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How I teach localization: Not like old-school translation

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Teaching students how to transfer meaning from one language to another is not enough to prepare linguists for careers in technology-driven translation and localization. A new brand of industry-specific courses blends live instruction with cloud-based tools and social media.



Image 1: The author demonstrating the use of a cloud-based translation memory system on a smartphone · Photo: Jane Wang

By Uwe Muegge

Almost 15 years ago, I received an MA degree in translation. Even at the time, I felt that this traditional degree did not fully prepare me for the field of technology-driven translation that I entered after graduation. In 2008, with a decade of industry experience under my belt, I was appointed Chair of the MA program in Translation & Localization Management (TLM) at the Monterey Institute in California. In this article, I am illustrating some of the features of the courses that I teach that differ radically from the translation courses I took not so long ago.

How is localization different from translation?

Let me begin by defining some relevant terms. **Translation** refers to the process of transferring the content/meaning of a written **text** from one language to another. **Localization** refers to the process of adapting a **product** or service in such a way as to make it suitable for a (foreign) locale or market. In other words: The translatables in localization are almost always linked to a product or service, whereas in many traditional translation projects, there is no such connection.

Focus on tools and processes

The fact that in localization, there is a strong connection between translatable text and product, has a direct impact on my teaching. I emphasize that a text in localization often has a prior version and typically is part of a larger release of related texts (e.g. user interface, help, manuals/tutorials, marketing collateral, etc.). Unlike in the translation of a newspaper article, for instance, which generally stands on its own, in localization, consistency within and across documents is of utmost importance. If translators use different terms to describe the same feature, e.g. in different documents of the same release, users might get confused. The big question is: How does one ensure the highest degree of consistency in the most efficient manner in a teaching environment? In my opinion, by having students develop a deep understanding of the benefits of translation tools and the processes associated with these tools.

Translation memory systems for quality assurance

Efficient, quality-oriented localization requires the use of sophisticated tools. Over the course of the two-year TLM program, my students get to work with quality assurance systems, machine translation systems (statistical and rules-based), terminology management systems, and translation management systems. But the most important tool that I teach, and which I insist students use for all localization projects, is the translation memory (TM). Why? Not because students benefit from translation matches immediately, which often they don't. But because students immediately benefit from the many quality assurance features TM systems offer, even if the memory is empty: Completeness control (is every sentence translated?), formatting control (are all tags present?), and terminology control (were glossary terms used correctly?), to name just a few. I want my students to look at translation memory systems as quality assurance tools first and productivity tools second. I believe that every localization project belongs in a translation memory system, regardless of whether or not there will be translation memory matches.

Terminology management is crucial

Solving the terminology challenge means solving a big (if not the biggest) part of the localization quality challenge. I say that because in a former life I was the corporate terminologist of a Fortune 500 company. In that role, I had the opportunity to see the dramatic effect proactive terminology management (i.e. providing multilingual terminology before translation) has on the entire localization lifecycle: Translators produce better translations faster, editors edit more and change less, and ultimately quality goes up, and cost goes down! Developing basic terminology management skills can be as simple as introducing students to the terminology management features of a translation memory system and Google Advanced Search Queries as research methodology. And these skills can - and should - be part of an introductory general course students take in their first semester (I teach basic terminology management early in my Introduction to Computer-Assisted Translation [CAT] course, which is one

of the first courses all TLM students take). More advanced skills, such as building a termbase from scratch, batch processing of entries, and achieving standards compliance can be covered later in a dedicated terminology management course (I teach a separate terminology management course in the second year, when students take other advanced courses such as software localization, website localization, translation management systems, etc.).

Cloud-based systems level the playing field

When I took my first course in computer-assisted translation, the learning environment was very restrictive: Students had to go to the computer lab, which was only available a few hours per week, and the PCs ran only one operating system (US English Windows). From an institutional perspective, teaching CAT was an expensive proposition because the software licenses and maintenance contract cost tens of thousands of dollars per year. The cloud changed all of that. In addition to having access to all of my teaching materials online - and shared student-generated content - my students have access to online translation software - from any device. In other words: Students can use a laptop, tablet or even a smartphone that runs Windows, MacOS, iOS, Android, etc. to work with the latest cloud-based translation tools. As an instructor, I really like the fact that the software solutions we are using, e.g. Lingotek, TermWiki, and Wordfast Anywhere are completely free. And since these software services do not require any upfront financial investment nor any involvement of IT (no software to install!), I deployed these tools literally within a few hours.

