

Peter Sandrini (Innsbruck)

Website Localization and Translation

Contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Website localization
- 3 Functional Perspective
- 4 Business aspects
- 5 References

Abstract

Website localization poses new challenges to translators and translation studies. Its object, the Web, is a new multidimensional type of multi-media source material and the translation of web material constitutes a new type of multilingual service. Translation studies is well-advised to face up to this new challenge as it has a lot to offer. Localization of web sites will bring new aspects into translation studies such as dealing with hypertext and multimedia and will create a new demand for translation products and skills. The following paper attempts to clarify the key concepts of localization and to describe this new type of translation, as well as suggest and develop a strategy to apply from translation studies approaches to website localization.

1 Introduction

The following paper deals with the relation between web localization and translation; the former being a relatively new form of multilingual service which has not been dealt with adequately so far in translation studies. It is attempted to show that some aspects of translation studies are relevant for website localization, and vice versa website localization could provide some new insights to translation.

First of all we will look at some central concepts of website localization to avoid misunderstandings. Next, we will define and describe the process of website localization and its purpose by focusing on the overall aim of translating or localizing websites. This clarification is followed by a brief description of methods and strategies used in the process of localizing websites including the role and 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 a number of documents, graphics, programs and so on, each of which is identified by a uniform resource identifier (URI). In German, however, there is a terminology problem, as there is no such term as 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*. It is important to note that the object of localization is a whole website, i.e. a *Webauftritt* and not just one single webpage.

The second term used in the title *localization* is a term which is defined as adapting a product to a particular locale (LISA 2003, Esselink 2001, Yunker 2003). A *locale* refers to a

group of people who share a language, a writing system and 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* 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 part of it, 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 acts as a contributor of foreign-language texts. Seen from a translation studies perspective, however, the process of translation involves linguistic as well as a cultural transfer and the communicative intention or function of the target text is of overall importance. Translation, therefore, always involves some form of adaptation with respect to the text itself or other items relevant to the document such as graphics etc. Website localization places the text in the background and focuses on multimedia aspects. Nevertheless, the text still remains a key information assets within a web page. Translation - as a task - has a century-long history, whereas localization is a phenomenon of the last 20 years – maybe just a new name, a specific type of translation. In that case translation would then be the broader concept.

In the literature 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, translation training institutes offering courses on localization and translators working in the localization industry even though translation studies may be rather slow in measuring up to the challenges is new field of research. In any case it may be useful for both fields to learn from each other instead of trying to re-invent the wheel on the one side or be reduced to a mere text substitution process within a broader localization concept on the other hand.

2 Website localization

As already stated, a website can be viewed as a container with an address and a domain name on it. A 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) with the web merely used as a means of distribution which is not able to represent the content directly. In addition to these different types of assets, the website can 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 texts or their hypertext components. Since hypertext and its features is extensively documented (e.g. Somers 2003), the following is only a very brief summary of its main features:

- No sequential entrance to a complete linear text is given; instead, short chunks of texts are offered to the reader who is free to decide in which sequence s/he will read them or which text chunks are chosen.

- Due to the specific measurements of the computer screen, the size of the webpage is limited; user friendliness of the web, therefore, depends on the length of a text - 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 with each update.

The linguistic characteristics of Web texts have been the object of many investigations: e.g. David Crystal (2001), who coined the term *Netspeak* for the language of the Internet or smaller scope contributions, e.g. Vengadasamy and others (2004), who investigate the language of e-Commerce-sites.

For translation studies, research objectives need to address the assessment of these features in the light of translation processes and their interrelationship on the decisions of the translator.

A website is a form of online eContent, a term used within 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 Perspective

Some general introductions to translation studies have already tried to include the area of Web localization but with rather short and relatively modest results. Williams/Chesterman (2002) 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". As 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, authors stress the role of web text features, esp. 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 the one hand side there are user demands from the ultimate readers of the target text, i.e. the localized version of the website. The readers want to read the web page in their own language, and expect clear and understandable information and not be culturally offended by language, images, colors, and so on.

