LOCALIZATION AND TRANSLATION STUDIES

LAKO Cristian[1]

Abstract

In recent years there has been much debate on localization of products and services and how this relates to translation in the light of a quasi-globalized market. This paper discusses the ways in which localization, translation and other associated concepts relate to one another.

Keywords: localization, globalization, internationalization, localization, personalization, translation studies

1.1. Globalization

Globalization started out as a natural consequence to the ever need of companies to extend and enter new global markets. Thus, the term *globalization* was initially used in an economic context, at decision-making levels of powerful companies looking to offer their products and service on a greater scale, to various customers around the globe. Only later did it come to the attention of the scholars in translation studies, when the need to offer products and services in various languages became a marketing necessity. *Globalization,* abbreviated as *g11n* by the business community, turned into a compulsory step in the process of translating a product and service related content to an internationally available content.

Merriam-webster.com defines globalization as "the act or process of globalizing **:** the state of being globalized; *especially***:** the development of an increasingly integrated global economy marked especially by free trade, free flow of capital, and the tapping of cheaper foreign labor markets" Dictionary.cambridge.org defines the same term as "the increase of trade around the world, especially by large companies producing and trading goods in many different countries • when available goods and services, or social and cultural influences, gradually become similar in all parts of the world". These dictionary definitions cover the social and economic aspect of globalization, but do not include any reference to the communication processes involved, namely communicating with the global market in the language of each of distinguishable local markets. Thus, globalization involves translation as well. Multinationals and professional associations such as MultiLingual.com, which already have a lot of experience in offering products and services to different language communities, give more precise, translation studies oriented definitions. The December 2011 issue of the online MultiLingual Magazine defines *globalization* as "... the process that addresses business issues associated with launching a

[1] Assistant, *Petru Maior* University, Târgu-Mureş

BDD-A3100 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 18.97.9.170 (2026-09-08 22:06:24 UTC)

product globally, such as integrating localization throughout a company after proper internationalization and product design."

Globalization is the very first step, a decision made in the marketing department, which initiates all the other consecutive processes: *internationalization (l18n)*, *localization (L10n)* and *translation*. It involves rather managerial aspects such as deciding which markets (locales) are targeted (usually affluent nations are targeted first) or where the return on investment - ROI - is more significant. Globalization sets a budget for the other consequent processes, sets and oversees sticking to deadlines, etc. Although only a selected number of markets are selected at first, a good product or service design will allow adding any number of market prospects. The extent to which globalization may be adopted is restricted very often by objective external factors: competition on a certain local market, costs involved in the subsequent processes (internationalization, localization, translation) when the markets are rather different from one another especially in terms of language and culture, geo-political issues, environmental problems, etc. For instance, keyboards on laptops are rather tricky to be set appropriately for various languages. The first computer keyboards were based on the 26 letters of the English alphabet, but many languages have more than 26: Romanian - 31, German - 30, Hungarian - 44, French - 26 + 6 diacritics and 2 ligatures. In the beginning, Microsoft solved the issues of extra characters from software (in Office Word you can still add various symbols from any language into your document). Only much later were special characters added to the keyboards, and that is because this added extra cost to development and production. They were first added only from the operating system, and it was quite awkward to get used to finding where special Romanian characters (Ş,Ţ,Â,Ă,Î) were supposed to be placed. Programming those keys to have several functionalities from the software and accessing those functions by pressing various combinations of keys involved more costs and implementation time. The extra characters were engraved onto existing keys only later, depending on the size of the potential market. There are even bigger issues with languages such as Chinese, considered to be using an ideographic alphabet. With modern gadgets, however, such as those using virtual keyboards on their touchscreens, planning for globalization is now a lot easier, as operation systems can include virtually any number of keys to match any targeted language, while being able to zoom or move the keyboard around the screen. Thus, although the initial costs for developing a touchscreen controlled gadget is more expensive, the processes to internationalize, localize and translate related content is far more reduced, because most of it is done from software, and software can be maintained and upgraded a lot easier.

