



## Localization, globalization, translation, etc.

(Reprint from the first part of Chapter 1 of *A Practical Guide to Localization*, by Bert Esselink.)

### Chapter 1: Introduction

*This introduction contains information on the basic principles of localization, including definitions for commonly used terms, an overview of the localization industry, and a description of a typical localization project (...).*

Over the past decades, localization has progressed from being an added effort by some software publishers to a multi-billion dollar professional industry. Localization, web site globalization, language engineering, and software internationalization have become important issues for companies that want to market and sell their products in international markets. In many cases, localization has proven to be the key factor for international product acceptance and success.

As explained later in the Definitions section, many different definitions exist for the term "localization". Generally speaking, localization is the translation and adaptation of a software or web product, which includes the software application itself and all related product documentation. The term "localization" is derived from the word "locale", which traditionally means a small area or vicinity. Today, locale is mostly used in a technical context, where it represents a specific combination of language, region, and character encoding. For example, the French spoken in Canada is a different locale to the French spoken in France.

Before the Internet and World Wide Web transformed software development and localization, a typical localization project would encompass full translation and engineering of a software application, its online help files, a set of printed manuals, and reference and registration cards included in the product box. Many current localization projects still fit this description. However, because of new web-based publishing and distribution technologies, localization can now also include the translation and adaptation of web-based applications and database-driven web sites.

Traditionally, translation is only one of the activities in a project where material is transferred from one language to another. Other activities in traditional translation projects include terminology research, editing, proofreading, and page layout. In localization, many more activities have been added to this list. Examples of activities in localization which are not necessarily part of traditional translation include multilingual project management, software and online help engineering and testing, conversion of translated documentation to other formats, translation memory alignment and management, multilingual product support, and translation strategy consulting. Most large, multi-language localization agencies focus on these additional activities, while outsourcing core translation activities to freelance translators. Only final language quality assurance is performed in-house by these vendors.

Another key difference between localization and translation is the fact that traditional translation is typically an activity performed after the source document has been finalized. Localization projects, on the other hand, often run in parallel with the development of the source product to enable simultaneous shipment of all language versions. For example, the translation of software strings may often start while the software product is still in beta phase.

The key reasons why software publishers localize their products are local market and legal requirements. In most countries, computer users prefer to work with software in their native language. In order to increase sales opportunities in target countries, software publishers have to localize their products, while local law often requires all imported hardware or devices to be accompanied by a user manual in the local language.

## 2 Definitions of Terms

Many different definitions and descriptions for *localization* are used in the software and translation industry. Below you will find a commonly used definition, as well as descriptions of some related terms, including: Internationalization, Localization, Globalization, Translation, and Language Engineering. Explanations of many other commonly used terms can be found in Appendix A, Glossary of Terms.

### 2.1 Internationalization

The Localisation Industry Standards Association (LISA) defines internationalization as follows:

"Internationalization is the process of generalizing a product so that it can handle multiple languages and cultural conventions without the need for re-design. Internationalization takes place at the level of program design and document development."

In general, a product is internationalized during the product development cycle, as a precursor to the localization of a product.

An important aspect of internationalization is the separation of text from the software source code. Translatable text, i.e. text which is visible to the user, should be moved to separate strings-only resource files. This will prevent translators from changing – or breaking – the program code, because the resource files only contain translatable components and no coding.

Central to internationalization is the ability to display the character sets and support local standards of a particular language and country. For example, before a software product can be translated into Japanese, it must support double-byte characters. If the application has been programmed to support only Western European languages, it must be *double-byte enabled* first, for example by using Unicode character support. Likewise, different foreign keyboard layouts, input methods, and hardware standards must be supported.

Internationalization is not limited to software. Online help, documentation, and web sites, in particular, also need to be internationalized. For technical writers this process is often called "writing for translation" or "writing for a global audience". In the case of web sites, internationalization, translation, and adapting the content to specific target markets is usually referred to as "web site globalization."

Internationalization is often abbreviated to "i18n", where "18" indicates the number of letters between the "i" and the "n". For more information on internationalization, refer to Chapter 2, Internationalization.

### 2.2 Localization

The Localisation Industry Standards Association (LISA) defines localization as follows:

"Localization 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."

Note that some publishers consider localization as an integral part of the development process of a product. In some cases, special country-specific releases of software products are called *localizations*. In this book, we will refer to all localization-related activities taking place during development of the original product as *internationalization*.

Localization projects usually include the following activities:

- Project management
- Translation and engineering of software
- Translation, engineering, and testing of online help or web content
- Translation and desktop publishing (DTP) of documentation
- Translation and assembling of multimedia or computer-based training components
- Functionality testing of localized software or web applications

Approximately 80% of software products are localized from English into other languages because the majority of software and web applications are being developed in the United States. In addition, software manufacturers in other countries often develop their products in English, or have them localized into English first and use this version as a basis for further localization.

A well-localized product enables users to interact with a software application in their native language. They should be able to read all interface components such as error messages or screen tips in their native language, and enter information with all accented characters using the local keyboard layout. "L10n" is often used as an abbreviation for localization.

## 2.3 Globalization

The Localisation Industry Standards Association (LISA) defines globalization as follows:

"Globalization addresses the business issues associated with taking a product global. In the globalization of high-tech products this involves integrating localization throughout a company, after proper internationalization and product design, as well as marketing, sales, and support in the world market."

Globalization is a term used in many different ways. For example, there is the top, geopolitical level that deals with globalization of business as an economic evolution. Secondly, there is the globalization of an enterprise that establishes an international presence with local branch or distribution offices. Thirdly, there is the process of creating local or localized versions of web sites, which we will refer to as "web site globalization". Web site globalization refers to enabling a web site to deal with non- English speaking visitors, i.e. internationalizing the site's back-end software, designing a multi-lingual architecture, and localizing the site's static or dynamic content.

In the context of this book, globalization covers both internationalization and localization. Publishers will "go global" when they start developing, translating, marketing, and distributing their products to foreign language markets. The concept of globalization ("g11n") is typically used in a sales and marketing context, i.e. it is the process by which a company breaks free of the home markets to pursue business opportunities wherever its customers may be located.

## 2.4 Translation

Translation is the process of converting written text or spoken words to another language. It requires that the full meaning of the source material be accurately rendered into the target language, with special attention paid to cultural nuance and style. The difference between translation and localization can be defined as follows:

"Translation is only one of the activities in localization; in addition to translation, a localization project includes many other tasks such as project management, software engineering, testing, and desktop publishing."

In localization there is stronger emphasis placed on translation tools and technology compared to the traditional translation industry.

## 3 Localization Industry

The localization industry is relatively young. Until the early 1980s, U.S. based software publishers did not appreciate the need for internationalized and localized products. This has changed dramatically since the early 1990s. The growth of the Internet, in particular, has made it much easier for software publishers to market and distribute their products in other countries.

Business reasons aside, many companies are translating and localizing their products for legal reasons. In many countries, such as some Baltic countries, importing or even using products which are not in the country's native language is not permitted.

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