# HIGH-PROFILE VS LOW-PROFILE WEBSITE LOCALISATION

**LAKO Cristian**[1]

*Abstract*

Descriptiveness and prescriptiveness are an everyday phenomenon in our lives and they most often refer to, in simple terms, the communication process we exercise in oral or written forms; they relate to how we communicate vs. how we should communicate. This dichotomy also transcends to any type of communication, from face-to-face communication to broadcasting. Exchanging information over the Internet is, past all doubt, included.

***Keywords: website localisation, prescriptiveness, descriptiveness, translation studies, SEO translation***

## Key concepts and delimitations

*localisation*: I opted for the concept of *localisation* instead of *translation* as localisation may include or may not *translation* as part of the "standard" GILT (globalisation, internationalisation, localisation, translation) processes. Translation can often be replaced with copywriting. (Lako 2013) For definitions and practices on localisation see B. Esselink (200.), A. Pym (2014), P. Sandrini (2008)

*website localisation:* It is a special type of localisation referring to web pages and how they are localised. (Jimenez-Crespo 2014, Lako 2014, Pym 2010, 2014, Sandrini 2005)

*descriptiveness*: In linguistics, it refers to objectively describing language usage synchronically without assessing it against standard rules. It can be regarded as a divergent linguistic phenomenon.

*prescriptiveness*: In linguistics, an approach to language analysis from the perspective of language rules imposed on its speakers. It is a convergent process, institutionalized, with the media as its main agent.

## The actors

Communication, the way people speak or write, is determined socially, professionally and through education. When two sides of a communication process exchange information, they make pre- and continuous adjustments to their linguistic output. In website localisation the main sender is the company, institution or individual that creates content on websites, whereas the receiver is the content consumer that arrives to the web pages either directly or indirectly (mediated through other chanels). However, content consumers are no longer seen as simple receivers but also as non-verbal message senders (their behaviour is recorded on the websites through mouse and/or eyes tracking) or verbal message senders (their input in search boxes or their data added with the help of forms, usually on blogs).

[1] Assistant Prof. PhD, „Petru Maior" University of Tîrgu Mureș



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Countries (for instance.gov), companies, institutions and individuals can be divided into high-profile and low-profile entities.

**High-profile entities** (prosperous) possess all the necessary instruments to control large sums of capital, human resources, and influence at great extent the market, and adjacently the communication process. Typically, they are multinationals and corporations that transcend borders and are involved in the making of global politics as well. They control the communication process as they are perceived as authoritative actors. The communication process is vertical and from top to bottom. They create needs in terms of products or services and thus they generate, in Saussurean terms, both the signified and the signifier. Companies from the tech or automotive industries, for instance, coin new terms for their latest inventions. These terms remain unchanged when translated into target content, with some exceptions when the translation is offensive or inappropriate in the target language.

During the translation process, there may occur translation errors or omissions in the target language and, as such, they appear on the local authoritative websites, or inconsistencies in the source texts are also translated - bitdefender and Google are two examples (Lako 2014:251) now (in 2018) rectified. Websites perceived as authoritative and, on a market largely under the spell of the "country of origin" effect (Pucci et al. 2012:155), such as Romania, can influence the target language, especially if the speakers are undereducated and more open to borrowings. While such oversights are rather rare, as usually companies with an impact have the capital to employ translation agencies, the human factor - the translator and the reviewer - can still affect the target language content consumers. A notable exception is Facebook and similar companies that allow users translate its interface and messages, while employing machine translation if the user requires so. On the other hand, institutions such as the EU, governments or city halls, universities, etc. acknowledging ethnic diversity, while they do have the capital and know-how for producing both reliable source and target content, and are, for good reason, accepted as authoritative, content generation, especially in target languages may be faulty. Furthermore, when on the EU website disclaimers such as "English is the official version ..." is displayed, there is a reason for concern. Are the translations unreliable?

In the case of high-profile entities, the communication process seems unidirectional as it is the users that most often go directly to the website they are interested in, in the case of institutions, even more so. However, institution websites are more prescriptive than those of companies, the communication process is closer to unidirectionality, in terms of signifiers and signified, as usually content creators of such websites are educated and due to the positions of those represented, they are authoritative. Companies may be less prescriptive especially in the case of outside-the-box thinking such as in communicating through advertisements, as the very role of ads is to stand out. The communication of high-profile companies is rather bidirectional as they



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both track users and collect feedback through support teams, blogs, forms, comments, statistical data and other, usually, low-profile entities approach.