On the other side hand there are the client's goals which concentrate on what the company, institution or individual wants to achieve with the new website version. This purpose could be entirely different for the new foreign language website version than that for the source language website which will influence the translation or adaptation process as a whole.

With these problems in mind, we suggest a new definition for website localization referring to the overall purpose of the new language version as the

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

Building a multilingual website implies a considerable effort with a clear-cut objective in mind. If we look at companies and international organizations, the communicative intention of their websites is closely related to their international marketing strategy. The international marketing strategy does not only decide upon about sales policies in foreign countries but also on image campaigns and publicity. A website is a medium by which new foreign customers,

partners or people in general can be reached. International Marketing sets the overall goals of the new website for a foreign market or, more in general terms, for a foreign readership, i.e. what the new website is for and what should be achieved with the new language version in terms of corporate image or branding for example. Furthermore, an overall website publishing strategy has to be set up which has to answer the following questions: Does the website serve publicity reasons? Does the company want to sell products on the web (e-commerce) and if so, what kind of products? Is the website meant for customer interaction and customer support?

For an international company its international marketing goals can be related to the choice of languages used for the 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 presented 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 not only determine the choice of languages and the design strategies but also have a decisive influence on the translation strategy and can be summarized as follows:

Website localization is a function of the international marketing strategy

International strategic marketing strategies formulate an international company’s commitments in another country or the expectations from a foreign readership. All this is vital information for the localizer/translator and s/he should insist explicitly on getting this information from the client along with the translation assignment. Christiane Nord uses the term ‘translation brief’ (Nord 1997) referring to the basic information and instructions supplied in detail 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 expect from it? The source text, the original website is just the point of departure for the localization project, which must be checked with the pre-defined aims of the client.

The focus on the communicative intention is nothing new for translators: Functional approaches in translation studies have been stressing this for a long time. Most criticism of the Skopos theory focused on the fact that it is not equally suited for all translational situations. For website localization, however, 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 localization project the pre-defined objectives of the company for the new website must be met. Any correspondence with the source text is of minor importance.

For the localization to be successful it is advisable to specify the client’s purpose of the new website explicitly and have it documented in a translation brief at the very beginning of the localization project. Included in the briefing should be the client and with Her/his organization, the management and/or marketing staff, not necessarily the IT experts who are responsible for the practical implementation of the website and can be included at a later

stage. Steps in this direction are already implemented in the DIN standard 2345 for translation assignments. The clearer the assignment, the easier is the quality control after completion of the localization process.

In the translation process, the communicative function is specified by the company or the organization represented by the website, less so by the web author who does the practical job of setting up the website and in most cases is 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, specifying the translation purpose is a necessity as the purpose determines the translation and localization strategy. Therefore, a close cooperation between different experts will be necessary as part of the translation process, i.e. 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 practices scenario the client has made a strategy explicit according to the conditions above, but in practice many companies and international organizations lack a global, consciously chosen strategy for a multilingual web presence. In many cases a website has evolved gradually and slowly with the company or with an organization, and a de facto situation exists (cf. Rose Lockwood's (2000: 15 cf. below) with three main strategies for the management of multilingual and multicultural content. Let us look at these de facto strategies employed when organizing a global website according to the three different approaches outlined by 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 strategies 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.

The monarchist approach in translation is prominent: The whole website is translated. The methodology implemented is unclear, generally referred to the translation of web pages, an approach 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 with no special change in translation strategy. This approach is typical for bilingual territories and centralized international organizations.

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 translation as much as possible into the information and publishing cycles of the company or organization. One way of achieving this is by clearly defining the purpose of the translation assignment. Another way could be cooperating with the client and discussing general strategies.

