

Another enlightening example of a strange, **unidiomatic choice of words** is on the scale with which the users can rate the hotels. These ratings are shown beside every hotel on *search results page*, on each hotel's *hotel page*, on *reservation page* and *on the guest reviews page*. The scales are as follows:

Table 10. The scales for guest reviews on the US and FI sites

The US site:	The FI site:
Outstanding	Verraton
Excellent	Erinomainen
Good	Hyvä
Fair	Kohtuullinen
Poor	Heikko

As can be seen from Table 10, the first and thus the highest grade of the FI scale is "Verraton". It is not a word one sees very often anywhere nowadays, and certainly not in this kind of context. "Erinomainen" is commonly considered the highest grade in similar Finnish scales, "Excellent" in English scales.[25] However, in this case, "outstanding" is considered even better than excellent. This ST word choice causes a translation problem because "outstanding" and "excellent" can both be translated into "erinomainen". "Excellent" also means "loistava", but there is no real difference between the degrees of their 'value', so it is difficult to determine which is actually considered better than the other.[26] One solution could be to translate "outstanding" as "erinomainen" and "excellent" as "erittäin hyvä" (cf. TripAdvisor's scales, in footnote 25), then the user would identify the distinction between them. "Verraton" is indeed an unidiomatic and **strange word choice** and may confuse the user. Nevertheless, the customer ratings of the hotels are presented also with numbers from 1 to 5, which guarantees that the user understands the ratings correctly.

Yet another example of a **strange word choice** can be found on Balmoral's *hotel page*, under the heading "Erityispiirteet" ("Special features"), where the restaurants of a specific hotel are listed (among other things). In Balmoral's case there are five restaurants or bars listed:

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[25] For instance, on TripAdvisor's sites (Finnish site www.tripadvisor.fi and US site www.tripadvisor.com) the scales are as follows: excellent/erinomainen, very good/erittäin hyvä, average/ keskitaso, poor /huono, and terrible/todella huono (TripAdvisor Suomi 2015; TripAdvisor US 2015).

[26] As a matter of fact, during a visit to the FI site in February 2016, I discovered that "verraton" had been changed into "loistava".

Image 10. Restaurants listed on the US and FI *hotel page*s

The above images illustrate well the fact that word-for-word or literal translation does not produce the most idiomatic language. As can be seen from Image 10, the ST's "onsite restaurant"/"bar" has been translated into "paikanpäällä ravintola"/"baari", which are literal translations. These translations clearly show that word-for-word translation can result in a strange, unidiomatic expression. One way of expressing the same in more idiomatic Finnish would be "Hotellin ravintola"/"baari". Such choice of words expresses clearly that the restaurant/bar is on the spot, at the hotel, which is emphasized also in the original. In conclusion, such strange word choices can be considered minor (2) usability problems.

4.3.1.3 Mistranslations and Errors

The last examined features belonging under the heuristic **Idiomatic language** are **mistranslations** and **errors**. On the examined pages of Hotels.com's FI site, I encountered some mistranslations but only very few plain errors. An illustrative example of a typical mistranslation on the FI site is "täydellinen aamiainen" [perfect breakfast], which is the translation for the ST expression "full breakfast". "Full breakfast" occurs on four different occasions on the examined US pages, whereas on the FI site two different expressions are used for it: the above-mentioned "täydellinen aamiainen" on two occasions and a word-for-word translation "täysi aamiainen" on the

other two. "Täysi aamiainen" can be considered the correct translation which should be used in all instances. Indeed, "full breakfast" refers to the 'full English breakfast' which includes a variety of warm fried food, hence 'full', but it most certainly does not mean 'perfect'. "Täydellinen aamiainen" is, thus, a rather funny **mistranslation**, but a mistranslation nevertheless. Since two different translation solutions refer to the ST's "full breakfast", this is also a typical example of term inconsistency (for more examples, see chapter 4.3.2.1). The severity rating for this particular usability problem is, however, minor (2).

The following images (Images 11 and 11.1) illustrate different types of unidiomatic expressions: plain error, mistranslation and strange word choice. When "Palautetta sivustosta" ("Website feedback") link, under the *main menu bar*'s "Asiakaspalvelu" ("Customer service"), is clicked, the following browser window opens on top of the screen view:

Image 11. The US *Website feedback* window
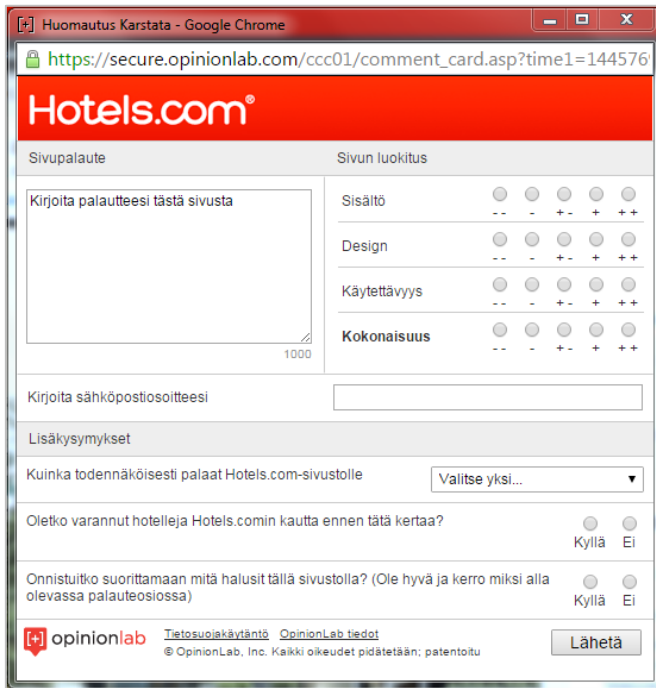
Image 11.1 The FI *Website feedback* window

As can be seen in Images 11 and 11.1 above, the title of the US window is "Comment card", whereas the Finnish version of the title is totally incomprehensible "Huomautus karstata". Even though "huomautus" is one of the meanings of "comment", here it does not make any sense. That word combined with "karstata", which refers to scribbling or teasing of wool in textile, makes this title unintelligible. At first glance, I considered the words to be some sort of technical gibberish, and hence not even meant to be a translation or a corresponding phrase to that of the US site. Interestingly, on the Swedish country site, the title is "Ge oss din feedback" [Give us your feedback], and so in consequence, the Finnish version is definitely an **error**. There is also another error, or rather a **mistranslation**, in the comment card on the FI site. As can be seen from Image 11, after the last question, the user is urged to clarify his/her answer by writing on "the comment box above". On the FI comment card, the user is asked to do this "alla olevassa palauteosiossa" (Image 11.1) [in the feedback section below]. "Above" has been wrongly translated into "below" [alla] which is a clear mistranslation. Also, the **word choice** "palauteosio" [feedback section] is a somewhat strange translation for

"comment box". Even though the comment box is visible on the upper left corner, the choice of words may mislead the user to think there might be another 'section' somewhere where the text should be entered. "Kommenttikenttä" would be a much more descriptive translation, and it is also widely used on web pages and other similar contexts; thus, it would be more familiar to the users. In short, the above errors are considered major (3) usability problems, whereas the mistranslation a minor (2) one.

In conclusion, my findings show that on the examined pages there are quite a few usability problems which violate the heuristic **Idiomatic Language**. All instances of unidiomatic expressions, which are rather numerous, whether they are strange word choices and expressions, caused by interference or not, or in fact plain errors, suggest that the translation of the FI site of Hotels.com has not been executed properly. Although the errors do not complicate the use of the website, they do, however, undermine the credibility of the website. Such errors should not be ignored; instead, they ought to be fixed as their severity ratings suggest, either at some convenient point (2) or immediately (3).

4.3.2 Consistency

According to the 4th heuristic on Nielsen's list (see section 2.1.1), it is not recommended to use many different terms to refer to one thing on a website, or in any text for that matter. When talking about the translation of terms and words, the same equivalent should be used consistently in every instance the term/word appears (cf. heuristic 5 on Suojanen et al.'s list). With the help of the ninth heuristic **Consistency**, which falls under the UCT aspect, I examined how consistently the **terms** used on Hotels.com's US site have been translated into Finnish. In addition, I studied the **consistency of the menus** on the site in regard to their translations by comparing the translated elements in them.

