

# The localization job market in academe

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*Abstract. There are now many academic institutions, particularly in North America and Europe, offering programs and courses on localization. All of them are housed in centers for translation in which the faculty is shared with traditional departments. This situation can be beneficial, as it creates new research opportunities in localization and offers customized training and services to the industry. Conversely, demands from industry may also affect the make-up of the curricula, and more candidates are now being sought to teach for the profession or business. This, however, entails a number of problems: a lack of publication outlets for localization scholars, the need to establish formalized departments of localization, and inadequate academic openings in the field.*

Slowly but surely, academia is catching on to localization. From practically no programs in 1995, there are now many institutions offering courses on localization, primarily in North America and Europe. As with any new type of course or program, finding a home in the academy is difficult, especially for subjects that cross the rigid disciplinary lines that are the hallmark of colleges and universities. This article examines some of the ways in which localization is entering the academy as a field of study and career option.

The University of Leeds in the United Kingdom offers a Master of Arts in Applied Translation Studies, housed in a Centre for Translation. In Ohio, on the other side of the Atlantic, Kent State University has a similar structure. Its Institute of Applied Linguistics offers a Master of Arts program in Spanish, German or French, with a concentration in translation. Several courses in that program also deal with localization. At New York University, a graduate-level course called Terminology: Theory and Practice is housed in the Center for Foreign Languages and Translation and “explores [...] computer-based systems for terminology management”. Students at this university can earn a Master of Science in Translation.

These post-graduate level programs, found in “centers” or “institutes” of Translation or Applied Linguistics, are a relatively new species in higher education. New fields, especially interdisciplinary ones, are often housed in centers where academics from various departments share teaching duties. Fields such as Area and Ethnic Studies and Translation, representing a broad

range of topics and languages, are often organized this way. Such centers or institutes seldom have their own faculty. They usually have to “share” teachers associated with traditional departments like language or engineering. A faculty member’s workload is thus divided between a “home” department and the center or institute. Such a structure is flexible, as it allows faculty to pursue research opportunities that may otherwise be unavailable or considered “unacceptable” in their home departments. Furthermore, as new fields develop and become more mature, certain research directions may no longer be favored and new lines of inquiry may be opened up. In this way, there is a diversity of interests that attracts faculty members who contribute to the center or institute at different times.

Such centers may also be beneficial to the industry, as they provide training, customized research and other services. For example, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst operates a commercial translation, interpretation, and localization service in 60 languages. On the educational side, the Comparative Literature Department of this university offers a course entitled Translation Techniques and Technologies which “experiments with latest technology”, as stated on its official website.

The University of Montreal in Canada began a program in January 2003 leading to a Certificate in Localization. This program is housed in the Continuing Education Department and consists of 23 courses, of which ten (30 credits) are compulsory. The program offers an impressive range of courses and reflects a truly multidisciplinary approach. Currently it is only available in French, but an English option may be offered in the future. This program is the fruit of a huge multidisciplinary effort by Rita Damiani, who joined the university after years of work in the industry, bringing a broad curricular perspective to the program (Damiani 2002). Courses at the University of Montreal are given in the evenings and attract a broad range of students, from engineers and public relations specialists to professional translators. A feature that this program shares with the one at Austin Community College is that it did not arise from a foreign language or translation department.

Another program, also entirely in French, is available at the University of Quebec at Outaouais. It consists of a series of courses, each three credit hours in length, plus a training course of six credit hours. This program leads to a Diploma of Higher Studies (DESS) and is considered a natural extension of the translation program already in place. It is also the first program founded at a French-language university in North America.

Because the core of localization revolves around language, translation and international business, institutions specializing in such areas have integrated localization topics into their language curricula. Examples here would include the Monterey Institute in California and the Maastricht School of Translation and Interpreting in the Netherlands. At Maastricht, localization is not taught as a separate course, but is integrated into its four-

year training program. Although the focus is still on translation, from the second year onwards localization is explored in greater detail, alongside pure translation issues and in all translation courses and assignments. Students are trained in specific translation techniques for localization and become familiar with a number of software applications. During their studies, quite a large number of students find employment in localization/translation companies (some even join high-tech ones). By the time they complete the program, students have become competent in localization techniques. Maastricht cooperates closely with localization and translation companies when designing and structuring its program. The localization part of its curriculum is jointly operated by linguists, mathematicians and electrical engineers, all expert in Computer Science.

