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Front Page

Select one of the previous 52 issues.

Select an issue:

[Index 1997-2010](#)

[TJ Interactive: Translation Journal Blog](#)

Editorial

[Submissions to the TJ](#)
by Gabe Bokor

Translator Profiles

[Can You Translate That for Me?](#)
by João Roque Dias

The Profession



The Profession

The Concepts of Globalization and Localization

by Ying-ting Chuang

Abstract

This paper approaches translation from a relatively broad perspective, considering translation as a kind of social practice in response to the expanding scope of translation. Translation is considered as one of the means, among other communicative activities, to shape, reflect and negotiate with the social context; that is, the social context interacts with translation activities.

With the rapid development of technology through globalization and internationalization of finance and culture, the social context tends to work against the functionality of translation, which always targets at specific audiences, stressing the need for localization. In other words, the purpose of translation seems to be in conflict, and at the same time, interacts with the social context.

On the basis of the current social situation, this paper focuses on two issues. First, what is the relationship between globalization and localization from the point of view of translation? Second, how would the globalization and localization influence translation activities?

This paper attempts to define globalization and localization, which are used differently across various fields, and to explore how these two concepts work or conflict with each other. By doing so, this paper attempts to make some suggestions regarding translation studies in general.

Key words: translation; teaching translation; globalization; localization; social semiotics

Introduction: expanding scope of translation

There is no doubt that the situation of translation in the world has undergone radical changes over the past decade. These changes are directly or indirectly related to the changes in human communication, pushed by technology, tourism, international finance, and economy. The scope of communication is expanding: more modes, forms, media, and channels are available and used for making meaning than ever before. Corresponding with the changes in the scope of communication, that of translation is expanding as well. This expanding scope of translation is faced with new challenges, brought about particularly by the computer and the Internet, e.g., shifting the form of translation from paper to screen, incorporating new semiotic modes such as sound and images, increasing the number of channels of translation through the Internet and mass media, bringing new demands from the translation client, such as shorter deadlines.

● [The Bottom Line](#)
by Fire Ant & Worker Bee

● [The Concepts of Globalization and Localization](#)
by Ying-ting Chuang

● [Will We Be Here Tomorrow?](#)
by Danilo Nogueira and Kelli Semolini

Translation and Politics

● [Señoras y Señores diputados/'Onorevoli deputati'](#)
by Armando Francesconi, Ph.D.

● [Ideological Interference in Translation: Strategies of Translating Cultural References](#)
by Shih Chung-ling

Interpretation

● [A Prototype System For Machine Interpretation](#)
by Milam Aiken, Mina Park, Shilpa Balan

Translator Education

● [Translanguage vs. Interlanguage: Exploration in Translation Strategies](#)
by Dr. Ali R. Al-Hassnawi

Science & Technology

● [Glossary of Aeronautical Terms](#)
by Concepción Mira Rueda

Translators and Computers

● [Hostile Takeover? Welcome Addition? Machine Translation Enters the World of the Translator](#)
by Jost Zetzsche

Advertising Translation

● [Advertisement as a Writing Style and Strategies for its Translation](#)
by Shi Aiwei

Translators' Tools

Translation is always addressed to specific audiences for the purpose of communication.

In this expanding landscape, the amount of translation is increasing exponentially and the landscape is reshaped by the redistribution of the translation industry—political, juridical, technological and commercial translations have become the mainstream, in contrast with the translation of literary texts, which probably

represent not more than one percent of the total production of translation (Nida, 1997). However, the central focus of translation studies is still mostly on literary texts. In other words, most of what has been discussed about the problems of translation has been based on literary texts and the findings and conclusions have been applied to non-literary texts, in spite of the changes in this field.

All new changes push translation activities toward a contradictory double-way movement. On the one hand, there is a tendency of information uniformization, mainly in professional and commercial uses, so that information can be passed around efficiently and be managed effectively. On the other hand, there exists a tendency of information diversity, mainly in linguistic and cultural circles, so that information can address local economic, political and cultural concerns and features.

The first tendency is directly related to the spread of communication networks at a worldwide level, which may be understood as *globalization*. It is of several types: economic, political and cultural (Marcus, 2004). In today's capitalist or post-capitalist society, globalization is particularly supported in socio-economic terms, referring to a corporate-led phenomenon (Ponzio and Petrilli, 2004). Globalization is business-driven in its essence, though its definitions have not been settled down and have varied across different fields and social situations. In contrast to globalization, the second tendency seems to receive relatively less attention and thus is referred as *specialization*, *multilingualism*, or *localization*, etc. These terms of the two tendencies are used to indicate different features of the changes in our world; in fact they work collectively rather than independently. With respect to the translation industry and activities, these two tendencies are more evident in the Internet-related translation than in other kinds of translations, and they are referred as *globalization* and *localization*.

