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Website Translation: a New Training Challenge

Web-based information is increasingly represented in the wide spectrum of source texts for translation (Wheatley, 2003). Nonetheless, translator training has not yet been adapted accordingly. This paper attempts to grasp the challenges posed by this new medium and seeks to define the competences needed for a professional translation service. The integration of this new content into the translator training curriculum is discussed.

What is website translation?

Before going into details, a few basic terms should be explained. First of all, we would like to define website translation in the context of translation studies with particular regard to the functional approach. Functionalism in translation theory stresses the functional appropriateness of the target text: The translator creates a new text based on the source text as well as on the specifications outlined in the skopos which is defined by the commissioner and by the professional knowledge of the translator (Nord, 1997, Vermeer, 1996). For a high quality translation, the specific communicative situation and the context of use of the target text need to be outlined as a part of the instructions to the translator.

The Web has become an ubiquitous textual platform with a variety of purposes. Nonetheless, it is possible to define the general purpose for some specific types of websites, such as selling products (e-commerce), acquisition of new customers (lead generation), creating online support in the case of company websites. The explicit definition of the purpose of a culturally and linguistically adapted website is of overall importance because all linguistic and cultural choices depend on it, and it „has to be negotiated between the client and the translator“ (Nord, 1997, p. 35). On the basis of such a functionalist approach we can explain website translation as the

1. production of a new website
2. which is targeted at another linguistic and cultural community
3. and based on an existing website,
4. in accordance with the predefined purpose.

This definition is in line with the broad description of localisation as “the provision of services and technologies for the management of multilinguality across the global information flow” (Schäler, 2002, p. 21). Localisation, thus, is a general concept, including software localisation and web localisation as specific types of localisation. A few aspects of both overlap such as user interfaces, text integrated in programming code, to some extent even file formats such as HTML, the language of the Web which is also used in help files of software programmes or the XML-format used as a mark-up language for documentation as well as for the Web. What sets the two types of localisation apart is the intrinsic global nature of web texts, their publicity in the general network of the Internet as well as the much broader scope of web texts in comparison to software programmes. Although software can be written for different applications, the Web touches almost every aspect of life. In practice, multilingual websites are important for international companies, export-oriented companies, international organisations and for every web author who targets international readers.

The training for software localisation is a very specific task and requires a technical background

of software companies and programmers. Moreover, a large proportion of the software localisation market is from English to other languages. Due to this, longer software localisation programmes are restricted to a few specialised training institutions with close ties to the software industry. General translator training institutions without such a specialist background may offer only short introductory courses. Because of its more general nature, website localisation, however, must be integrated into the general training programme for translators.

Website translation is becoming more and more a standard task for the freelance translator. On the other hand, the development of the Web is going to integrate all sorts of applications, see the new trends “.net” and “Web 2.0”. More technically orientated developers would like to see the Web changing from a document delivery system to an application platform. If this occurs, or at least for the part of the Web where this change takes place, website localisation will move closer to software localisation.

Having distinguished the two concepts of software localisation and Web localisation, we still have to clarify the relation between the two terms of Web localisation and website translation. Their content seems to overlap, though some would argue for a gradual difference based on the degree of adaptation involved. This, however, is refuted by modern translation studies where linguistic and cultural adaptation is a part of every translation and the restriction of translation to a mere change of the language code is obsolete. Besides the degree of adherence to the original, also the completeness of localisation as a service is often mentioned as a distinguishing factor where “translation i.e. the conversion of text from one language to another, is only one of the large number of tasks which together form the localisation process” (LRC, 2003, p. 2). If we see translation as functional text production as well as a professional service (Holz-Mänttari, 1984), which results in a functionally appropriate target text, then all other aspects such as technical requirements, project management, terminology management, quality assurance, etc. needed to provide this service, must be included as well.

