CTAN goes multi-lingual: Additional language support for the Web portal

Gerd Neugebauer

Abstract

TeX is used for many languages: support in the TeX engines and macro packages is abundant, but the CTAN portal has been available in English only. Now we are conducting an experiment to provide the Web presentation in German as well.

1 Introduction

Modern Web frameworks are equipped with means for internationalizing the presentation. We are currently attempting to make use of these means for the CTAN portal, `https://www.ctan.org`.
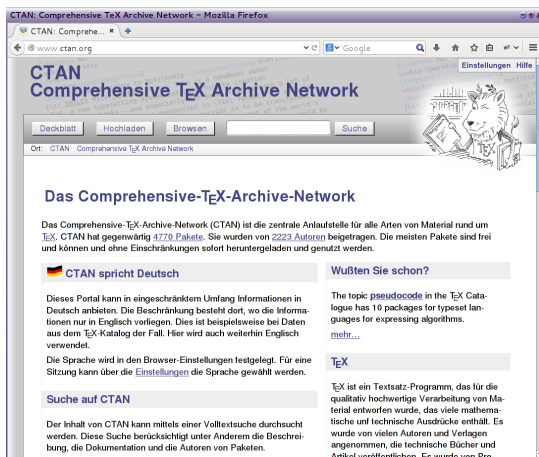

Figure 1: The cover page in German

Whenever you visit the portal, the language is automatically selected for you. This magic happens in a negotiation between the browser and the server in the background. In the browser you can configure your preferred languages (cf. figures 2–4).
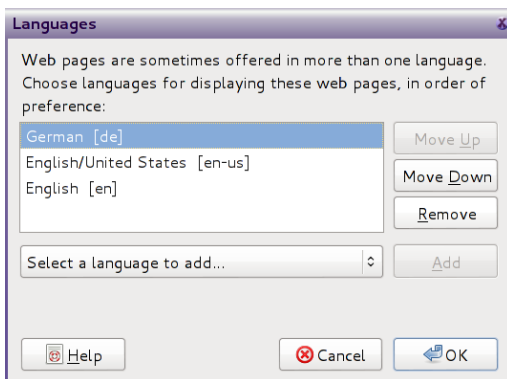

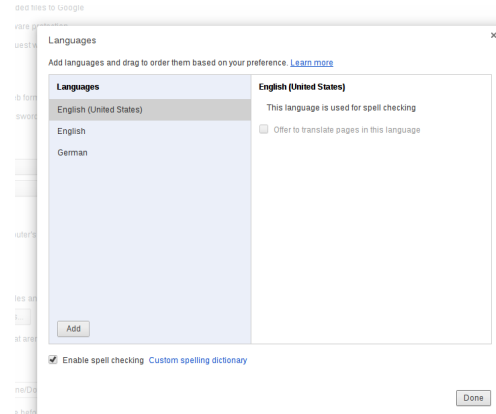**Figure 2**: Language configuration in Firefox

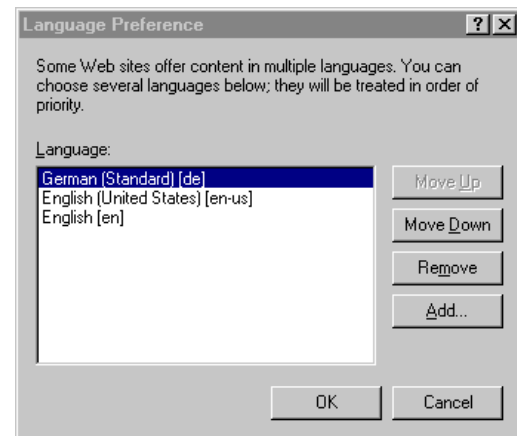**Figure 3**: Language configuration in Chrome

Figure 4: Language configuration in IE

When you request a page, the browser passes these language preferences to the server, where the list is compared with the list of supported languages. The best fit — or the default fallback — is then chosen. Currently, the CTAN portal supports English and German. Thus it is usually sufficient for you to navigate to the CTAN portal to see your preferred language from these alternatives.

You can also explicitly choose the language on the settings page by clicking on the appropriate flag (figure 5). This selection is valid only for the current session. When you return later, this setting is forgotten.