4.3.2.1 Consistency of Translated Terms

There are quite a few inconsistencies in the use of terms on the examined pages of Hotels.com's FI site. Instead of consistently using one equivalent for one concept, various translations are used. The ST term "landmark/s" provides an illustrative example. "Landmark/s" is used consistently on the US site to refer to sights and other locations, which the user can use as search criteria in order to find a hotel in the best location for him/herself. The term occurs on seven occasions in the researched material. On the FI site, there are two different translations for the discussed term: "Maamerkki/-merkit" [landmark/s] is used on four occasions and "nähtävyydet" [sights] on three occasions. The term "nähtävyydet" occurs in all three *lists of suggested locations*, whereas "maamerkki/-merkit" is used on the other four occasions. It is somewhat confusing that two different Finnish terms are used for the ST term. As can be seen from my back-translations above, "nähtävyydet" refers only to sights. Since the lists do not only include sights but also other such landmarks as the "University of Edinburgh" and "Edinburgh International Conference Centre", "nähtävyydet" can be considered a mistranslation. "Maamerkki/-merkit" is the correct term covering all locations mentioned, and indeed, it should be used throughout the FI site. Further examples of similar **inconsistencies in the use of terms** are also presented in subsections 4.3.1.2 (regarding the translations of the ST term "connecting rooms") and 4.3.1.3 (the translations of "full breakfast").

Inconsistencies in cases where a term appears on many different pages (such as "landmark(s)") are somewhat understandable. On the FI site, there are also occasions where a ST term is used in two or more places on one single page. Since the terms are in close proximity to each other, one would think that the inconsistency is easy to detect and to correct. Surprisingly, there are inconsistencies also in such cases on the examined pages. A case in point is provided by the ST utterance "24-hour" and its translations on the FI *hotel page* of the example hotel, Balmoral:

Image 12. The *In the hotel* section of Balmoral's US *hotel page*

Image 12.1 The *In the hotel* section of Balmoral's FI *hotel page*

As illustrated in Image 12, there are three instances where "24-hour" is used to describe the availability or opening hours of room service, business center and front desk. In the Finnish version (Image 12.1) the same has been expressed differently in each instance: "Ympärivuorokautinen huonepalvelu", "Vuorokauden ympäri avoinna oleva liikekeskus" and "Vastaanotto avoinna ympäri vuorokauden". All these versions are legitimate and readable for sure, but there is no reasonable explanation why each translation is different. As a matter of fact, the same could also be expressed in a much shorter way by using the ST-like "24h" which is commonly used in Finnish to indicate '24 hours'. Using the same expression in all instances would bring the needed consistency to this particular part of the page.

In addition to the inconsistent use of terms, other types of inconsistencies also occur on the examined pages of Hotels.com. An illustrative example is the term 'WiFi' which occurs in three instances on the researched pages of both the US and FI sites:

Table 11. US and FI versions of the term "WiFi"

| Location on the site	US term	FI term
Amenities menu	Free **wifi**	Ilmainen **langaton internet-yhteys**
Balmoral *hotel page*: 1) *At a glance* section	**WiFi** in public areas	**Wi-Fi-yhteys** julkisissa tiloissa
Balmoral *hotel page*: 2) *Small Print* section	**WiFi** is available […]	**Wifi-yhteys** on käytettävissä […]

As Table 11 above reveals, in this particular case, it is not only the equivalents that are used inconsistently but also the spelling varies. Surprisingly, also on the US site, the term is spelled in two different ways, in one case with lower case letters only ("wifi") and in two cases with capital letters ("WiFi"). Still, there is some kind of consistency there, since the instances which occur both on the same page, i.e. on the *hotel page*, are similar. This is not the case on the FI site. Although the translations of the term on the FI *hotel page* are seemingly similar with each other ("Wi-Fi-yhteys" and "Wifi-yhteys") their spellings are totally different, which is rather irritating. To add to the list of different versions, the translation for 'WiFi' on the FI *Amenities menu* states "langaton internet-yhteys". It is actually the traditional term which was in general use some years ago but nowadays 'WiFi' is more commonly used. Nevertheless, regardless of which of these terms is chosen as the equivalent, it should definitely be used consistently throughout the site, and always in the same spelling form.

To conclude, inconsistent use of terms is a usability problem, as it may confuse the user and make him/her wonder whether something different is meant with the different terms. Such unnecessary speculation may cause irritation but it does not complicate the use of the website as such. Nevertheless, these kinds of inconsistencies violate the heuristic of **Consistency**. Additionally, the fact that the amount of these inconsistencies in my material is rather high makes them major (3) usability problems and should be corrected as soon as possible. Nonetheless, it must be mentioned here that some of the discovered problems exist on the FI site simply because of the nature of localization: many different translators at different times translate and correct the pages and

Translation Memories (TM) are used. Therefore, inconsistency is, at least to some extent, built into the system because of technology and how it and TMs are used.

4.3.2.2 Consistency of Menu Translations

Another type of inconsistency was discovered in some of the menus or lists of Hotels.com FI site. Namely, there are inconsistencies in what has been translated, has not been translated and whether some kind of explanation is offered for the untranslated parts or not. These types of inconsistencies appear on all the menus/lists which contain location names: on *the list of suggested locations* of the *Hotel search* window (on the *front page* and the *Hotel deals* page), as well as on the *Landmarks* menu of the *Narrow results* column (on the *search results* page) as demonstrated in the image underneath:
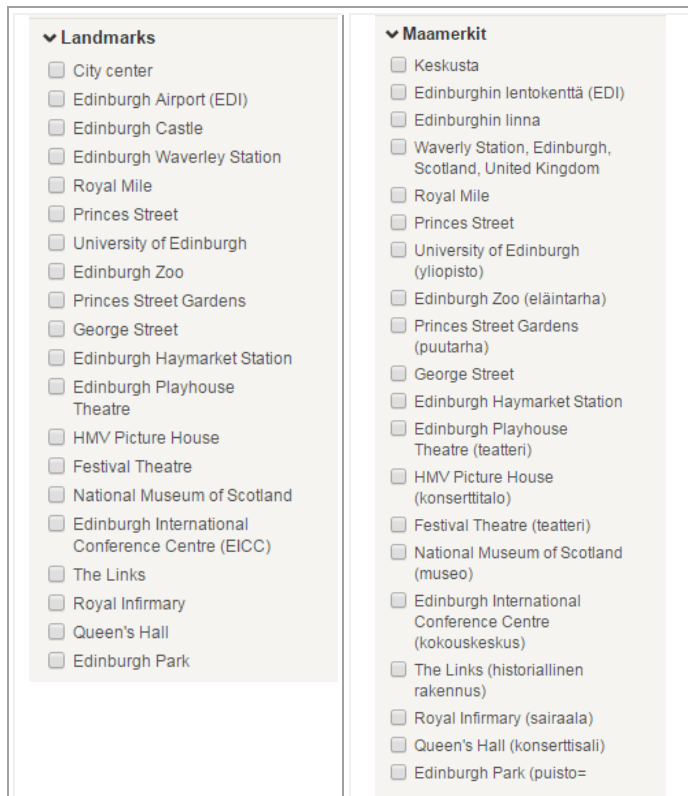
Image 13. The US and FI *Landmarks menu*s

As we can see from Image 13 above, the locations are presented inconsistently in the FI menu, which makes the menu somewhat messy. The first three locations "City center", "Edinburgh Airport (EDI)" and "Edinburgh Castle" have been translated into Finnish: "Keskusta", "Edinburghin lentokenttä (EDI)" and "Edinburghin linna". Surprisingly, the fourth location on the US menu, "Edinburgh Waverley Station", is presented in a totally different manner in the FI menu: "Waverly Station, Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom"[27]. Not only has this location name not been translated but it contains too much information for this particular context and, more alarmingly, there is a typo in how Waverley has been spelled.[28]

The rest of the locations on the FI menu are in their original ST forms, either with a translation or explanation in brackets after the name or without one. However, the reason why the translations/explanations are provided only for some locations remains unclear.[29] There is no clear distinction between the location types, which might explain why some, e.g. "University of Edinburgh" or "Princess Street Gardens", have explanations ("yliopisto" [university] and "puutarha" [garden]), and why some, e.g. "Edinburgh Haymarket Station" or "Royal Mile", do not. Whatever the reasons, the menu is inconsistent in terms of the translations provided in it. As mentioned above, all menus/lists with location names on the examined pages contain similar inconsistencies. This usability problem may cause difficulties for a user who does not speak any English whatsoever, whereas those users with a working knowledge of English encounter no problem with such inconsistencies. Nonetheless, it is a usability problem and the menus should be made more consistent at some point, hence, the severity rating is minor (2).

