

India: Many languages, one emerging market

Elanna Mariniello, Matthias Steiert & Afaf Steiert

The Indian translation industry is a \$500 million market and is expected to increase drastically within the coming three years. This may come as a shock to some; however, both the general industry and translation in India have been creeping into the forefront of global business recently. In 2010, Reuters' Alastair Sharp pointed to the fact that both Google and Microsoft placed Arabic and Hindi in their top ten languages that need prioritized attention. As stated by Ram Kesarwani, the director of Translation India, "one of the most important criteria for flourishing commercial activity in any state or country is easing the language barrier." Industry and translation go hand in hand.

Logically, it makes perfect sense: An emerging market calls for the translation of documents and reports, speeches and procedures, articles and literature. It is not, however, the most logical jump to consider a growing market in conjunction with the expansion of its translation industry. In fact, it is overwhelmingly taken for granted. The general public expects to receive breaking news on the market trends in India in their own language without considering the transformative gap the information had to travel through. They expect answers to political dilemmas, detailed government policies, technology advice and support, and even instantaneous Twitter updates.

The Indian translation industry is especially interesting to analyze, as the general industry has reached a certain level of

maturity over the past few years. Invest in India, an online platform dedicated to promoting lucrative investment opportunities in the country, states in "Language and Translation Industry of India: A Historical Perspective" that "Tier II and III cities in India have a huge potential for investments in the emerging outsourcing market, IT, offshoring and retail and real estate development areas. With a GDP growth expected to trail at 8% over this decade, India stands to benefit from the rapid development of these emerging economic sectors." This is in opposition to many countries that are showing slowing gross domestic product (GDP) growth (Figure 1). *Businessweek* has called India an "emerging giant" and asserted that over the next decade, developing nations' share of world GDP is expected to grow from one-fifth to one-third. During the next two decades, China, India, Brazil and Russia alone will add to their populations about 225 million consumers who earn at least \$15,000 a year.

While the growth of the Indian market has received noticeable attention, the growth of translation has been publicized less to the general public and more within the translation community.

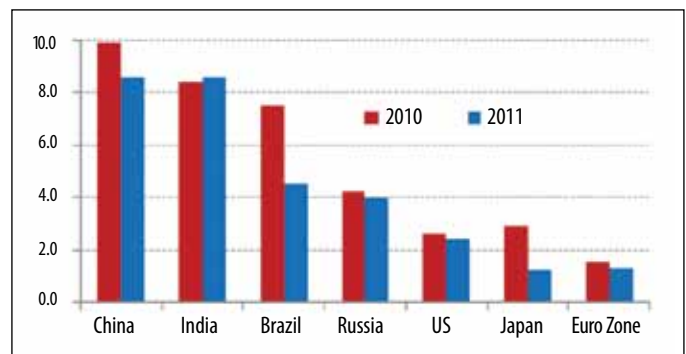


Figure 1: GDP growth outlook and percentages, 2010 and 2011.



Elanna Mariniello (left) began working with Afaf Translations in 2010. Matthias Steiert (center), cofounder of Afaf Translations, specializes in German pharmaceutical translations. He holds a Ph.D. in biochemistry from the University of Basel. Afaf Steiert (right), president and cofounder of Afaf Translations, works as a conference Arabic interpreter and translator. She holds an M.Sc. in molecular biology from the University of Basel.

Those within the community know that the Indian translation market is looking toward quite a steady growth. *The Hindu* reflects that the industry “is regarded as a great consumer base and especially as more and more multinational companies are setting up shop here and the need to speak the language of the local populace is being felt more strongly than ever before.”

At the same time, the fact that English is extensively spoken throughout the country provides a strong base for the Indian translation industry to expand its services into delivering translations from and into English and many different target languages. In fact, Nascom reports that India is one of the most popular locations for business process outsourcing and IT outsourcing. In an article dedicated to the history of the Indian translation industry, leading translator Ravi Kumar cites that both types of outsourcing were even predicted to grow ten-fold between 2007 and 2010. The overwhelming presence of foreign companies in India has created an increased need for English speakers, translations into English, and translations from English into a variety of Indian languages and dialects.

The historical development of translation in India was borne precisely out of this linguistic diversity (Figure 2). At the moment, Standard Hindi is the official principal language of India, with English coming in as the second. In 1961, statistics showed that India had roughly 1,652 mother tongues. While this was the official number, it didn't take into consideration a number of mother tongues that were unclassifiable or unidentifiable. Kumar astutely mentions that “linguistically, India is made up of many mini-Indias.” With such a vast variety of languages spoken, the need for translation was undeniable, even 50 years ago. More prominent translation services began to emerge in India in the late 1990s as ease of communication improved, mainly due to the internet. Prior to the internet boom, linguists and translators had to work more diligently to find work, often traveling farther for work and without the help of online translation tools.

