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TRANSLATION AND LOCALIZATION

Localization has become a popular concept in both translation practice and theory. Four main historical phases are generally designated: software, websites [6], mobile phones and video games [7] including those that are digitally distributed. As desktop personal computers became more prevalent throughout the 1980s and software companies began to envision sales in countries and languages for which software programs were not originally conceived, the need arose to modify the functions and features of the applications in such a way that they would fulfill the requirements and demands of local consumers. At the same time that software engineers and programmers were coding content in their respective local languages around the world, the effective marketing and localization strategies and campaigns by multinational developers and the initial forays into initiatives that sought to harmonize protocols internationally – Unicode character encoding is one example would eventually give way to increasing use of standard interfaces and terminology for office applications and Internet browsers worldwide. Indeed, the quest for a more seamless communication process by computer across diverse protocols, interfaces, and platforms in multiple languages was not confined to business transactions; it became a social experience as well.

Localization service providers quickly developed into large organizations. The growing ease with which to offer multilingual services allowed for the emergence of multiple language vendors in addition to the usual single language vendors. The array of services associated with producing multilingual translations expanded to include

project management, software engineering, graphics engineering, desktop publishing, and eventually sophisticated content management system development and maintenance. The more complex the process for creating and distributing digital content at its origin with the client, the more complex the subsequent process became of extracting the content from its original digital framework for translation and localization. In a highly competitive market, software and hardware products with short shelf lives must be regularly and quickly updated and launched at the same time (known as simultaneous shipment, or *simship*) in myriad languages. Software programs designed to deal specifically with the new and diverse translation and localization environments have consistently improved, leading to the now common use of translation memory and terminology management systems, part of the suite of functionalities known as computer-assisted translation tools. Machine translation and postdating services now supplement these traditional ones [4].

Today the localization industry is supported by professional organizations such as the Localization Research Centre, the Centre for Next Generation Localization, the annual Localization World conference, and the Globalization and Localization Association.

Localization refers not only to the professional procedure of adapting content linguistically, culturally, and technically; it also is used more loosely to refer to the entire industry that has emerged around localization. It is also highly context bound [4]. The acronym GILT (*globalization internationalization localization translation*) refers to the four correlated and interdependent activities that now comprise this industry. Although the order of the activities referred to in the acronym indicate the current sequence of processes that should ideally take place, the emergence of the terms historically is exactly the reverse. Overlapping practices, histories, and theorizations of the practices yield different readings in the translation studies domain.

Globalization, in general, has a long history of debate in various contexts (economic, political and social) and acquires more specific meaning in the practice of

professional localization. Penned G11N for short, globalization is synonymous with a certain mind-set that includes a series of corporate tasks.

This lends support to Fry (2003), who noted early on that globalization is “the process of making all the necessary technical, financial, managerial, personnel, marketing and other enterprise decisions to facilitate localization” [5, p. 42].

Internationalization, abbreviated in the professional domain, refers generally to two approaches, the first technical and the second linguistic/cultural. In terms of historical chronology, the widespread introduction of internationalization procedures grew out of a convergence between the knowledge gained from real localization project experience, evolving technologies, and the development of various protocols. It advocates separating the code from content and supporting international natural language character sets when the original digital content is first conceptualized so that there is less need for manipulation and engineering of the code later, when it is localized. Internationalization also includes use of controlled language.

Localization in terms of professional procedure rather than in reference to the industry overall, is most closely linked to translation. In its broadest sense, localization “revolves around combining language and technology to produce a product that can cross cultural and language barriers – no more, no less” [2, p. 5] and implies “the full provision of services and technologies for the management of multilingualism across the digital information flow” [1, p. 4]. Depending on the technical complexity of the content originating at the source, and on the languages and cultural regional users for which it is ultimately destined, localization project resources and workflows will vary substantially. In a nutshell, however, three areas are always addressed: linguistic, cultural, and technical. Content that was adapted linguistically and culturally before widespread use of computers, information, and communication technologies and digital devices was most commonly addressed in the literature as “adaptation.” Technical adaptation through technologies for use of the content in or with other technologies prompted the shift in terminology (i.e., to “localization”) in the translation domain.

Translation, the last component of the GILT acronym, can be viewed from two main perspectives in relation to localization. When analyzed from the perspective of professional workflow models, translation is a part of localization. When conceptualized from the perspective of translation history and the academic discipline, localization is a part of translation. There are various ways of analyzing, interpreting, and understanding translation in this context. If we assume that localization is about adapting a text so that it accounts for the local (i.e., target culture's) linguistic and cultural norms and conventions, then the idea seems to be well established in both translation studies and practice. Adding a new term (i.e., localization) would therefore seem unnecessary, except that we are clearly moving away from the traditional sense of translation within the equivalence paradigm.

As a last remark in this discussion of the characteristics of digital and media backdrops in relation to translation, according to some scholars, globalization (in the general sense) is believed to promote (cultural) homogeneity and impose sameness, whereas others tend to think of it more in terms of cultural heterogeneity. The two opposing approaches to globalization have been partially reconciled, at least to some extent, within the concept of *glocalization* introduced by Robertson [8], a concept that has been a useful for considering traditional localization practices operating from top to bottom. On the one hand, we witness some homogenizing processes in the form of product *globalization* and *internationalization* that would seem to impose sameness; on the other hand, there are localizing processes in the form of product *localization*, whereby the products are adapted both linguistically (*translation*) and culturally so that they have the look and feel of a locally made product. However, no matter how local a given product looks, it will still retain a number of features of the original, global product (e.g., Microsoft's Windows has some distinctive features across all its localized versions that make it easily recognizable irrespective of the language into which it has been localized). It could therefore be argued that such products are, in fact, *glocalized*.

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