

Website Localization and Translation

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Website localization poses new challenges to translators and translation studies. The object of translation, the Web, is a new type of multidimensional source material and the translation of web material constitutes a new type of multilingual service.

Translation studies must try to integrate this new challenge as it has a lot to offer. On the other hand localization of web sites brings some new aspects into translation studies as well. The following paper attempts to clarify the key concepts and to describe the new object of translation, as well as to develop a strategy to apply approaches from translation studies to website localization.

1. Introduction

The following paper discusses the relation between web localization and translation; the former is a relatively new form of multilingual services which has not been dealt with adequately so far in translation studies. Some aspects of translation studies also apply to website localization, and vice versa website localization could provide some new insights into translation.

First, some light is shed on the central concepts of website localization. Next, we define and describe the process of website localization and its purpose by focusing on the overall aim of translating or localizing websites, which is followed by a brief description of methods and strategies used in the process of localizing websites integrating the role and the importance of business related aspects of localization.

When we speak of the localization of websites, the terminology seems rather clear, at least in English: website is a very practical term in English. A website encompasses all web pages which are accessible under a common Web address (domain name) such as www.petersandrini.net. A website consists of several documents, graphics, programs and so on, each of which is identified by a uniform resource

identifier (URI). In German, though, there is a terminology problem, as there is no equivalent term for website. When we talk about 'Webseiten' (web pages) or 'Homepage' in German we mean all pages on the World Wide Web for a specified company or institution. Today, the new term 'Webauftritt' has been created for the English term 'website'. In localization, it is important to note that the object of localization is a whole website and not just one single webpage.

The second term used in the title 'localization' is a term which is en vogue today and is defined as adapting a product to a particular locale (LISA 2003, Esselink 2001, Yunker 2003). A 'locale' refers to a collection of people who share a language, writing system and any other properties which may require a separate version of a product. This could be a region, a country, or just a language community.

Localization today is used in conjunction with the terms 'internationalization', which means the preparation of a product to make it suitable for efficient localization, and 'globalization' which signifies the global design of a product. Website localization is thus defined as the "process of modifying a website for a specific locale" (Yunker 2002: 17).

As translators we may ask ourselves whether translation is a part of localization, as pointed out in Esselink (2000), where the author defines localization as the overall task, with translation being just a part of the process, just like any other part of the process like project management, image adaptation or setting up a language gateway. This would imply that the localization professional is in command and the translator is downgraded to a mere contributor to provide foreign-language texts. On the other hand, translation studies have come a long way in pointing out that translation involves a linguistic as well as a cultural transfer and that the communicative intention of the target text is of overall importance (Nord 1997, Pym 2004) (reference). Translation thus, always involves some form of adaptation, like adaptation of text as well as of all other items relevant to the document such as graphics etc (cf. Horn-Helf in this volume). With website localization the text retreats into the background with all the multimedia gadgetry assembling around it. Nonetheless, the text still remains one of the key information assets within a web page. Translation as a task has a history of a few thousand years, whereas localization is a phenomenon of the last 20 years. So maybe

localization is the same old phenomenon with a new name, and thus a specific type of translation. In that case translation would be the broader concept.

In the real world there are indications for both assumptions: on the one hand, there are specific training courses for localization professionals (LRC), associations for professional localizers to support the notion of a new strong localization profession, and on the other hand, we have translation training institutes offering courses on localization and translators working in the localization industry. We have to admit, though, that translation studies are rather slow in adopting this new field of research. But there is no way around it, if translators and translation studies do not want to leave this field entirely over to IT-professionals and documentation experts. Translation must deal with localization in training programmes as well as in research. Otherwise translation will simply be reduced to a mere text substitution process within a broader localization effort.

2. Object of website localization

Let us now have a look at the object of localizing or translating: As already stated a website is a container with an address, the domain name, on it. The website contains different types of digital assets which can be texts, pictures, multimedia files such as audio and video streaming, as well as application assets, i.e. files which can be accessed only by using proprietary software (e.g. Ms-Word files) - in this case the web is merely a means of distribution, that cannot represent the content directly. In addition to these types of assets it could also contain transactional assets, i.e. information about transactions (e.g. shopping baskets, sessions in e-commerce) as well as Community Assets, i.e. dynamic contents in forums and chat rooms, created by the web surfers themselves.

