

THESIS SUMMARY

The main purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that the academic community and website localization industry are not always aware of the end-user (be that an individual or a business). Website localization, in most cases, follows the traditional strategy of intrusive marketing and does not appear to openly and actively embrace the potential benefits of inbound marketing, namely content marketing. Content marketing, as demonstrated, is the most rewarding strategy in comparison with all the other types of internet related advertising. Content marketing in the case of localized websites cannot be accomplished without conducting a separate research on the end-users from the target market. Search engines are the main force behind inbound marketing. They function by serving results based on user input – keywords. Therefore, keywords become a matter of shared knowledge between website owners and end-users. In Translation Studies this idea has been around since the introduction of reader-oriented translation, derived from pragmatics, rhetoric and reader-response criticism.

The thesis can also be considered as a starting point in localization training for Romanian and other international “minor” language students enrolled in translation and/or communication BA and MA programs.

By using a multidisciplinary approach, this research aims to observe and analyze how the Romanian online business community promotes its products and services to various international markets. The number of Romanian companies on outer market is limited to a few, yet important Romanian companies. The websites of these and other foreign successful companies are analyzed in order to synthesize a list of factors that are accountable for their success. The data collected will be used for creating website localization models to be used by other companies as well. Romanian companies thus benefit from the means of increasing exposure on the global market by localizing their products and services to foreign markets. While considering well-known brands for benchmarking purposes, I will demonstrate that even national brands and small local companies may gain global exposure, by using affordable online marketing methods.

The research involved analyzing the main concepts associated with the localization process in general, and the related processes applied to the specific field of website localization. Initially, I reviewed the more general concepts, globalization and internationalization, analyzing specific issues sometimes overlooked by the academic community, such as the internationalization or standardization of the source text so that the efficiency and speed of the translation into the target texts may be increased.

From a managerial perspective, I consider that decomposing the transfer of a source website to several other target market websites into four distinct processes – globalization, internationalization, localization and translation (GILT) – is a most rewarding endeavor. They are consecutive processes that derive from one another. While globalization tends to be a management specific process, internationalization requires minute preparations. Some of the ideas linked to internationalization which were omitted by the academic community include: text standardization and setting a global translation strategy. As for localization itself, I have shown that various processes can be automated either by using advanced content management systems (CMS) or by collecting information from such systems. Thus, the translator can easily become a localizer him-/herself. Also, I considered that localization should be considered from a slightly different perspective. I defined it as adapting the communication and marketing strategy to the customers' expectations, based on a locale mix. All previous definitions focus on the product or service that must be changed. In my opinion it is not the products themselves that need to be changed but the interface. Modifying the interface is not changing the product. Thus, human interaction makes localization a communicative issue and not (only) a product related one. Furthermore, my definition of localization is also valid when it comes to e-commerce websites. The website owner does not change the products on sale but the communication and marketing strategy. Localization could also be seen as a personalization process. If localization is compared to personalization, the latter appears to be a specific type of localization as it targets a smaller community or even a group of people. A niche can be regarded as a specific type of localization comparable to personalization. However, a community targeted through personalization shares the same locale, while a niche shares common characteristics (like the academic community interested in localization) while being part of different locales.

By further analyzing the GILT related concepts I have shown that, in practice, translation is not always necessary. While translation is more appropriate for informative text types,

copywriting is more efficient for expressive and operative texts. On websites there are no clear-cut text types and one type may prevail over the others. However, if there are elements of expressive and operative texts, copywriting may be a more effective strategy. I have also shown that copywriting can easily include related keywords (for cases in which the target market is not aware of a certain product or service). Regardless of the translation strategy that is used, translators are required to add in extra information so that the content may include related keywords. Considering that translation is often replaced by copywriting, the two competing concepts should be encompassed under a broader notion, that of text production.

From a cultural, social, political and economic point of view, a more appropriate term to be used instead of GILT is that of glocalization. Glocalization emphasizes the interdependence of global and local factors in shaping the methods by which online and traditional communication are achieved. It suggests more appropriately the idea that global and local forces influence in a synchronous manner the inhabitants of the “global village”. I have demonstrated that while GILT can be considered a set of rather finite, consecutive and unidirectional processes, glocalization is a continuous, simultaneous and multidirectional process. Glocalization mirrors in a more accurate manner the reality of the current state of affairs.