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[27] This expression appeared in this exact form also in several other places on the FI site. It suggests that there might be a technical problem of some kind behind it.

[28] When I revisited the FI site in September 2015, this part had been corrected into "Edinburgh, Waverley Station". Therefore, the usability problems mentioned do not exist anymore.

[29] It is also unclear why the abbreviation of the ST's "Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC)" has been omitted from the FI menu. Instead of the abbreviation, there is the explanation "kokouskeskus" [conference centre] after the original name of the location.

4.3.3 Match Between ST and TT

The tenth heuristic is the last heuristic of the UCT aspect and it concentrates on the **match between ST and TT**. Accordingly, the aim of this heuristic is to evaluate whether the examined pages of the FI country site of Hotels.com match with the corresponding US ones in terms of their contents. I compared the pages of the country sites and paid attention to possible omissions and/or additions in the TT, in order to discover whether all relevant material has been translated. In addition, I contemplated the reasons behind the omissions and additions so as to determine whether they are justified or not.

Starting from the *front page*, it is evident that there are differences in the contents of the US and the FI country sites of Hotels.com. The US *main menu bar* (Image 14) features three headings that do not exist on the FI *main menu bar* (Image 14.1) lacks: "Packages & Flights", "Groups" and "Gift Cards". Clicking these headings (or links) opens a new browser window with more detailed information and ads about the subjects in question. As mentioned above, these headings do not exist on the FI site; thus, the browser windows are missing as well. As a consequence, each reference to 'gift cards' on the pages of the US site, e.g. in *Choose when you'd like to pay* window (see Image 15 further below), has also been omitted from the corresponding locations on the FI site. Furthermore, the "Payment preference" heading (on the US menu of the *Narrow results column*), has been removed altogether from the FI site. All these omissions can be considered justified since the product range Hotels.com offers its users in the US differs from the one aimed at the Finnish users.
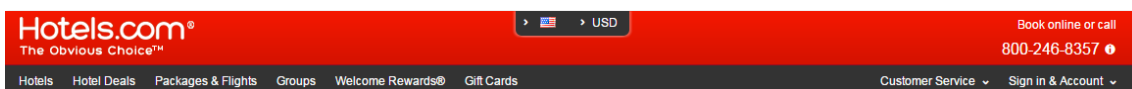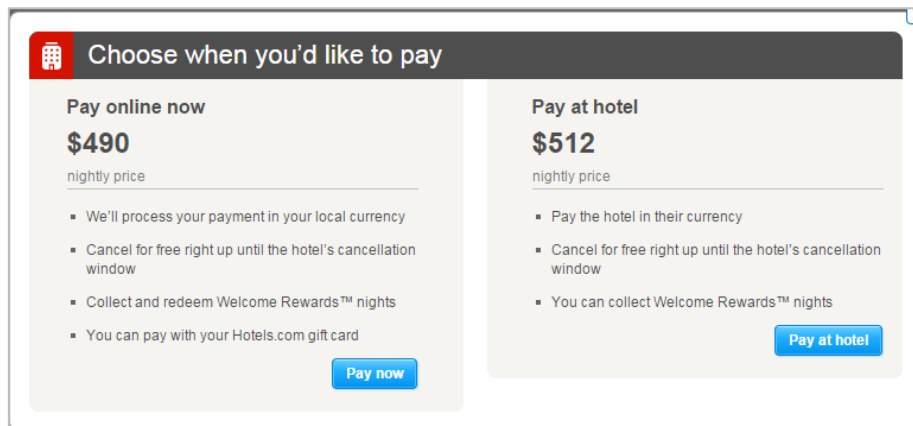

Image 14. The US *main menu bar*
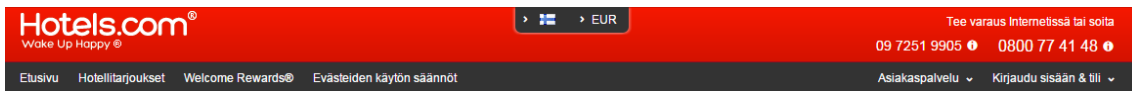
Image 14.1 The FI *main menu bar*

As illustrated in Image 14.1, there is also an addition on the FI *main menu bar*: the heading/link "Evästeiden käytön säännöt" [cookie policy]. The corresponding link, "Cookie policy", is placed on the *footer* of each page on the US site. Interestingly, "Evästeiden käytön säännöt" occurs also on the FI footer, thus, for some reason, appearing twice on each page. One can only try and guess why this particular link has been deemed so important that it has additionally been placed on the FI *main menu bar*. Since there is no evident reason for it, this addition can be considered unjustified.[30]

Another addition on the FI site is illustrated in Image 15.1 below. When the user chooses a hotel and a certain room type and then clicks the "Book"/"Varaa" button, the following window appears:

Image 15. The US *Choose when you'd like to pay* window

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[30] I quickly visited some other country sites of Hotels.com in order to find out whether this link was placed on the *main menu bar* only on the FI site. Interestingly, this was the case with many other European country sites as well, which suggests that there might be some legal requirements concerning the visibility of this particular link in the EU. If that is the case, the addition is self-evidently justified.

Image 15.1 The FI *Choose when you'd like to pay* window

As can be seen from the above images (15 and 15.1), the prices are expressed in a different manner in these country versions (see chapter 4.2.1.3 for cultural adaptation and localization of prices)[31]. However, there is also an extra piece of information "sisältää verot ja maksut" [includes taxes and fees] in the Finnish version. This addition provides the Finnish user with more information than the US user, the reason for which may be, for instance, country-specific legal requirements. It is axiomatic that such differences between the ST and TT are justified; they are based on the cultural adaptation which is required in the localization process of any website.

Further examples of both omitted and added information on the FI site of Hotels.com were discovered in the contact information sections, which are located on several pages in two slightly different forms illustrated in the image below:

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[31] On the US site, the amount mentioned is a "nightly price". However, the amount on the FI site is, presumably for cultural preference's sake, the total price for the whole stay, in this case for two nights, "hinta 2 yölle". This concerns all pages of both country sites where there are prices.
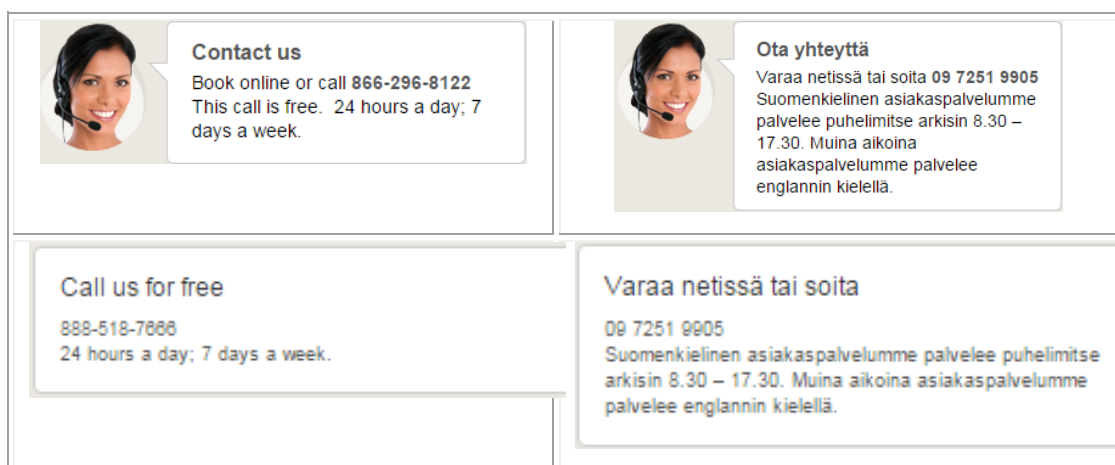
Image 16. The US and FI versions of contact information sections

