

# Real-life Training for Translators

## Software Localization and Technical Documentation at the Sprachen- und Dolmetscher-Institut München

by Cornelia Groethuysen

To give you an idea of the background and environment in which we offer our post-graduate courses, let me begin with a brief description of the Sprachen- und Dolmetscher-Institut München (SDI) in Munich and the training it provides. The SDI is a private school for translators and interpreters and was founded almost 50 years ago in 1952. Due to a political decision in Bavaria, training for translators and interpreters was not included in the offerings of universities but in a special kind of professional school or college, although the requirements are the same, i.e. the German "Abitur" or a similar school-leaving certificate of other countries. On the EU level, this training has been recognized and participates in the Erasmus program. Most of our teaching staff are active translators and interpreters providing a close link with the real life of translation and interpreting. As for me, I am a freelance translator specializing in IT marketing and the localization of advertising and I teach technical translation at the SDI, where I am also a member of the management team.

The institute offers a three-year course of studies for technical translators and interpreters in English, French, Italian, Spanish,

Russian or Chinese and four (in some departments two) specialist subjects, e.g. Economics, Technology, Science and Law). The students choose one first language, one special subject plus a second language or a second special subject. The emphasis in the first year is on language studies and translation, in recent years complemented by technical writing in German, the native language of most of our students. In the second and third year the main focus is on the special subject and translations in this

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subject. Interpreting (simultaneous and consecutive) is another focus in the third year for those who plan to become interpreters as well. Due to the comparatively short duration of this course of study, our students have about 30 course hours per week. At the end of the three years they sit a state examination. In the fourth (post-

graduate) year they can do another subject or language and improve their interpreting skills and in the fifth year we offer training for conference interpreters to the "crème de la crème" of our students (most years not more than 2 or 3).

While this basic structure has not changed much during the last few decades, changes in the language professions have required changes in the way we teach them and, of course, some important additions in recent years. Text processing and computer-aided terminology have been part of the curriculum for the last ten years or so but this is not enough. Translators of my generation—whether employed or freelance—typically worked on their own using first, the typewriter and later, the computer. They got their translations on paper—first by post and later by fax—and sent them off by the same means. Today, they usually get them as files by e-mail or over their company's intranet. They do their research on the Internet and they use electronic dictionaries and other reference material. And due to the increasing volume of translation projects, they have to work in teams rather than on their own and they use terminology databases and translation memories to speed up their production and to guarantee a consistent team output. All this means that computer

literacy is a highly important competence of translators and also interpreters. This is why in addition to the basic courses required by the Bavarian curriculum for this type of school we offer optional PC training consisting of five additional modules: Basics of Data Processing, Windows and Excel, Text and Computer, Image and

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Computer and Internet. And in the courses in computer-aided terminology (CAT) in the second and third year we also offer a computer-aided translation module where they get acquainted with the use of professional tools like translation memories, etc.

But for the purpose of this article, I would like to focus on two post-graduate offerings we have developed more recently—Software Localization and Technical Documentation.

### **What is the situation?**

Let's have a look at software localization first. The localization market is fairly young and growing fast. The fact that most participants of our courses, if they were interested, were taken over by the companies they had done their in-house training with, is another indicator for the good market situation. The market is even starting to diversify. We can identify three fields in which companies can position themselves:

#### **a) Classical Software Localization**

i.e. the localization of general software such as operating systems and office applications. Most localization projects involve Windows-based products, Linux does not yet play an important role. A slightly younger market is the localization of industry-specific applications (business processes, banking, medical software). An additional challenge for the translator who does not only need to know software terminology but must have industry-specific knowledge and terminology as well.

Both areas have common features, however. They are technically sophisticated due to various data formats. And they include parts other than the software that need to be translated (documentation, online help,

training materials, license agreements). The life of these texts is comparatively long and their re-usability in case of updates very high. The target group of users is relatively homogenous and the source language is usually English.

#### **b) Localization of Web sites**

The second most important market segment is the Internet. The question actually is whether this really is software localization, as software—apart from the Java scripts—does not play a very important role here. But for the translator of HTML documents his working environment and methods (testing) are not very different from pure software localization. Language combinations are more varied here: companies want to be customer-friendly and, therefore, want to address their potential customers in their own languages. Other features of website localization are that these projects tend to be relatively small, the life of their content is much shorter and they are limited to a few data formats (HTML, XML, WML, graphics).

#### **c) Localization of Multimedia Applications**

A third segment of software localization is the localization of multimedia applications, such as encyclopedias, games and other entertainment software. These products usually have a very culture-specific background so that a lot of effort might have to go into their adaptation and editing. In addition, they are usually technically demanding because of their variety of data formats (images, sound).

