

Yours Truly International

—Rahel Bailie

Barriers

Users are impatient. Users skim. Users want to DO, and jump to action. Users read to do, or read to learn to do. The thing to watch is how you present the ideas. With a linguistic barrier, readers not only have to *read*, but decipher. Hurdles facing information users who face linguistic and other accessibility barriers:

- ▶ **Technological**
Downloading software or upgrades. Users in some countries won't/can't download large files because of slow connections, so they download programs updates but not associated help files. In some countries, Internet access is highly restricted or even illegal.
Assuming expertise. Users may not be familiar with "local" technologies because of local differences or because of lack of local resources.
Local differences. Do you make materials printable in A4 format?
- ▶ **Educational and experiential**
Terminology. "Edit" can refer to changing text or using the Edit menu – can confuse users who are struggling with language.
Metaphor. The shopping cart is a universally-accepted metaphor, but others can be incomprehensible to users unfamiliar with those experiences. Sports, for example.
Experience. "Left-loose right-tight" is an example of an experiential assumption that could fail if the experience isn't the same.
- ▶ **Economic and marketplace**
Pricing. Does the market require a lower price point? Will you ship scaled-down product versions and documentation? How will that affect users?
Local economic differences.
- ▶ **Geographical**
Power grids. This varies by geographic region.
Weather. Has your product been tested for performance in extreme cold, heat, dampness, sandstorms?
- ▶ **Social, cultural, and religious**
These can affect how you depict or discuss your product, the colors that you use to present your product, and other subtle cues that can make or break your product in the marketplace.
Colors. Different colors are appropriate choices for different markets. White, the North American color for weddings, is the color for death.
Gender depiction. Some cultures have religious taboos around depicting women in public (women's hands assembling something, for example)
- ▶ **Political and legal**
The STC Intercom had a wonderful article in May 2000 talking about the complications faced by writers in India because of political and legal issues. "The India Paradox" discusses linguistic requirements, the legal restrictions around depicting money, the flag, and other items.
- ▶ **Phenotypical:**
What is a phenotype? It's a physical manifestation of a genetic trait.
Color-blindness. Does your product use color-coding? Does it work?
Skin color. Famous goof was a baby product company whose advice included instructions to test bath water by seeing if one's elbow turned pink.

- ▶ **Linguistic**
The most common barrier. Also, the barrier with the most research on the topic.

In documentation

You may not find ideal *solution*, but you must do *something*, so you may end up with a result that is a compromise, a *resolution*.

- ▶ **Make your writing “translation-ready”**
Even if you never translate, a translator can pick out all the ambiguities, jargon, and so on. This reduces linguistic barriers due to vocabulary.
Define terminology. Could be through a glossary, pop-ups, side-bars, or expanding text.
- ▶ **Reduce concepts per sentence**
Avoid complex sentences: use one concept per sentence.
Break complex sentences down into manageable chunks.
- ▶ **Use straight-forward sentence structures**
Use a subject-predicate-object construction wherever possible.
Construct sentences that follow in a sequential order. (When you get to the light, turn left.)
Also, look for assumptive constructions. (Go to the light. Turn left.)
- ▶ **Use parallelism**
Parallel structures helps users anticipate, and reduces the amount of extra deciphering.
Don't join short parallel sentences into long, complex ones.
- ▶ **Use instructional design principles**
Provide a “learning objective.” Focus on outcomes, not objectives.
Use a given-new contract and feedback. (Build on something that's previously given, then link it to something new.)
Show anticipated results. Readers can continue, confident that they're on the right path.
- ▶ **Use the appropriate mood, and use it consistently**
Indicative mood - for general assertions, facts, explanations, questions.
Imperative mood - for requests or commands.
- ▶ **Use controlled language**
Put tight controls on vocabulary, word forms, and grammatical constructions.
Find the simplest word for a concept and use only that word.
Use only one form of a word (example: choose to use “list” as a noun or verb, not both).
Avoid polysemy (single word, many meanings), synonymy (multiple words, same meaning, and homonymy (same sound, different meanings).
Edit to remove “clutter.” It reduces the amount of deciphering to be done. Don't name things that don't need naming.
Avoid pronouns. Often, readers are not clear about which noun is being modified.
- ▶ **Keep your schema consistent**
Once readers figure out the schema, their comprehension levels increase.
Clearly delineate components: introductory text, steps, commands, headings.
Use clear labels: captions, alt-image tags, placeholders, headers, and so on.
- ▶ **Use visual cues**
Not only do visual cues and feedback reduce your word count, but also help readers decipher what to do.
Constrain user input. Use sliders and other closed-range techniques to help users figure out instructions.
Use screen tips, cues, and feedback messages.
Dim non-editable choices.
Use previews.
Use affordance and metaphors.