The Indian government took notice of this linguistic diversity as well. Kumar related that it initiated a language policy to create a system of protocols for language use within the public sphere: “The Language Policy of India relating to the use of languages in administration, education, judiciary, legislature, mass

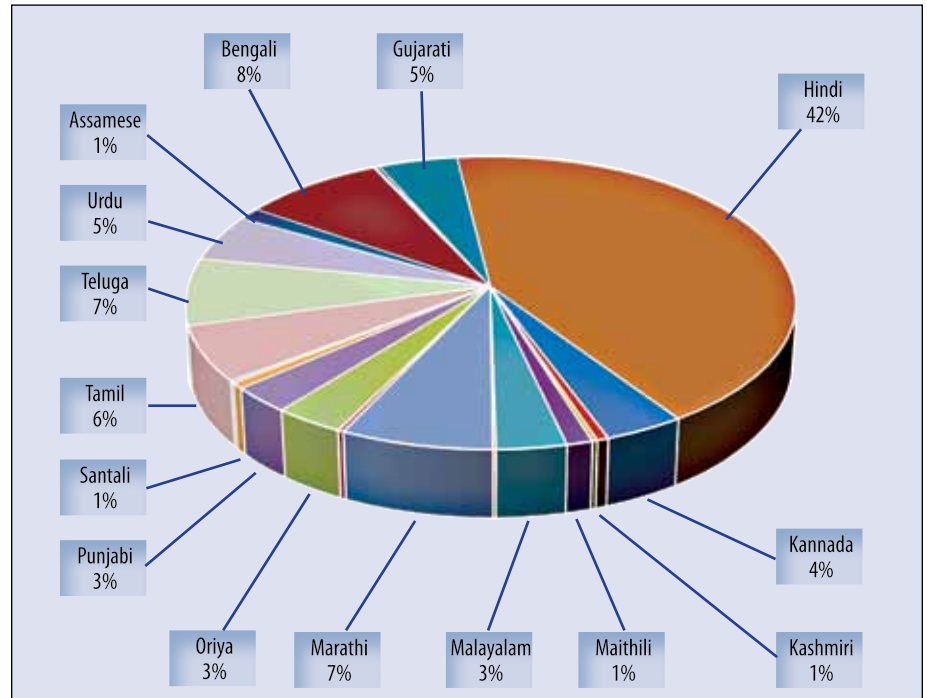


Figure 2: Distribution of 15 Indian languages.

We speak your language.

Everywhere.

ADAPT
LOCALIZATION

www.adapt-localization.com
adapt@adapt-localization.com

Region Focus

communication, etc., is pluralistic in its scope. It is both language-development oriented and language-survival oriented. The policy is intended to encourage the citizens to use their mother tongue in certain delineated levels and domains through some gradual processes, but the stated goal of the policy is to help all languages to develop into fit vehicles of communication at their designated areas of use, irrespective of their nature or status like major, minor, or tribal languages." In essence, it's a policy that promotes the use of all languages, without attention to language preferences or those languages that are more prevalent in society.

In addition, the Central Institute of Indian Languages introduced a plan for the National Translation Mission (NTM), which is aimed toward concentrating all vital translations in a central location. The NTM provides tools for translation, and a system of evaluation for gauging language proficiency in a variety of Indian languages. The website is currently

in 23 languages, and its mission states that NTM fulfills a "government of India initiative to make knowledge-based texts accessible in all Indian languages listed in the VIII schedule of the Constitution through translation." They also focus upon improving translation tools, helping translators become accredited, and awarding educational grants and scholarships.

Aside from the NTM and the emerging economy, the growth of the Indian translation industry cannot be considered separately from the establishment of a very important organization: the Indian Translators Association. The organization has played a driving role in the Indian translation industry and has forced the general public to redefine and reassess the importance of the profession. While the general industry has slowly crept forward in the global marketplace, a team of determined translators watched as the translation industry began to follow suit. They decided that official recognition as an entity was an

important step toward the development of the sector.

The original idea, set forth by the association's founder Ravi Kumar, was to unite language professionals. He wanted to create a forum through which translators could share ideas and support one another. The first step was to create a Translators Initiative, a forum through which members of the translation community could work together to draft a proposal for the Translators Association. Following a 2005 meeting with the members of the initiative, a proposal was drafted, and the Indian Translators Association was officially recognized on December 19, 2006. The association has gone full speed ahead since its 2006 inception. Its website boasts that the association has "developed relations with leading translator associations at regional, national and international levels with a view to exchange information as well as develop relations that help in the up-gradation of translation as well as technological skills of its members and converge on areas of mutual interests." It has grown drastically since its inception five years ago, and it held a conference in New Delhi entitled "The Role of Translation in Nation Building, Nationalism, and Supra-Nationalism" in December 2010.

As with any emerging market, there are still struggles to be overcome on the path toward India's future growth. These challenges include a perceived lack of organization, lack of professionalism and a continued effort to master the English language. Despite these challenges, the statistics, reports, articles and associations all reflect the same defining factor: growth. **M**

References

- Engardio, Pete, Michael Arndt, and Geri Smith. "Emerging Giants." *Businessweek*, 31 July 2006.
- Kesarwani, Ram. "Growth of Translation in India as Commercial Activity." *Articleclick.com*, 4 November 2010.
- Kumar, Ravi. "Language and Translation Industry of India: A Historical Perspective." *Translation Industry of India*, 31 March 2007.
- "National Translation Mission." *National Translation Mission*. Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, India.
- Sharp, Alastair. "Microsoft, Google eye Arabic web growth potential." *Reuters*, 24 April 2010.
- "Translation Industry Set for Big Growth in India." *The Hindu*, 19 October 2009.



Agility

It's about the speed, isn't it?
Today's competition is about getting your products or content to your global customers faster. Rapid development leads to very short release cycles, and almost instantaneous publication. Use our agile localization best practices to accelerate your localization process and jump ahead of the curve. And remember, you don't need to be purely "Agile" to be truly agile.

Moravia
worldwide

www.moraviaworldwide.com/agile-localization