4 Business aspects

The economic aspect of translating websites is the most important for the client. It is here that 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, e.g. 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, for 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 done independently of all other authoring and publishing activities, i.e. it costs money if it is integrated into information and publishing cycles, if multilingual support in general is planned for from the beginning on a long term basis, and if multilingual tools are set up within the company or organization.

Translation as a cost factor has been discussed within the transaction cost model by Pym (1995 and later) and others: it states that the mutual benefits for the communication partners must be higher than the costs for translation, otherwise there would be no more translation assignment. Translators should be well advised not to leave such economic reasoning 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 them good advice, the translator/localizer may establish a good basis for a medium to long-term relationship with his client - opening the client's eyes to his role in successful multilingual communication.

Applying simple *Return on Investment* (ROI) calculations when planning a web localization could be of great help. The ROI describes the relation between the investment put into multilingualism and the resulting benefits for the company or organization 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 Fig.s from her/his own company. 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?
- Are market growth rate and revenue potential Fig.s available? (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 or briefing at the very beginning of a localization project. Although most of these questions are of a purely economic nature, and although the client, the company or the organization, has to find the answers with the help of the respective staff, sales and marketing people, as well as financial advisers, it is 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 recognized professional practice accounts would also require 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 technological challenge for translators.

Summary

Localization has evolved in the past 15 years into an important industry with a few global players, whereas translation still remains in many aspects a fragmented field of free-lancers' website localization poses new challenges to translators and translation studies. In particular, the function of the localized website 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. This makes explicit translation or localization assignments indispensable and includes business models for localization to assure successful translation. The big advantage that translation has is a wide area of academic research, something that localization lacks - at least at this point in time. Therefore, there has to be a convergence between translation studies and localization, or in other words, translation studies must address localization issues, or else we will end up having an academic field of localization studies, independent from translation, which will compete with translation for ever diminishing funding. Website localization, on the other hand, should account for the progress made in translation research and put it into use. The interrelationship of localization and translation, therefore, opens up a new research paradigm.

5 References

- Crystal, David (2001): *Language and The Internet*. Cambridge: University Press.
- DePalma, Donald (2002): *Business without Borders. A Strategic Guide to Global Marketing* Wiley and Sons.
- Esselink, Bert (2001): *A Practical Guide to Software Localization*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Lockwood, Rose (2000): 'Have Brand, Will Travel'. In *Language International*. Bd.Nr. 12/2, 4/2000: 14-16.
- Lisa (2003): *Localization Industry Primer*. 2nd edition.
- Nauert, Sandra (2007): "Translating Websites". Paper presented at the MuTra Conference 'LSP Translation Scenarios', 30 April – 4 May 2007, Vienna (to be published in the Proceedings 2007).
- O'Hagan, Minako & Ashworth, David (2002): *Translation-Mediated Communication in a Digital World. Facing the Challenges of Globalization and Localization*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Nord, Christiane (1997): *Translating as a Purposeful Activity. Functionalist Approaches Explained*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Pym, Anthony (1995) *Translation as a Transaction Cost*, Meta 40/4. Bd.Nr. 40/4. 594-605.
- (2004): *The Moving Text. Localization, translation and distribution*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Vengadasamy, Ravichandran & Jaludin, Azhar & Hamat, Afendi (2004): 'Characteristics of Written Text in E-Commerce Websites'. In *Internet Journal of e-Language Learning & Teaching*. 1(2), July 2004: 15-32.
- Schewe, Theo (2001): 'Multilingual Communication in the Global Network Economy': In Eschenbach, Jutta & Schewe, Theo (eds): *Über Grenzen gehen - Kommunikation zwischen Kulturen und Unternehmen*. Halden/Norwegen: Hogskolen i Ostfold: 195-209.
- Williams, Jenny & Chesterman, Andrew (2002): *The Map. A Beginner's Guide to Doing Research in Translation Studies*. Manchester: St Jerome.
- Yunker, John (2003): *Beyond Borders. Web Globalization Strategies*. Indianapolis: New Riders Publishing.