GLOCALIZATION OR "LOOKING IN BOTH DIRECTIONS"

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Abstract

The paper analyses and compares glocalization and GILT processes in general and also applied to website localization. Glocalization is considered from several perspectives.

Keywords: glocal, glocalization, GILT processes, globalization, internationalization, localization.

Language, more than ever is subject to changes, as it shapes to the needs of those who use it. Source texts, usually in the language of a dominant culture tend to influence to a greater extent the "minor" target languages. However, the process of translating has focused even more on the receiver of the translated text, culture and specific context. The beneficiary of the translated information "dictates" what signifiers and what contexts should be used in the process of conveying the message into meaningful bits, even if misspelt or grammatically incorrect. The same applies to all the elements of a certain website. For instance, its design and usability can influence to a great extent the communication process. So, the translator needs to cover a gap between the source message and the receiver of the message who is dependent on certain pragmatic contexts. These contexts are to some extent known to the translator with the assistance of search engine tools. The translator should no longer have a prescriptive role in translating, in terms of correctness at word level, but should employ terms used by searchers. Still, at all the other levels the message should probably be as close to the target culture as possible, especially when the translator becomes a localizer. The localizer must find the balance between global influences and local features

Although English is nowadays the *lingua franca* (the global element and main carrier of global values), the vast majority of Internet users opt for reading information on products in their own language (locales). This user preference translates into the decreasing of the percentage of webpages written in English in favor of national and regional languages. In recent years there has been a steady decrease of the percentage of webpages written in English, while other major languages gained exposure. According to http://www.internetworldstats.com/ English is still the most widely used but Chinese and Spanish follow closely. In 2010 there were 536.6 million pages in English, 444.9 million in Chinese and 153.3 million in Spanish. Japanese, Portuguese and German follow with 99.1 million, 82.5 and 75.2 million, respectively. Arabic comes on the 7th position with 65.4 million, followed by French and Russian ranking very close by the number of webpages with million and 59.7. The last in the top

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ten is Korean with 39.4 million. The other entire world languages make up the rest of 350.6 million webpages.

This classification is a result of a more complex mix:

- number of total number of speakers of a certain language
- level of Internet access
- broadband penetration rate
- Internet technology development
- affluence
- investment in technology
- IC&T governmental programs
- prices of telecommunication services
- percentage of persons employed with IC&T user skills
- teleworking and organization culture
- online buying activities and their percentage from the total sales

The combination of all these unique (local) elements constitutes the global Internet medium. The interaction between the local and the global elements is called glocalization.

The term **glocalization** was coined by Sony's chairman Akio Morita. It is the result of blending *global* and *localization*, and refers to *global localization*. Glocalization is a special type of localization as theorists in social and cultural studies see the localization of products and services as "insiderization" and "looking in both directions." (Ohmae cited in Nederveen Pieterse 2009:52) In what follows, I analyze several definitions for the terms **glocal** and **glocalization**.

Oxforddictionaries.com defines **glocal** as "Reflecting or characterized by both local and global considerations "[1] while **glocalization** is defined by the same source as "The practice of conducting business according to both local and global considerations."

While Oxforddictionaries.com definitions are from a business-like perspective, there are several theorists in social and cultural studies that define glocalization from a different perspective. Friedman (2000:295) defines it as a coherent, non-tensioned, natural process: "the ability of a culture, when it encounters other strong cultures, to absorb influences that naturally fit into and can enrich that culture, to resist those things that are truly alien and to compartmentalise those things that, while different, can nevertheless be enjoyed and celebrated as different." Whereas Friedman's definition focuses on the actors that influence the glocalization process, The SAGE Dictionary of Cultural Studies refers to products (cultural products – a movie, a service, or goods) involved in the process: "The concept of glocalization, in origin a marketing term, has been deployed to express the global production of the local and the localization of the global. The global and the local are mutually constituting, indeed, much that is considered to be local, and counterpoised to the global, is the outcome of translocal processes." (Barker 2004:77)

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Ritzer, on the other hand, refers to glocalization as an outcome. "Glocalization can be defined as the interpenetration of the global and the local resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas" (2011:168). For the same concept, Robertson uses the term **globalization** - "the notion of glocalization actually conveys much of what I myself have previously written about globalization" - to reflect the same phenomenon: "globalization has involved the simultaneity and the interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local, or - in more abstract vein - the universal and the particular." (2010:336) However, in previous articles, (Lako 2012), I used the term **globalization** as an integrated part of GILT, as a pre-localization step. In my opinion globalization rather refers to the convergence of all the elements that constitute the global amalgam.

A definition encompassing all the activities from the human sphere is provided by Mendis "The way we — nations and communities — respond to an ever-changing interplay of global political, economic, social, religious, and cultural ethos at different localities is the unique process of <<glocalization.>> Glocalization is essentially a hybrid of globalization and localization. Glocalization is likely to empower local communities through strategic linking of global resources to address local issues for positive social change and to balance changing cultural interests and community needs." (2007:2)

The main point in all these definitions is that *glocalization* is perceived as a continuous and simultaneous process of mutual influence between local features, on the one hand, and characteristics that have become global on the other. Local features can become global, while global ones either suffer changes under the influence of the locale (s), disappear or survive only in the more conservative communities. Local and global should not be considered as antithetical. Local and global should be seen as a symbiosis. They share a symbiotic relationship and one cannot be ignored over the other. Local can be global and global can be particularized to function as local.

