

Development of Localization and Technologies Applied to Localization

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Abstract: This paper aims at analyzing of the merits and problems in applying technologies in localization. The paper explores from the definition of localization and its relations with other terms---internationalization and globalization. From the development of localization, technologies bring about standards which increase productivity of the process. However, problems occur simultaneously. This paper examines failures of dynamic equivalence of localization as well as the contradiction between of standardization and cultural diversification.

1. Introduction

Localization is to adapt certain materials such as software from one market to a foreign-language market and the process includes software localization and website localization. The adaptation of the language should be based on the linguistic equivalent rather than a literal translation, during which cultural elements should be considered. As Anthony Pym (2010) points out, localization is considered as a “partial return to equivalence” for using “fixed glossaries” and promoting “decontextualized translation” (p. 121). Pym also notes the definition of localization made by the localization Industry Standards Association (LISA): “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” (p. 122). Another two terms highly related to localization are internationalization and globalization. The former is the “process of generalizing a product so that it can handle multiple languages and cultural conventions without the need for redesign. Internationalization takes place at the level of program design and document development” (p. 122). And the latter is making localization not just the simple adaptation from the source context to the target but to think about from the very beginning, from the research and planning of the product. It involves “integrating localization throughout a company, after proper internationalization and product design, as well as marketing, sales, and support in the world market” (p. 122). In this sense, compared to economic globalization, it’s much more specific. Besides, localization is usually distinguished from translation. The former refers to the adaption of products while the latter refers to the adaption of texts. Meanwhile, translators do not deal with digital material while localizers do.

As the internationalization and globalization becomes the trend, localization gradually plays an important role in today’s global market. Here is the relationship among the four terms, globalization, internationalization, localization, and translation (with the abbreviation of GILT). If a corporate is globalized, the products are then internationalized. At the meantime, in order to obtain more revenues, their products should be localized as fast as possible and simultaneously (the most important part). To put it simple, the internationalization of a product comes before its localization into foreign markets. The whole process includes yet not excludes large quantity of translation work.

2. History and Development of Localization

As Bert Esselink (2003) puts, “the international expansion of software and hardware developers automatically triggered the need to localize the products for international markets” (p. 22). Localization industry sprung from 1970s when freelance translators started career in providing professional translation service as well as translation project management. In 1980s, software

developers came to realize the importance to promote their products to foreign markets. Technologies are accepted by language operators to improve their service and gain more profits. This is the beginning of localization. Till 2000, the most popular localizing languages are French, Spanish, Italian, German and Japanese with the source language of English. According to Chen Shanwei (2014), localization industry has increased by the rate of 30% annually.

The first notable case in localization occurred after the Microsoft company explored the North American market. Traditional translation work is no more satisfactory, which brought about problems and challenges. As pointed out by Pym, the software required “not just replacement of the pieces of language in the menus, dialogue boxes, and Help files visible to the user” but “attention to a long list of apparently minor details like date formats, hot-keys, and punctuation conventions” (p. 123), which are more than the traditional functions of translators. The process requires teamwork rather than single translation.

To deal with such challenges, some companies began to establish “in-house teams of translators and language engineers” (p. 124) and others built international offices in foreign markets with the task of localizing their products. However, seldom did they realize that they unintentionally separated localization from the planning and development of the products, which later proves to be wrong. Since there are different syntactic structures in different languages, specific parts of translation should be dealt with concerns. It is suggested for translators to consider all aspects of localization before the development of software. Making localization an after-thought will only result in costing much more both in time and in money. Hence, it’s highly crucial to have considered localization in the very beginning of the process. Luckily, user-friendly frameworks and development platforms i.e. Unicode, HTML, XML, make the whole process easier.

3. Applying Technologies during Localization

3.1 Merits in Applying Technologies

As is mentioned above, localization projects are complicated and complex that require more than simple translation. Thus technologies, such as CAT tools, are developed to control complexity. One of the merits of TM lies on its consistency, which is fairly significant to teamwork in localization and the whole productivity as well as efficiency. With similar segments in both source and target texts, translators are able to pay more attention to those differences and achieve higher productivity naturally.