A website contains texts in different forms and formats, usually paired with multimedia contents. The most outstanding characteristic of web based texts is the cross-linking of the texts or their hypertext ability. Much has been written about hypertext and its features, and hence, the following is only a very brief summary of its main features: No sequential entrance to a complete text is given where the reader can read from the beginning to the end, but several short chunks of texts where the reader is free to decide in which sequence he will read them or which texts he chooses. Due to

the specific measurements of the computer screen, the size of the webpage is limited; so, user friendliness of the web depends on the length of a text, for if it is longer than the screen, users have to scroll down. Furthermore, texts on the WWW are relatively short-lived. They are very fast on-line, but disappear just as fast again, as the next update is made.

The linguistic characteristics of Web texts have been the object of many investigations: for example David Crystal (2001), who coins the term Netspeak as the language of the entire Internet, up to smaller focused contributions, such as Vengadasamy and others (2004), who investigate the language of e-Commerce-sites. For translation studies, primary research objectives should be the assessment of these features in the light of the translation process and its repercussions on the decisions of the translator.

A website is thus a form of online eContent, a term which is used in the framework of the European community research programs eContent and eContent*plus*. eContent localization is the translation and cultural adaptation of digital information for local markets and we can distinguish three different types of eContent localization: software localization, website localization, and localization of other digital resources such as databases, documents, etc.

3. Functional approach

Some general introductions to translation studies have already tried to include the area of Web localization but with rather short and relatively modest notes. Thus, Williams/Chesterman (2002) in their "Beginner's Guide to Doing Research in Translation Studies" see the following research areas: "establish the current practice, investigate the effect of website constraints and user demands on translator's decisions both on the micro and macro level, evaluate the product, explore the feasibility of using controlled languages into website design to facilitate translation". While there are still some doubts about using controlled languages for websites in view of the heterogeneity of web documents and the strong expressive character of web advertising texts, the authors of this book are right in pointing out the role of web text features and in particular the role of user demands and their consequences on the decisions of the translator.

User demands bring us back to the definition of website localization in which a website should be made linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale. On one side these are user demands from the ultimate reader of the target text, i.e. the localized version of the website. The reader wants to read the web page in his own language, he wants to have (expects) perfectly clear and understandable information, but he does **not** want to be culturally offended by language, images, colours, and so on. A website could be perfectly translated this way producing a culturally adapted target language version.

On the other side there are the goals of the client which concentrate on what the company, institution or person wants to achieve with the new website version. This purpose could be entirely different for the new foreign language website version than for the source language website. Thus, it will influence the whole translation or adaptation process.

Bearing this in mind, we venture into a new definition of website localization referring to the overall purpose the new language version should serve and thus define it as the

process of modifying a website for a specific locale according to the goals outlined by the client

Building a multilingual website denotes a lot of work and nobody will do this for the fun of it without having clear cut goals in mind. If we look at companies and international organisations, the communicative intention of their website is closely related to their international marketing strategy. The international marketing strategy does not only decide on sales policies in foreign countries but also on image campaigns and publicity. A website is just another medium to reach new foreign customers, partners or people in general. International Marketing sets the overall goals of the new website for a foreign market or, more in general for a foreign readership. It decides what the new website stands for and what should be achieved with the new language version; for example, corporate image, branding. Furthermore, an overall website publishing strategy has to be set up. Does the website just serve publicity reasons? Does the company want to sell products on the web (e-commerce)? What kind of products? Is the website meant for customer interaction and customer support?

For an international company its international marketing goals can be put in proportion to the choice of languages for its website. An empirical study conducted by a Swedish researcher Theo Schewe (2001: 205) establishes a close link between the marketing policy of a company and the choice of languages for its Web presence. The study has come up with a classification of 'web site language design strategies' where Schewe distinguishes three general types of websites: monolingual, bilingual and multilingual websites. Within each type, the choice of languages reveals a certain type of marketing strategy that stretches from the domestic marketing strategy with a monolingual website in the 'native' language to the global player strategy with a central website in English or the native language with independent local websites in other languages.

