

Training for localization (replies to a questionnaire)

BOB CLARK, JO DRUGAN, TONY HARTLEY,
DAMING WU

Centre for Translation Studies, University of Leeds, United Kingdom

What, for you, is meant by “localization” and “the localization industry”?

This never fails to be an interesting question. Everyone would have to agree that localization in the broad sense can be defined as the process of adapting anything to a target locale. Any text or speech content must be translated or “rendered”. Has anyone else noticed that very few people ever used the term localization before software publishers began to have their products translated? Virtually overnight, software translation began to be referred to as software localization and, in what used to be called the translation industry, there was a lemming-like stampede of translation companies hoping to enter this lucrative new market. It was a very risky business and in the process many companies went under.

After some time there emerged a very clear distinction between software localization companies, often referred to as localization companies, and those companies that either could not, or would not localize software, which continued to be called translation companies. That the founding members of the Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA) were exclusively software publishers and localization vendors is no accident. In those days, it would not even have occurred to someone to ask the question in the heading. So why is it necessary to do so today?

There are a number of reasons. The kind of material being translated today bears little physical resemblance to what was being translated at the beginning of the nineties. The “extra stuff” that localizers had to do in addition to translation is no longer limited to software products. The complexity of current documentation workflows requires translation companies to employ tools, processes and project management very similar in a lot of respects to what would be found in a software localization project. Another important factor was the flattening out of the IT market and its knock-on effect on localization. If you were a large localization company totally reliant on the software sector, what would you do? Exactly, turn your attention to “vertical markets” and start “localizing” what translation companies had always “translated”.

So where does this leave us? We still have a problem knowing what people mean when they use the term localization. The processes and tools required for software localization are still quite different from those used by the rest of the “Localization Industry”. The safest thing is to ask them what they mean.

Should all translator-training programs include localization?

The answer to this is very simple. Whatever flavor of localization we are talking about, the translator will be expected to cope with the tools and processes required. It seems inappropriate to teach someone how to translate without giving them the tools to do so.

What elements of localization should be obligatory in the curriculum for translators? Which electronic tools should be taught?

Depending on the flavor of localization, all translation students should have a thorough understanding of the processes involved and as much exposure to appropriate tools as possible. Tools should include terminology management and translation memory systems, software localization tools and project management tools, even a simple one like Excel. Ideally, this should be a “why”, not “how” approach and be as comparative as possible.

At what level should students receive training in localization?

It is never too early to start teaching fundamental skills, such as teamwork, project management, problem solving, and computer skills. Extensive training in localization tools should occur during translator training, normally at the graduate level, depending on the country.

Does the localization industry need interaction with the traditional translator-training institutions?

By “traditional” do you mean institutions that hitherto have *not* included localization/translation technology in their curricula? The answer is probably a reluctant “yes”, if you accept that there is a lack of translators and that the industry needs a steady supply of recruits. The important thing for employers is that these recruits have the linguistic expertise to translate the kinds of texts they deal with. And of course, they prefer it if the training institutions have already taken care of equipping their trainees with experience of the necessary tools. As we pointed out earlier, the physical (well, electronic) format of certain kinds of texts—such as texts embedded in software applications—means it is not feasible to translate them without (recourse to) specialized technology. And the nature of other types of texts, such as those that are repetitive either internally or from one version to another, means it is

not economical to translate them without (recourse to) specialized technology.

Do traditional translator-training institutions need interaction with the localization industry?

Only those that want their students to become part of the localization industry in its broadest sense.