If the Mountain Won't Come…
Translation Studies Meets Localization

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Localization has significantly influenced translation tasks and roles of translators due to the technological development of text production, processing and distribution. However, Translation Studies remains at the periphery of a broader area of emerging Localization Studies that includes related scholarly research in IT technology, human-computer interaction, empirical Cultural Studies, cross-cultural and international management, etc. These lines of theoretical, descriptive and applied research are currently isolated and need to be synthesized and problematized under a unifying theoretical framework. Currently, localization is approached within Translation Studies as just another technology-aided type of translation. Theoretical conceptualizations that provide a theoretical framework for a transdisciplinary turn in localization research are few and have not generated much enthusiasm among TS scholars. The question is whether the time has come for the state-of-the art TS to meet the challenge or to occupy but a small niche within maturing Localization Studies.

Keywords: localization, Localization Studies, Translation Studies, industry discourse, transdisciplinarity.

Introduction

Localization industry is "the most important and influential business segment of the language services market, and the term is being increasingly used instead of translation" (Austermühl & Mirwald 2010: 6). It has significantly influenced translation tasks and roles of translators due to the developing technological context of text production, processing and distribution. The new realities of localization have been addressed both by the emerging and highly fragmented scholarly area of Localization Studies and by Translation Studies (TS). The share of TS in localization research remains insignificant. The present paper draws on the relations between TS and the new challenging area of practice and research.

TS vs Industry Discourse

Localization has been an issue in TS for about two decades. Related concepts and practices are covered in translation and linguistic encyclopedias and TS handbooks. A "comprehensive interdisciplinary overview of web localization" has recently been provided by

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Jiménez-Crespo (Jiménez-Crespo 2013). This monograph addresses and encapsulates key topics in the field, including the emergence and progress of localization, localization processes, management and quality assessment, methods of scholarly research and training, etc. The chapters on the nature of digital texts, genres and the relevance of TS methods in web localization research are the author's major original contribution to this interdisciplinary field.

Overall, however, the issues of localization are peripheral within current TS. There seems to be a common agreement that "there has been remarkably little debate about localization among translation theorists" (Pym 2013: 6), localization "is still a relatively neglected area in translation studies" (Sin-Wai 2013: 360), and that its impact on TS is "surprisingly marginal" (Jiménez-Crespo 2013: 133). TS-related discussion of localization remains prevalently a descriptive afterthought of the industry discourse. TS as a mature theoretical discipline could be expected to problematize and move beyond empirical accounts in the field. However, "[a]ttempts at the conceptualization of localization at a deeper level have been few and far between in the mainstream translation theory" (O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013: 98).

It should be mentioned, that the only truly theoretical approach that provides a framework to study localization and translation as essentially related phenomena are A. Pym's concepts of distribution (Pym 2004) and "localization paradigm" (Pym 2010). The latter concerns internationalization that prepares "the product prior to the moment of translation", eliminates all culture-specific elements and modifies products/ texts, thus ensuring that "localization can work directly from the internationalized version, without necessary reference to the source" (Pym 2010: 124). The focus on this additional step allows approaching localization as a practice that involves "a complete rethinking of the way

products and texts are produced" (Pym 2010: 125). The former, the concept of distribution, provides a theoretical framework for rethinking both localization and translation in the broad social, cultural, economic, marketing, etc. environment. According to Pym, distribution is a material process, "a set of real movements through time and space", including texts "as material objects that are constantly being distributed in time and space, just as material subjects (people) are". (Pym 2004: 5). The concept of distribution precedes localization ontologically, regardless of material, spatial and temporal circumstances of particular "movements". In this perspective a "localized text is not called on to represent any previous text; it is instead part of one and the same process of constant material distribution, which starts in one culture and may continue in many others. This is where translation theory has to learn to think differently" (Pym 2004: 5). Though Pym's theoretical input provides "a major contribution to the theoretical discussion" (Munday 2008: 191), it has received remarkably little attention both from TS and industry-related scholarly discourse.