Translation departments, centers and institutes are clearly a popular venue for localization initiatives. The emergence of these organizations is also an interesting phenomenon, as it may indicate the future of localization itself, perhaps signifying increased reliance on translators to provide traditional engineering services such as program compilation, data structure and character encoding. This trend has already been echoed by the translation and localization industry. Companies such as Star, Logos, Lionbridge, Alchemy, Trados, and SDL International have already marketed products for translators working as terminology managers, software localizers, desktop publishers, technical writers, project managers, and software testers.

Academia is often responsive to industry needs. This may be seen from the re-alignment of foreign-language education curricula that has been slowly underway for many years. It is well known that the supply of PhDs in foreign languages in the United States has long exceeded the demand for them, and a steady decline in the number of students learning languages has gutted many Foreign Language departments, leading to a much-discussed “crisis” in the profession. The Proceedings of the 118th Annual Conference of the Modern Language Association of America include a lively discussion on this.

This phenomenon may affect the make-up of curricula. New curricula now pay more attention to the industry’s needs for multilingual skills. Instead of the traditional Literature major, we now increasingly find Linguistics and Cultural Studies options in many foreign language departments. There is also a sharp rise in the number of Ethnic and Area Studies centers. In recognition of increased study options, some departments have changed their names. This is the case of the former Department of Germanic Languages in the University of Texas at Austin, now the Department of Germanic Studies.

As many of us still remember the localization boom in the 1990s, we recall there was once a strong demand for localization professionals. Part of that demand, of course, was exacerbated by a dearth of educational programs

to train or re-train those professionals. With an economy at near-full employment and a soaring demand for high-tech skills, could the employment crisis of Foreign Language graduates spur an interest in curricular modification? Quite possibly, especially if one considers the industry demand for languages such as German, Dutch and Italian, where courses have suffered from dwindling enrollments.

There is some possibly coincidental evidence to support this view. One of the founders of the Software Localization Certificate program at the University of Washington at Seattle is Ulrike Irmeler, who holds a doctorate in German. At Austin Community College, the program founder, Tim Altanero has a doctorate in Germanic Studies. At Kent State University, Sue Ellen Wright, who offers a Terminology Management course, also holds a doctorate in German. Her colleague, Kieran Dunne, has a doctorate in French. The Director of the Localization Research Centre at the University of Limerick, Reinhard Schäler, is a “real” German. Stefan Sinclair, who teaches in the Humanities Computing program at the University of Alberta in Canada, holds a doctorate in French Literature. Many of these individuals worked in the industry before taking up academic jobs, and this has also probably affected curricular offerings.

Notably absent are doctors in Spanish, perhaps because the job market for them is considerably larger and more robust. At the Modern Language Association, which might be seen as the clearinghouse for foreign-language faculty positions in the United States, there are currently 216 openings advertised for Spanish, which is slightly less than the total number of positions available in all other modern languages combined. The implication is that academics holding doctorates in languages other than Spanish may have a more difficult time locating academic employment and thus first have to secure jobs in the industry. Indeed, many of the founders of the localization programs mentioned in this article first found employment in the industry before moving back to academia.

Interestingly, we are now finding more Foreign Language positions seeking candidates to teach “for the professions” or “business”. For Spanish, this has often meant health or welfare professions such as nursing, social work and court interpreting, but for other languages the emphasis has clearly been on business and international trade. One can even find centers, such as that at the University of South Carolina, where appointments in Foreign Languages are often made jointly with the business school. Whether these positions will evolve into entryways for localization professionals to join the academy remains to be seen, but the door is clearly opening, if not already slightly ajar, at least for Foreign Language hiring. Engineering and Computer Science departments may not be far behind.

