

*Summary of discussion on*  
**Is localization just technology?**

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Two of the initial questions were: “Is localization just a result of technology, or does it involve deep conceptual changes?”, and “In what ways, if any, should localization change traditional conceptions of translation?”

James St. André (National University of Singapore) opened the discussion by asking participants to consider the broader question of the relationship between changes in technology and culture. Referring to George Landow, he emphasized the way computers have changed the way we write, read and think, and that have led to conceptual changes that challenge our definition of translation.

Olga Torres, of the Tarragona Ph.D. program, suggested the answer to the question lies in the definition of technology itself, as this involves deep conceptual changes and therefore by definition affects tasks such as localization that make use of technology.

Daniel Gouadec believed localization was the result of having to cope with new media, using new tools and learning new skills. He introduced the idea of the translator going beyond just transferring the language element to paper. He saw the translator as actually reaching out and adopting the technology required to take a step further into previously uncharted territory, into the realms of multimedia, software, video and websites. He did however draw the line at programming. He claimed his view was increasingly consistent with that of documentation engineers or managers. Gouadec concluded that localization is the result of technological changes but it is also firmly in the domain of technology.

Peter Sandrini, adopting a narrower concept of localization as “adapting a text (or a product) to a local audience”, did not consider there to be any deep conceptual changes but did strongly advocate the idea that the translator must acquire a new skill set. Translators should be able to bridge the gap between technical people who lack the necessary cultural awareness and translators who do not possess sufficient technical know-how.

Tytti Suojanen, from the University of Tampere, suggested that instead of pondering the question of whether localization should change traditional conceptions of translation, we should consider how technological change has

and will continue to impact upon both the concepts of localization and how translators and training institutions should respond.

Ignacio García accepted that software and webpages are “localized” but considered that Help files, manuals, spare-part catalogs and pharmaceutical leaflets etc. are not treated in the same way. Instead he believed those documents are “translated very expeditiously using translation memories”. He went on to request that the role of translation memories should be incorporated into the discussion, and he asked what the interrelationship is between translation memories, localization and traditional translation.

Beverley Adab, of Aston University in the United Kingdom, saw localization as a branch of translation that requires a fundamental awareness of translation theory but, equally, represents an activity that is far more complex in its use of IT. She felt that the underlying concept of adaptation to the local target audience remains constant, but what changes is the extent of technical know-how involved. She thus concurred with Daniel Gouadec’s emphasis on ‘what the translator does’.

Jim Oliver added his definition of localization, which centers on new technology and internationalization. He said that in his view “localization is the translation of the new age”. Consequently the translator needs to be *au fait* with the latest technology. This is the “new” harsh reality.

José Ramón Biau Gil made referred to Anthony Pym’s comments and stated that the concept of internationalization should be central. This would involve the idea of the source text as a draft which is then converted as efficiently as possible into the localized and final versions. Gil believed this shift to be the change in the conventional conception of translation.

Anthony Pym added that while the localization industry is dedicated to “an extreme degree of adaptation to target-user purposes”, the electronic tools that are deployed actually reduce translation to “good-old backwards-looking phrase-level equivalence-seeking”.

Brian Mossop, a government translator in Canada, pointed out that localization can be defined in two ways: 1) as an industrial practice, and 2) as a term in theoretical discussion (whose extension is potentially very large depending on how it is defined). He gave examples of news stories taken from English-language press agencies and the way they are translated for use by local newspapers. This illustrates how localization has been existent since before the computer era, as have its frequent failures. As far as deep conceptual change is concerned, Mossop thought that any definitions need to be formulated on the basis of a large time-scale, not just what has been going on in the past 20 years.

John Graham (BDU, Stuttgart) defined localization as the “preparation of a text or part text for insertion in documentation for the locale in question”. He also presented two further descriptions from different sources:

“Localization involves taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale (country/region and language) where it will be used and sold.” (LISA)

“Localization: Linguistic and cultural adaptation and translation of software applications, technical descriptions, user manuals, etc., for local markets.” (ÖNORM D 1200—Austrian standard)

Sue Ellen Wright, of Kent State University in the United States, thought that Graham’s definition was not comprehensive enough and elaborated further on it by describing the localization process as requiring “huge interaction between the translation of text and the manipulation of a wide variety of tools and methodologies”. She insisted on the increasing need for translators working in the localization field to have a decent grounding in XML and other formatting and exchange mechanisms. Graduates needed the opportunity to obtain these skills during their training.

Vanessa Enríquez understood localization as the convergence of language and technology but nevertheless considered the “classical” translation model and theories still pertinent. Localization has not brought conceptual changes to translation but has instead broadened the concept. The way technology has developed has forced a change in the industry whereby traditional translation skills must now be combined with technical ability.