

Translation and Localization — Instruments of Improving the Economic Mechanism

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the development of the global economy, often referred to as globalization, and the importance of high quality translation. The importance that communication has on organizations that conduct business on an international level should not be underestimated. Without accurate language translation and localization, most manufacturers would find it nearly impossible to exist. Translation, internationalization and localization are important tools that companies can use in order to gain new customers by accommodating their needs and cultural sensibilities.

Key words: global economy, globalization, translation, internationalization, localization

Introduction

The world of today is gradually getting more unified from a socio-economical and political point of view. “Economic globalization” or “globalization” in every sense of the term is encompassing the whole world and there is an increasing integration of the world production, consumption and the financial markets with a concurrent homogenization of culture worldwide.

At the same time, rapid technological developments and the emergence of new areas and industries has led to the exponential growth of knowledge and the need for prompt and efficient communication. All this is due to the revolutions in telecommunications and computerization domains, which has enabled a rapid and inexpensive processing of documents. It has also allowed for processing huge data bases and their efficient and effortless transmission across national and geographic borders. Nowadays, information

is considered to be the fourth factor of production, in addition to property, labour and capital.

The appearance of the internet has made a seemingly endless stream of information available to anyone who has access to a computer with a web connection. The internet is also vital for business. It creates a new ground where companies are able to display their particular products and services in original and innovative ways to new and diverse audiences.

Global trade is also promoted by the increased number of translation agencies, along with improvements in technology and communication. Developments such as these also improve the economic outlook of many countries. The language translation and localization industry has a great influence on imports and exports of the countries.

Problem definition

Carlson (2010: online) writes that eight out of ten international businesses lose revenue, delay product launches or pay fines for non-compliance because of translation errors. A recent survey has revealed that 80% of international businesses suffer because of errors in document and website translation. 40% of respondents to the survey, carried out by Global Information Management provider SDL, claimed that translation mistakes have led to delayed product launches. 7% of the surveyed companies even reported being fined for non-compliance because they failed to translate material accurately.

Translation has long played a role in the distribution of scientific information. With increased contact between nations in the past few decades and with increased communications through satellites and other products of modern technology, it has become easier and faster to learn about what is happening in the rest of the world. As Hammond (1992:1) notes, the exchange of ideas and printed matter between different linguistic communities has necessitated an unprecedented amount of translation. In the last decade, the need for translation has continued to rise, reflecting the needs of businesses, the scientific community, and other areas.

The fact that multilingualism was granted the status of independent political activity

is an obvious indicator of the acute awareness of the European Commission regarding the growing importance of languages in the broader context of the European project. As a result of enlargement, the single market, increased mobility in the European area, updating the status of regions, the emergence of knowledge society, the flow of immigrants into the EU and globalization, the challenge of multilingualism have all taken on a completely new dimension — in terms of scale, complexity and political relevance.

The advantages of translation on the broader global economy are perhaps not immediately apparent. But if a company, whether large or small, plans to get involved with its customers in a meaningful way it needs to approach them in a manner that is conducive to them. Companies express their cultural sensitivity by providing their diversifying customer base with materials tailored to suit their own languages. For a company not to offer this kind of information would be short-sighted and not make good business sense.

Therefore, when a company sees a gap in a potential market for a new or existing product; it is essential for it to convey the message that their company wishes to fill that particular, gap, and to express it in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner. Companies need to express their cultural sensitivity by providing their diversifying customer base with products adapted to suit their own cultures and languages.

Thus, translators are the link which establishes the connection between the producer and the customer within a global economy. They must be capable of expressing, in the target language, ideas that, in this case, the company/producer has formulated in the source language. Translators need to understand the language from which they are translating and be able to write well in the language into which they are translating. This requires understanding subject-specific terminology and having an awareness of style and grammar, regional language, and nuances and idiomatic expressions. Translators must understand the technical area in which they are working and are often expected to possess an in-depth knowledge of highly specialized subjects. They are required to stay

up-to-date with respect to terminology and must be able to look at a text for meaning and not necessarily translate it literally.