The examples in Image 16 demonstrate the fact that different locales require different information and that these differences can be realized with additions and omissions. Indeed, the length of the FI texts is caused by the fact that the Finnish customer service is not available around the clock like the US service is, and it must be clarified to the user. Hence, there is an explanation of the availability of the customer service in Finnish and a mention that at other times the customers are served in English. This kind of addition is a prime example of a justified addition based on the adaptation of country-specific information. Surprisingly, regardless of the fact that there is more text in both FI versions, one essential piece of ST information has been completely omitted from them. In both US versions, it is explicitly stated that the user can contact the customer service for free ("The call is free" and "Call us for free"). However, in the FI versions, there is no information about the cost of a phone call to the Finnish customer service. This comes across as very strange because it is a general custom, in a context like this, to inform the customer of any costs there might be. Hence, there is no justification for this omission of information.

Another example of unjustified omissions was detected on the FI *search results* page, on the list of the hotels which meet the search criteria to be more precise. On the US list, the lowest part of each hotel's short presentation urges to "Compare prices" (see Image 18 further below). This part contains prices, for the same hotel for the same

period of time, offered by several other travel websites. It is somewhat surprising that this part is missing completely from the FI list (Image 18.1). The Finnish users would surely appreciate the possibility to compare the prices easily with one glance but, for some reason, only the US users get this benefit. Therefore, there is no reasonable justification for this omission.

As the examples presented above illustrate, the relevant ST material has, for the most part, been translated into Finnish. Furthermore, the majority of the omissions and additions on the FI site of Hotels.com can be considered justified based on the different target groups, cultural conventions and country-specific product ranges. However, there are also some omissions and additions that are not justified which counts as a usability problem. The severity rating for this particular problem is minor (2); accordingly, the parts deemed unjustified here should be considered again and corrected whenever there is time to do so.

Table 12. Usability problems discovered from the UCT aspect

UCT aspect				
	Discovered usability problems per severity rating			
Heuristic *-examined features*	**Cosmetic problem (1)**	**Minor problem (2)**	**Major problem (3)**	**Total (per heuristic)**
8. Idiomatic language				
-Interference				
-congruence	-	1	-	1
-inflections	-	6	-	6
-Word choices	-	11	-	11
-Mistranslations	-	17	-	17
-errors	-	-	4	4
9. Consistency				
-Consistency of translated terms	-	-	13	13
-Consistency of menu translations	-	4	-	4
10. Match between ST and TT				
-Unjustified omissions	-	11	-	11
-Unjustified additions	-	3	-	3
Total (per severity rating)	-	53	17	**70**

In sum, as the above findings demonstrate, the usability problems regarding the **UCT aspect** in my material are numerous. The discovered problems are presented in Table 12 above. Similarly as in Table 8, the several instances of identical usability problems are counted as one. As can be seen in Table 12, most of the discovered problems are only minor (2) usability problems, but their amount, together with the fact that there are some major (3) problems as well, indicates that more attention should be paid to the language of the FI site of Hotels.com.

4.4 General Usability Aspect

The last four heuristics of my complete list (see Appendix 3) concentrate on the **general usability aspect**, which in this study refers to the technical features of a website. Accordingly, with these heuristics, I examined[32] the functionality of the basic technical features which a casual user encounters when s/he uses the FI country site of Hotels.com. The first three heuristics (heuristics 11–13) of this aspect are from Nielsen's (1995b) list (with slightly modified specifications), chosen for their significance in regard to the overall usability, whereas the last one I developed myself. The heuristics for the **general usability aspect** are presented in Table 13 below:

Table 13. Heuristics for the general usability aspect (adapted from Nielsen 1995b)

11. Visibility of system status	Is the user informed of the system status at all times? In other words, does the system show the user somehow that something is happening?
12. User control and freedom	Does the system support an "emergency exit" and "undo/redo" on all pages? Is the user able to navigate the pages easily?
13. Aesthetic and minimalist design	Is the information on the website relevant to the user? Rarely needed or irrelevant information distracts and confuses the user.
14. Link functionality	Do the links lead to the promised, correct page/screen view/browser window?

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[32] As mentioned earlier, I conducted this part of the research in September 2015. Therefore, these findings tell about the general usability level at that particular time.

In what follows, I will discuss each of the above four heuristics in its own subchapter.

4.4.1 Visibility of System Status

According to the first heuristic on Nielsen's list (see 2.1.1.), the user should always know what is going on when using a website. Therefore, the system must provide the user **feedback** of some kind. When conducting my research, I discovered that on both the US and FI country sites of Hotels.com the user is informed of the situation with two slightly different ways (applies to other country sites as well). First, a *white revolving arrow* on yellow background appears in the place of the numerous blue action buttons, such as "Hae" ("Search"), "Valitse" ("Select") and "Varaa" ("Book"), whenever they are clicked, thus, indicating that something is happening. Such an arrow appears also, for instance, when the hotel search is narrowed by ticking the preferred filters. Second, *a revolving line* appears on the top left corner of the browser window title bar whenever a new page or browser window is loading and disappears when the page/window opens.

The aforementioned two indicators inform the user of the system status on all the examined pages but one. On the *results page*, where the hotels that match the search are listed, the amount of results can be narrowed down by choosing certain qualities for a hotel, e.g. the preferred star rating, location or amenities. Having done that, one may choose to return to the previous settings and view, which can be accomplished by clicking the "previous" arrow on the browser window title bar. Surprisingly, on this particular page, the revolving line does not appear. Consequently, the user is left with uncertainty whether anything is happening or not while the page is loading. Such absence of an indicator most certainly makes the user assume that the "previous" arrow does not work and, thus, urges the user to click the arrow again. Depending on the number of clicks, one may end up all the way back to the front page (this happened to me), which undoubtedly causes not only confusion and irritation but also unnecessary renavigating. Therefore, this is a major usability problem (3) and should be fixed as soon as possible. Nevertheless, the fact that this is the only instance of a usability problem of this kind in my material is extremely positive.

4.4.2 User Control and Freedom

The 12th heuristic, **User control and freedom**, concentrates on evaluating how easily the user is able to navigate the pages of Hotels.com. As Nielsen (1995b) points out, on every page of a website there must be a so-called "emergency exit" (such as "redo" and "undo" buttons) which lets the user leave a page easily. Accordingly, this heuristic assesses the implementation of these features on Hotels.com website.

In the course of my research, I discovered that on most pages of both the US and FI country sites it is possible to use the arrows (indicating "previous" and "next") of the browser window title bar to navigate the pages. Thus, the arrows can be called the "emergency exits". However, the "previous" arrow of the new browser windows which open, for instance, when the numerous links are clicked, is never active, thus, making it impossible to navigate with the arrows. For that reason, in order to get back to the previous window view, or to move from window to window, one must click the title bar of the desired browser window. Nevertheless, such manner of navigating the different browser windows is typical for websites and the Internet and, therefore, familiar to the users. Consequently, navigating these country sites can be considered easy.

What is more, yet another "emergency exit" exists on both examined country sites of Hotels.com. Namely, the *header* and the *main menu bar* as a whole can be considered an "emergency exit" as well. As Images 14 and 14.1 above illustrate, the *header* is the uppermost part of a page (red with Hotels.com logo on the left and the contact information on the right), whereas the *main menu bar* is located right underneath the header (the black bar with menu headings/links in white). By clicking on the Hotels.com logo on the *header*, or the link "Etusivu" [front page] ("Hotels") on the *main menu bar*, the user is able to return to the front page of the country site. Furthermore, by clicking the other links on the *main menu bar* the user is able to 'start over' and navigate to a desired page.