The main trends of research in localization within TS concern prevalently industry project-based practices and general issues of conceptualizing localization either as an extension of translation or a separate phenomenon of which translation is only a part. There is also a growing body of case studies, as well as bachelor and master theses dealing with particular aspects of web localization. TS could be expected to take the lead in the study of cultural adaptation as part of localization because "this type of adaptation that often appears in localization discourse was nothing new to TS, particularly since the emergence of communicative or target-oriented approaches in translation theory" (Jiménez-Crespo 2013: 31), and "if seen as a process of cultural adaptation, localization

probably does not add anything new to existing translation theory" (Pym 2010: 125). Maybe due to the lack of newness, or general disregard for localization, translation-centered studies on cultural customization remain essentially trivial. Typical research on web localization addresses "checklist multiculturalism" descriptions (Cronin 2006:30) uttering the "translation plus (cultural) adaptation" mantra or its extensions with cultural adaptation always being their part of it. A review of "114 studies on culture and websites" (Nacar et al.: 316) includes papers from the areas of marketing, communications, management, information and technologies including computer-human interactions and computer-mediated communication. The review does not even mention Translation Studies.

It has recently become obvious recently that localization and Localization Studies (the term often avoided by TS scholars) threaten the (inter) disciplinary borders of TS and challenge its very identity and status. The academic mainstream of TS tends to ignore localization; however, there are voices expressing anxiety about the growing and developing area of Localization Studies. One of the possible answers to this challenge is to promote localization research within TS: "translation studies must address localization issues, or else we will end up having an academic field of localization studies, independent from translation, which will compete with translation for ever diminishing funding" (Sandrini 2005: 137). Another simple and effective way to settle the problem with the "new kid on the block" (Pym 2014: 45) is to extend the concept of translation: "If we take a wider definition of translation, which includes multimedia integration and hypertext, localization can be included in Translation" (Nauert 2007); or to merely say that localization "is translation in a broad sense. An act of localization is in fact an act of translation. (Sin-Wai 2013: 360). TS has put a lot of effort to

solve the problem of part-to-whole concerning localization and translation, with the inevitable result of conceptualizing localization as an extension of translation, a "technology-based translation modality" (Jiménez-Crespo 2013: 22) or "a type of multidimensional translation" (Nauert 2007). This question obviously allows no single theoretical solution. We could come up with similar results deciding if language is a part of sign systems or all sign systems are a language in a broader sense. However, the issue has clear ideological implications, because "[w]hat is at stake here is the nature and status of translation theory (Pym 2004: 136).

The discussion of this issue often involves critical accounts of translation-related aspects of industry discourse thus contributing to the claims of theoretical and disciplinary superiority of TS. Most TS scholars would agree that localization discourse provides an essentially 'mechanistic' treatment of translation or even that "technicians have developed their discourse with some disdain for all the academic waffle about translation" (Pym 2004:52). Indeed, from the very beginning localization industry has provided a simplistic view of translation, motivated primarily by the marketing discourse of localization service providers. The overall complexity of localization projects has been referred to as exceeding the scope of 'general', 'standard' or 'strict' translation. This simple layman's point of view is taken in by potential customers with no related linguistic or scholarly background. A similar approach has been adopted and still prevails in industry-based conceptualizations that see translation as but a small part of localization. This issue has been much lamented by the scholars, who extend the concept of translation to embrace localization and expect the industry to show more consideration to TS. This strategy, however, has not resulted in any considerable improvements. The industry consistently communicates the view of "naïve

substitutionalism" (Cronin 2006:30) suggesting that "[t]ranslation is merely changing words from one language to another" (Freij 2010: 9). Localization industry experts and academics from related non-linguistic fields keep (re)producing naïve accounts of translation, often drawing on the concept of translation equivalence. N. Singh, the author of seminal works on cultural customization and cross-cultural analysis of websites based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions, provides the following account of translation equivalence: "When translating websites, special attention must be paid to how various concepts, words, and sentences are translated from one language to another. <…> [W]e almost always still need good human translators to ensure translation equivalence. <…> It is advisable, when launching multilingual content on the web, to ensure that the content has achieved true translation equivalence" (Singh 2012: 11-12). Focus on "words and sentences" and obsolete interpretation of equivalence reduce translation to "just a language problem". As a result, localization produces a "marginalized image of translation and translators in localization industry", which is "in stark contrast to the academic image of translation and translators in Translation Studies" (Austermühl & Mirwald 2010: 29).