Once in the academy, tenure decisions rest on scholarly production, in addition to course development and teaching. Promising talents may find it difficult to place articles for lack of publications in the localization field.

There are, of course, trade journals of various kinds available, but academic journals are scarce. There are journals specific to various disciplines in which one might publish, but seldom is an academic journal reviewed by industry or academic peers in the field of localization.

At the 7th Annual Localization Research Centre conference, academics from both sides of the Atlantic discussed the perceived position of localization in the curriculum. To address the need for peer-reviewed publishing outlets, the Localization Teaching and Training Network was formed by representatives from Austin Community College (United States), the University of Limerick (Ireland), the Maastricht School of Translation and Interpreting (Netherlands), the University of Stirling (United Kingdom), and the Canadian Bureau of Translation (the Canadian government's translation arm). During its first meeting in Dublin, the group founded the International Journal of Localization, specifically aimed at filling the void in academic outlets for localization research. The journal has been published since January 2003.

The Localization Teaching and Training Network also expressed considerable support for localization to be housed in formalized Departments of Localization. Movement toward such a structure may be forthcoming, possibly as a result of the outgrowth of the centers and institutes discussed earlier. Such an outcome would not be unexpected, as Computer Science programs were often housed in other centers and institutes before becoming formalized departments. The group is also working on joint research enterprises, exchanges of students and faculty, and an annual reader, among other initiatives. It seems that, with time, all of the trappings that define a field of study as "academic" will come into place. We can readily see the shift in position announcements, the emergence of a journal, and the formation of several working groups and professional organizations.

Although we occasionally find a position in Localization advertised in the academy, that is still far from the norm. Localization academics still seem to start as non-localization professionals and gradually make their move as the field gains more acceptance by (and becomes more crucial to) educational programs in localization. As critical human mass is built within academia, new avenues will develop, offering more academic careers and opportunities in the field of localization.

## References

- Damiani, Rita. 2002. "Localization Education in Montreal". *LISA Newsletter*: [http://www.lisa.org/archive\\_domain/newsletters/2002/4.2/damiani.html](http://www.lisa.org/archive_domain/newsletters/2002/4.2/damiani.html). Visited November 2004.
- Proceedings of the 118th Annual Meeting of the Modern Language Association of America*. 2002. Modern Language Association: <http://www.mla.org>.

## **Links**

Certified Localization Professional:

<http://www.localisation.ie/research/projects/clp/index.html>. Visited November 2004.

Chronicle Careers, Chronicle of Higher Education:

<http://chronicle.com/jobs/>. Visited November 2004.

Department of Linguistics and Translation, University of Montreal:

<http://www.ling.umontreal.ca/>. Visited November 2004.

Institute for Applied Linguistics, Kent State University:

<http://applling.kent.edu/> Visited November 2004.

MA Applied Translation Studies (MAATS), Centre for Translation Studies, School of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of Leeds:

[http://www.smlc.leeds.ac.uk/cts/cts\\_content/ma\\_programmes/maats.asp#structure](http://www.smlc.leeds.ac.uk/cts/cts_content/ma_programmes/maats.asp#structure). Visited November 2004.

Maastricht School of Translation and Interpreting:

<http://vertaalacademie.hszuyd.nl>. Visited November 2004.

Modern Language Association of America. <http://www.mla.org>. Visited November 2004.

Technical Certification Programs, High Technology Institute, Austin

Community College: <http://www2.austincc.edu/taltaner>. Visited November 2004.

Terminology: Theory and Practice, School of Continuing and Professional Studies, New York University:

<http://www.scps.nyu.edu/departments/course.jsp?courseId=33527>. Visited November 2004.

Translation Center, University of Massachusetts:

<http://www.umass.edu/transcen/>. Visited November 2004.

Wake Forest University:

<http://lrc.wfu.edu/certificates/translationandinterpreting/certificates.htm>. Visited November 2004.