Adapting a source text to the regional conditions of the target language is, of course, nothing new and translators have always done this. But what becomes clear in the various definitions of "software localization" is that economic benefits come to the fore. For instance, Klaus-Dirk

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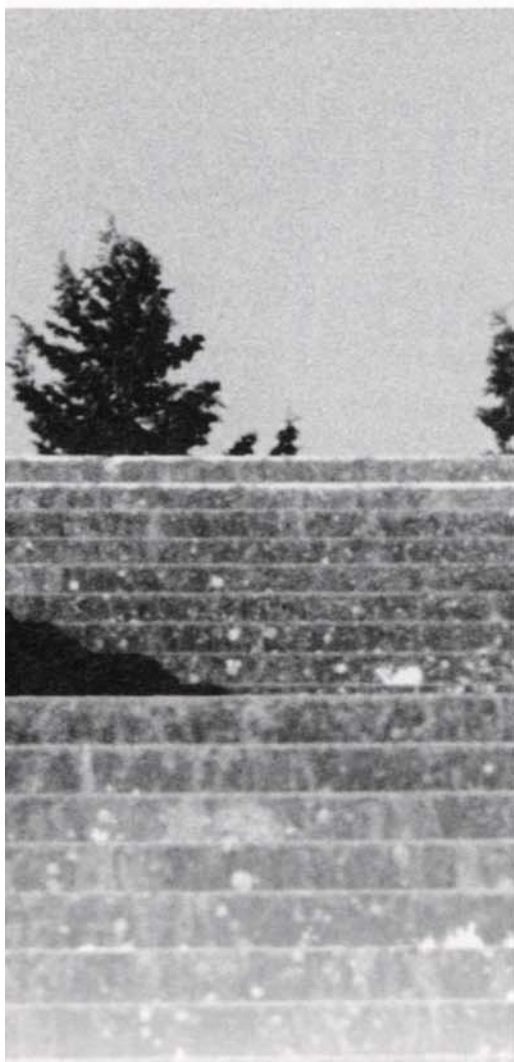
Schmitz in Schmitz/Wahle Software-Lokalisierung: "The process of adapting a (software) product to regional markets, i.e. to different linguistic and cultural areas, is

called software localization" (my own translation). "Process", "product", "market"—these are new words in the small world of translators. Software localization is a business and must be treated as such. This requires the translator to adapt to the requirements of software vendors in

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terms of workplace, working processes and quality assurance.

Technical documentation or, more specifically, multi-lingual technical documentation, on the other hand, is nothing new and translators have been involved in it for a long time. What is new, however, is a more wide-spread professional approach. We have probably all had some gruesome experience with bad instructions that made it all but impossible to use the device they came with. Bad in their original form and not made any better by incompetent or unprofessional translation. European and national liability legislation have now included documentation into the manufacturers' liability making it in their interest—apart from other considerations such as the salability and usability of this products—to provide adequate documentation. Regardless of the quality of the source text, translators are expected to produce translations that meet the requirements in their specific country in terms of cultural and linguistic habits as well as legal regulations. As in software localization, the sheer amount of documentation to be produced as well as the reusability of texts with new models requires the development and use of software tools to streamline and speed up production. The terminology used must be consistent with the company terminology used in all other publications and be stored and made available for everybody by proper terminology management. And, while translators involved in documentation projects will probably not be required to create graphics or layout, they will have to be able to work



with the most common desktop publishing systems.

This means that translators involved in a localization project or in a documentation project must have specific competencies:

#### 1. Linguistic competence

This competence is, of course, one you would expect from a translator anyway. Native language competence is the most important one in technical documentation and localization, as in most other fields of translation, a fact that is often overlooked in the training of translators. Technical writing requires findings in the field of human information processing to be implemented. The trend is towards a clear and precise language, i.e. a customer-friendly language which might not always be "translator-friendly". In software localization, the linguistic requirements depend on the project and might even require literary standards. Games or web-sites can be quite sophisticated and this must be reflected in localization.

#### 2. Technical competence

As in many other fields, translators must be able to understand the technology and the steps described in a text. While translators do not have to be able to build a machine or engine themselves, they must understand how it works. They must have the necessary technical knowledge in those fields of technology that may require technical documentation—from computers, machines and cars to airplanes and power plants—to enable a problem-free communication with all other experts involved in a documentation or localization project. In software localization this includes a basic understanding of software development and programming.

#### 3. Social and organizational competence

To develop a software product, many competencies must be brought together. One them is localization which comprises a wide range of service—consulting and

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translation among them—which a single translation cannot offer. Efficient communication is therefore required to enable an effective solution to be found. Also, localization projects are normally too big to be handled by one person. The same applies to many technical documentation projects. They require exact planning and transparent communication rules. Realistic deadlines must be worked out and the cooperation between freelance translators and in-house staff must be managed. The quality of the results must be assured by proper quality assurance procedures.

