

Searching the Web in Languages You Don't Speak

Sometimes, surfing the *world* wide web, it's easy to forget that some people speak languages you don't know, considering that the majority of hits you'll get on any given search will, most times, be in English. In fact, of course, there are millions of internet sites in foreign languages. Researchers in maritime history, or any other subject, will find accessing these sites useful, but locating them can be difficult. If English is your native tongue, how do you go about searching and reading pages in other languages? Not surprisingly, the web offers some extraordinary tools for doing just that.

One first step for finding foreign-language resources, particularly when you're familiar with the country and its language, is to search Google's 'local' version. Start at <http://www.google.fr> (France), <http://www.google.vn> (Vietnam), <http://www.google.lv> (Latvia), or any of about 170 locations. All of the locations are listed towards the bottom of Google's **Language Tools** page at http://www.google.com/language_tools.

Often, the default search will still come back in English. You may see a link that reads: "Google.de offered in: Deutsch" (or as appropriate; for example, Switzerland's site, <http://www.google.ch>, offers a range of language options). When you click on that link, you'll automatically change the default search language.

Many other top-level domains exist, including **.name** (for individuals), **.pro** (for professionals), **.travel**, **.aero** (for the airline industry), and **.museum**. See, for example, <http://aimm.museum>, the Arkansas Inland Maritime Museum. In addition, there are sub-levels based on the type of museum, such as **garden.museum** or **maritime.museum**. Only about a dozen maritime museums have registered these names (for example, <http://wgmather.maritime.museum>) and most actually don't work properly. Perhaps, over time, more and more maritime museums will identify themselves in this manner.

When you do find a potentially interesting piece of foreign text, the web offers many impressive automatic translation services. Of course, none will convince anyone you're a native speaker, but they are effective at conveying the intent of text in a different language. Try **Babel Fish** (<http://babelfish.altavista.com>), which offers dozens of language options—and not just translations into—or from—English. You can also put in a URL and Babel Fish will translate the results, as well as the results of each link on that page.

Google, not surprisingly, has an impressive set of tools at the Language Tools page, mentioned above. Like Babel Fish, it can translate text between languages or do translations on the fly. You can also search in more than a dozen languages from this page, defining both the language you speak and the different language in which you want to search. As results are returned, Google translates them for you.

For more language help, say, some assistance with a language that you haven't used in a while—try <http://www.freelang.net/>, a site that offers 115 different foreign language dictionaries that you can download to your computer or use directly online. **YourDictionary** (<http://www.yourdictionary.com>) offers standard- and translation dictionaries in hundreds of languages. **WorldLingo** (<http://www.worldlingo.com>) offers free *human* translations of small bits of text, in addition to many specialized, industry-specific translation services.

If all of these language- and translation-related sites have piqued your interest in the the topic of language itself, it is worth a look to visit **Omniglot** (<http://www.omniglot.com>), a fascinating site that describes writing systems and languages of the world.

Suggestions for other sites worth mentioning are welcome at shipindex@yahoo.com. See <http://www.shipindex.org> for a compilation of over 100,000 ship names from indexes to dozens of books and journals.

—Peter McCracken