Focus on the industry

Traditionally, translation courses are taught as part of language study programs, where the emphasis has always been on working with literary texts and methods of analysis. Localization is very young as a practice and even younger as a field of study, and I personally find the traditional literary approach not particularly helpful in training future localization professionals. As the Senior Tools Strategist at Beijing-based CSOFT International, I work with both translation buyers on the client side and

project managers on the vendor side on a daily basis. Through my involvement in complex global localization projects, I have developed a deep understanding of the skills people need to launch a successful career in the field of localization. And that is what informs my teaching practice.

Project management is becoming the most important skill

The vast majority of students graduating from the Translation and Localization Program in the past few years work as project managers (PMs), both on the provider and the client side. While there are exceptions – mostly in smaller organizations – project managers typically don't translate. Instead, PMs manage localization projects throughout the entire lifecycle from planning and preparation to production and quality assurance to delivery and post-mortem. My goal is to make sure my students are ready, not only for the best jobs after graduation, but also for the best internships after the first year of study. That is why I teach basic project management skills in my Introduction to CAT course: Covering the phases of a typical project, best practices (e.g. identifying client needs vs. wants and managing projects towards meeting or exceeding those needs), developing a quality assurance strategy, etc.

Students seek in-house employment instead of freelance careers

According to survey results, only 10 percent of incoming localization students are interested in a freelance career. In other words: The overwhelming majority of students is looking for in-house employment after graduation. Today, very few organizations have internal translation departments. In fact, even most language service providers do not employ translators, but use freelance linguists instead. Take CSOFT, the localization service provider I work for, as an example: While CSOFT has a network of several thousand freelance linguists, out of a total in-house workforce of approx. 500 employees, less than 10 percent are translators. With those numbers in mind, preparing students for a career as an in-house employee in the localization industry means shifting the emphasis from linguistic towards project management and technical skills.

Industry standards serve as best practice

With localization being such a young field, teaching seems to suffer from a lack of unifying principles, methodologies, and even text books. Does that mean educators have to start from scratch when they develop materials for localization courses? Not in my humble opinion! While there may not be an abundance of text books, there are in fact quite a few industry standards that can be used for teaching localization-related best practices. For instance, I use *ASTM F2575: Standard guide for quality assurance in translation* as a road map for teaching students how to structure localization projects. And I use other standards such as *ISO 704 Terminology work – Principles and methods*, that I believe are highly effective teaching materials. Granted: These documents, like most standards, were not explicitly written for an audience of college students. However, I am a strong believer in sharing best practices, and I think university classrooms are an excellent place to spread the idea of standardization in the localization field.

Focus on social

There is an obvious connection between social networking and localization: Localization of social networking services and apps played a crucial role in the global success stories that Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are. It is a well-known fact that social networks were among the early adopters of new business models such as crowdsourcing, which is one reason I cover these services in class. But the primary reason I use social media as an educational tool is that social networking sites make it very easy to extend teaching beyond the classroom.

Helping students find the best (job) opportunities with LinkedIn

With approx. 260 million users, LinkedIn is the global leader among professional networks. It did not come as a surprise to me when a survey in my Intro to CAT course indicated that 54 percent of incoming students already had a LinkedIn profile. But it quickly turned out in class that none of those student profiles had content in all three sections most recruiters check: Photo, headline and summary. Also, students generally don't understand that unlike a résumé page on

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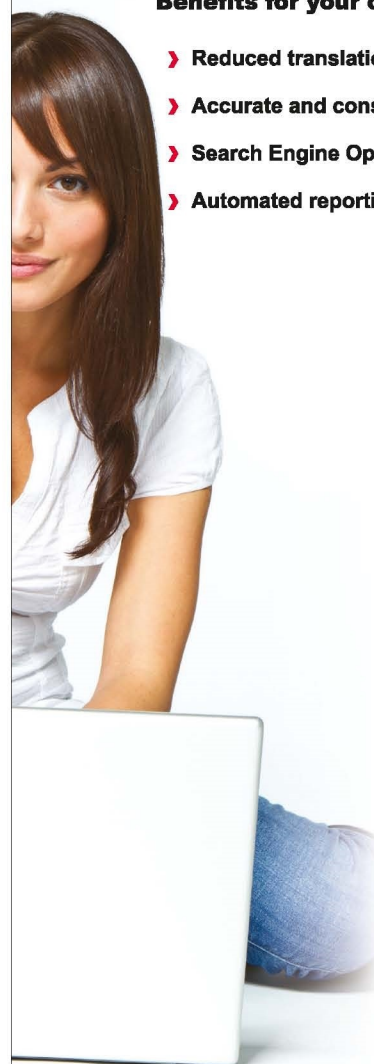
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a career website like Monster or CareerBuilder, a LinkedIn profile is typically not visible to basic LinkedIn members outside the user's network. This is why I am devoting class time to explaining how LinkedIn works, how to create a compelling profile and how to efficiently build a large LinkedIn network. I also encourage students to take advantage of my extensive professional network, and many do even long after leaving my program. For instance, I was recently contacted via LinkedIn by a former student, whom I subsequently assisted with securing a leadership position in the internal machine translation program at Honda R&D. (You can find me on LinkedIn here: www.linkedin.com/in/uwemuegge)