Such global strategies determine the choice of languages and the design strategies. As such they have a decisive influence on the translation strategy and the following can be said:

Website localization is a function of the international marketing strategy

Every export oriented company and every international organisation have some kind of international marketing strategy. Strategic decisions have to be taken on how to meet commitments in another country or what should be expected from a foreign readership. All this is vital information for the localizer/translator and he should not just be aware of it, but insist explicitly on getting this information from the client with the translation assignment. Christiane Nord uses the term translation brief referring to the basic information and instructions as detailed by the client. The general guideline for a web localization project should, thus, read as follows:

Localize/translate in a way that the aims of the client can be successfully implemented with the new foreign-language website

The most important factor for an overall translation strategy is to establish the general purpose of the new foreign-language website: What are the aims of the client? Why does he want to set up a foreign language website? What does he have in mind with it? The source text, the original website is just the point of departure for the localization project, which must be checked against the predefined aims of the client.

Now, this focus on the communicative intent is nothing new for translators: Functional approaches in translation studies have been saying this for a long time. There

were many discussions about the usefulness of the functional approach and the theory of the Skopos. Most criticism focused on the fact that the Skopos theory is not suited for all translational situations in the same way. For website localization, at least, it is obviously of overall importance to take into account the function which „has to be negotiated between the client and the translator“ (Nord 1997: 35). The target text, i.e. the new foreign language website and its function are the primary focus. For the success of a localisation project the predefined objectives of the company for the new website must be met. Any correspondence whatsoever with the source text is of minor importance.

For the localisation to be successful the aims of the client and the purpose of the new website have to be explicitly documented in a translation brief at the very beginning of the localization project. There must be a meeting with the client and with the people within the client's organization or company who are responsible for the purpose of the new website, that is the management or the marketing people, but not the IT experts who are solely responsible for the practical implementation of the website. A few steps in this direction are already implemented in the DIN standard 2345 for translation assignments. The clearer the assignment, the easier is the quality check after completion of the localization process.

A functional approach in translation puts the communicative intention to the foreground. For a website the communicative intention is specified by the company or the organisation represented by the website, not so much by the real web author who does the practical job of setting up the website, in most cases an IT expert. The relation between the owner of a website and the web author could pose some problems on the monolingual level which of course can be avoided or at least weakened when the intended purpose of the website is made explicit. On the multilingual level this becomes a necessity as the purpose determines the translation and localization strategy. Therefore, a close cooperation between different experts will be necessary: the management defines global aims, international marketing experts refine these aims and state a global purpose for each market and the respective foreign language website, web authors set up a website, and the localizer adapts it taking into account the given purpose for local markets.

In a best case scenario the client already has such a strategy in place, but in practice many companies and many more international organisations lack a global, consciously chosen strategy for a multilingual web presence. In many cases the website has evolved gradually and slowly with the company or organisation, and a de facto situation *has been* created. Hence, the expert advice of a serious service provider is very important. Regarding the websites of international companies, Rose Lockwood (2000: 15) has identified three main strategies for the management of multilingual and multicultural content. In contrast to the overall marketing policies which determine the choice of languages in company websites, these are de facto strategies employed in organising a global website. Lockwood distinguishes three different approaches (Lockwood 2000: 15):

1. The monarchist approach with central control over the content where content is translated but seldom adapted. The result is a website which is not sensitive to local markets.
2. The anarchist approach with multiple local sites without coordination, each using a different design. In this case there will be high costs and no corporate strategy.
3. The federalist or subsidiary approach which is a compromise between the first two as it integrates global, regional and local content (GRL). Global content is produced centrally, translated and used internationally; regional content is also translated and used in a regional context whereas local content will be produced locally in the local language without the need for translation.

In the first case, the monarchist approach, translation is prominent: The whole website is translated. The methodology implemented is the translation of web pages, an approach which is in line with traditional translation strategies - with the only exception that hypertext pages (HTML) must be translated. This however, involves a few technical questions regarding the characteristics of HTML-documents that have been mentioned before, but there would be no special change in translation strategy. This approach is typical for bilingual territories and centralised international organisations.

The anarchist approach seldom involves any translation as the whole content is produced independently and locally. It is only in the federalist or subsidiary approach

that localization becomes relevant as global and regional content must be adapted/localized/translated for use in different countries. Whatever the approach of the company may be, the most important aspect of translation as a service provider is to integrate itself as much as possible into the information and publishing cycle of the company or organisation. One way of achieving this is by clearly defining the purpose in the translation assignment, another way could be by discussing general strategies with the client.