Globalization and Localization: in a narrow sense

In the area of Internet-related translation, such as teletranslation (O'Hagan, 1996; O'Hagan and Ashworth, 2002) or machine translation (Hutchins and Somers, 1992), globalization is intimately linked with localization; these two concepts are defined alternatively. Globalization refers to a product "that has been enabled at a technical level for localization" (LISA, 2000), and localization means "a process to facilitate globalization by addressing linguistic and cultural barriers" (O'Hagan, 2002: 66). From these two definitions, localization can be regarded as a means to help achieve globalization.

More concretely, when the translation process takes place in the digital environment, namely Internet-related translation, or in O'Hagan's terms "teletranslation" (including translation operated via the Internet, or translation of Internet-related area), the verbal messages of the source text are dealt with first, by translating them into target-language verbal messages. Then nonverbal messages, such as pictures, music, sound effects, textual elements, such as the layout, the color scheme, the font, and are transformed with local appeal. The translation and transformation are used to re-package a product to become globalized. The relationships between translation and localization and globalization are illustrated as follows (O'Hagan and Ashworth, 2002).

Internet-related translation		Conventional Translation	
Product	Globalization		
Text	Localization	Text	Translation
Verbal messages	Translation		

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by Michael Wilkinson

● [Projetex: A Translation Project Management Tool](#)
by Vitaliy Pedchenko

● [Translators' Emporium](#)

Caught in the Web

● [Web Surfing for Fun and Profit](#)
by Cathy Flick, Ph.D.

● [Translators' On-Line Resources](#)
by Gabe Bokor

● [Translators' Best Websites](#)
by Gabe Bokor

● [Call for Papers and Editorial Policies](#)

From the above, translation, localization and globalization are not in a kind of parallel, but rather in a hierarchical relationship. Globalization is superior to localization because it deals with the final presentation of the whole process. In addition, in comparison with conventional translation, the text is no longer the subject to deal with-the product is.

So far, three points can be mentioned in the area of Internet-related translation. First, globalization and localization are in accord in this area. Second, if translation is perceived from a narrow perspective, globalization is superior to localization and localization is superior to translation. If translation is perceived from a broad perspective, they are both parts of the translating process. Third, the focus of the translating process is shifted from dealing with text to dealing with product.

Globalization and Localization: in a broad sense

To look at translation activities as a whole, globalization and localization are means in response to the expanding landscape, the ever-changing social context. On the one hand, as claimed by Newmark in a paper titled "No Global Communication Without Translation" (2003), translation of all kinds of texts plays an important role to help economic, technological, cultural and commercial globalization, and at the same time, globalization of these aspects pushes translation activities to become a part of the globalized process. If translation is to "form cultural identities to create a representation of a foreign culture that simultaneously constructs a domestic subjectivity" (Venuti, 1998), globalization is to select and represent translation materials to construct a global culture and global identities, which are inevitably tied with mainstream languages and cultures. English has been, undoubtedly, the most prominent among all for being the lingua franca since the latter half of the 20th century (Dollerup, 1997: 89). Thus, globalization in the context of translation is almost equal to globalization of English, creating global needs for English-language culture.

On the other hand, translation is always addressed to specific audiences for the purpose of communication. Apart from constructing a global culture, translation also needs to produce domestic identities for local appeal and effects. That is, while globalization refers to maintaining and enhancing the influence of current mainstream languages and cultures through translation, localization refers to promoting the status of the minor languages and cultures and to compete with the major ones. In this sense, the process of globalization is in conflict with the process of localization.

However, the conflict between globalization and localization, according to Dollerup (1997), is heading toward a resolution. He explains the unprecedented growth of translation work worldwide for two reasons. One is that major languages, especially English, have become dominant linguistic resources for communication in the international society. The other is that minor language communities prefer messages in their own languages for the sake of better understanding. In other words, "the progress of English towards becoming the most prominent international lingua franca" can go along well with that of preserving "languages of limited diffusion" (Ibid. 104). Consequently, he concludes that the trends of globalization and of localization may seem to be contradictory but, in reality, they can coexist.

Globalization and localization are in conflict when they are used as translation strategies, but in fact, they are intricately complementary, because while promoting a process of unequal positioning of major and minor languages, or hegemonic and subordinate cultures (Venuti, 1998), they support and enrich the minor languages and cultures more than they do the major ones..