BDD-A3100 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 18.97.9.170 (2026-09-08 22:06:24 UTC)

1.2. Internationalization

The next step down the line is internationalization (I18n). Schäler defines the term as "...the process of designing (or modifying) software so as to enable users to work in the language of their choice (even if the software is not localized) and to isolate the linguistically and culturally dependent parts of an application in preparation for localization."(2009: 158) Software is not the only product that can be internationalized. Internationalization is not only about preparing a product or service for language changes. Inappropriate or partial internationalization, especially if in the target culture products or services aimed for the source culture have already been used, can be troublesome or, at least, some readjusting is needed from the part of the user.

For instance, when using keyboard shortcuts such as CTRL+S for saving a document, "S" for "saving" works for the Romanian "salvează" as well. The same happens for CTRL+C ("copy"-"copiază") and CTRL+P ("print"-"printează", used more and more instead of "tipăreşte" when using a printer). But even in English some of the shortcuts are not necessarily indicating the operation to be done. "Undo" and "redo" cannot use the "U" and "R" keys as they are used for "underline" and respectively for "align right". On the other hand the use of CTRL+X for "cutting" is rather iconographic (a welcome tendency especially in the use of gadgets - a triangle used for "play", a square symbol used for "stop", etc.). "Open" and the Romanian "Deschide" are using the same combination - CTRL+O. Hence, preparing software for a new market would be rather difficult. It is better in such cases to let the user learn the key combinations. The process of preparing a service, in this case keyboard software, can be taken even further. For non-English users you can even choose between using a standard keyboard layout with diacritics and a programmer keyboard layout with or without diacritics. Another argument is the usage of a slightly different keyboard in the UK - an extra £, as compared to the standard US keyboard.

Thus, internationalization is not only about preparing the way for providing your product in several languages. It is about preparing your product for local rules and regulations, habits and needs while keeping and generating common communication patterns. Offering various customers from different parts of the world the opportunity to use commonly recognizable icons such as the previously mentioned "play" and "stop" buttons on gadgets could be a plausible solution. Considering the above remarks, the definition for internationalization found in the *MultILingual Magazine* encompasses much better the current realities about this phenomenon: "... the process of generalizing a product [or service] so that it can handle multiple languages and cultural conventions (currency, number separators, dates) [and legal regulations] without the needs for redesign."[2] Like *globalization, internationalization* is rather a managerial decision involving financial and technical aspects. Microsoft is using for the same concept the term *localizibility* in its documentation for Visual Studio 2005: "An intermediate step prior to localization is testing for localizability. In this step, you ensure that you have separated

[2] December 2011 issue, p. 49

BDD-A3100 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 18.97.9.170 (2026-09-08 22:06:24 UTC)

the application's resources that require translation from the rest of the application's code."[3]

Apart from separating the resources that require translation, the main technical aspect involved in the internationalization process is delimiting and separating the localizable parts from the whole. Good planning at this level can save time and money when moving to the *localization* process.

1.3. Localization

Localization (L10n) is a process that cannot be done without going through the globalization and internationalization processes first, as already shown in the previous pages. Cadieux and Esselink define the term as "...adapting a thing to the needs of a given locale."[4] The online MultiLingual Magazine, defines in its terminology section *localization* as "the process of adapting a product or software to a specific international language or culture so that it seems natural to that particular region. True localization considers language, culture, customs and the characteristics of the target locale."[5]

Although the software industry started to be interested in localization as early as the 1980s, scholars showed no interest in it before Anthony Pym (1999) and David Brooks (2000). Later on, several researchers started tapping the subject, either from a linguistic perspective (David Crystal (2006)), a technical one (Cutroni Justin (2010)) or from a multidisciplinary perspective which, nevertheless, involves translation studies to a high extent (Dianne Cyr, 2003, Anthony Pym, 2004, 2005, 2010 and others).

