Language standardization in e-commerce by applying terminology structured content management: Case Colombia

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Abstract. In recent years a number of developing countries are pushing forward to achieve a technological infrastructure capable of providing economic and social development without losing the focus on an effective international insertion. In part, this infrastructure considers the massive use of the New Information and Communication Technologies ICTs for Business which proposes as a key element for development. Moving in this direction Colombia as a developing country is implementing the use of these technologies in official procurement and licensing which brings several considerations in the way buyers, providers and users at large, deal with the language in describing, classifying and sharing Product Data regarding Information Management and commercial proposes conjunctly.

This paper aims to highlight the role of Terminology Work in terms of Structured Content Management in e-commerce and how terminology principles and resources (International Terminology Standards) can and should be implemented in a context of rapid technological and economic growth such as Colombia that is living a crucial change in the way of making business mostly with official entities.

Keywords. Internationalization, terminology, e-commerce.

1. Introduction

With over 46 million consumers, the third largest GDP in South America ($369,8 billion, 2012 est.) according to World Bank (Banco Mundial, 2012) and a robust free market economy, Colombia is a strong economic force in the region. Investor's confidence and commercial ties with major world economies are on the rise. Foreign direct investment (FDI) has increased fivefold and exports have increased fourfold since 2000, according to the Colombian Embassy in Washington. Colombia's economy has been growing steadily and faster than the Latin American average, and the nation is quickly becoming one of the world's leading emerging economies. In fact, some economists have included it in a new class of growing economies – CIVETS – Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey and South Africa, which are characterized by their dynamism and high prospects for growth in the coming decades.

Colombia's outstanding economic stability has fostered foreign direct investment, and FDI inflows reached $15 billion in 2011 (Ministerio de Comercio Industria y Turismo, 2013). The United States continues to be the main source of FDI in Colombia. And according to the UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development) Colombia is the fifth country in the world attracting FDI (UNCTAD, 2013). According to (EMarketer, 2011), growth in the sector has been fueled by online marketing of airline tickets, technology, distributors of recognized brands, department stores, tickets, discount coupons and all sorts of goods and services, which in 2012 will account for more than $ 250 billion (around € 185.9 billion) in sales worldwide.

1.1. Trade and export growth

The strengthening of economic and commercial relations is a priority for Colombia's development. As a result, the country has implemented seven free trade agreements (FTAs) with 15 countries. By 2014, it is expected that the country will have implemented FTAs with 49 countries, gaining preferential access to 1.5 billion consumers worldwide. Colombia's exports have more than

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tripled since 2000 and exceeded $56 billion in 2012 being its main destination the United States (World Trade Organization, 2012).

The internationalization of the Colombian economy has already begun, back from the 90s, as an official economic policy and it has brought a number of changes in the domestic market. In terms of development, the entrepreneurial culture has also helped to foster innovation within firms and to reach international recognition. Important government organizations have been created to assist Colombian firms in their path to become international. At the same time the electronic market has suffered a very important growth representing an important part of today's economy in Colombia. One remarkable aspect from the growth and international projection of the Colombian Economy is the rapid electronic commerce as a way of internationalization not only for firms in the service sector but also for any kind of firm trying to venture its operations abroad. Estimates from the Colombian Chamber of Electronic Commerce in 2011 $ 1.2 billion (more than € 892 million) in goods and services were sold in the country via the Internet."

This scenario shows a very crucial momentum for the Colombian economy in order to consolidate as a real strong open market economy. In doing so Colombia's government is also innovating and facilitating the insertion of Colombian firms into the world of e-business

With the decision of the Colombian Government to implement a Virtual Unified Platform (Colombia Compra Eficiente, 2013) for the purchase of products and services a very important step has been taken towards the offering of products and services in the field of e-commerce by firms looking for contracts and business with the Colombian State. At the same time, it brings with it a number of interesting challenges. The first of these is the seeking of transparency in the purchase and contracting processes by the State, since through this platform these processes become traceable and seeking also to avoid public goods squandering, preventing of buying the same products with different prices. Another purpose of this strategy is to create unified policies as guidelines for buyers and suppliers in order to create a more efficient market. The Colombian Government buys and constantly engages in all the important aspects of the national life such as education and defense among others. On the other hand, this new business scenario demands a new paradigm for public and private companies in terms of commercial electronic communication, that is to say how communication is performed when businesses become virtual

More challenges are brought along with this initiative. For instance, the huge task of harmonizing these business processes in all official agencies and more specifically the task of standardizing products and services electronic data management that both suppliers and buyers (mainly the State in this case) should have to be embedded in a unified electronic market scheme, which is the aim of the Colombian Purchase Efficient Agency (Agencia de Contratación Pública, Colombia Compra Eficiente). With this Agency, the government made mandatory the use of this electronic tool, for any procurement process. In its website, the Agency provides training and informative documents, so companies interested in registering could appropriately classify their goods and services and understand all the undertaking procedure.