4. Business aspects

However, the economic aspect is the most important for the client. It is here where technology comes in and translation technology has indeed a lot to offer. It must be stressed, though, that translation technology profits from long term planning and long term investment. A terminology data base, a translation memory are tools that must be serviced over a long period of time to become really useful resources. The same holds true for a content management system with standardized paragraphs of text and the newer global content management systems with multilingual support incorporating terminology and translation memories.

On the one hand we can see a convergence of content management, web publishing, print publishing and database publishing, where documents will be split up into knowledge items or small chunks of text which can be reused for different purposes like in manuals, on line help texts, customer support files, websites, etc. On the other hand there is a convergence of translation and multilingual web publishing in the sense that translation will be integrated into multilingual web publishing. Consequently, translators won't need to interfere with HTML or XML or whichever mark-up language, instead the software will do the job. As content management, terminology databases and translation memory systems integrate into global content management systems (GCMS or GMS); translators will deal with just one software environment.

Localization and translation cost money. This is evident, but it is much less evident that it costs more money if it is done independent from all other authoring and publishing activities, and that it costs less money if it is integrated into information and publishing cycles, if multilingual support in general is planned from the beginning on a long term basis, and if multilingual tools are set up within the company or organisation.

Translation as a cost factor has been discussed within the transaction cost model by Pym (1995 and later): it states the fact that the mutual benefits for the communication partners must be higher than the costs of translation, otherwise there would be no more translation assignment. Translators should be well advised not to leave such economic reasoning exclusively to the client, because not always is the client well informed about costs and benefits of translation or localization projects. By drawing the clients attention to this aspect and by giving him good advice, the translator/localizer may establish a good basis for a medium to long term relationship opening the client's eyes to his role in successful multilingual communication.

The application of the *Return on Investment* model (ROI) on web localization could be of great help. The ROI model describes the relation between the investment put into multilingualism and the resulting benefits for the company or organisation such as the opening of a new market, savings in customer support or an increase in e-commerce revenues, and so on. The client needs to get the corresponding economic figures from his own company, but unfortunately not always is he aware of them. With the help of a short list of questions the client could be made aware of possible costs and benefits:

- ✓ Does the new market need your products/services?
- ✓ Can they afford your products?
- ✓ How can consumers pay?
- ✓ Market growth rate and revenue potential? (GDP, GDP-growth rates)
- ✓ Internet usage – digital divide
- ✓ Product delivery?
- ✓ Customer and product support? (staff resources)
- ✓ Cost of website localization?
- ✓ Cost of website maintenance?
- ✓ Compatibility of computer systems?
- ✓ Any legal or regulatory issues?

These questions should always be discussed in a meeting at the very beginning of a localization project. Although most of these questions are of a purely economic nature, and the client, the company or the organisation, has to find the answers with the help of

his staff, sales and marketing people, as well as his financial advisers, it is nonetheless the responsibility of a good service provider to underline their importance as a sound basis for the success of the project. In the end the success of a foreign language website - and consequently of the whole localization effort - will be measured by these standards. The localizer has to present himself to the client as a provider of solutions who helps the company achieve its aims and not just as an outsider who costs a lot of money and causes a lot of problems.

In order to achieve this, traditional training models and curricula must be adapted to cater for a new image of the localization expert. Defining training requirements in the light of recognised professional practice models would also require in addition to the obvious localization courses the integration of the following skills:

- Basic knowledge of international marketing
- Business models of localization and multilingual information management
- Strong emphasis on translation technology (terminology management, translation memory, and content management) as website localization could be a technical challenge for translators when they do not have thorough training

Summary

Website localization poses some new challenges to translators and translation studies. It resembles a perfect example for a functional approach to translation where the function is closely related to economic and business strategies, hence the overall importance and impact of international marketing on foreign language website creation and consequently on website localization. Translators and localizers have to address these requirements in their work, hence the absolute necessity of explicit translation or localisation assignments, as well as the need to take into account business models for localization to assure a positive outcome.

Localization has evolved in the last 15 years to an important industry with a few global players, whereas translation still remains in many aspects a fragmented field of free-lancers. However, the big advantage that translation has, is a wide area of academic research, something that localization still lacks, at least at this point in time. So, a convergence between translation studies and localization would be beneficial, or in

other words, translation studies must take into account localization issues, or else a new academic field of localization studies will emerge, independent from translation, which will then compete with translation for ever diminishing funding. Website localization, therefore, constitutes a new dimension for translation studies and translators training, as well as a challenge for a renewed research agenda.

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