There are hundreds of examples to support this idea, even if we only adopt a linguistic perspective, and more specifically refer to inter-borrowings. Visiting http://www.vocabulary.com/ to look for borrowings from Spanish into English will show a list of 164 words. The Spanish words entered the English vocabulary at various times from various locales, primarily through contact of Americans with Mexican populations, but also from earlier European English-Spanish encounters. With the "expansion" of American English into the world, many of the Spanish loan words have been exported to other cultures as well. Words like *alligator, armada, avocado, banana, barracuda, barbecue, cannibal, canoe, guitar, guerilla, lasso, toreador, tornado, vanilla*, have been universalized through English and adapted to the pronunciation of each particular language. The same inter- influence can be seen at any level of human activity: cultural, technological, etc. To describe the same phenomenon there are other terms in use as well: mélange, hybridity, syncretism (Nederveen Pieterse 2009:55) or

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heterogenization, creolization, but these are directed rather towards cultural and sociological issues.

Considering how glocalization is influenced and influences e-commerce websites, I can assert that the term glocalization, as an interaction of both global and local factors, can be seen almost on any website. Most often web-users may be imposed the task of learning and using English. Numerous websites are localized just for the most widely used languages on the Internet; other sites are at different stages of localizing their page content (for instance, the description of a new tool on Google will be first available only in English and later "roll out" into the world with its localized content) for all of the languages. The name of the products or services is in English, and for the sake of marketing consistency they remain in English (There were cases when a product name had to be change because of language or cultural issues). While for an English speaker it is facile to predict what Google's KeywordPlanner[2] is intended for, in the case of a non-English speaker it is a completely new word that has to be learnt and assimilated. Indubitably, one could argue that it is a term that enters the vocabulary of a certain socio-economic group, that of SEO; similarly, with regard to *adobe*, most people around the globe will think only of the company and not of the term originating from Spanish and meaning *sun-dried brick*.

However, *glocalization* on websites refers to providing global information to users from local social contexts around the world and allowing them to understand, retrieve, organize, share and produce content following the characteristics of their given specific locale, while retaining its globally accessible feature. The usage of icons for the main page, envelope for contact, map icon for location is globally accepted by any web-user, similarly to the square form for stopping or the double horizontal bars for pausing the music from playing on a music device has been accepted and used ever since its invention.

In the case of e-commerce websites, I believe that the term *glocalization* reflects genuinely the mode in which they are built and used. While, in general I support Nord's instrumental translation (1997), it cannot be always successfully applied in the case of e-commerce websites, as the products' semiotic representation (text, pictures, video) cannot be entirely written in such a way as to be perceived as "an independent message transmitting instrument in a new communicative action in the target culture, […] intended to fulfill its communicative purpose without the recipient being conscious of reading or hearing a text which, in a different form, was used before in a different communicative situation." (2005: 81) For instance, I cannot possibly put on sale a device and use its picture in the source content and change it for target culture, unless the product's specifications are different for the two markets. I could instead replace the background image; for instance Dacia Duster on Transalpina for the Romanian market and the same car make next to Stonehenge if targeting the UK market. Also, in the case of brands, most often they already contain the traits of

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the culture from which they originate. Documentary translation is closer to glocalization means.

Venuti's foreignization-domestication dichotomy (1998:240) applied to the resemioticization of website communication is closer to glocalization theory, with the mentioning that the **foreignization- domestication** paradigm, like glocalization on websites, is a **moving semiotic system**. The boundaries between what is perceived as foreign or global versus domestic or local elements are continually shifting and this is reflected in website content maintenance.

As already mentioned at the beginning of this article, I consider that glocalization is a special type of localization, i.e. global localization. Unlike general website localization, where instrumental translation applies (useful for affiliate websites that usually operate at national level only), glocalization theory acknowledges that there is simultaneity of both the global and local factors involved in the process of website adaptation from a source website to the target website.

From a more technical perspective, glocalization appears to be a bi-dimensional process involving concurrent globalization and localization processes, and bidirectional as global traits influence the local traits and vice versa. On the other hand, within the GILT approach, the processes derive from each other and the direction is from the more general, globalization, to the more specific, localization. The direction, if each step is carefully planned, is unidirectional, and changes and updates are initiated from the globalization stage, and moving through internationalization, then localization, and finally translation. This does not imply that signals from local markets cannot be accepted and applied at global level and then reapplied to each of the local markets. A possible scenario could be that a localized banner proves successful on a local market and then it can be tested on several other local markets.



Figure 1: GILT versus Glocalization

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In Figure 1, I illustrate the differences between glocalization and GILT. Whereas GILT is a systematic, step-by-step approach (in practice not with clearly delimited borders), unidirectional (G11n > I18n > L10n > Translation / Copywriting > Personalization) and reflects the necessary steps for localization rather as processes, Glocalization involves synchronous and bidirectional processes or states, acknowledging reciprocal influence of both local and global factors. The table below synthesizes my findings regarding the predominant features of GILT processes, on the one hand, and glocalization, on the other.

Table 1: GILT vs. glocalization

GILT	**Glocalization**
systematic	somewhat hectic
planned	unplanned
unidirectional	bidirectional
somewhat unresponsive to changes	highly responsive to changes
institutionalized	decentralized
translation based	copywriting centered
asynchronous state	synchronous state
predominantly prescriptive	predominantly descriptive
predominantly domesticating	foreignization and domestication cohabitation
locale oriented (locale)	global + locales intermingled (glocal)
4 distinct processes	combined bipolar processes
communication direction: global to local	bidirectional
methodical production strategy	observational and analytical framework
rather viewed as a set of processes	rather perceived as a product

All in all, while **glocalization** from a technical point of view is not a valid approach as it cannot be implemented systematically, like **GILT** related processes, glocalization theory reflects reality of the modern interrelated and interconnected world, the "global village" shaped by two forces: homogeneity and heterogeneity. Also, glocalization does not specifically include translation, which means that actually GILT is often only GIL.

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[2] https://adwords.google.com/ko/KeywordPlanner/

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