In terms of translation strategies, globalization can be seen as an extension of foreignization and localization as domestication. To examine the effect and function of these two translation strategies, this paper reviews Chinese translation history to show how they are in conflict and co-exist at same time.

Foreignization vs. Domestication in Chinese Translation History

On the basis of the theoretical concern above, this paper approaches Chinese-related translation practice in terms of using translation as a social means to modify and reconstruct the socio-cultural identities. For three thousand years,

the Chinese translators' work can be divided into four periods: the translation of Buddhist scriptures, the work of Christian missionaries, the influence of the Fourth of May Movement, and the contact with European countries (Hung and Pollard, 1998)

Buddhist sutras were translated from Sanskrit into Chinese. The power relationships between these two languages are dominated by the religious factors, so the messages in the source text were deemed sacred not to be tampered with, resulting in difficult translation for the target reader. The superior status of the source culture determined the translation strategy, reflected in foreignizing the target text to establish a new ideology, Buddhism. However, up to the present, Buddhist ideology has submitted to Chinese culture and has become an indispensable part in forming Chinese ideologies.

The work of Christian missionaries is also religion-related, but not as influential as the first period of translation activities. Translation of Christian works, such as the Bible, is only a small part of the overall translation activities in this period. The main source texts are associated with various branches of science, e.g., mathematics, astronomy, geography and physics. These texts are translated from western languages to Chinese and organized by government officials, to supplement and be assimilated into the target culture. Translators' sinocentric attitudes are in favor of domesticating the source materials, revealing the hierarchical relationship between the source and target languages, the latter being established as the hegemonic and dominant one. However, the Christian works latter turn out to have a distinguished foreign identity and resist the domesticating attempt.

The Fourth of May Movement (1919) refers to many political and cultural reforms at the turn of the twentieth century. With respect to the primary concern of this paper, this movement reflects the ideological and linguistic changes of that era. With respect of ideological change, the mainstream social ideologies have shifted from imperialism to nationalism, from traditionalism to modernism, from conservatism to liberalism. Before the movement, translation works are about domesticating, selecting materials that can be integrated into traditional Chinese values. However, as pointed out by Venuti, the domestic cultural and political agenda does not entirely wipe out the foreign elements but triggers the struggle to compete internationally, which ultimately transforms both the source and target cultures (1998: 180).

Finally, the contact with European countries in the latter half of the twentieth century, the Chinese language and culture position themselves in striving a balance; translation strategies alternate between foreignizing and domesticating to promote cultural change by pursuing linguistic and literary heterogeneity.

Globalization and Localization: the current situation

Globalization and localization are different from foreignization and domestication because they are not only translation strategies but they change the landscape of translation with their effects and functions. With the aid of computer and the Internet, translation of all kinds of texts, including websites, literary works, technical texts, online newspapers and magazines, advertising translation, subtitles, etc., are involved in the process of globalization and localization at the same time. The aim of this process is for the commercial value of translation.

Take the translation of *Harry Potter* for instance. The translation of the text and the representation of the package are global enough (i.e., faithful enough to the source text in this case) to make all versions in different languages to form a Harry-Potter discourse, to be shared and recognized by the global community. At the same time, the translation of the text is localized in certain aspects, to be consumed and accepted by the local audience.

Another example is advertising translation. The verbal message and non-verbal message of an advertisement may be localized into target languages, target icons, target culture, etc. completely or partially, depending on the sale strategies of the product. However, if the product is for the global market, and the representation of the product is often globalized in the logo, the images, the color scheme, etc, as illustrated in the following.

Internet-related	Advertising	Advertising Translation for
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translation		Translation for global market		local market	
Product	Globalization	Product	Globalization	Product	Localization
Text	Localization	Text	Localization	Text	Localization
Verbal messages	Translation	Verbal messages	Translation	Verbal messages	Translation

In comparison with Internet-related translation, only one out of the three points is applicable to all translation activities; that is, the focus of translation is shifted from text to product. As to the first point, globalization and localization in the aspect of translation may not be in conflict but may coexist, depending on the purpose of translation. Secondly, globalization and localization are not in a kind of hierarchical, but rather parallel relationship; they work collectively and cooperatively.

Future studies

This paper shows that globalization and localization are defined and used differently in terms of Internet-related translation and translation activities as a whole. It suggests that if the process of translation is for globalization, the two concepts are used in the same way as in Internet-related translation. Because of the rapid development and extensive use of technology, translation of all kinds of texts and translation activities as a whole will be related to computers and the Internet, which sooner or later will be used in the translating process. Globalization and localization will deserve the researcher's close attention for their enormous influence on the translating process and translation studies.

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