The *header* and the *main menu bar* occur on each examined page of the US and FI sites of Hotels.com. Surprisingly, on one page they do not, however, function as an

"emergency exit". That is to say, on the *reservation page* (on both country sites) where the user must fill in his/her personal information in order to book a hotel room, the *header*'s logo does not function as a link to the front page. Moreover, the usual links of the *main menu bar* do not exist on this page; instead, there is a completely new link, "Palautetta sivustosta" ("Website feedback"). For the above reasons, the user cannot leave the *reservation page* as easily as all other pages: s/he has to return to the previous page with the browser window's "previous" arrow first and only then is s/he able to utilize the links and the logo. Regardless of the fact that it is rather easy to access the links, some extra effort is required of the user. Therefore, this can be considered a minor (2) usability problem which should be corrected at some point. To conclude, in spite of this one usability problem regarding this heuristic, navigating the US and the FI country sites is, in general, fairly easy and straightforward.

4.4.3 Aesthetic and Minimalist Design

The thirteenth heuristic, or the third related to general usability, **Aesthetic and minimalist design**, refers to the fact that there should not be too much going on, on the pages of a website (cf. heuristic 8 on Nielsen's list). Too much information or, for instance, too "busy" design (e.g. colors, flashing components) may distract the user and interfere with the very thing s/he is attempting to accomplish. With this heuristic, I examined some of the design-related features that catch the eye of a casual user on the US and FI sites of Hotels.com.

Pop-up windows are a typical feature of commercial websites in particular and their main function is to provide extra information for the users. Given the fact that Hotels.com is an online sales channel, the total number of pop-up windows I encountered on the examined pages of the US and FI sites is surprisingly small. Most of the pop-up windows emerge into the lower right corner of the screen view on the *search results page* and on the *hotel page*s of individual hotels. On those pages, the pop-up windows provide the user with information, such as the number of people who are currently looking at the hotels of the same destination as the user, how many people are looking at the specific hotel the user is looking at, and which hotels have been booked.

Apparently, the purpose of these windows is to indicate popular hotels, as well as to urge the user to book a hotel. However, they take the user's attention away from the actual thing s/he is attempting to do, i.e. to search a hotel suitable for him/her. Furthermore, the fact that the same pop-up windows emerge every time the *search results page* or the *hotel page* is entered, or refreshed for that matter, is somewhat irritating. Therefore, regardless of the fact that they stay on the view only for a short while and that they do disappear independently (there is no need to click "x" for 'close'), they can be considered unnecessary features and information, distracting the user's focus on the task at hand.

Nevertheless, some of the pop-up windows on the US and FI sites provide useful information. For instance, whenever the user stays on the *reservation page* for a while without filling in all required information immediately, a pop-up window with the following text emerges:

(1)   US: Don't miss out. Are you sure you don't want to book The Balmoral Hotel? If you leave now, your details won't be saved and you're missing out on a great price.

FI: Älä menetä tilaisuuttasi. Oletko varma, että et halua varata The Balmoral hotellia? Jos lähdet nyt, tietojasi ei tallenneta ja menetät tilaisuuden hyödyntää tämän loistavan hinnan.

As we can see from the above example (Example 1), the text (in both country versions) is marketing speech like; however, it does provide important practical information. That is to say, it urges the user to complete the reservation as soon as possible, in order to get the wanted room for the wanted price. Furthermore, it states that the user's personal information will not be saved and, therefore, must be re-entered later, if s/he does not proceed with the booking process at this point in time. Consequently, this pop-up window can be considered useful unlike the most others on the FI and US country sites. In brief, since most of the pop-up windows offer unnecessary information they violate the heuristic of **Aesthetic and Minimalist Design** and are, therefore, minor (2) usability
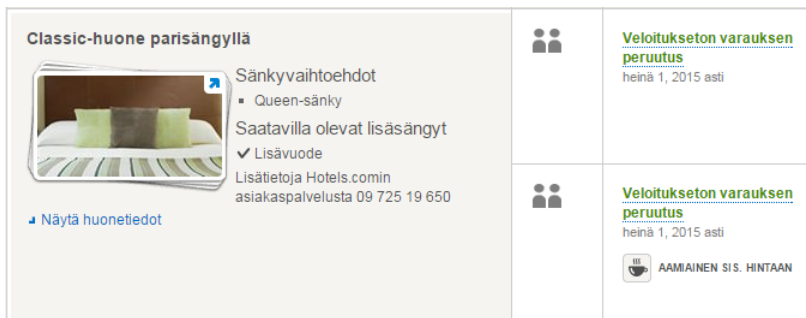
problems. However, it must be noted here that Hotels.com is a commercial website and, accordingly, utilizes all means available to promote the products. Therefore, it is highly likely that it will continue to support pop-up windows also in future, but perhaps the frequency they appear on the screen views could be reconsidered and possibly limited.

Other design-related features that offer additional information for the users on the US and FI country sites of Hotels.com sites are the **dialogue windows**, which emerge when the cursor is placed on certain items. In some cases, the dialogue window appears automatically, in others, the user needs to click on the item, in order to open the window. These items include symbols, e.g. ⓘ or 🌙 , and phrases, such as "Parhaan hinnan takuu" ("Best Price Guarantee") or "Ilmainen peruutusoikeus" ("Free cancellation").

Most of the dialogue windows provide the user with useful, additional information on the subject matter at hand, which enhances the usability of the site. One of such instances occurs on the *hotel page* where the different room types of a chosen hotel are presented, as illustrated in Images 17 and 17.1 below.

Image 17. Room information on the US *hotel page*

Image 17.1 Room information on the FI *hotel page*

As the above images demonstrate, the terms of cancellation are stated in a very short manner in the column "Vaihtoehtoja" ("Options"), in this particular case with a phrase "Veloitukseton varauksen peruutus" ("Free cancellation"). This piece of information is essential for the user and might even be one of the most important criteria for choosing a certain room. Therefore, the user is provided also with more detailed information on the cancellation policy in a dialogue window which opens when the cursor is placed on the text. The dialogue window contains the following information (Example 2):

(2) US: You can cancel this booking right up to Sep 13, 2015 for free. You may be charged if you cancel or change your booking after that. And we can't refund you if you check out early or don't turn up at the hotel.

FI: Voit peruuttaa tämän varauksen ilmaiseksi syys 13, 2015 asti. Muutoksista saatetaan tämän päivämäärän jälkeen periä maksu. Emme voi hyvittää hintaa, jos päätät lähteä ennen lähtöpäivää tai jos et saavu hotellille.

Such dialogue windows as the above one are numerous on the US and FI sites of Hotels.com. Since they provide important additional information which is not available on the actual page, they can be considered essential elements.

Following the above thought, it is then extremely surprising that some of the automatically appearing dialogue windows are totally unnecessary since they repeat the information already visible. Typical examples of such cases are e.g.
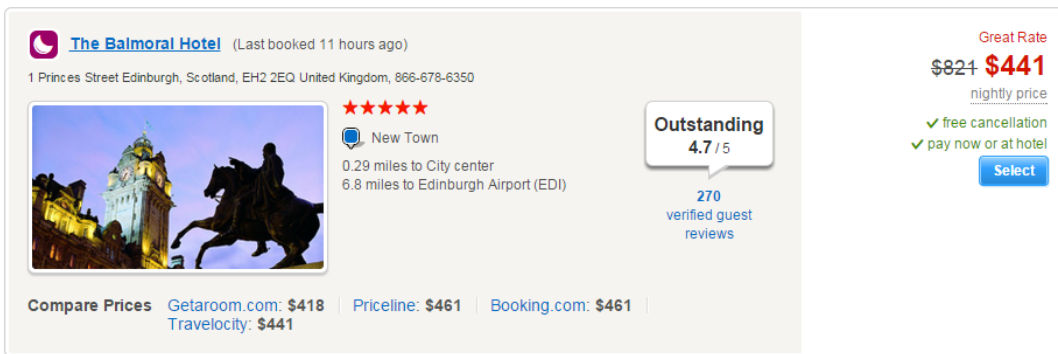
("Free Wi-Fi") and ("Breakfast included") on the *hotel page* (see Images 17 and 17.1) where the options for a specific room are listed. The messages in the dialogue windows which appear when the cursor is on these elements state the exact same, only in a few more words: "Tässä huoneessa on käytettävissä langaton internet-yhteys" ("Free Wi-Fi is available in this room") and "Aamiainen kuuluu hintaan" ("Breakfast is included in your stay"), respectively. Yet another instance of such unnecessary information occurs on both the *search results page* and the *hotel page* where the stars, indicating the star rating of a hotel, are clearly visible but, still, there appears a dialogue window telling the amount of the stars, e.g. "4 tähteä" ("4 stars"). Such dialogue windows seem to underestimate the user. Since they do not provide useful information, they only create frustration and irritation and, in addition, disturb the user's concentration. While they do not prevent or complicate the use of the system, they worsen the user experience simply by annoying the user. Consequently, they can be considered minor (2) usability problems which should be corrected at some stage by removing the unnecessary dialogue windows altogether.