We would therefore, like to endorse a concept of website translation that encompasses all processes needed to achieve the overall goal described in the above mentioned definition. Such a discernment would come very close to the general definition of localisation. Only a thorough understanding of the characteristics and features of the professional service of website translation can lead to the design of adequate training courses (Kelly, 2005, p. 24). What should be achieved by the training, is an expert that can do the job professionally, i.e. produce a new (translated) target website based on the source website that meets the specified purpose for the new cultural and linguistic community.

The first step in assessing a successful website translation curriculum is to look at what distinguishes website translation from other types of translation. Starting from these differences we can deduce what must be changed or added to a general translator's training, and how website translation can be integrated in the translator's training.

Two general peculiarities can be identified. First, the format of the source and the target text. Both are digital documents in a variety of file formats, from the classical Web page designed with the help of a mark-up language such as XML or XHTML, up to the dynamically generated Web pages such as JSP, ASP, PHP and multimedia content such as audio and video files. Today, almost any translation assignment involves texts in a digital format; translating a Web page, however, means that the digital format of the source should be preserved in the target text to avoid a new mark-up or programming of the target text. This requires the use of specific tools that can handle and preserve the format.

Secondly, the public nature of Web texts. Once published on an Internet server the texts are globally available. Most translated texts, however, are designed for a local audience, i.e. targeted at readers of a specific culture. This is also true for web documents which are produced in

different languages for different users. Nonetheless, translated documents on the Web are accessible to everyone. Thus, website translators are more exposed to criticism, but on the other hand this makes website translation more challenging as translated web pages are incorporated into the target culture web.

Competences needed

Before we try to outline the specific contents of a website translation training, we would like to sum up the objectives of such a training since all actions and methodologies depend on how one defines the overall aim. The adaptation of websites for different languages and cultures is a complex task combining skills from different fields such as text production, translation, script programming, web authoring and so on. Now, one could argue that the production of a multilingual website constitutes a process that must be dealt with in cooperation with different specialists: the Web author, the translator, marketing experts, programmers, etc. As this is certainly true for extensive and complex websites, it is nonetheless also true that the translation or the production of a new language version encompasses all this know-how and skills, and a professional service provider is required to fulfil this need. The overall responsibility for such a service should be in the hands of someone with a training background in linguistics and culture-specific text production. The aim of a successful training programme, therefore, is a professional service provider who is able to understand and to manage the whole process of creating a multilingual website, even if he needs help in implementing some details. In the following we will try to outline the prerequisites of such a professional website translator and describe the competences needed.

Translation competence

There are two components which make up a good translator: language skills and translation methods. While the first is evident, the second provides the necessary insight into the translation process as well as the strategies and methods to apply. This includes the reflexive ability to identify and analyse what we are doing. Website translation, thus, must be based on a general knowledge of translation fundamentals and on an overview of translation studies with particular focus on functional translation theory which sees translation as the production of a new text that has to fulfil a role within a target culture, within a new textual universe. A translation always has to be done with the scope of the target text in mind. The general guideline for a web localisation project should therefore read as follows: localise/translate in a way that the aims of the client can be successfully implemented through the new foreign-language website. This is especially important for localisation where the target text – be it a software product, a manual or a website – serves underlying economic goals.

Translation Technology

A real-world translation assignment is always part of an economic framework and consequently restricted by time pressure and financial constraints which lead to the need of a streamlined and efficient translation process. However, the use of translation tools allows a productive gain in translation. For website translation, two other factors necessitate the use of such tools: the need to preserve the format of the text and to leave mark-up or programming instructions untouched in the translation process, as well as the fluidity of the Web requiring a constant updating of on-line information where textual changes need to be identified automatically. A website translator must be able to use translation memory systems, terminology management systems and at least have some introductory knowledge of machine translation. For the management of big projects such as a company website with more than a couple of language versions where the cooperation of

many linguists is needed, the use of standards is of special importance: TMX and SRX for the exchange of translation memories, TBX for terminology exchange, XLIFF for document interchange with all related language information. Correspondingly, the knowledge of such standards and the ability to implement them constitutes a part of the competence in translation technology. If the translation service provider is going to develop a long-lasting relation with the client – continuous updating of multilingual websites will require such a long-term relationship - he should also be aware of the tools which help in managing multilingual websites such as global content management systems GCM or Web content management systems. These are rather complex and expensive tools that only larger service providers utilise to host the website of their clients. Nonetheless it should be part of the technology competence of a website translator to include introductory knowledge of GCMs.