#### 4. Pragmatic competence

Translators must be able to work efficiently with the various programs and tools that make up the increasingly complex modern translator workplace. As a minimum requirement they must have a good knowledge of translation memory systems. In technical documentation the variety of tools is even wider ranging from desktop publishing systems, terminology and content management systems to translation memories and machine translation.

There is, of course, no upper limit of what might be useful and translators must be able to acquaint themselves with new programs quickly and efficiently.

So, how did we become involved in those new fields of real-life training? It all began with the institute organizing weekend seminars (for our teachers and students as well as practicing translators) on subjects like "Translation in the Time of the Internet" and "Software Localization". But these seminars could obviously not compensate for the lack of specialist training available. The experience of companies involved in software localization showed that a translator with traditional training needs between one and two years to get familiar with the requirements of software localization, placing a tremendous strain on in-house training resources and making it difficult for beginners to benefit from this promising market. This is why we got together with experts from Siemens and Bowne Global Solutions, one of the biggest international software localization companies which has its German branch near Munich, to develop a curriculum which closely reflects the requirements of this industry. Bowne also provided practical in-house training for 3 months for participants without previous working experience, i.e. our post-graduates, when we ran this course in 1999/2000 for the first time. Meanwhile, the number of companies involved has increased to 6 and the course has become a forum for the localizer scene which is particularly active in Munich.

The course is divided into several modules—some of them seminars, some of them workshops. As it is not only offered to our post-graduate students but also to practicing translators, they take place in the late afternoon as well as on Friday afternoons and Saturdays. Teachers include SDI teachers as well as specialists from the companies involved and from other areas of business or from universities. In 2000/2001, the course started with an introduction to software localization followed by the following 5 modules:

1. Tools for translators (for license reasons this module could only be offered to our post-graduate students)
2. Working methods
3. Introduction to software development
4. What the localizer needs to know
5. Quality assurance and project management.

The aim of module 1 is to enable students to efficiently use the tools required in this industry such as terminology management (Multiterm), translation memory (Workbench) and alignment tools (WinAlign), localizing tools such as Corel Catalyst or Passolo, machine translation systems such as

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T1 and terminology extraction tools. Module 2 looks into the basic rules of team work, project management and working efficiency (Gesellschaft für Arbeitsmethodik). The aim of module 3 is to enable software engineers and translators to communicate efficiently and includes topics such as data formats, formats of online help, software programs and their structures, an overview of programming languages such as C++, Java or Visual Basic, macro programming and user interfaces. Module 4 looks at the various processes and skills involved in software localization such as the various software components to be localized, "simultaneous delivery" projects, country specific elements of software (language, symbols, currencies, dates, standards etc.), localization and testing of online help systems, linguistic aspects, localization of voice-overs, dialogs, images, multimedia content, economic aspects of localization (big players, industry associations, standardization, prices, preparation of offers, timing, etc.). Module 5, finally, deals with questions such as liability, industry standards, certification, project management and communication, change management, etc.). At the end of the course, i.e. after the in-house training at one the companies involved, the students' practical work is presented and discussed before a committee. The modules are assessed and reviewed each year and adapted where appropriate.

For the coming academic year, we have developed a new course in Technical Documentation together with representatives of the industry and industry associations. The curriculum comprises the following elements:

- Introduction to multi-lingual documentation
- Particular aspects of technical communication
- Human information processing
- Terminology extraction and terminology management
- Project management
- Processes involved in the creation and production of multilingual documentation (text processing, style sheets, markup languages, data structures, document structure and layout, processing of structured data, information and content management, editing of source texts, translation memories, publication systems etc.)
- Quality assurance (same as software localization)
- Language engineering (linguistic analysis, text analysis, machine translation, controlled languages, information retrieval).

Post-graduates, or other participants with specialist subjects other than technology, will be required to attend the relevant courses (terminology and translation) in the second and first years.

The approach we took in developing these (and other) new offers was first to observe the market and analyze new developments and requirements. Second, to ask users of translation services what they need and what they feel is lacking in the training of translators and interpreters. Third, to involve them in the development of the curriculum, asking them to provide informa-

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tion, lecturers, hands-on training and—where applicable—internships. Where we do not have qualified teachers for new subjects we use guest lecturers until our own staff has acquired the necessary qualifications. We have done this not only with software localization and technical documentation, but also with our course for conference interpreters with 3 C languages (one of them East-European)



which we offer for the first time in 2001/2002 and which is going to complement our traditional conference interpreter training with two B languages. The new course aims at meeting the demand of EU organizations and similar institutions in view of the future EU enlargement by inclusion of East European countries. In our experience, all partners involved—training providers, students and the industry—greatly benefit from such co-operation and are eager to make it work.

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