

# **Training for localization (replies to a questionnaire)**

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

Various definitions have been suggested for the concept of “localization”. For me, localization is the interdisciplinary process of adapting an electronic product (software, website, Help file, CD, etc.) to the needs or expectations of a specific target audience (group of users, country, etc.). This definition is wider than the usual one, as it opens the door to a localization process without translation. For example, one could want to adapt a website to the needs of visually-impaired users or to the specific needs of a country that shares the language of the original product.

The “localization industry” includes everyone involved in the localization process, the localization tools developers and the end customers of the localized product.

## **Is translation a part of localization, or is localization a part of translation?**

Translation is one of the activities that may take place in localization alongside, among others, project management, marketing, graphic design and software development. Large localization projects tend to include more actors than small ones, and multilingual localization projects include translators. In my view, translation and localization are parallel domains that need to interact based on the nature of the project at hand.

## **Is localization just a result of technology, or does it involve deep conceptual changes?**

Technology, through the Internet and access to a world-wide market, has played a major part in the birth of the localization industry. It has made large corporations aware of cultural details that mainly remained unseen until the end of the 1980s. But I tend to remain skeptical and believe that the conceptual changes we observe on the surface are mainly driven by financial

concerns. The driving force behind the localization efforts is still potential revenue increase, as local markets become saturated. However bad this may sound, it is still a very good thing for translators, as they gain more exposure and may secure new revenues.

**In what ways, if any, should localization change traditional conceptions of translation?**

I do not see how it has changed, or will change, the actual translation act except that translators no longer work behind closed doors, as they usually did in the past. They are now considered members of a larger interdisciplinary team. Translators have to pay special attention to the consistency of terminology, phraseology, style, etc. between very different products. This was part of their task in the past, but it usually applied to a few documents of a similar nature and not to products as different as the ones we see in current localization projects (Help files, websites, printed manuals, etc.). Localization has made translators more aware that their translations will be included in a larger context. For example, when translating a graphic file, the task of the translator is to make sure the string is consistent with the overall translated material and that it respects visual constraints. On the other hand, a design or a marketing specialist, and not the translator, should ensure that the picture, the icon or the diagram is appropriate to the target audience.

**Should all translator-training programs include localization?**

Yes! In the short term, we need to familiarize students with the specific challenges of the new media (software interface, websites, multimedia documents, etc.). This type of translation has challenges and constraints—mainly the tools used in the process—just like audiovisual translation or interpretation, which we usually include in a standard curriculum.

I expect things to be different in the long run. I tend to agree with Bert Esselink, who recently suggested that the need to turn translators into semi-engineers will fade out with time, as localization tools evolve. Localization will remain an issue and will still need to be discussed in a translation curriculum, but I believe that localization tools will be a lot more user-friendly and that we will spend less time familiarizing students with technology. That said, the introduction of drastically new publishing technology will lead to periods when the available localization tools will not be able to assist the translator. Hopefully, as we have seen with the introduction of Microsoft's .NET platform, these periods will be relatively short.

**Should all localization-training programs include translation?**

In my opinion, every actor involved in the localization process should have at least a slight idea of the challenges of translation. I also believe it is very important for translators to have a good idea of the challenges the other members of the localization team are facing.

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

Localization tools should obviously play an important part in the curriculum. However, teaching students how to handle specific localization tools is not the most important aspect, as these tools and the technical aspects of the material to be translated continuously evolve. We should help students understand the capabilities and, more importantly, the limits of such tools. It is also crucial that they understand when, and in which context, they should or should not use electronic tools.

**What should be the main components in a curriculum for training people for the localization industry?**

This is a difficult question but I can explain how we approach the problem at the University of Montreal. We currently have two localization programs, one at the graduate level (“postgraduate”, for some countries), the other at the undergraduate level. The graduate program is targeted at translators who want to acquire good knowledge of what localization is and what it involves. The students first go through an introduction to localization. They then move on to training in localization tools, computer-assisted translation and machine translation, multimedia and hypermedia and, finally, to XML. Upon completion of the program, students are fully trained to join a localization team.

The undergraduate program is geared towards people who have been trained in translation, computer sciences or project management. There is a core group of classes in which students with different backgrounds learn to work together. Once the basic skills are acquired via the required courses, students select an area of expertise based on their prior training. Language specialists acquire computer skills and learn to use translation and localization tools. Computer specialists are trained to understand and use internationalization techniques and tools. The students wishing to develop management expertise take a series of project management courses and learn to apply the acquired knowledge and skills to localization projects.

**At what level should students receive training in localization?**

In my opinion, students should be trained at all levels and have a good idea of what localization covers. The sooner we can do this, the better.

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

Yes! As most localization projects include a translation component, the localization industry should keep in touch with the future workforce. Without proper interaction between the industry and the training institutions, we will end up with training programs that do not reflect the needs of the industry, and industry expectations that differ significantly from the training offered.

In the case of the University of Montreal, proper relationships with the localization-tool vendors have been very difficult to establish. Our biggest challenge so far has been obtaining localization tools to train the students. The tools are expensive and our budgets tend to be very small. A few vendors now seem to be revising their previous position which was to see universities as customers. They now consider us as marketing grounds and not as money-generating entities. We noted, very interestingly, that it was easier to establish relationships with small vendors than with the well-established ones. I see this as a double-edged sword for the vendors. They might save some money in the short term by not providing training institutions with their technology, but our students, once they hit the market, will want to keep using the tools on which they have been trained.

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

Yes, for exactly the same reasons I stated in my previous answer. This, in my opinion, is a two-way street.

**Who should fund the training programs?**

There is no easy answer to this question. I think governments should play a role, for obvious reasons of public education and social involvement (not limited to localization or translation programs). In multilingual countries such as Canada, I strongly believe that governments should take an active role in language-related training programs.

The localization industry (translation vendors, tool vendors, etc.) is also one of the key players. We often hear that students hitting the market have to face a steep learning curve. In many cases, training institutions are fighting with tight budgets that limit their capabilities to train the students fully. It would only seem logical and profitable for the localization industry to

support the training and ensure that students have the required expertise once they complete their studies. Of course, we need to keep in mind that experience cannot be bought or thought.

At the financial level, I would like to see the professional translators' associations become involved. They could ensure a flow of expertise.