4.4.4 Link Functionality

As is well known, in order to guarantee that the user is able to use the online booking and purchasing options of a website smoothly and efficiently, the technical features of the website should function faultlessly. For that reason, the last heuristic of the **general usability aspect** concentrates on **Link functionality** and is named accordingly. With this heuristic, I tested the functionality of all the links on the examined pages on both US and FI country sites, in order to find out whether they take the user to the promised location or not.

As with all websites, on Hotels.com links leading to different pages, different parts of pages and to new browser windows are plentiful. Moreover, on the US and FI sites, there are many types of links: separate words or phrases, headings, parts of text, as well as symbols or icons. Their status as links is, in most cases, indicated with blue color.

When conducting the test in September 2015, I discovered that most of the links worked at that particular point in time properly, i.e. with a click the promised **page/view/ window** opened. For example, on *search results page* (see Images 18 and 18.1 below), clicking the hotel name lead, indeed, to the hotel page of the specific hotel; clicking the blue icon on the left side of the location, opened a detailed map of the area in question; and clicking the blue text stating the number of reviews (underneath the rating of the hotel), opened the *Guest review page* of that specific hotel. These links, thus, functioned faultlessly.

Image 18. The Balmoral Hotel on the US *search results page*

Image 18.1 The Balmoral Hotel on the FI *search results page*

Some of the links on the US and FI sites take the user to another part of the currently open page and, thus, speed up the navigation. An illustrative example of such links in my material is the following group of links which appears on each hotel's own *hotel page*: "Siirry kohtaan: Yleiskuvaus | Huonevaihtoehdot | Hotellitiedot" ("Jump to:

Overview | Room Choices | Hotel information"). This group of links appears in several places on the *hotel page*s: first, directly under the name and address of the hotel; second, after the list of room types; third, after the hotel information section; and fourth, after the special features section. Furthermore, on the very same page, there appears another link, which performs the same function but reversely. Namely, the link "Takaisin sivun yläosaan" ("Back to top") appears in all the same places as the aforementioned group of links but the first, and it takes the user to the uppermost part of the page with ease. With the help of such links, the user is able to move to a desired part of the page quickly without having to scroll, which enhances the usability of the sites. All of these links functioned without any problems in September 2015.

As mentioned above, most of the links on both the US and FI country sites functioned as they should. However, on the FI site, there were some exceptions as well. One such instance occurred on *Hotels.com Rewards page*[33] in a section titled "Onko sinulla kysyttävää?" ("Got a question?"). In this section, there are four frequently asked questions which all are links leading to the *Customer Service* page. Clicking any of these links on the US site took me to the correct page, whereas all the corresponding links of the FI site lead to the screen view illustrated in Image 19 underneath:
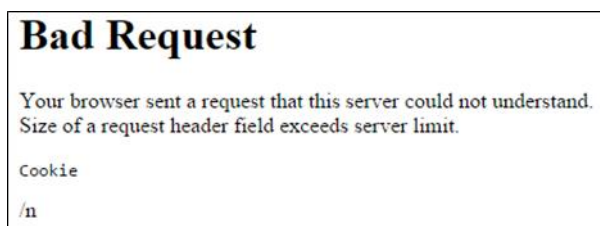
Image 19. Error message on the FI site

As we all know from our own experiences, it is extremely disappointing and frustrating to receive an error message instead of getting answers to important questions regarding the product and/or the use of the website. Links that do not function as they should are

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[33] In March 2015, the title was Welcome Rewards.

certainly a usability problem, but the fact that the above message merely indicates the error without suggesting any solutions makes it a serious one. Furthermore, the error message is in English, not in Finnish as it should be on the FI site. Moreover, this error message appeared each time that I tested the four aforementioned links during the several visits to the FI site between May 2015 and September 2015. Indeed, it must be pointed out here that if a link fails to take the user to the promised location on a site once or twice it can usually be explained, for instance, with updates. However, if it happens repeatedly, as in this case, the problem can be considered serious. In fact, problems of this nature may be a dealbreaker for a user; s/he might decide to move on to another website. Consequently, malfunctioning links are major (3) usability problems which should be corrected immediately.[34]

As the above findings reveal, there are some usability problems (see Table 14) regarding the **general usability aspect** on the examined parts of the FI site. However, the fact that most of the discovered problems were minor (2) ones indicates that the general usability of the site is, for the most part, quite good.

Table 14. Usability problems discovered from the general usability aspect

General usability aspect				
	Discovered usability problems per severity rating			
Heuristic *-examined features*	Cosmetic problem (1)	Minor problem (2)	Major problem (3)	Total (per heuristic)
11. Visibility of system status	-	-	1	1
12. User control and freedom				
-emergency exit	-	1	-	1
13. Aesthetic and minimalist design				
-unnecessary pop-up windows	-	5	-	5
-unnecessary dialogue windows	-	3	-	3
14. Link functionality	-	-	6	6
Total (per severity rating)	**0**	**9**	**7**	**17**

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[34] When I re-checked the situation in November 2015, these links functioned faultlessly.

In the following subchapter, I will present a summary of the above findings. I will also present some conclusions which can be drawn from the findings.

4.5 Summary of the Findings

As the findings of my in-depth analysis above show, there are a number of usability problems regarding all examined aspects, i.e. the globalization, localization, UCT and general usability aspects, on the FI site of Hotels.com. As shown in Table 15 below, the discovered problems related to all aspects are mostly minor (2) usability problems (66), hence, fixing them can be given low priority. However, the total number of major (3) usability problems was 24 and these should be corrected immediately.

Table 15. Usability problems discovered in the material

Discovered usability problems				
	Discovered usability problems per severity rating			
Aspect	Cosmetic problem (1)	Minor problem (2)	Major problem (3)	Total (per aspect)
Globalization aspect	-	1	-	1
Localization aspect	3	3	-	6
UCT aspect	-	53	17	70
General usability aspect	-	9	7	16
Total (per severity rating)	**3**	**66**	**24**	**93**

As to the **globalization aspect**, the results of the analysis indicate that the globalization of Hotels.com website has been conducted extremely well. Although there are four violations against the heuristics (see section 4.2), only one of them can be counted as an actual usability problem: the continent menu was localized but not "universal". This was considered only a minor (2) usability problem. My findings, therefore, prove that Hotels.com has, for a good reason, earned its position as the fourth best global website in 2015, as mentioned in section 1.1.

Regarding the **localization aspect**, the findings suggest that the localization of the FI country site has been executed rather thoroughly as well. Although the amount of usability problems regarding the localization aspect is larger than in regard to the globalization aspect they are still few (6). There are some cosmetic (1) and minor (2) usability problems concerning the cultural adaptation of the examined country-specific features. On some occasions, the culture-specific features, such as dates and prices (see sections 4.2.1.1 and 4.2.1.3), appear to have been adapted into FI country conventions only partially. It might indicate that the localization has been done in haste, which would not be at all surprising, given the nature of the field. The advertisements, as well as the slogan, had, on the other hand, been thoroughly adapted to fit the cultural context and the preferences of the target users.