Project management

Many people with different expertise contribute to localisation projects. Add a limited time frame and a tight budget and the need for efficient project management becomes clear. The project manager has to plan, organise and monitor the project, making maximum use of the available resources and producing the best quality. This can be achieved by streamlining the course of the project but also through the deployment of quality assurance and quality management models. A translator can be in charge of a larger localisation project only if he has a thorough training in project management – this is an often neglected aspect in traditional translator training because many training institutions see the freelance translator as the predominant job model.

International marketing

Today, we can say that the “metamorphosis of the Internet into an essential corporate resource” (Cronin, 1995, p. 27) has succeeded. The need for a multilingual website arises from international activities, mostly of a commercial nature. Export-oriented companies and multinational enterprises as well as international organisations use their multilingual websites primarily as marketing tools, among other functions. Everybody who designs, manages or changes such websites should have a basic understanding of international marketing, including e-commerce. The critical link between the costs of multilinguality and the benefits arising from multilingual and localised websites is another subject that benefits from marketing know-how: exploring different Return-On-Investment (ROI) models as a resource to put its own work into the right perspective as well as to gather arguments in the dialogue with clients. If a site is to succeed globally it must be visible; this is what website promotion is all about: ranking in search engines, subject specific portals as well as link exchanges. This requires language and cultural competence and therefore, must be carried out by the localisation expert or website translator.

Web design

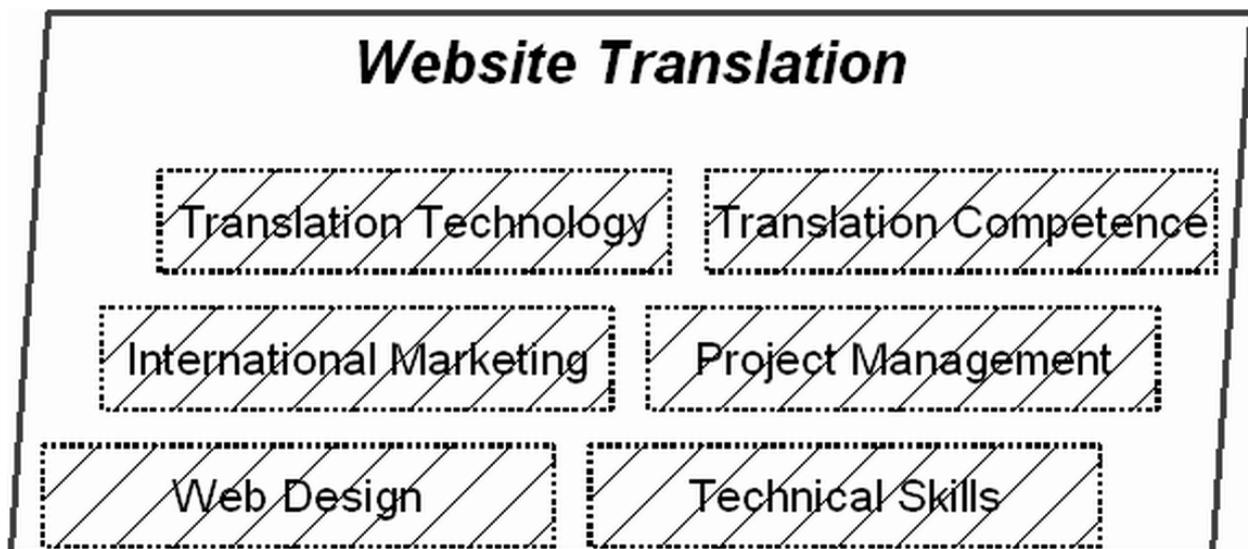
Some specific competences are requisite for the creation of multilingual Web pages: mastering the technical requirements such as character sets and encoding standards on the Web, as well as the menu options on websites that allow users to change language on the Web, i.e. the global gateway (see Yunker, 2002, p. 291). This constitutes a particular feature of a multilingual website and always part of a professional Web localisation service.