Two points should be kept in mind when approaching this contradiction. First, localization is not a solely "corporate linguistic response to the ecological injunction to think global and act local" (Cronin 2003: 63). It has emerged as a response to the market needs and dynamic technological change. Being focused on "techno-centric workflow" (O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013: 101), the industry discourse attending localization, unlike that of TS, is not primarily of scholarly nature. It is rather a 'multi-level cake', including marketing discourse of vendors, professional blogging, white papers, best practice guides, practical manuals, industry standards,

etc. The higher-level generalizations informed by these genres and industry processes do not constitute "a theory of localization" or any type of study that might appeal to the epistemic gains of TS. Second, TS is no less naïve providing simplistic accounts of localization as some kind of technical fuss around translation and reducing the whole phenomenon, as distinct from translation, to "just a technology problem". TS seems to have a general disregard to the impact of technology on translation: "Even today, research related to MT and CAT tools has made little theoretical impact on the discipline as a whole in contrast with other fields, such as computing and engineering where language and translation technology research are mainstreamed" (O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013: 98). What is even more surprising, TS has overlooked ideological, sociological and economic factors of localization. Procedural models of "localization process" in TS, for example, mirror industry-based "start-to-end" descriptions disregarding factors that lay beyond the uses of technology. Some scholars would demur and would probably point to research that enjoys a happy marriage of TS and industry discourse. The overall trend, nevertheless, is just as I have outlined it.

To sum up, it could be argued that TS and the industry discourse on localization are closely related; however this relation is not symmetrical. The industry discourse is expanding, evolving and mutating, being essentially a follow up of advances in industry practices and technologies. From the outset it has been providing a very simplistic account of language-related aspects of localization, in particular restricting the role of the translator to string replacement procedures. The frameworks of TS are not and should not be expected to be carried over into the industry or industry-related scholarly fields, partly because this would shift the primary focus of the industry-related agenda and partly because the "industry experts have no need for careful

theoretical concepts, and little time for extensive empirical research within the frame of such concepts" (Pym 2010: 136). The TS discourse on localization, on the contrary, has been influenced by the industry, importing its concepts and terminology. TS definitions of localization show "clear influence of the industry discourse in the discipline" (Jiménez-Crespo 2013: 18), while localization remains "first and foremost an industry-based discourse" (Mazur 2009: 146). There is a clear tendency to conversion between the two discourses represented on the one hand by industry experts who provide contributions to scholarly research in TS or moved to academic environments, and on the other hand, by scholars with TS or linguistic backgrounds who joined the industry or teach industry-related technologies. Some recent examples of the latter are J. Roturier (Roturier 2015) who has a TS background and experience at *Symantec*, the *OASIS XLIFF Technical Committee* and who is a member of the *Centre for Next Generation Localisation,* and M. Bernal-Merino (Bernal-Merino 2015), who teaches game localization and media translation and participates in industry-related organizations. This trend represents further penetration of specialized industry-based concepts and practices into scholarly and educational fields, while still lacking theoretical problematization.

TS vs Technology

TS-centric accounts of web localization address technological aspects of text production, processing, distribution and project management as an add-on to "the common cross cultural and cross-linguistic communication practices" and therefore "localization can easily be conceptualized as a technology-based translation modality, that requires collaboration of a number of agents in addition to translators" (Jiménez-Crespo 2013: 22). This is very much true in the broad context of TS and communication theories. After all, any type of technical development, be it technologies of information distribution or multilingual text processing, including computer aided or machine translation, is designed to support and promote communication. However, the realities of localization resist such a conceptualization because technology-driven tasks are not just a technological or managerial context supporting translation. They are "evolving into huge, complicated, standardized, automated and web-based activities where the tasks performed by localizers of the early days, i.e. translating strings and performing manual testing, are becoming less and less important" (Schäler 2009: 160)

Consider, as an example, recent challenges in web localization. They are dynamic web-page-generation; blurring technological boundaries "between Web sites, mobile apps or desktop programs" (Roturier 2015: 3); user's active participation in application's lifecycle and Web 2.0. paradigm within which "publishing cycles have also been dramatically reduced, thanks to the easy-to-use online services including collaboration tools" (Ibid). Collaborative translation and crowdsourcing, personalization of the web, including production and consumption of digital resources, that tends to replace the concept of locale, increasingly affect technological, procedural, managerial and economic aspects of web localization (Schäler 2009; Jiménez-Crespo 2013, Freij 2010). All these issues reshape the configuration of localization processes and funding, demand new aids for processing texts, and entail redistribution of work. To say that all these factors are 'just a technical problem' or another way to aid communication would be an oversimplification. But even if so, there are advances in web localization industry that directly address the linguistic issues of text production for target locales and undermine the

possibilities of applying TS purpose-oriented models to localization.

