

Culture in/and Multimedia Localisation: Measurable quantity or smoke and mirrors?

A one-day workshop for researchers, language industry professionals and students organised by the “Modèles et discours” research group of the EA4182-TIL research centre, in collaboration with the [Multimedia Translation \(T2M\)](#) and [Intercultural Management \(ICM\)](#) MA programs.

Date: Friday, 23 November 2018

Location: [Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, Dijon](#) (on the Montmuzard university campus)

Organisers:

Will Noonan, Alex Frame, Laurent Gautier, Isabel Rivas ([UBFC](#))
Aurélie Perrin (videogame translator, [Oreli Translation](#))

Languages: English is the primary language for presentations and for the planned follow-up publication. Proposals in French will also be considered.

Background:

Despite, or perhaps because of, growing scholarly and professional interest in the field, multimedia localisation remains an awkward subject to conceptualise, teach, and explain to potential clients. One factor here is the lack of a sufficiently robust practical definition: if “[l]ocalization involves taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale (country/region and language) where it will be used and sold” (LISA 2003), both the diversity of products and the varied technical, linguistic and cultural skills required to adapt them for different markets and submarkets make it difficult to determine where the process begins and ends.

Part of the problem lies in the evolution of interactive digital products since the field first came to be recognised: from software interfaces through web-based content to mobile and tablet apps, and from text-based to multimedia, VR, AR and IoT products, capable of increasingly complex input as well as output channels. But whether we adopt a restrictive definition of localisation as covering only the questions specific to interactive multimedia products beyond the more general issues of translation and adaptation (cf. Martin 2005), or a “holistic” view of “a complex communicative, cognitive, textual and technological process by which interactive digital texts are modified to be used in different linguistic and socio-cultural contexts, guided by the expectations of the target audience and the specifications and degree requested by initiators” (Jimenez-Crespo 2013: 20), the intangible cultural dimension of localisation ultimately seems more problematic than the strictly technical one. While Jimenez-Crespo highlights the importance of following client specifications, the increased emphasis on multimedia content and on interaction in digital products arguably implies a greater need for cultural expertise in adaptation than in the case of specialised written texts.

The notion of a “culturally customised” website has long been a mainstay of research into multilingual digital communication strategies (cf. Singh and Pereira 2005, Baack and Singh 2007, Singh 2012). A search through Google results, social media and other content posted by localisation professionals also suggests that the concept offers a viable marketing strategy, at least from the point of view of explaining the need for and benefits of culturally-oriented localisation to clients. What is less clear, however, is how principles of “cultural” customisation can be balanced against the demands

and preferences of a given market segment, or against the source or target market positioning of a specific organisation, service or product. Contributions to the academic literature cover both theory-driven deductive and data-driven inductive approaches to the question of cultural differences (cf. Moura, Singh, & Chun 2016 for a comprehensive review). Although some are sensitive to the influence of multiple factors on the localisation process (e.g. Shneor 2012), sometimes extending to questions of strategic marketing or communications positioning, a relatively small number of studies underline the need, for example, to take into account representations of the organisation or its national identity among the target publics (cf. Tigre Moura, Gnoth, and Deans 2015).

While it is difficult to object, in principle, to cultural customisation as a factor in the localisation process, it is also important to acknowledge the danger of indulging in cultural generalisations. Indeed, the very notion of cultural customisation in web localisation begs the question of a working definition of “culture” in the context of global digital communication. In the absence of this and faced with the large number of potential variables to be taken into account in elaborating a localisation strategy, parallels might be drawn with the global product development or GILT cycle, which is better understood as an analytical tool than as a recipe for successful internationalisation and localisation, or indeed a similar approach to standardisation vs diversification in the domain of global advertising (De Julio 1999).

Call for proposals:

In order to address this theme, proposals are invited from industry professionals, researchers and graduate students, for:

- 20-minute papers
- 90-minute panel sessions
- Interactive workshops, case studies or round table sessions

Contributions may address but are not limited to the following topics:

- How can we apply “culture” to the field of web or multimedia localisation? Can generalising models such as Hofstede’s be useful here?
- In today’s globalised societies, what understanding/s of the term “culture” should we adopt? How can we relate it to notions such as subculture, target market and locale?
- What criteria are perceived as important by localisation professionals, and how might these differ from the criteria used to market localisation services to potential clients? Can academic research help?
- Does the cultural dimension of localisation depend on the nature of the product? Can we apply the same guidelines to websites, mobile apps, videogames, and other interactive products?
- Is “localisation” a unified phenomenon? How can we compare perspectives from different disciplines (translation studies, applied and corpus linguistics, UX design, computer science, etc.), and what can we learn by combining these perspectives?
- How might debates around cultural appropriation affect localisation strategies?

Please send proposals of up to 500 words plus references, accompanied by a short bio note, to culturelocalisation2018@gmail.com.

Deadline for proposals: Friday, 1 June 2018.