

Using language as a tool to reach customers - Samoan OPACs at Wellington City Libraries.

One of the pre-requisite features of Wellington's Whekenui – the new library system – was that it needed the ability to support more than our two national languages.

One such group targeted is Pacific Islanders. Samoan People outnumber other Pacific Islanders around the Wellington region, hence the Samoan language was chosen as the first. Also – at a practical level, the Samoan alphabet uses the letters of the English alphabet.

This was an excellent opportunity to use technology to enhance services to Samoan customers – to encourage Samoans of all ages to use libraries more and interact with computers where the medium of instruction is Samoan. Similarly, having instructions in one's own language gives a sense of belonging or partnership.

The translation process went through several editions until finalised. The initial translation draft was prepared by staff, which was tested via customer focus groups, then the whole translated work was quality checked by two Samoan language experts - Afioga Galumalemana Alfred Hunkin, Head of Samoan Studies (Victoria University) and Afioga Muagututi'a Harry Tauafafi (Wellington City Council).

Certain principles were used to guide the translation. Samoan words for much of the everyday English language already existed and this was good for the Help text. Where library terms were concerned e.g. for the bibliographic fields, it was important to give more precise translation as well as retaining the real meaning of the terms.

In some cases, if the terms were new and no Samoan word existed, transliterations of the terms were made, for example, computer – komepiuta, item – aitema, click – kiliki, loan – louni, e-mail – imeli or i-meli. In the case of Magazine – mekasini - the dictionary meaning is tusiata, which is too general. Tusiata means a picture book.

Some new concepts encountered had to be redefined - for example, fa'aulu (enter); entering on a computer is not the same as entering a room (ulufale). Series means fa'asolo as in a TV series. Thus series title was translated to ulutala fa'asolo (a title is periodically done.) Another example which caused some discussion was "download" - it was translated auina ifo (auina meaning send, and ifo, in this context, downwards). In one case – for "the web", guidance was sought from back in Samoa as to the appropriate concept to be used – which became upega (or a fishing net).

Some working decisions –

1. To use the colloquial style language wherever possible.
2. To consider the actual display on the screen – it had to sensibly fit the layout.
3. To use the umlaut as a substitute to indicate where the macron should be, so older browsers still displayed it in a helpful manner. Written Samoan is very important. The macron and the glottal stop, are critical marks that determine the meanings of the words.

The Samoan OPAC was presented to the Pacific Island Forum in April and warmly endorsed by the Wellington Pacific Island community leaders attending.

There is now a choice of language for customers to use. Language is a tool that libraries can use to reach out to customers. It is a gift to use to enable customers feel more part of the library, have a reason to try to use a computer, and feel comfortable about searching. If you would like further details about our Samoan translation please contact Lotofoa.Fiu@wcc.govt.nz (Lotofoa Fiu, Samoan OPAC Project Coordinator).