Multilingual Nick

Translations That Have to Survive an Audit



Mack Palomäki · Ljusa Tider

Thirteen countries, thirteen first languages. Everything in this talk exists because language had to carry everything I built.

Croatia · Iran · Pakistan · India · Spain · Vietnam · Indonesia · Singapore · Denmark · Russia · China · Sweden · Nigeria

Every automated check passed this German string. It says something its English source does not.

"Determines if your Plone is optimized for **small or** large sites…" → "Optimiert Plone für große Websites…"

A wrong button on a medical page is a wrong device. In twenty-three languages it is twenty-three places to be wrong.

Yes · No

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No · Yes

EU law wants safety information in the official language of every market: up to twenty-three languages, each carrying legal liability.

MDR · IVDR · Machinery Regulation · General Product Safety Regulation

Content is what an editor writes; a string is what a developer defines. Different pipelines, different failures, and the regulator holds both liable.

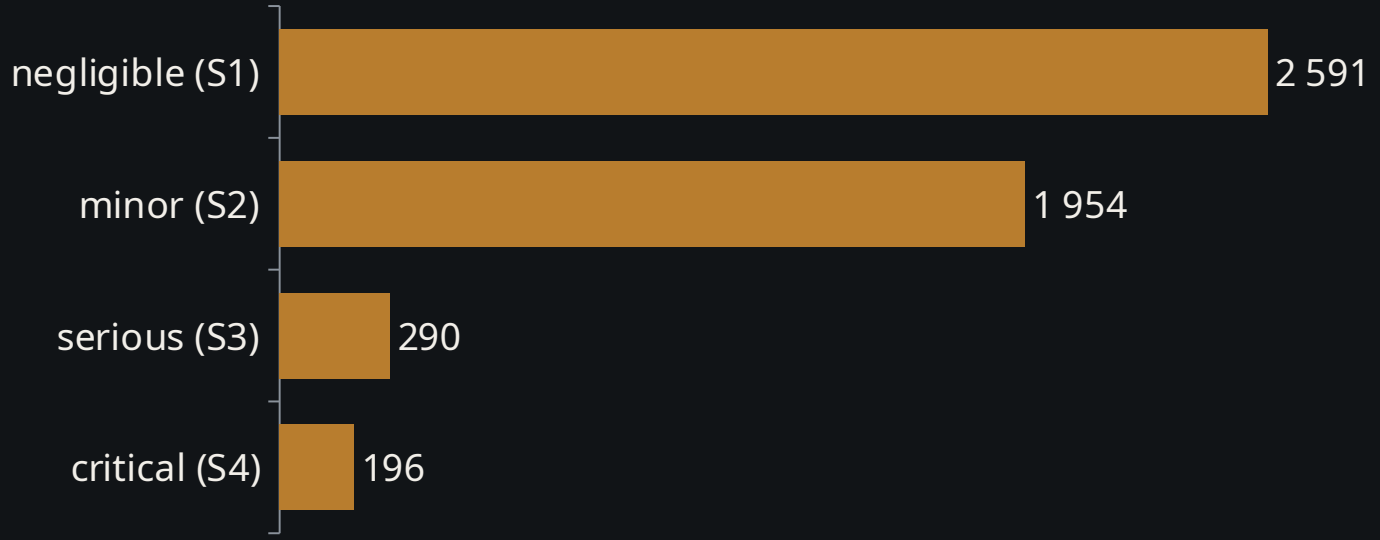
CONTENT
pages, an IFU, a safety notice
written by an editor in the CMS
translated as documents
language roots, translation groups

STRINGS
buttons, labels, error messages
defined by a developer in code
translated as catalogues
.po files, message ids

The corpus has its own wrong buttons: Enabled shown as Disabled, a password field swapped, "case sensitive" rendered as "trivial". All three are closed CAPA records.

ko · ko · hi

Every source message is classified for severity before translation, and every translation carries a risk number: 196 critical-class messages, 7,936 translations flagged unacceptable by name.