Most often, when speaking about localization, scholars in the humanities refer only to language and cultural issues. The language aspect is covered in broad lines by the **translation** process and maybe rightfully considered to be the most time consuming part within the localization process. **Culture** is acknowledged to play an important role as there can be significant cultural differences from one language community to the next even when they are using the same language. For example, American English and British English have both their language and culture particularities, due to different environmental, historic and economic conditions. The same is true for French. Canadian French is slightly different from that used in France or Belgium. **Customs** can lead to even more particularization, as customs can vary from region to region.

1.4. Personalization

Schäler (cited in Baker, 2009: 162) observes that a specialized type of localization is *personalization*. Applications allow users to pick from a range of options. For instance, Yahoo Mail allows you to change the lookout of the email service (colors, fonts). Firefox

[3] http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/h6270d0z.aspx
[4] http://www.translationdirectory.com/article127.htm
[5] December 2011 issue, p. 49

BDD-A3100 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 18.97.9.170 (2026-09-08 22:06:24 UTC)

browser allows changing its background image. Other applications, like Adobe Flash, let you change the layout of the menus and toolbox windows (re-placing menus, minimizing or expending certain sub-menus); you can use a designer layout or a programmer layout, or you can set your own layout. This type of localization is called by Schäler (ibid.) *development localization*.

1.5. Culturability

Many of the above mentioned aspects related to localization, especially to website localization are referred to as **culturability** in some academic papers: "<<culturability>> is the merging of culture and usability and represents a relationship between design elements and culture". (Badre, 2000; Cyr, 2004).

Along the same lines, Nielson (cited in Pym, 2010: 7) pointed out back in 1994 the features to be considered when thinking of website usability (often referred to, by website or application developers, as *user-friendly* design and content):

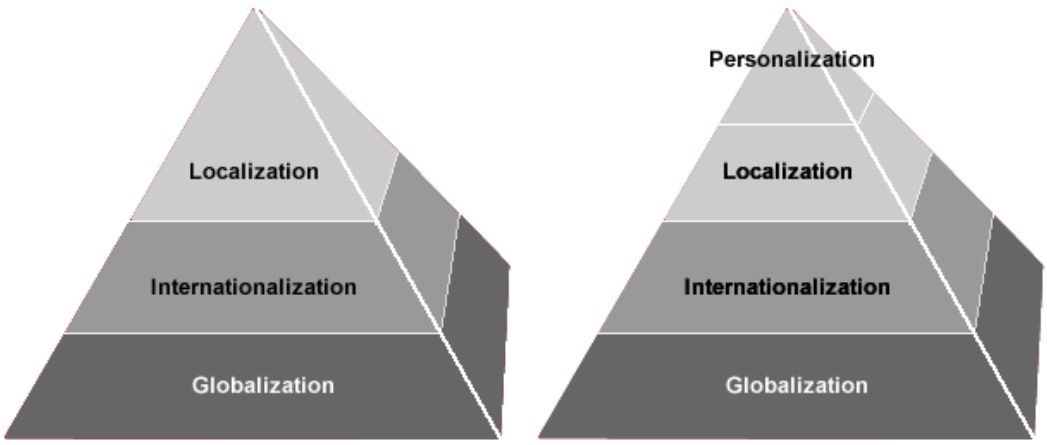
- *Learnability* seen as easiness of usage of the design the first time. Design should be simple and intuitive. Iconic menu buttons are a good example. And tooltips can be added so that the user can find out quickly information about the tool.
- *Efficiency* refers to how fast a task can be accomplished with minimum expenditure of time and effort. On a website or in an application, testers often test for the number of clicks needed to achieve a certain task, for instance getting to a certain piece of information on a site. Google recommends clicking no more than twice for getting to any page of the website. Learnability and efficiency put together are called *accessibility* by some publishers
- *Memorability* refers to the ability of a user to recall the usability of a design after a longer period of non-usage. I think this is not so relevant for the fast moving economy of computer technologies, as technologies are continuously evolving, always adding more and better features for the users. For instance, the design of Microsoft Office Word 2007 was considered by many to have been quite radically changed, as compared to its predecessor, Word 2003. However, even if menus were far better organized in the more recent version, for those used to the 2003 version it was rather difficult to find their way. So, it is more important to avoid steep learning curves. Intermediary versions would help but would add to development costs so they would not be economically viable.

