



Localization as languaging?

Methodological problems

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Translation in mainstream linguistics?

- Translation hasn't overall been a point of interest to the mainstream linguistics
- Research concentrates on one L at a time, though another can serve as the research meta-L
- Translation equals, roughly, to finding equivalency pairs between (strings in) source and target Ls, and hence, translation does not “affect” the TL
- More finely-refined accounts mention the context of use (that affect the equivalencies)

Translation and change

- In reality, translation *does* affect the TL: Ls *do* change because of translational activity
- Also, translation affects more than the “ways of saying”: whole new areas and ways of meaning arise
- It is not clear who follows whom: do Ls change to “reflect” the changes in meaning, or do meanings change because of changes in Ls?
- *Or*: Shouldn't we ask if we need to separate Ls from meanings at all?
- *Or*: What does it mean to “be” a L? And what exactly is “meaning?”

What is “meaning”?

- In linguistics) meaning refers to ways of “typically” using a pre-existing code to refer to a a general type
- This means doing something only virtually (“third-order” doing)
- One has to prepare the “meaning” using whatever comes handy: meaning is not “in the head” (of one), it is what happens “between” (of two)
- Localizing something means not only translating strings from one L to another but pre-creating a whole new resource (or “context”) of things that *does* get handy at one time

Language and translation as “communication”

- The preconceived notions of “language”, “translation” and so on create a whole mythology of what it is to *communicate*: an idea (not-L) is always “translated” in L in order to pass it to another being
- More simply, communication is just a way of achieving something by doing something else (i.e., *mediated* action)
- Ls exists in so far people have already done something and created a prior “landscape” of semiotic activity
- (I.e., the “slow dynamics” on human cognition, Cowley & Kravchenko 2008)
- Localization is one form of *this kind of* translation

Research target and material

- Finnish localization of KDE SC desktop environment
- I've been around for the last 2–3 years; there are < 10 active localizers
- 1–2 push changes “upstream”
- “Crowdsourced” but actually very private activity: decisions are made by individuals and offered to the community to judge
- Questions: *How are the norms of L use present in the localization work? How do they get referred to? How do they emerge?*



More specifically...

- How are metalinguistic negotiations carried out in practice? In what portion are they *public*?
- How is language stabilized? How do people change already stabilized norms?
- When translating, which of all the factors involved get connected and how are these connections actualized?
- Which kind of factors affect the power relations inside the discourse community of crowdsourcing? How is power signalized?

(Meta)linguistic negotiations

- Localizers usually work alone and make their decisions alone: there's no timetable for the negotiations
- Of course when ready-made solutions exist, they can be used without question; however, even they can prove inconvenient in specific instances
- How do the localizers “negotiate” in practice? How do you start a negotiative sequence? How many steps does it require to obtain a solution?
- Are there differences in the procedure if the solution reached is old (“ready-made”) or if it only emerges out of the negotiation?

Norms and normativity

- How (and how often) do localizers refer to existing norms? Are there differences between different levels of norms?
- How and when does a practice (X does Y) become a norm (X does Y because Y is “correct”)?
- When and why can norms be *broken* (“Y is *correct* but...”)?
- How can we as researchers discern the norms underlying the so-called general principles (“simplicity”, “readability”, “understandability”) that *are* often referred to?

Motivating factors

- Correctness (as of prescriptive lg norm): very important in Finland!, especially when marketing the product to the general public
- Usability: coherence of the resulting “text”
- Tradition: breaking the tradition might help newcomers but alienates oldtimers
- “Googlability” (reverse-translatability): simplifies searching for advice but might affect usability or even correctness

Power relations

- Crowdsourcing escapes external power relations but creates its own ones
- The first gatekeeper position is acquired by chance: someone just happens to be the first one
- Later, gatekeeper positions follow indoctrination to the localizing “crowd”, the discursive community
- However, since even the gatekeepers do not actively monitor the output of the localizers, power is widely distributed
- Output *per se* does not give anyone power: negotiating practices do

What am I looking for?

- Norms and normativity: how is language experienced as correct and appropriate?
- **The emergence of norms ~ languaging:** what does it take for a habit to end up as norm?
- The degree of publicity in language users' intentions: how does one motivate norms?
- Conceptual and methodological questions: What is language? What is a text? What can a linguist use as research material?

The “austere practice”¹ of the translator

- Usually the localization work deals with string pairs:
msgid “String to be translated”
msgstr “Käännettävä merkkijono”
- There’s no real context (= one that the localizer would recognize), so appropriateness is anyone’s guess
- Besides the “comments” that act as part of the ID’s (“msgctxt” tags), the translator can add real comments as well:
This is a translator’s comment

¹ Thanks to Google Translator!