Sharing breaking industry news in real time on Twitter

Every day, I come across internship and job announcements, scholarships and competitions, industry events and conferences that might be of interest to my students. Some of these opportunities are short-lived, and the sheer number of them makes it impractical to use class time to communicate these news items to students. Twitter is an ideal channel for sharing this type of information with students because twitter is an opt-in service, so there is no danger of inundating students with unwanted information. In addition, I make extensive use of hashtags such as #Chinese, #internships

and #t9njobs, which makes it even easier for students to separate relevant tweets from irrelevant ones. Examples of students who have directly benefitted from information shared via twitter: One student won the prestigious JTG Student Translation Scholarship and another one landed an internship with the International Criminal Court and a job with Amazon after acting upon tweets I sent.

(You can find me on twitter here: <https://twitter.com/UweMuegge>)

Engaging current, past, and future students with Facebook

Is there a difference between how instructors in other fields and localization instructors use Facebook? Probably not. But I do think localization instructors are ahead of the curve in the percentage of them that is active on social media (100 percent of instructors in my localization program are). So what do I share with my present, past and sometimes even prospective students? Photos from visits to local attractions, announcements of and reports from community events, and of course, pictures of the food I eat (I recently switched to a vegetarian diet). At the same time, Facebook lets me stay involved with my students' lives, whether they are landing a promising internship, going on a big trip, or are having a baby. And no, not all students friend me on Facebook, but many do – and typically the connection in the virtual world remains

intact long after students graduate in the real world. (You can find me on Facebook here: www.facebook.com/UweMuegge)

Resources

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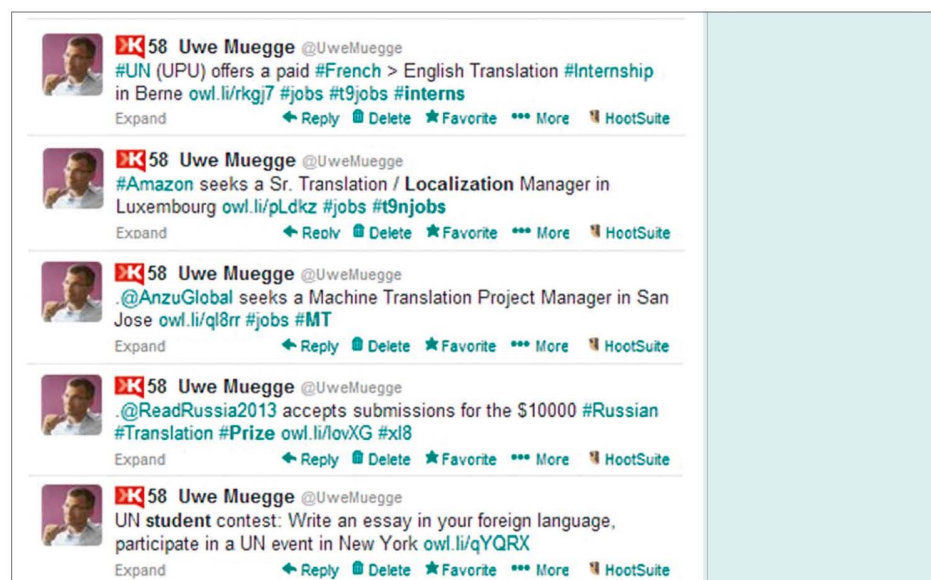


Image 2: A sample of tweets by the author about opportunities for students in the translation / localization field

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