Glocalization also suggests the fact that the perspective on localization and text production from the point of view of the academic community should not be an exclusively prescriptive one but should include descriptive approaches as well. In a similar manner to adapting translations for children based on their age and level of knowledge, or old language texts to modernized ones (diachronic intra-translation), so should localizers adopt the descriptive approach to translation. Prescriptive translation products should be “imposed on” the end-user in stages. Standard language should be suggested and not imposed. The prescriptive approach may also disregard an important share of potential customers.

My suggested descriptive approach means further focusing on the end-user and finding a common linguistic base (onomasiological or semasiological approaches) even if this means using foreign elements. It also involves using language standard and non-standard keywords. Thus, the e-text is closer to its purpose: efficient online communication.

Focusing on the end-user translates into higher traffic on company websites, i.e. a higher base for conversion rate into buyers. Thus, including keyword research in the website localization process is of utmost importance. In the thesis I proposed that keyword based website localization be called SEO localization. With the multitude of available online tools, this type of localization is an achievable goal. Keyword research highlights the importance of search engines in online marketing and search engine optimization (SEO). SEO localization implies a subsequent specialized type of translation – SEO translation. In practice, keyword research and selection is applied to textual content.

The thesis also analyzed issues regarding text and electronic text (similarities and differences). I reviewed the classification of online texts by applying traditional text classification theories to e-texts. The Audiomedial functional typology (Reiss cited in Munday, 2008: 72) is of particular interest to e-texts. Audiomedial texts are specific to the semiotic mix of websites. Web content is composed of text, graphics, video and sound.

Darwish's textual layers (2010:155) and how they apply to website localization can be useful in determining text comprehension and text production strategies. Within the textual layer I proposed a new element: the shell of the text, which refers to the macrostructural organization of texts (as books, brochures, magazines, etc.). Based on text typologies Hatim and Mason distinguish instructional texts as a distinct text-type (1990: 153-158). On websites, it is a major text type as most of the information on the Internet is for educational purposes. Companies "educate" both their potential and existing customers - similar to Biber's online informational elaboration. (1995: 102)

A two-dimensional classification of texts into verbal and nominal texts reveals that a high percentage of the information found on the Internet is nominal, thus corroborating the importance of instructional texts. An analysis of the elements that constitute the contextual layer of e-texts was also conducted, highlighting the particularities that apply to electronic texts.

Regarding the cultural layer, I reviewed some major cultural trends applied to texts. I also synthesized the cultural profile of the typical Romanian web-user. The intentionality layer with its subdivisions – informative intention and communicative intention, shows a high degree of applicability especially on e-commerce websites.

The intertextual layer of texts can be seen both from an intra- and interlingual perspective. Intralingual aspects may refer to coherence within each of the localized websites, whereas interlingual ones refer to coherence among the various localized websites (branding strategy). A special type of intertextuality can be a search engine results page. Intertextuality is achieved by the keyword entered by the web-user.

My main contribution in this part of the thesis is the addition of the anticipation layer as an important part of the users' interaction with the search engines. The anticipation layer constitutes a pre-reading activity. This layer also involves considering the call-to-action words from the results listed in the SERPs. I analyzed what the call-to-action refers to, developed a method for collecting call-to-action expressions, built a general list of call-to-action words for the Romanian market, differentiated between call-to-action words and web-user generated keywords. The comparative study on Romanian and English CTAs also revealed that Romanian tends to use nominal texts, whereas English uses verbal texts.

The results of the analyses clearly show that the E-text is perceived as a communication process, thus corroborating the main hypothesis of my thesis, i.e. e-texts should focus on their consumers. Considering the current inbound marketing trend, the proposed SEO localization approach and the keyword-based communication mediated through search engines (also supported by empirical evidence), it can be asserted that interaction shifted from B2C (business-to-customer) communication to C2B (customer-to-business) communication.

In order to verify the correctness of the conceptual claims I conducted several analyses of the textual and non-textual components of a website both from the perspective of scholars in linguistics and TS on the one hand, and from a more technical standpoint on the other. Within the verbal component of a website I proposed the addition of the administrative text type, as a distinct type of text, with two subdivisions: user administration pages and corporate administration pages.