Translation, and in particular localisation, is text production. Indeed, text production for the Web in our case. Successful web texts share a few characteristics (see Schweibenz/Thissen, 2003): For example, they must evoke immediate interest or else the surfer/reader will switch to another website/link. They must be concise in order to fit into a computer screen and, they must meet

cultural and linguistic user expectations. Cultural traditions and their influence on Web design (see Singh/Pereira, 2005) as well as on cultural adaptations of websites is an emerging field of study with practical impact. Knowing about such cultural differences is extremely important for website translators.

Technical skills

On the technical side, the Web is a computer network based on a few general standards, a thorough knowledge of the Web and its functionality must be part of every website translator's curriculum: XML, XHTML in combination with the use of the already mentioned standard exchange formats TMX, XLIFF, SRX TBX. Furthermore, incorporating some knowledge about image processing would be needed, as graphical elements and pictures are subject to cultural adaptation.



Six pillars of website translation

Didactic considerations

While there are a few very good books covering multilingual websites there is no consistent book on website translation, i.e. from the viewpoint of the translator. The existing volumes are very different in their approach to the subject. Whilst some discuss website translation from the perspective of an international company needing a multilingual website (Yunker, 2002; DePalma, 2002), others try to give a more neutral introduction into multilingual websites (LRC, 2003), and some finally cover a neighbouring topic such as international marketing (DePalma, 2002; Cronin, 1995), international e-commerce or Culture and Websites (Singh-Pereira, 2005), software localisation (Esselink, 1998) and others. There is a lot of material on the Web about global marketing and websites as well as on e-commerce, but all clearly address the problem from the company's, or from an international organisation's perspective.

The problems and pitfalls a company encounters when trying to establish a multilingual website are more or less identical to the hurdles that a translator of a website comes across, since in both cases the overall aim is a successful website. Nonetheless it is another perspective since the company is the originator, writer and owner of the website, the translator only a service provider.

Much depends on the integration of the translator into the whole production process of a multilingual website: Does he manage the whole process of producing different language versions? Is he involved in authoring or adapting the texts? Or does he play a minor part in the process by providing the texts only in another language?

The whole localisation process will be more effective as well as more efficient if the language consultant, localiser, translator is involved right from the start. Texts could be streamlined, terminology made consistent across the whole website, cultural pitfalls removed, etc. For a middle-sized company who produce goods for a global market and try to keep up to date in their particular field it is already a challenge to be able to compete worldwide. In general, they do not have the resources for the combination of linguistic, cross-cultural and technical competences needed for a successful international website. In most cases the managers do not even know where to attain these competences. Often, they hire computer specialists or marketing people to create their website who in turn hire translators. To change this unsatisfactory situation and to move the translator upwards in the chain of service providers we strongly believe that the translator has to expand his field of activity so as to provide a comprehensive service to these companies. The following considerations thus, start from the assumption that website translation is integrated into the traditional translator training curriculum.

The competences described above are taught in a linear and progressive approach, beginning with technical right up to cultural implications. Therefore, we can characterise three levels:

a) Level 1

At this level the basics of website translation are taught. A simple website made for this purpose is used as an initial training object. This would be used to cover the first two pillars of competences, the technical skills and general Web design. How to write a text for the Web? How does a multilingual website work? What character sets and encodings should be used? How can the user switch to other languages and how does he find the website in his language? The aim of this first level is to provide the capability to produce a simple multilingual website complete with a working global gateway.

b) Level 2

At the next stage, real-world examples of multilingual websites serve to illustrate how companies or organisations put their international strategies into practice. This involves on the one hand the policies enforced by the companies for the management of multilingual and multicultural content. In this regard, Lockwood (2000, p. 15) has identified three different approaches in organising a global website: the *monarchist* approach with central control over the content where content is translated but seldom adapted; the *anarchist* approach with multiple local sites without coordination; the *federalist* or *subsidiary* approach which is a compromise between the first two as it integrates global, regional and local content.