One of such issues is that of complying with selective ways of submitting information by search engines and their non-neutrality known as 'search engine bias'. To the best of my knowledge, this issue has not been covered so far either in TS or Localization Studies (Jude & Massey 2011; Achkasov 2015). Just like internationalization is an additional pre-translation procedure, that makes localization a new paradigm in TS, search engines as non-human mediators in the communication process make it necessary to take additional pre- or post-translation steps to ensure that a localized web resource will reach the target audience. The issue of visibility and accessibility of localized websites has come to the front with the increasing competition of web resources and the progress in search engine ranking algorithms. The industrial response to selective submission of information by search engines is search engine optimization (SEO), "the activity of designing pages in a web site so that they rank highly on search engines for targeted queries" (Levene, 2005: 98). In fact, bringing a website to a new locale implies optimization for the new competitive linguistic context structured and segmented by search engines. Since 2008, and even more enthusiastically since 2010, localization service providers have made a major shift towards SEO-based practices and SEO-related terminology in the marketing discourse, informing their customers on the importance of SEO factors in website localization. Google currently returns over 19,000 exact matches for "SEO translation" along with a variety of related phrases, such as "SEO web translation", "SEO-localization" "SEO web localization", "multilingual SEO", etc. The greatest number of hits comes from web localization/translation industry and professional blogs informed by

increasing customer awareness of SEO factors in web localization.

Crudely put, the key linguistic activity within SEO localization is identifying relevant search terms or "keywords" in the target locale and placing them into positions on web pages preferred by search engines. The process of "keyword localization" exceeds conventional concepts of adaptation and customization and often confronts the issues of linguistic quality as well as customers' 'vision' on marketing strategies. SEO translation has to be done with a view to ranking criteria and user search behavior, the formal 'rules' of placing keywords into the right positions and user queries often including misspelled and ungrammatical search requests. The response of professional SEO optimizers to the new competitor in the SEO market is in the least controversial, because "no one knows how to mix SEO and translation or has even figured out if this really adds to search engine performance"(Atkins-Krüger 2009). "[T]he tension between standardization and adaptation of marketing strategy" that has been "a key dilemma in international marketing" (Shneor 2012: 352) is thus complicated by tension between SEO and conventional strategies of translation and adaptation. "SEO linguistics" and "SEO translation" thus challenge TS with linguistic issues that may be effectively problematized only in conjunction with technological aspects of localization.

TS vs Transdisciplinarity

Presumably, the industry discourse with its reductionist vision of translation should not be the main concern of TS. The intellectual landscape around localization and TS is rapidly changing; both neighboring and distant disciplines approach localization and translation issues and bring new methodological and theoretical approaches, thus challenging the interdisciplinary borders of

TS. The interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity of Localization Studies seems to exceed that of TS. The TS-centered view of the situation is optimistic: "The emergence of so called 'Localization Studies' <…> can easily be conceptualized as a sub-branch of general TS interfacing with and feeding off all the three branches of research [theoretical, descriptive and applied TS] but also incorporating connections with a number of new disciplines not previously connected to TS, such as information management or international business strategies" (Jiménez-Crespo 2013: 139). With his proposal for "mapping localization studies research into TS", Jiménez-Crespo takes significant steps towards bringing the two fields of research together. This promising proposal is still a program that needs implementation rather than reality. The fact is that recent contributions to localization studies from neighboring fields cannot be easily 'baptized' as TS just because they refer to localization, adaptation or translation.

The list of "general themes and subjects particularly conducive to academic investigation in the humanities and which are peripherally, if not directly, connected to the diverse processes at work in the world of localization" provided by a D. Folaron (Folaron 2006: 207-208) draws on many issues that may be considered a priority of TS. However, it includes "themes and subjects" that cannot be easily placed into the state-of-the-art map of TS, including "conceptualization and representation of knowledge", "dynamics of human organizational structure" and "human commerce", "dynamics and dimensions of human play, and its diverse cultural manifestations", "natural language processing and machine logic", "digital representation of natural language writing systems", "business and management concepts and tasks, including process planning, resource management, progress tracking, quality control, compliance with industry standards, team

management, assessment and consulting" (Ibid). Transdisciplinary vectors of localization may be considered both as factors blurring the identity of TS and as an opportunity for development. However, "the position of localization in Translation Studies remains one of separation rather than integration, where it is often seen as a business model rather than a translation phenomenon" (O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013: 99).