The research also involved examining all the factors associated with the localization process, from the objective factors like the front-end and the back-end to the more subjective human factor. The human factor is the most important one as it is not always a factor that can be

accurately determined. Therefore, the role of keywords in text production is of paramount importance.

The main purpose of the final part of the thesis was to test the claims and theories from the previous chapters. One of the important topics covered benchmarking website localization. In that particular subchapter (4.2) I analyzed several international brands both from the perspective of their brand value (Interbrands), localization degree (John Yunker's bytelevel.com), and user usage (Alexa.com). I showed that the findings of the three perspectives do not always match. Localization is thus not always the only factor that determines the popularity of a website. Usability may still be the primordial factor in determining the success or failure of a website. Usability may imply localization, but localization does not necessarily imply usability; for instance, a user-friendly iconographic online editing software with directed and controlled steps for usage would require internationalization through standardization, i.e. graphical resemioticization of the textual interface.

Another important aspect was to demonstrate through observation and analysis that localization does not always imply translation. Anglophone countries, just like Francophone or German speaking countries, may share the same content or, on the contrary, the content may be personalized to such a degree that it is produced taking into account only local market interests (Eurosport).

As already discussed in the theoretical part of the thesis, many companies apply localization strategies but not necessarily translate. There are two main directions in producing localized content: translation and copywriting. I conducted two experiments that involved keyword research and on-site SEO optimization applied to the two types of strategies. While the methods may differ, the outcome is rather similar as long as keyword research and keyword implementation are achieved methodically.

The research has also included a complete analysis of two hotel pages from booking.com, in order to verify the extent to which localization is applied in the case of one of the most successful global brands. The findings can be applied to both localization and reverse localization.

Furthermore, I developed a strategy for localizing websites for the Romanian market, pinpointing cultural aspects that are applicable to this particular market that could be of interest for international companies. It is worth mentioning that my findings, applied to the online Romanian users' profile, do not always corroborate Hall's (1963,1976, 1990) and Hofstede's (2010) conclusions with regard to the high-context vs. low-context culture dichotomy, proxemics and chronemics, on the one hand, and power distance index, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance index, pragmatism, indulgence, on the other.

I also analyzed websites of Romanian companies and their performance on foreign markets (i.e. the UK). I compared Romanian winegrowers' websites with the websites of two of the most successful Romanian companies: Dacia and Bitdefender.

The website localization industry is likely to continue to follow a sharp ascending trend as there are still numerous companies that plan to approach the global online markets. As for the technologies involved in localization, they are developing exponentially, together with other communication related technologies. In the not so distant future, the informative text translation will be highly acceptable both in terms of output quality and production speed. For some types of texts and for certain language pairs it already functions satisfactorily. The combination of aligned corpora and statistic machine translation (based on an ever-increasing quantity of indexed content by Google and other search engines) will further improve machine translation technologies and CAT software. However, the extensive usage of automated translation tools will lead to the homogenization of texts – accidental (self-) plagiarism and duplicate content). The rapid spread of CMS platforms will further facilitate the increase of cross-border online sales and, thus, of the demand for localized content production.

Considering the rapid advance of the localization and translation technologies it could be predicted that the role of the translators will decline. Nevertheless, while machines will take over significantly more of the translation process, a human translator will still be held responsible for the final output. The minimum requirement for a translator will be to do post-editing work. At the same time, as shown previously, machine translation will be reliable only for informative text types. For expressive and appellative texts, MT will never completely replace the work of a human translator.

This thesis has attempted to offer new perspectives on a topic that is nowadays widely debated, i.e. localization. Through the various research methods I employed I have tried to demonstrate that the initial hypotheses of the thesis were correct. The case studies also helped in the demonstration of its main and secondary objectives. We even venture to predict that keyword based or SEO translation and localization could soon represent a new direction in Translation Studies, especially for non-literary texts. The continuous use of technology, both in tracking user behavior and in text production will eventually determine shifting focus onto the end-user. This is a necessary step in order to achieve higher global exposure and superior performance on local markets through keyword based website localization strategies.

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