1.2. Product data management

To achieve the goal of increasing efficiency and transparency on the State purchases, a serious work is required in the way how suppliers and buyers in the electronic market managed, stored and offer their products and services data. In other words, agreements in how products and services are called, classified, and stored must be reached so these data management could be unified accordingly to rigorous and scientific principles that prevent errors in communication.

Not only agreements on prices, supply and demand must be addressed but also the interoperability between data of products must be ensured. If standardized systems of classification and description of products and services are implemented, electronic communication between suppliers and customers will be as needed, interoperable. This is a reality in which we are now engaged and to which we must adapt in the best way possible.

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This is an example on how firms can become more international implementing electronic marketing as a strategy of differentiation, by facilitating a broader access to markets all around the world. Since business opportunities can be found not only in domestic markets but also in a global horizon, this gives the opportunity for Colombian firms to become more profitable and more cost-efficient.

Product Data Management as a way of collection, storage, use and reuse of all kind of Data (terms, measurements, Product Description, Classification) related with the firms activities, concerns every aspect of a Product or service life cycle, it includes processes such as production, logistics (procurement, and distribution) marketing and sales, maintenance, among others. This Data Management provides information to all levels at the firm and when it is built according to unified principles it brings efficiency in communication and ensures a better performance in the commercial activities in which the firm is involved.

Outside the firm, the usage of standardized language and data in terms of Structured Content Management is a requirement in several schemas of e-commerce, such as:

- Business to consumer
- Business to Business
- E-procurement

The application of terminology principles and a concept oriented scope when managing Product Data is an optimal way of assuring common conventions not only on language but also in a process of knowledge description.

Terminology principles can be the pattern to manage huge amount of information produced within a firm and for commercial purposes. This information collected and converted into data of every nature is the key to successfully reach a precise communication across firm's levels. Data storage and retrieval in the shape of Terminology Databases, Ontologies, or Thesauri, among others, is also crucial to have an information resource where all Product Data are collected and classified for its use in commercial communication. That is why to take advantage of the work done in International Terminology Standards is a key factor to achieve a solid ground to develop the Product Data Management required in the context describe in this paper.

2. International terminology standards

International standards are built upon the process of agreements among national delegations representing several sectors involved in a specific area to be standardized, *e.g.* suppliers, customers, government and other groups such as consumers. The agreements are made about specifications and criteria that are consistently applied in areas such as: classification of materials, manufacturing and product supply, testing and analysis, and last but not least, the agreements on terminology the products description ((Drame, 2006)). In other words, the value of the agreements on the terminology used in exchanging products and services is as important as the agreements themselves. At the same time, it is clear that international standardization is forged in the framework of the international economy, thus, it serves as a technical support for the economic sectors to be able to encounter agreed solutions to the differences between technical specifications, which is often a serious barrier for the product data interchange needed within the framework established by the Colombian Government and presented in this paper.

The foremost aim of International Terminology Standardization is: "[...] *to facilitate the exchange of goods and services through the elimination of technical barriers to trade*" (ISO/TC37, 2007). This foremost purpose left clear the commercial content interrelated to the actions of agreements that are around the international normative activity, which is developed in all organizations equally dedicated to designing standards in different specific areas. One of these areas is the development of terminology in order to make technical communication as accurate as possible and serving at the same time as the foundation for Product Data Management.

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Terminological standardization, understood as a set of methodological and technical standards for the development of language resources makes part of terminology management, which is the set of activities related to the design, classification, organization and presentation of language resources which is perfectly applicable in product data as well. A quite appropriate definition of this concept is given by Wright and Budin, who describe it as "any deliberate manipulation of terminological information" (Wright/Budin, 1997). This definition includes a very broad overview in matters of the terminological work approaches and potential resources that can be obtained from its management. Experts have divided terminology management into two approaches: the first one is the descriptive terminology management, and the second one is the prescriptive terminology management, where the terminological standardization belongs.

Taking these aspects of International Terminology Standardization it is clear that for the purpose of the Colombian initiative regarding business with the official sector, International Terminology Standards provide a set of common criteria in order to make commercial and official transaction through the internet in a more efficient way. For the development of business in the national context the application of International Terminology Standards is crucial and taking into account the direction given by the Colombian Government with the Virtual Unified Platform considerations in the way Product Data are managed must be turn to a consensus in the way these Data can become really unified.

According to the data shown in this brief attempt to call attention on the importance of terminology principles in the shape of International Standards, a national terminology policy can be achieved counting on the participation of all actors involved (Diaz Vasquez, 2010). This will lead to a truly consolidation of a better communication and information management favoring not only business at the national level but also fostering the internationalization of Colombian's Economy.

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