Concerning web localization, for example, the agenda of TS overlooks issues in global marketing, such as the impact of "culture, geography and infrastructure on decision <…> to launch market-specific websites" (Shneor 2012: 352) or the work of communications teams in localization projects (Ledet & Bailie 2005: 32). The use of empirical methodology based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions in localization (Singh et al. 2013; Gygi et al. 2007), cross-cultural analysis of websites (Singh 2005, Baack & Singh 2007, Singh et al. 2004, Thatcher et al. 2007) including lexical choices (Cucchi 2012) has not been noted by TS. It should also be mentioned that neighboring disciplines cover issues that do not directly address localization or translation, providing methodological models and empirical data that may be effectively applied within the TS frameworks. For example, the agenda of research in human-computer interaction (HCI) "has played a leading role in propagating importance of user's cultural background knowledge in interaction design" (Lee 2009: 39). The *HCI International Conference Series* features such "thematic areas such as 'Internalization and localization', 'Cross-cultural user interface design', and 'Universal access in human-computer interaction' <…> The studies on cultural interface design have varied from addressing linguistic and semiotic perspectives, creating new user experience, and comparing human cognitive styles" (Ibid.). HCI has established close links with empirical Cultural Studies, which is not the case with TS,

and addresses such issues as "the effect of cultural differences on user requirements" (Choi et al. 2006: 171), "cultural contexts in human–computer interaction design using" (Heimgärtner 2013: 205), the use of "cultural dimensions for global user-interface analysis and design (Baumgartner 2003), etc. Issues related to "Culture and HCI research" are reviewed in Clemmensen & Roese (Clemmensen & Roese: 2010). These lines of theoretical, descriptive and applied research in Localization Studies are currently isolated and need to be synthesized or even conceptualized under a unifying theoretical framework.

concepts and theories. The attempts to define localization as just another technology-aided type of translation and to map localization research into TS have not so far produced the desirable result. Theoretical conceptualizations, such as A. Pym's theory of distribution that provides a theoretical framework for a transdisciplinary turn in localization research, are few and have not generated much enthusiasm among TS scholars. At TS conferences "localization topics tend to be (if included at all) consigned to a special technology track, often divorced from the mainstream theoretical discussion"; "the major localization research project <…> launched in 2008 in Dublin to map the next generation localization, involving some 120 researchers and industry partners has attracted hardly any attention in Translation Studies circles" (O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013: 99). The question is whether the time has come for the state-of-the art TS to meet the challenge or to occupy but a small niche within maturing Localization Studies.

Conclusion

Currently TS remains at the periphery of a broader interdisciplinary and highly segmented area of Localization Studies and seems to expect industry discourse on localization and related scholarly research in IT technology, HCI, empirical Cultural Studies, cross-cultural and international management, etc. to adopt TS

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Если гора не идет к Магомету…
Локализация и переводоведение

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В постоянно меняющемся технологическом контексте создания, обработки и распространения текстов локализация оказала существенное влияние на виды переводческой деятельности и роли, которые переводчики выполняют в рамках комплексных проектов. Тем не менее, переводоведение остается на периферии новой широкой области исследований в области локализации, которая охватывает IT-технллогии, человекокомпьютерное взаимодействие, эмпирические культурные исследования, кросс-культурный и международный менеджмент и т.д. Указанные направления теоретических, дескриптивных и прикладных исследований в значительной степени изолированы и требуют создания общей теоретической модели их осмысления. Современное переводоведение рассматривает локализацию как еще одно направление технологического обеспечения перевода. Теоретические подходы, которые позволяют осуществить переход к трансдисциплинарной модели изучения локализации, не получили должного внимания в среде переводоведов. На повестке дня стоит вопрос о том, готово ли переводоведение принять этот вызов, или оно займет в рамках исследований по локализации лишь небольшую нишу.

Ключевые слова: локализация, исследования в области локализации, переводоведение, дискурс от индустрии, трансдисциплинарность.

Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.