2 Features

Internationalization includes the localized presentation of several types of content:

- The page frame which includes header and footer as well as the static parts of the dynamic pages
- The page content for the "static" pages
- The dynamic content from the TeX archive

rtal (skinning) to fit to your personal taste. This feature can
CTAN portal and without being logged in.

Local Settings

☑ Apply hyphenation

eans that
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browser in-
t preserved.
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is activated

Language Selection

The language is negotiated with the browser
and kept during the current session. This
choice can be overwritten for the current ses-
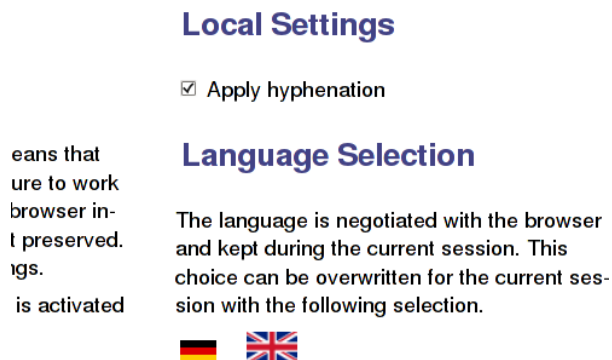sion with the following selection.

🇩🇪 🇬🇧

Figure 5: The language selection on the settings page

- The dynamic content from the Catalogue
- The dynamic content from the search index

For the current internationalization experiment,
only the frame and some of the static pages are
offered in German, as a starting point. It should pri-
marily help to make it more comfortable for visitors
in their first steps.

Some pages have intentionally not been trans-
lated. For instance, the upload page (`https://www.ctan.org/upload`) is provided in English only since
the communication language with the CTAN team
is English. Thus, an uploader should not be encour-
aged to try another language since this might not be
understood on our side.

3 Limitations

The major limitations are derived from missing data
in the back-end. The files in the TEX archive are
provided by the numerous authors. The language is
whatever the author provides — for instance in the
package documentation.

The TEX catalogue is mainly in English. It is
partially prepared to carry texts in different lan-
guages. For instance the descriptions are to a small
degree already present in languages other than En-
glish. The CTAN team is presently not able to pro-
vide translations, due to limited resources and skills.

If no appropriate localized text is available the
English version is used. This can be seen in figure 1.
Here the text for the topic teaser is in English while
the other parts of the page are in German.

Another limitation applies to the search. The
search is currently language-agnostic. It should in
the future be based on the language settings, in that
entries with the proper language should be ranked
higher than non-matching entries. Maybe entries

for languages not understood by the user should be
suppressed completely. But this already belongs into
the next section on "visions".

4 Visions

In the future we could consider to develop the interna-
tionalization of the CTAN portal in several directions.
First, of course there are more languages to be sup-
ported. Right now the language-specific texts are
contained in 31 files. These files are either mapping
files which map keys to language-specific texts, or
complete pages which are present in separate incar-
nations.

To support a new language is initially a matter
of providing these 31 files and adding a configura-
tion option for the new language. However, this
isn't enough. The portal is not static. The content
changes over time. Thus we would need a commit-
ment that we have volunteers for the new supported
language to guarantee continuity.

For the support of even more languages the
existing administration interface could be extended.
Then maintenance of the different languages could be
performed via a Web interface by different persons.

The other side has already been mentioned.
The TEX catalogue has to be augmented with new
language-specific texts. The same applies here. The
support has to be guaranteed for future changes.
Thus volunteers for a long-term engagement would
be required.

We must also reconsider the processes in the
CTAN team. They are currently not designed for
parallel processing of a change for a single package.
These processes work well for the small team which
is currently active. The more languages that are
supported, the more people have to work on one
change. Unfortunately this seems to be beyond the
capabilities of the CTAN team right now.

5 Epilogue

I hope that the experiment with the German lan-
guage for the CTAN portal succeeds. Feedback in any
direction is welcome. For discussions, please consider
using the mailing list `ctanweb@dante.de`. You can
subscribe via `https://lists.dante.de/mailman/listinfo/ctanweb`.

Keep on TEXing — in many languages.

⋄ Gerd Neugebauer
  Im Lerchelsböhl 5
  64521 Groß-Gerau (Germany)
  `gene@gerd-neugebauer.de`
  `www.gerd-neugebauer.de`