TEACHING LOCALIZATION IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

Although a very high percentage of Romanian companies export their products and services to the EU and other countries around the world, when it comes to localizing them to each of the specific markets, they lack the skills and knowledge for that task. Foreign companies are also deficient in localization competences when we analyze their products localized for the Romanian market, hence the desirability and necessity of training students in applied linguistics and marketing company staff the skills for linguistically and culturally customizing the specifications of their products or services.

Keywords: localization, translation, web site localization, translation curricula, teaching localization

In recent years, the web presence of companies has translated into growth of market share and extension of collateral services. Contrary to the economic trends in the last three years, companies that have extended their activities beyond the traditional means of business to client communication, claim that have stayed afloat during the crises and even made profit.

This underlines the importance of offering easily accessible information to the existing and potential clients. However, providing the information in an appropriate manner is very important when the company tries to convey the message „we are the perfect match".

Language, more than ever is subject to changes, as it shapes to the needs of those who speak it. Source texts, usually in the language of a dominant culture tend to influence more the target "minor" languages. However, the process of translating is no longer dependent on the translator(s) alone but also on the receiver of the translated text and culture and 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. Same is true for all the elements of a certain website. For instance the design and usability of it can influence a great deal 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, contexts which are to some extent known to the translator with the help 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

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all the other levels the message should probably be as close to the target culture as possible, especially when the translator turns into a localizer.

Although English is the *lingua franca* of our days, the vast majority of internet users opt for reading information on products in their own language. This user preference translates into the decreasing of the percentage of web pages written in English in favour of national and regional languages. In recent years there is a steady decrease of the percentage of web pages written in English, and other major languages are starting to catch up. According to http://www.internetworldstats.com/ English is still the most widely used but Chinese and Spanish are closing in. In 2010 there were 536.6 million pages in English while Chinese 444.9 million and Spanish 153.3 million. Japanese, Portuguese and German follow with 99.1 million, 82.5 and respectively 75.2 million. Arabic comes on 7th place with 65.4 millions followed by French and Russian ranking very close by the number of web pages with 59.8 million and 59.7. Placed last in the top ten is Korean with 39.4 million. All the rest of the world languages put up 350.6 million web pages.

This classification is a result of a more complex mix:

- number of total number of speakers of a given 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 ICT user skills
- teleworking and organization culture
- online buying activities and percentage

On a global market, the Internet is the fastest way to approach affluent clients with high purchasing power. So any Romanian company should be interested in offering its products and/or services in the language of those potential clients. Any economic activities based on exporting goods and services will communicate with potential business partners and clients considering the language- culture pair of the targeted market.

Globalization, internationalization, localization and translation are processes of making the transfer of the message from one language/culture/context to one or more target languages/culture/contexts in a more efficient and cost- effective way. Most frequently these proceses are directed from a major language source, in Romania mainly for products from China, the EU (especially from Germany) and the US, to the cultural and linguistic locale of Romanians. For example, **Apple** is one of the biggest US

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companies with a well-established place in the world due to both its quality of products, and to its marketing strategies. The localization process for the Apple products is done at regional level, and they cover most of the countries.

But these processes can also have a reversed direction as well, from a "minor" language-culture pair to a "major" market locale. **Nokia** is one of the most successful Finish brands in mobile technology that sells their products and services around the world, but with the US as its most important market. Their products and websites can be considered as studying material to prove the principles of processes mentioned previously, as there is a site for each country in the world.

Such renowned companies are proof that localization should be considered by Romanian companies as well. And some of them already do it quite successfully. For instance, the Romanian car maker Dacia, has localized its websites to most of the European contries and languages, quite successfully and all the elements of the localization process are more or less attended to.

The official site of the EU, although very complex in structure and information abundancy is one of the best examples of a localized multilingual website of an institution. It can also be used as an example for localizing sites, especially those that want to offer information.

Unfortunatelly, there are many Romanian companies that fail at this task. Most often the translator considers that the text only needs to be translated, while failing completely when it comes to the other aspects of localization. Furthermore, even text translations lack what it takes to be perceived as texts in the target language.

For instance, http://www.eusecholding.eu, although offering services in several countries, completely fail when it comes to localizing. One can trace the source text and context (Hungarian) easily, in both the English and Romanian languages, both because the skills of the translator are poor ("In what we are other" and "In ce suntem diferiti" for the Hungarian "Amiben mások vagyunk") and the pictures have not been translated at all.

In the view of the realities of today, the web as a business tool and information resource, educational as well, it is vital to reveal the importance of the end user in the localization process of multilingual websites so that the gap in the business to client and business to business relations should be covered as much as possible by observing both sides, the offer of a product or a service on one hand and that of the potential client on the other. And there is a mutual understanding between the two sides as the seller is interested in generating big sales and the buyer is interested in finding fast what he/she is looking for. The research engine aware localizer can be a catalyst in this process by adopting an appropriate method, and helping in the development of non-invasive communication. Non-invasive refers to delivering to search engine user real information and in the appropriate contexts, contexts dependent on the semantic web system.

Although most aspects concerning localization have been barely touched, this article wants to call the attention upon the requirement of introducing in the translation

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curricula modules on localization, because the current market necessities are no longer met. The translator needs good language and culture skills in the source and target texts but also technical skills like general computer literacy and more specialised ones like using translation memories, translation engines, search engines, SEO skills and more.

Unfortunately, although Romania could re-launch its economy especially developing goods and services for the external market, the lack of skills in (reversed-) localization is a major drawback. Currently there are no Universities in Romania that teach the skills of localization, whereas in other countries modules on localization are a consistent part of the translation curricula.

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