3.2 Problems in Applying Technologies

However, considering equivalence of translation, problems exist in applying these technologies i.e. text-reuse technologies in localization projects. It is evident that the text-reuse technologies function the role of pre-translation and finish their translation before the actual translation conducted by translators. But what if the text-reuse technologies present false matches instead of accurate ones? Usually translators are required to follow all full matches even if those matches appear to be wrong. They are instructed to respect text-reuse technologies no matter how many errors they have. In addition, translators seem to have no rights or the willing to alter and correct wrong matches since they have no “effective ownership of the memories and thus little self-interest in correcting false matches” (p. 125). Besides, there are some conflicts of authority involved in this situation. Normally the text-reuse technologies represent the authority of clients. However, if the translator has high reputation and enough experience in the particular field, he or she may have the willing to alter wrong matches.

3.3 Equivalence within Localization and Dynamic Equivalence.

So, the question is, what kind of equivalence is involved in localization? Shown by this example, it’s evident that equivalents here are restricted only to segment level or sentence even phrase level. As Anthony Pym notes, “we enter an age of artificially produced equivalence” (p. 132). The equivalence within localization is systematically standardized and artificial with purely technology

language, which is highly criticized by scholars of other theories.

In Eugene Nida's theory, he explains that translation is communicating, and that language carries many functions in translation and communication. He proposes the concept of dynamic equivalence, which is oriented by the target language and readers from the target culture. Thus, it is important to reach equivalence effect during the translation. In this way, foreign customers can receive information of the products from a foreign country the same that local customers do, even sometimes better ways. From this perspective, equivalents only in segment level are not enough. Ergo failures in dynamic equivalence may become problematic to most localizers.

3.4 Standardization and Cultural Diversification.

Apart from standardized equivalence, standards per se form problems, too. On the one hand, lack of standards may cause inconvenience and low efficiency. According to Rainhard Schaler, the traditional mainstream localization together with technologies have reached their limits (p. 195). The use of "language technologies and language resources" through disruptive approaches will respond effectively to the challenges encountered during localization. From his perspective, localizers have applied "web-based, automated and open standard-based environments to achieve a localization throughput" (p. 200), as illustrated through a case study of Oracle's Worldwide Translation Group and its use of language resources during localization processes. This company has successfully achieved 2 million files throughput per month and 20 US dollars saving per year by adapting "the translation factory" (p. 202) approach. Nevertheless, this case is too specific and not representative at all. Here is the reason. Oracle's success lies on the fact that it is actually one of the world's leading and biggest localization companies. Their approach is completed largely by the "sophisticated process automation supported by standards and integrated process and language technologies" (p. 203). While the truth is most localization operations or translation companies are small or medium-sized. They do not have enough language resources or standards to achieve such efficiency and revenues.

Thus, brings about the fundamental problem: different standards (which relate to the formatting of source texts, etc.). It is highly accepted that XLIFF (XML-based localization Interchange File Format) still has a long way to go towards solving this problem. For instance, a Chinese software company starts to promote its products to European countries by localization. The translators hired by the company in China use Translation Memory of Snowman may have problems in cooperating with other localizers using other CAT tools and software i.e. Trados Studio in Europe due to different standards. This challenge seems to be overcome or at least reduced by the LGNITE consortium coordinated by the Localization Research Center (LRC). Instead of applying the traditional approach (the way localization is done at present), it proposes a new approach based on "open standards, tried, tested and further developed linguistic resources" (p. 208), which leads to the development of the "localization memory" (p. 210).

While on the other hand, the only ideology of localization is based on cultural diversity and diversification, yet the adaptation of standards and text-reuse technologies are in fact the opposite of cultural diversification. Here exists one of the major contradictions: "the technologies do something quite different from the ideal of cultural adaptation that would seem to be invested in the term localization" (p. 136).

4. Conclusion and Future Development of Localization

Localization is a process of adapting products into foreign markets which requires a large number of translation work. In the development of localization, the use of technologies that brings about more standards assist localizers achieve higher efficiency and productivity and gain companies more profits. However, problems occur simultaneously. This paper examines and explains problems of applying text-reuse technologies in localization, failures of dynamic equivalence of localization as well as the contradiction between standardization and cultural diversification. Considering these problems, reviewing maybe one possible way out. In this way, reviewers may play a more important part of translation and localization in the future. In addition,

outsourcing part of localization or translation work may be another trend.

As Tim Altanero (2006) notes, though discussed and studied a lot nowadays, localization is “still far from the norm” (p. 35). Perhaps only when localization gains its specific position in the academy, will the role of localizers be clearer.

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