Besides translation, another important factor contributing to the economic mechanism is the *language localization* which can be defined as the second phase of a larger process (internationalization and localization) of product translation and cultural adaptation (for specific countries, regions, groups) to account for differences in distinct markets. Thus, it is important not to reduce it to a mere translation activity because it involves a comprehensive study of the target culture in order to correctly adapt the product. The first phase, *internationalization*, is the process of designing a software application so that it can be adapted to various languages and regions without engineering changes. This process entails according to LISA (the Localization Industry Standards Association) that “all cultural assumptions are removed and any country or language-specific content is stored externally to the product so that it can be easily adapted” (<http://www.lisa.org/>).

The localization process is most generally related to cultural adaptation and translation of software, video games and websites, and less frequently to any written translation (although these also involve cultural adaptation processes). The process of localizing can be done for regions or countries where people speak different languages, or where the same language is spoken. At the end of each phase, a testing and quality assurance tests are done to ensure that product works properly and to deliver it according to the client's quality expectations.

The essential elements of internationalization and localization efforts include:

- Language (computer-encoded text, alphabets/scripts; different systems of numerals, writing direction, spelling, text processing differences)
- Input (enablement of keyboard shortcuts on any keyboard layout, graphical representations of text, as well as subtitling of film and video)
- Culture (images and colours: issues of comprehensibility and cultural appropriateness, postal codes, currency, weights and measures)

- Writing conventions (date/time format, including use of different calendars, time zones, formatting of numbers)
- Any other aspect of the product or service that is subject to regulatory compliance

The difference between internationalization and localization is subtle but significant. Internationalization is the adaptation of products for a possible use practically everywhere, whereas localization is the addition of special characteristics for use in a specific locale. Internationalization is performed once per product, while localization is performed once for each combination of product and locale. The processes are complementary, and have to be combined to lead to the objective of a system that works globally. Subjects unique to localization include: language translation, national varieties of languages, local customs, local content, symbols, aesthetics, cultural values and social context

Results

The correct use of terminology is essential for successful communication of enterprises, organizations, and institutions that utilize and generate terms on a daily basis as a part of monolingual communication within a particular enterprise or country, and in multilingual environments. Legal texts, product information, information retrieval systems and thesauri, manuals, private and public information systems, industry standards, marketing brochures, research reports and language engineering tools all depend on the use of terminology to fulfil their goals of information and communication. In this way, terminological resources ensure knowledge representation and transfer cultural diversity, safety, and the quality of goods, of services, and of life within the emerging information society. As a first and the most important result, they have a considerable strategic and economic impact. (Cravacenco, 2007: 42)

Companies are looking outside their home markets to increase their profits and gain new customers. An important step to take is to develop a multilingual website, but just translating web content is not enough. The key element in this case is the need to

localize and be sensitive to needs of the people in the local markets, where the company, for example, intends to sell goods or services, as there can be differences from market to market. As a result, disseminating information is essential, but the importance of getting it right is decisive.

Summary

Inadequate translation and localization can have undesirable business effects by reducing efficiency and productivity due to misunderstood communication, misapprehension of messages, signs and environment. It can be the source of ridicule, embarrassment, or offence and in the worst case result in broken personal and economic opportunities. Customers interpret inadequate localization as incompetence which will diminish trust and thus jeopardize the business relationship.

Today the power of the Internet can allow exporters to reach previously unattainable customers in remote parts of the globe, and businesses that have had the foresight to have their website translated into the languages spoken in their target marketplaces or better still localized, i.e. translated and culturally adapted, are reaping large benefits. Translating and localizing fulfil a fundamental role by removing language barriers in a world that is progressively more interlinked, at a time when globalized communication is essential for both international business and social relations.

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