Since this is a Master's thesis of Translation Studies, the findings concerning the translations on the FI site of Hotels.com, in particular, are of major interest. Given that the FI site is a localized site, it is somewhat natural that there are numerous violations against the heuristics of the **UCT aspect** in the material (see Table 12). A few instances of *interference* were detected; they are considered only minor (2) usability problems. The interference in the material manifests itself mostly in inflections and congruence, but these problems are few. Conversely, *word choices* which sound rather strange to a native Finn's ears are numerous. Nevertheless, they are also rated as minor (2) usability problems. Interestingly, only some *mistranslations* were discovered and plain *errors* are rare. The errors are considered major (3) problems, which should be corrected as soon as possible while the mistranslations are rated as minor (2) problems. One of the most serious problems discovered is the *inconsistent use of translated terms*. In fact, the extent and density to which several Finnish equivalents are used per one ST term in the material make them into major usability (3) problems. The findings also imply that more attention should be paid to the *consistency of the menu translations* as well. Regarding the heuristic *Match between the ST and the TT,* most of the additions and omissions of the ST material on the FI site are justified based on the cultural differences between the locales, the exceptions are considered only minor (2) usability problems.

In conclusion, the total amount (70) of discovered usability problems concerning the translations is rather large (see Table 15). The instances of interference (7), strange word choices (11), mistranslations (17) and errors (4) suggest that the texts on the FI site have not been translated by a native Finnish person. It might be that the translator has been a person with Finnish as a second language. It would explain why most of the language is idiomatic but then again also some unidiomatic structures and expressions have been used. Another possible explanation is that the translations have been produced by a localizer who does not have the linguistic competence of a translator. Or perhaps the explanation simply lies in the nature of the field: more than one translators have been doing the work, at various times. Nevertheless, since most of the language used on the FI site is idiomatic, it suggests that the translations have been produced by human actors, not by Machine Translation. Self-evidently, in order to produce idiomatic, usable translations a native-language translator should be used.

Regarding the **general usability aspect**, the discovered usability problems (16), such as the frequent emergence of pop-up windows, are considered mostly minor (2) ones, as shown in Table 15. However, in one instance the system status is not visible to the user; hence, it complicates the use of the system. This and the malfunctioning of some links are rated major (3) usability problems (see sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.4).

All in all, the total number of usability problems discovered on the examined pages was surprisingly low (93) considering that the amount of material was rather large. The fact that there were only some major usability problems (24) suggests that the overall usability, covering all the examined aspects, of the FI country site of Hotels.com was, indeed, at the time of conducting this research good.

In the beginning of this research process, I hypothesized that "The means of user-centered translation (UCT) offer a way to avoid translation problems in the localization process of websites". As mentioned earlier, I visited the FI site several times during the research process. These visits demonstrate well that localization is an ongoing process and that websites are constantly updated. More importantly, these visits prove that the usability problems that I discovered based on the heuristics list that I applied and

developed for the purposes of this research are indeed real ones. Namely, several of the discovered problems have been fixed at different points in time, as mentioned in the footnotes of this section. This proves that the hypothesis set for this research undertaking is true: the UCT method used in the analysis – heuristic evaluation – can indeed provide a way to avoid translation problems in the localization process of websites. Moreover, heuristic evaluation is not only useful in avoiding problems in the localization process but also in discovering usability problems regarding translations and other aspects, such as globalization, localization and general usability, on websites. It is my firm belief that if heuristic evaluation was conducted already in the beginning of the localization process the discovered problems could be avoided altogether or at least diminished considerably. However, the evaluation that is conducted iteratively at different stages of the localization process or on an end-product, as in this study, is equally important, since it enables fixing the discovered problems during the updates of a website.

It must be noted here, once more, that I am aware of the fact that my analysis is extensive. Indeed, the thesis could be criticized for its length based on the argument that I have not succeeded in outlining my research very well. However, presenting the in-depth analysis in such a detailed and exhaustive manner as above, with multiple examples per each aspect and heuristic, was a fully conscious choice. As mentioned in the beginning of the analysis chapter, I considered it essential to cover these multiple aspects thoroughly so that the results would prove useful in practice. Therefore, I deemed it crucial to provide the reader with a comprehensive view on the aspects and features which need to be taken into account when the overall usability of country-specific websites is under examination.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This MA thesis set out to evaluate the overall usability of the Finnish (FI) country site of Hotels.com, with the help of one of the tools of user-centered translation (UCT), namely heuristic evaluation. To be more precise, four aspects of the Finnish country site were under examination: **1) globalization aspect**, **2) localization aspect**, **3) UCT aspect** and **4) general usability aspect**. By examining these aspects, my aim was to find out how well the FI site had been adapted into the Finnish cultural and technical conventions and how usable the site was for a casual user. My research questions were 1) Are there usability problems in this language version? 2) If there are, how serious are they? and 3) How serious are the problems related to translations in particular? I also hypothesized that "The means of user-centered translation (UCT) offer a way to avoid translation problems in the localization process of websites".

To study the above-mentioned four usability-related aspects, I developed a list of fourteen heuristics based on the theoretical background of this study. My theoretical framework regarding the general usability aspect was based on Jakob Nielsen's fundamental views on usability, whereas Tytti Suojanen, Kaisa Koskinen and Tiina Tuominen's newly-developed theory of *User-Centered Translation* (UCT) provided the basis for the UCT aspect. In regard to the localization aspect, the theoretical framework consisted of the views of numerous scholars of the field, e.g. Bert Esselink, Minako O'Hagan and Carmen Mangiron and, lastly, John Yunker's views on web globalization acted as the theoretical background for the globalization aspect.

The material of this study consisted of 127 corresponding screenshots of the US and FI country sites of Hotels.com, gathered in March 2015. The screenshots were both parts of pages and complete screen views of the pages that I deemed most relevant to a casual user. The contents of the screenshots were mainly textual elements but in some cases also images and symbols. I conducted the empirical part of this research by comparing the screenshots of the US and FI country sites by going through each screenshot with my heuristics, listed and categorized the elements that violated the heuristics and rated the severity of the discovered usability problems. I carried out this part of the research

during the spring and the summer of 2015, whereas the last part of the research, i.e. assessing and testing the functionality of the examined features of general usability aspect, was conducted in September 2015.

The findings of my in-depth analysis revealed that there were quite a few usability problems in the researched parts of the FI site of Hotels.com (see Table 15 in section 4.5). The total number of discovered usability problems regarding all examined aspects, i.e. the globalization, localization, UCT and general usability aspects, in the material was 93. However, the number can be considered somewhat low, given the fact that the amount of material was rather large. Furthermore, most of the discovered problems (66) were only minor usability problems, with a severity rating (2), which do not complicate the use of the system as such, and can be fixed whenever there is time to do so. There were, however, also some major (3) usability problems (24) which would require immediate attention.

As for the UCT aspect, the most (17) of all major usability problems, as well as the largest number of minor problems (53), were discovered from the translations of the FI country site (see Table 12). Since the FI site is indeed a localized country site and not an "original" website, this was perhaps to be expected. Nevertheless, that does not justify the numerous language-related usability problems discovered, such as unidiomatic expressions, mistranslations and inconsistent use of terms. Even though most of the language used on the FI site was idiomatic, the findings of this aspect suggest that more attention should be paid to the translations. In regard to other aspects, fewer usability problems were found. Indeed, the findings show that the globalization of Hotels.com, in particular, has been conducted extremely well: only one usability problem, a minor one, was discovered regarding the aspect. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the localization of the FI site has been executed rather thoroughly as well. Namely, there were no major usability problems in the material regarding localization, and the minor and cosmetic ones discovered were only a few. The analysis of the general usability aspect revealed some major problems, most of which were malfunctioning links, as well as some minor problems.

As mentioned in the introduction, it is advisable for companies to support properly localized country sites at least for their most important target locales; that is to say, an English-language site alone is not enough. Furthermore, in order to best serve all their customers, as well as to create sales and produce returns, the companies should invest in the usability of their websites: websites must not only be easy to use but they must also be culturally and linguistically adapted to fit the target country's conventions. Based on the findings of the analysis it is evident that Hotels.com has managed to take into account the various usability issues in the localization process of its FI country site. Indeed, regardless of the fact that there were usability problems on the researched pages, the site was, in general, easy and pleasant to use. The results of this research, thus, clearly indicate that the overall usability of the FI country site of Hotels.com is good.