Types of rhetorical acts in translator's comments

- The comment lines of PO files, email exchanges, forums: the rhetorical acts fit into the same categories
- **Invitation:** the community is invited to solve a problem (though a solution can be given as well)
- **Choice:** choice is made from alternatives but is left open for possible disagreements
- **Rationalization:** a choice is made and rationalized
- **Explanation:** a not-so-obvious choice is explained to the community

Example: “Invitation”

- Source: **Favicons**
- Translation: **Webbisivukuvakkeet**
- Comment: **Webbisivukuvake, verkko-osoite-kuvake, pikavalintakuvake, kirjanmerkkikuvake**
- Different TL candidates are listed without taking a firm position, i.e., the community is asked to judge
- NB, we have a stabilized *term* in SL but not in TL

Example: “Choice”

- Source: **Suffixes**
- Translation: **Loppuliitteet**
- Comment: **In here, ”Päätteet” would be the correct translation, but since the word has many meanings in IT and might be misleading, I changed it here to ”Loppuliitteet”**
- A grounded choice is made from (an open-ended set of) candidates but the “invitation” is still left open
- NB, there is a stabilized term in both the SL and the TL

Example: “Rationalization”

(An obsolete example)

- Source: **KDE logout was canceled**
- Translation: **KDE:n uloskirjautuminen kumottiin**
- (Usually *was canceled = peruutettiin*)
- Comment: **Not even the normative guides help here. In my language use, cars “peruutetaan” and the actions of computer software “perutaan”. It’s best to use the word “kumota”**
- Proposed translation differs from jargon norm but the digression is rationalized by the more general norm (prescriptive guides and personal language use)
- The stable term is questioned

Example: (Extreme) “rationalization”

- Source: **About Bug Reporting – Help**
- Translation: **Vian ilmoittamisesta – Opaste**
- Comment: **In translation, a choice of words can be motivated in many different ways. For instance the Finnish word “Ohje” for “Help” has also the sense of a rule or an obligation – words having maybe negative connotations – and thus “Opaste” is stabilizing as the Finnish translation. [...]**
- (Many further examples in the long comment!)
- Rationalization comes not from a stable but a stabilizing norm

Example: “Explanation”

(My own translation and comment)

- Source: **Possessive**
- Target: **Kuukaudennimen obliikvimuoto**
- Comment: **“Possessive” is probably an English-speaker’s idea of the form, if not nominative, that a month name takes when inserted in a date string (it is a genitive in Russian, for instance)**
- The comment intends to help in understanding the not-so-obvious choice; in itself, this might be interpreted as an invitation for a better translation
- NB, stabilizing of a term is probably not to be expected

Norms emerge

- There's not a single norm but a multitude of norms
 - standard language (= prescriptive) norm
 - jargon norms (IT, Linux, KDE SC and so on)
 - “That's how we have done it” (tradition)
 - “It's easier this way” (usability)
- The importance of maintaining the tradition(s)
- Googlability
- On the other hand, norms do not just exist but they are actively *created*

GUIs as communication

- Because GUI concepts are often metaphors from the external world (“desktop”, “window”), translation can look like “converting” the SL metaphors to equivalent TL metaphors
- In reality, GUIs are “external resources that extend our mental powers” (Clark & Chalmers 1998) *par excellence!*
- Also, despite the G (“graphical”) in “GUI”, GUIs are very much (written) linguistic in nature
- Hence, localization is adding communicative resources to TL, not just utilizing existing ones

GUIs as dialogue

- GUIs only *simulate* talking: they do not engage in real dialogue but change the environment by repetitive monologues
- This tends to divide computer users in two categories:
 - Those who CAN'T use computers find them “stupid” and ruthlessly unforgiving because the dialogue is *not* based on “grounded coordination” (Cowley & Kravchenko 2008)
 - Those who CAN use computers seem to be able to merge them in their own semiotic activities: they expect and get a dialogue with mute environment (instead of with people)

Methodological problems

- Decisions (decision candidates) are reached alone: only a part of the negotiations is done publicly
- What is public are the proposed language forms, not the intentions behind them (motiivit, perustelut)
- Transience: chat negotiations (IRC, Skype, Facebook jne.) do not leave trace
- More permanent forms exist as well of course: email, email lists, forums, wikis (eg., dictionaries)

The question of material

- What is the “research material”?
 - Localization files (the PO files)
 - The more or less transient data from the (public) negotiations
- What forms the “text”?
 - The source string is not a meaning closure!
 - Text is probably best seen as the use of the eventually localized GUI
 - (Except when localization itself forms the target)

“Language in context”

- Important: language is here strictly a tool
 - You act by using language, but:
 - The context and target of the action transcends the traditional “linguistic” scheme
- “Social cognition”???
 - (Although computers are usually regarded as devices of solitary action!)
 - Cf. Web 2.0
- But there are methodological problems: How to show all this? What can we really see in the research material?



THANK YOU!