By e*rrors,* Nielson refers to the number of errors and their severity. This aspect has become somewhat unnecessary nowadays. Through careful planning and design most potential errors can actually be excluded. I suggest guiding the user by restricting his/her input and actions. For instance, in the case of sign up forms there is often used a step-by-step, subsequent order for input.

BDD-A3100 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 18.97.9.170 (2026-09-08 22:06:24 UTC)

According to Nielson, *satisfaction* refers to the degree of fulfilment when using a design. Based on the explanations and examples above I think that satisfaction in usability is actually depending on all the features previously mentioned. It is a sum up of learnability, efficiency, memorability, and error-free functionality of the design.

All these usability features need to be considered in the process of localization in general and personalization in particular. That is why I would add personalization as well to Richard Sikes' graphic below that shows the interconnection between globalization, internationalization and localization (from the Multilingual.com guide: Localization – 2009 issue[6], p. 4)



Personalization as a custom type of localization

The two graphics show the interdependence of the four processes. Globalization is the building block, on which all the other processes are based. The closer to the tip of the pyramid, the more specialised and specific the processes and skills involved. I added personalization at the top as it is a specific type of localization.

While localization requires a wider set of skills, translation is a more specific process dealing strictly with text. Translation is an integrated part of the localization process, which in turn is inherent to internationalization, while the whole process is commenced by the assignor through the globalization initiation.

Bibliography:

Cyr, Dianne (2003) *Localization of Web Design: An Empirical Comparison of German, Japanese, and U.S. Website Characteristics* Available online: http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.85.8765&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Dimitriu, Rodica (2002) *Theories and Practice of Translation.* Iasi: Institutul European

Esselink, Bert (2000)*A practical guide to localization*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing

[6] http://www.multilingual.com/downloads/screenSupp103.pdf

BDD-A3100 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 18.97.9.170 (2026-09-08 22:06:24 UTC)

Maroto, Jesús & Mario de Bortoli (2001) *Web Site Localisation* Available online: http://www.globalpropaganda.com/articles/WebSite%20Localisation.pdf
Nielson, Jakob (2006), *F-Shaped Pattern for Reading Web Content*. Available online at:
Parr, Terence (2005) *Web Application Internationalization and Localization in Action* Available online: http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.95.5589&rep=rep1&type=pdf
Pym, A., Perekrestenko, B. Starink (eds.) (2005) *Translation Technology and its teaching (with much mention of localization)*. Tarragona: Intercultural Studies Group. Available online: http://isg.urv.es/publicity/isg/proj ects/2002-2005 bff/index.html
Pym, Anthony (1999) *Localizing Localization in Translator-Training Curricula.* Available online *http://www* . tinet. org! ~apym/ on-line/localization. html
Pym, Anthony (2004) *Localization from the perspective of Translation Studies: Overlaps in the digital divide?* Paper presented to the SCALLA conference in Kathmandu, January 2004. Available online: *http://www* . elda.org/*en/projl* scallaiSCALLA2004/Pymv2. pdf
Pym, Anthony (2005)*Localization: On its nature, virtues and dangers.* Available online: http://www.rut.es/~apym/ on-line/Localization bergen. doc
Pym, Anthony (2010) Website localization. Publicat în The Oxford Handbook of Translation Studies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. 410-424.
Rodrigo, Elia Yuste (ed.) (2008) *Topics in Language Resources for Translation and Localisation* Philadelphia: Benjamins
Schäler, Reinhard (2009), 'Localization' in Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha (eds.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2nd edition
Schiller, H. (1976) Communication and Cultural Domination, M.E. Sharpe
Singh, Nitish and Arun Pereira (2005) *The culturally customized Web site. Customizing Web Sites for the Global Marketplace.* Burlington, USA & Oxford, UK: EISJVi Butterworth-Heinemann.

BDD-A3100 © 2012 Universitatea Petru Maior
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 18.97.9.170 (2026-09-08 22:06:24 UTC)