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3,279 messages · 1,412 with a `#. Default` · 43.1 %

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Volto 100 % · volto-slate 0 % · Plone 43 % have a `#. Default`

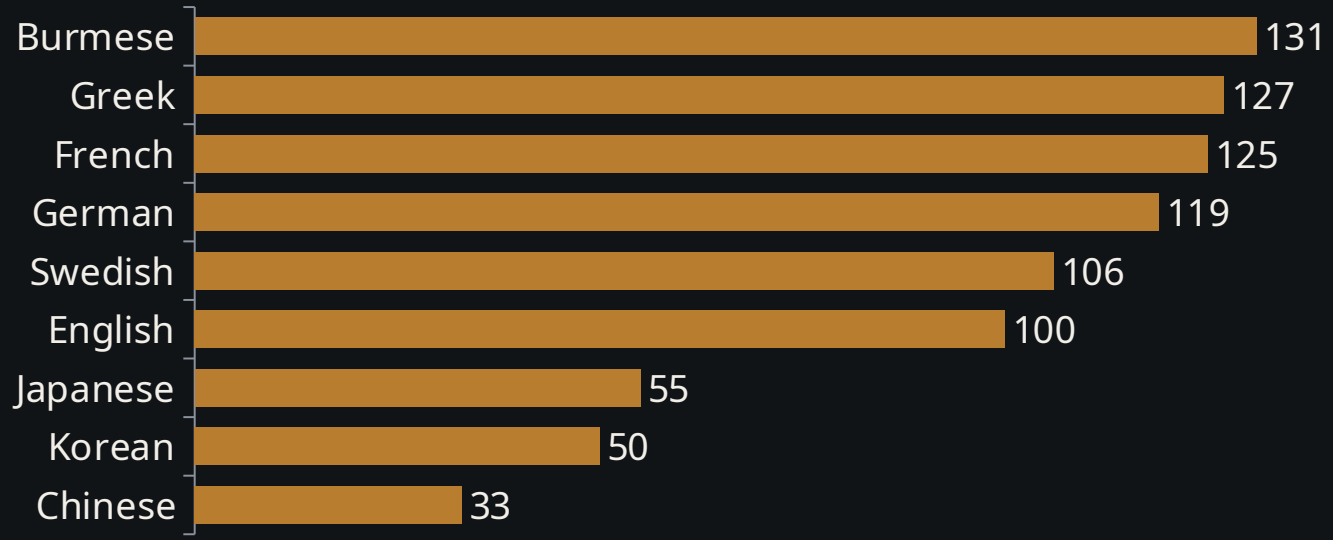
Even "Yes" and "No" carry defects in seventy-one languages: three found computing this slide, still in the queue.

是 · 예 · Ja · Oui · Kyllä · ဟုတ်ကဲ့

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sr-Cyrl *Да* · ar *لا* · es *sí* · ro *da*

The same button has to hold a third more Burmese and a third as much Chinese. On a button, expansion is truncation, and truncation is a different meaning.



One batch import put 3,687 translations in the wrong rows across 43 languages. The tool has taken one string at a time ever since.

"Just have an LLM grade the translations." We did, paid for it, and stopped: a model's opinion of a translation is not evidence of anything.

Structural checks catch the mechanical failures: 96,000 findings at the first run, and the two dangerous categories read zero today.

placeholders · script · length ratio · duplicates · HTML balance · URL paths · ICU plurals · terminology

What the checks cannot see needed its own instrument: geometry, not judgement; candidates, never verdicts.

```
embed(EN), embed(msgstr)
    → distance
    → per-language robust z
    → candidate
    → a human disposes
```

Pace is enforced where it cannot be argued with: batch → one string → two calls → a database token that must be three seconds old.

```
batch import                  (shuffled)
      ↓
one string per call           (no file to shuffle)
      ↓
two calls per string          (the dry run is the review evidence)
      ↓
a review token in the database, at least three seconds old,
checked by a trigger on every update
```

The record is a database, not a set of files: one model for backend and frontend messages that keeps what gettext knows.

```
platform · domain · msgctxt · msgid
default_text · source_type · has_default_comment
```

The corpus this week: 5,222 messages, 358,627 translations, 71 languages, 7 platforms.