On the other hand, on this applied level the link between the marketing policy of a company and their website design must be stressed and illustrated. Theo Schewe, a researcher in Norway proposes a classification of *Web site language design strategies* with three general types of websites: monolingual, bilingual and multilingual websites (Schewe, 2001, p. 205). Within each type, the choice of languages reveals a certain type of marketing strategy that stretches from the domestic marketing strategy with a monolingual website in the native language to the global player strategy with a central website in English or the native language with independent local websites in other languages.

Apart from the competence of international marketing, pillars four and five of the six modules

also come into play at this stage when a more complex translation assignment must be managed and executed, namely project management and translation technology. Both are needed to rationalise and streamline the process.

c) Level 3

The third level serves to consolidate what has been taught already as well as to deepen specific aspects. Small empirical studies have proved to be useful in this respect since students can identify a certain problem, analyse existing multilingual websites for inadequacies or errors and try to optimise these websites; company websites could also propose solutions that can be memorized by students. Such studies constitute academic exercises that promote the link between the academia and the practice.

Translators act as consultants to small and medium-sized companies for their international websites. They should also be able to propose solutions for smaller export-oriented companies such as the microsite approach outlined in Bass (2005, p. 14) in which the author describes a procedure for smaller companies that want to test new export markets: websites in multiple languages that contain the company's mission statement (not more than 750 words), product and service description in a very small website, thereby saving costs. This ability combines well with international marketing and business related competences that should show the client the way to enter foreign markets with the help of multilingual websites.

Integration into the curriculum

So far translation studies have treated website translation only as marginal, most handbooks do not even mention it as a possible topic of study or even research. While this omission is comprehensible for older handbooks written roughly before 2000 (Snell-Hornby et al, 1998; Shuttleworth/Cowie, 1997; Baker/Malmkjaer, 1998), newer books should account for this new field of study and practice, like Williams/Chesterman who mention it as a possible area of translation research under the heading translation and technology (2002, p. 15).

Today, it is certainly practically relevant; according to a survey (Höcker, 2003) roughly one third of translated texts are Web-based texts. If website translation is considered a type of translation and not something different, then translator's training institutions must integrate it into their curricula. We are not talking about postgraduate training or any other form of self contained courses on website translation where all the competences mentioned in the six pillars of website translation have to be integrated in one course, but an integral teaching of website translation within the general training of translators.

Some of the competences mentioned above are already present in the general curriculum: translation competence and translation technology, others such as project management should be incorporated as soon as possible. This is of great importance to all translators who plan to undertake larger translation projects. And finally some competences are specific to website translation. The last ones need to be taught in a specific course on website translation.

Today, translator training curricula in Europe are undergoing a reform with a new 3/2 years system being introduced. At a glance, the first and the second level competences would be suitable for the three years bachelor training programme while the advanced level can be integrated into a general master programme. A specific master programme for website translation would be conceivable as well; this, however would require further research.

Conclusion

In this article we have shown that website translation is a prime example for a functionalist perspective on translation. Thus, it can be defined as the creation of a new website on the basis of an existing website for another linguistic and cultural community according to the predefined function. To deliver a successful service that can achieve this, the translator has to master all necessary competences outlined in the six pillars of website translation.

On the basis of these competences we tried to outline a progressive methodology of teaching website translation articulated in three levels: the basic level, the applied level and the advanced level. The three levels must be integrated into translator's training programmes: some competences are already taught in many courses, the more specific competences such as international marketing and cultural adaptation of websites are still new to many training programmes. Today, website translation has become a common task for most translators and therefore, the corresponding competences must find a place in the general translator's curriculum.

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