As the findings of this study show, real usability problems were discovered by applying the heuristics that I had developed specifically for the purposes of this research. Indeed, several of the discovered problems had been fixed at different points in time, as the several revisits to the FI site during the research process revealed. This proved that the hypothesis set for this research undertaking was true: the UCT method used in the analysis, namely heuristic evaluation, can provide a way to avoid translation problems in the localization process of websites. Furthermore, this research proved that heuristic evaluation is a useful method for discovering usability problems not only in regard to translations but other aspects as well, such as globalization, localization and general usability of websites. My list of fourteen heuristics (see Appendix 3), thus, proved to be applicable for studying all aspects examined in this study and can, therefore, be considered a finding in itself.

Furthermore, the results of this study indicate that it is possible for a single evaluator to find a considerable number of real usability problems. As discussed in section 2.1.1, in order to achieve valid results, or to find a sufficient amount of usability problems, at least three evaluators should conduct the heuristic evaluation (Nielsen 1993: 156; 1995a). However, if the single evaluator is a double expert, as I am, based on my previous career of over ten years in the tourism industry and my current expertise in

translation, it is feasible to achieve reliable and fruitful results, as was proven by this study.

The newly developed UCT theory and its tools have not been tested much yet. This case study proves that heuristic evaluation is an efficient tool which can easily be applied to the translations, as well as other aspects of website localization. However, it must be remembered that this is only one case study; therefore, these results cannot be widely generalized. Nevertheless, the findings provide an interesting perspective on the possibilities of UCT, as well as valuable data for the basis of further research undertakings of a similar kind. Several country sites of a single global travel company, or any global company for that matter, could, for instance, be examined in order to compare the localization and usability levels of different country versions. Furthermore, specific country sites of various companies within a particular field could be examined so as to assess, for example, how well the cultural conventions of a specific locale have been observed by the companies. It would also be worthwhile to conduct user tests since they provide vital information on actual user experiences, which would be extremely valuable for any company wanting to improve the usability of its country sites.

It is my sincere hope that the results of this study will prove valuable and useful not only for global travel companies supporting several country sites, such as Hotels.com, but also for all other companies with web presence and international customers.

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Appendix 1. Purho's (2000) list of heuristics

1. Match between documentation and the real world	The documentation should speak the users' language, with words, phrases, and concepts familiar to the user, rather than system-oriented terms. Follow real-world conventions, making information appear in a natural and logical order.
2. Match between documentation and the product	The forms, screens, manuals, and online helps system should match so that the same terminology is used in all of them. This may contradict with "Match between the documentation and real world" if the interface uses strange terminology.
3. Purposeful documentation	If the documentation set contains several documents, the purpose of each type of document should be clear, as well as the intended use. The media of the documentation must be purposeful so that users get what they need. For example, people working on a rooftop installing some hardware would not necessarily be delighted with nice multimedia CD-ROMs but prefer a laminated quick reference card.
4. Support for different users	The documentation should support users with different levels of knowledge on the domain as well as those assigned different tasks in the domain. Any unnecessary information for a specific user must be hidden from other users or be easily overlooked. Quick reference information for expert users should be available.
5. Effective information design	Information must be presented in a way that it is easily found and understood by the users. Short lines and paragraphs are easier to read. Graphics, tables, and lists are easy to scan and read, and appropriately used to support the information need the user has. Unnecessary graphics only slow the reading and the download time of web-based documentation. Write instructions in imperative form and address the user directly using active sentences.
6. Support for various methods for searching Information	Documentation should support people with different strategies for finding information: some search through the table of contents, some use the index, some browse, and some use searches (in electronic documentation). The index should contain users' own terminology as well as system terms, terms from international standards, and those used by competitors. The layout of documentation should support browsing so that beginnings of new chapters and important warnings and notes are easily picked up.
7. Task orientation	Instructional documentation should be structured around the users' job tasks, that is, tasks that are independent of the tools used. The job tasks remain the same although the tools may change. For example, the job task "baking bread" remains the same although the baker may do it all by hand or using latest state-of-the-art tools. This reduces the need to restructure the documentation when the product is changed. The tasks should be approximately at the same level of granularity throughout the documentation

8. Troubleshooting	The documentation should contain a troubleshooting section giving users guidance for common problem situations and how to analyze rare situations. All documentation related to errors must be easily accessible.
9. Consistency and standards	Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing. If the product has several documents, they should be consistent in their structure and the information in different documents should be designed so that no unnecessary overlapping exists. Follow platform conventions when creating the help system. Be sure that the terminology is consistent throughout the documentation suite.
10. Help on using documentation	If the documentation set is large, provide instructions on intended use, and how it is going to be updated (if separate updates are delivered).

Appendix 2. Otava's (2013: 45) heuristics for translations

1. Correspondence between the translation and the user	Who are the translation's users? Do the translation choices support the users' needs? Is the text usable to multiple audiences?
2. Correspondence between the translation and the commission	Does the translation fulfill the purpose outlined for it in the translation commission?
3. Correspondence between the translation and the real world	What is the correlation between the source culture and the target culture? Does the text reflect the culture of its context and/or of its user?
4. Correspondence between the translation and the genre	Does the translation match the conventions of its genre? Does the genre match that of the source text?
5. Readability of the translation	Is the translation easy to read and follow? Is the reader guided through the translation with markers appropriate to the genre?
6. Comprehensibility of the translation	Is the meaning of the translation easily comprehensible without the need for excessive interpretation?
7. Appropriate register	Is the translation written in appropriate style and register with proper grammar? Are there any unwanted residual source language influences?
8. Consistency of style	Are the linguistic and stylistic choices used consistently throughout the translation?
9. Correspondence between the source text and the translation	Is all necessary material translated? Are all omissions or additions justified?
10. Error prevention	Is the possibility for misunderstandings minimized?

Appendix 3. Heuristics for the overall usability of the FI country site of Hotels.com developed for the purposes of this research

Globalization aspect	
1. Supporting several languages	Global websites should support English + at least ten other major languages (e.g. the most supported languages French, German, Japanese, Spanish, Chinese, Italian, Russian, Korean, Portuguese and Dutch). The best global websites support over 30 languages, so the more the better.
2. Supporting country codes	Country codes should be supported in country sites' web addresses. Additionally, or alternatively, the country code, or even the name of a country, could also be integrated into the company logo.
3. Improving the discoverability of local websites	There should be a global gateway on every page of a website. Supporting geolocation and language negotiation are a plus.
4. Supporting a "universal" global gateway	The gateway menu on every country site should be "universal", i.e. understandable for everybody regardless of their mother tongue.
5. Avoiding the use of flags whenever possible	Flags should neither be used for country selection nor to indicate language. If used, they should be placed carefully in order to avoid "messy" effect.
Localization aspect	
6. Cultural adaptation of country-specific features	Have the country-specific features been adapted in a correct way? Have all country conventions or formats of the target culture been followed?
7. Cultural context and preferences	Have the cultural context and the cultural preferences of the target users been taken into account?
UCT aspect	
8. Idiomatic language	Is the language of the translation idiomatic and natural? Is there interference? Do mistranslations and/or errors occur? Is the translation readable and comprehensible?
9. Consistency	Have the terms been translated consistently? Are the menus consistent with each other in regard to translation?
10. Match between ST and TT	Has all relevant material been translated? Are there omissions and/or additions and are they justified?
General usability aspect	
11. Visibility of system status	Is the user informed of the system status at all times? In other words, does the system show the user somehow that something is happening?

12. User control and freedom	Does the system support an "emergency exit" and "undo/redo"? Is the user able to navigate the pages easily?
13. Aesthetic and minimalist design	Is the information on the website relevant to the user? Rarely needed or irrelevant information distracts and confuses the user.
14. Link functionality	Do the links lead to the promised, correct page/screen view/browser window?