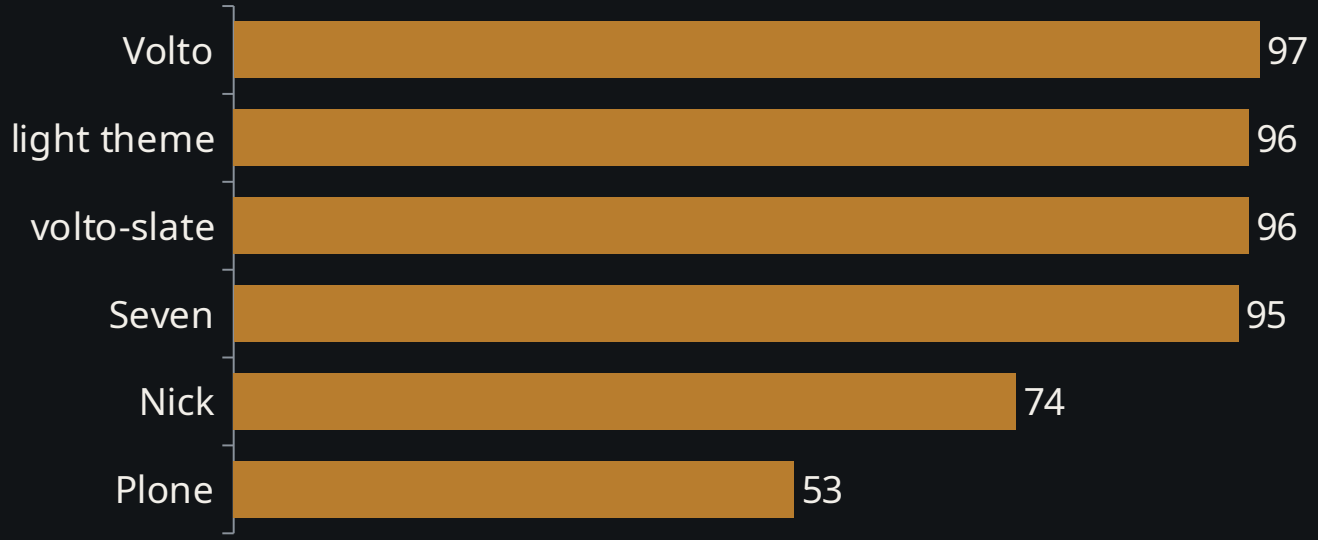
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23,718 preserved terms · 9,428 agreed translations · 1,546 concept definitions · 86,723 corrections applied

Four triggers on one table are the audit argument: the source must be canonical, the workflow declared, the operator identified, the change audited.

```
validate_translation_source_trigger   BEFORE INSERT OR UPDATE
enforce_workflow_trigger              BEFORE UPDATE
trg_enforce_operator_identity         BEFORE INSERT OR DELETE OR UPDATE
translations_audit_trigger            AFTER  INSERT OR DELETE OR UPDATE
```

Coverage, honestly: the interfaces are in the mid-nineties, Plone classic at fifty-two by policy, and Nick at seventy-four because eighty-nine of its strings are still empty in every language.



Three rules I argued yesterday, in this room, and will not re-argue.

1 Every language model runs locally, never on production — results cross through change control (Wednesday, slide 21)

2 Source control is self-hosted inside the EU: a repository holding audit findings is regulated material (slide 22)

3 The AI is a team member under the same discipline: 76 violation records, 48 named failure modes, 261 standing controls (slides 24–26)

In June the corpus was merged into Nick: 118 files, 62 locales, pulled by the release team. Polyglot is now a source of Plone's translations, not a consumer.

plone/nick #25 · merged 11 June 2026

It arrived through an export API: one scoped key, every pull audited. What Nick ships is a snapshot of the database, and a re-pull stays in sync.

306 pulls · 2 days · 3 platforms · 71 languages · one address · 303 × HTTP 200

Four pull requests against Volto have been open since 26 May, stalled on one question: one pull request, or one per language?

#8283 · #8284 · #8285 · #8286

Full effort on the interfaces, best effort on Plone classic, by decision. If this room wants more, that changes.

The PLIP proposes the first style guide for Plone's English source: the rules that make text translatable are the rules that make it good.

E1 sentence case · E2 no terminal period on labels · E8 one spelling · E11 named placeholders · E16 quotes · `#. Default` everywhere · governance

Where the PLIP stands: seconded, welcomed, and not decided, because nobody has carried it through three rooms.

23 Jan filed · 27 Jan tooling path (erral) · 12 Feb docs home (davisagli) and the three teams (stevepiercy) · 5 Mar +1 (tisto) · 14 Jun v1.5.0, closed by mistake · 17 Sep reopened

What I want from this room first: not a vote, a carrier.

Plone already has a living human translation community on Weblate: 69 languages, 59 of the last 100 commits. Everything here has to live alongside it.

collective/plone.app.locales · newest commit 21 September 2026

How should an AI-assisted, database-backed corpus live alongside Weblate?

- one pull request per language?
- a source Weblate pulls from?
- a review route the reviewers here can sustain?

A translated string is a claim about meaning. The general machinery for claims was yesterday's talk.

- one data model for backend and frontend i18n
- where `#. Default` versus `msgid` bites
- a method for catching meaning drift
- local models as an architectural decision
- an AI on regulated material without the audit trail becoming fiction
- what changes when translations carry legal weight