On the other hand, **low-profile entities** are small companies or even individuals, obviously lacking the huge resources of high-profile entities, that attempt to secure a piece of the market either through unique products/services or through unconventional means of communication: guerrilla advertising (Levinson 1994), out in the real world, or black- and white-hat strategies in the digital environment. With the democratization of the marketing through the Internet, search engines, and, later, social networks, any small entity benefits, in theory, from the same marketing conditions, same technical costs, and similar smart digital tools. Nowadays such tools, by default, are equipped or can be extended with automatic translation and localisation modules (Prestashop, Wordpress, Drupal, etc.). And as it is cost effective to launch your website globally right from the very beginning, low-profile entities often do so. By using individuals or small teams of SEO- (search engine optimization) and localisation-aware translators they can earn a market share. Such approaches to digital marketing are applicable especially to companies and institutions from countries with lower GDP. They can get a market share in domains such as healthcare in the form of healthcare tourism, low university education costs (for instance Romanian university diplomas are acknowledged in the EU and by other strategic partners), digital services (the case of Bitdefender Lako 2014:165), product awareness (Dacia and wineries, in Lako 2014:252). Such translation and localisation techniques are categorised as reverse localisation (Schäler 2007) strategies. (Unquestionably, *reverse localisation* may be an appropriate term if we pondered affluent vs. third world countries, but it is improper if we considered companies from various affluent nations from around the world such as Samsung, German car makers, Ikea, etc., Romanian Bitdefender antivirus where the starting point is not an anglophone nation.) Therefore, under these terms of low resources in all the area, website localisation is advantageous for low-profile companies. Unlike high-profile or authoritative websites the case in which communication is either from the website to the users or to some extent bidirectional, low-profile websites, most often, base their communication by tracking what users look for on search engines, they fundament their strategies, either on the home market or on foreign markets, by copywriting or translating (Lako 2013) content using keywords used by search engine users, often referred to as SEO translation/localisation. In this case the communication is horizontal and bidirectional. SEO translation should be perceived as a descriptive translation strategy.

**Researchers in translation.** The same as with the above entities researchers can be divided in two main categories: those having experience or acknowledging only high-profile entities and those having experience or acknowledging low-profile entities as well. Researchers and academics in translations studies are highly educated and often work or collaborate with large companies or institutions. By default, they are prescriptive and fail to acknowledge the role of statistical data in translation (A. Pym, M. A. Jiménez-Crespo)



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in the era of big data. Machine translation evolution may compensate for SEO unaware translators. On the other hand, there has been a new trend that has moved towards statistical data usage in translation as well, similarly to some of the industry, namely deciding on terminology and translation based on users' interactions with search engines. (Jud & Massey 2011, Lako 2014, Achkasov 2015). Using SEO translation and localisation is a rather descriptive approach in terms of signifiers being determined by search engine users. However, using data provided by users does not imply using non-standard terms. Dialectal or misspelt words can be used in meta tags, maintaining standard language in content. Search engines are aware of this type of data and, by default will provide results from websites written in standard language. So probably SEO translation should be given more consideration.

**The industry**, on the other hand, has been doing so for quite some time now, but only as a niche and not as a full strategy. Some professional translation and localisation bodies such as GALA (Globalization and Localization Association - https://www.gala-global.org/), MultiLingual (https://multilingual.com/), CommonSenseAdvisory (https://www.commonsenseadvisory.com/), Localisation Research Centre (https://www.localisation.ie), Proz(https://www.proz.com), and more, host various articles or mediate discussions on SEO and its influence on translation and localisation.

| | High-profile entities | Low-profile entities |
|---|---|---|
| Capital | ample | limited |
| Human resources | ample | limited |
| Communication by direction | vertical (top to bottom) | horizontal |
| Marketing approach | preponderantly prescriptive | preponderantly descriptive |
| Translation/localisation agent | translation agencies | MT and/or freelancers/ crowdsourcing |
| Language variation direction | convergent | divergent |
| SEO aware | affirmative | affirmative |



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**Conclusions:** High- and low-profile website localisation is linked to the type of entity that appeals to website localisation strategies. The profile of an entity determines its communicative competence and communicative performance. This can range from grobalization/McDonaldization (Ritzer and Ryan 2007:52) to (g)localisation.

Whereas some high-profile entities dominate linguistically, in terms of economy, and from the standpoint of communication the global market, the US most notably, there are institutions and organizations such as the EU and the UN actively encourage companies and nations of small diffusion to promote themselves. They provide funds to revitalize or maintain linguistic and cultural diversity.

The institutionalization of translation services lead to predominantly prescriptive translation strategies. However, two high-profile entities from the the IT&C industry, Google and Facbook, appealed to crowdsourcing, translation done by non-professionals (Anastasiou, D. Gupta, R 2011). It demonstrates that the descriptive approach in translation gains momentum. Similarly SEO translation, to be more specific, setting up the most communication-efficient termbase, is user input based, statistical analysis of crowd input in search engines. Therefore, I suggest both a descriptive and prescriptive approach, as they can be complementary. Descriptiveness is intentionally placed first as it is important to initially analyse the language used in communication, and then, through prescriptiveness, to fine tune a standardized output. Both descriptive and prescriptive approaches should be given the proper attention.

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