"Transfer" XIV: 1-2 (2019), pp. 132-140. ISSN: 1886-554

A Rose by Many Other Names: Translation, Adaptation, and the "New" Localization Industry

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Reception date: 02/02/2018; Acceptance date: 15/03/2018

In recent years the traditional world of commercial translation services has undergone a remarkable change. In the context of translation networks, this commercial phenomenon invites us to rethink some concepts fundamental to the idea of translation in light of the rise of the fast-growing, multi-billion dollar new language services industry called "localization." *Localization* represents an interesting economic opportunity for people who have gifts in languages and a penchant for translation. For those not familiar with localization, I have digested a definition using materials found on three web sites from among the scores of "language service providers" (companies known as LSPs) who have found new and creative ways to monetize their polyglot abilities:

Localization means adapting a product or text to a specific locale or market, to give it the look and feel of having been created specifically for that market. A successfully localized service or product is one that appears to have been developed within the local culture.

Primary elements of localization include the following:

- Adapting to local tastes, business practices, and consumption habits
- Adapting graphics, design, and layouts for varying local conditions such as different orthographies, color sensitivities, and visual conventions

· Aligning with local formats such as currencies, units of measure, dates, addresses, and phone numbers
· Adapting for social considerations such as local demographics, gender roles, and government systems

For example, when localizing American English to British English one must often change spellings, such as an internal *z* to *s* (*organize* to *organise*), *-ter* to *-tre* (*center* to *centre*), and *-or* to *-our* (*favor* to *favour).* One company, CNN, has separate Latino programming in the US, based upon an estimated audience of 55 million Latino viewers. In China, search engines such as Baidu eclipse Google because they look and feel more Chinese than Google. Japanese consumers have, for decades, resonated more with oblique, ambience-driven TV commercials for luxury goods than hard-selling ads touting the virtues of the products.

Localization is happening all around us. Consumer goods you may be wearing at this very moment, for example, are likely to have been influenced by the process of localization. The Swedish home furnishings store IKEA sells products around the world and takes a very pragmatic approach to localization. Its instruction manuals use little or no text, only images, and when text is necessary, such as with safety equipment, it tends to be very inclusive (28 languages) and limited to the most perfunctory information, such as “Don’t wash vest more than 25 times!” Cell phones also embody the idea of localization, since they are often strategically adapted for sales and promotion in one’s country and language, while still allowing consumers the chance to “personalize” their own devices, a very individual form of localization.

Lionbridge, one of the larger LSPs, notes on its website that “It is important to remember that the target market is different from the market for which the product was originally developed.” This truism about translation may seem obvious to comparatists, but there are conditions in the world of literary translation today that derive directly from warped assumptions about communication and mar-

keting. Primary among these is the assumption that the act of translation is merely a direct and correspondent transfer of *information*; secondary to that is the assumption that information is contained in *words alone*. Together these two assumptions lead to Google translate and other online tools that evidence the simplistic and unexamined belief that correspondences exist between languages at the syntactical level and that translation can be reduced to an algorithm based on formulas. And, if we have learned anything from our experiences with Google translate, it is how machine translation beyond a very narrow spectrum of conventional discourse requires human fine-tuning for syntax and idiom!

Common to all definitions of *localization* is the sense that localization’s magic is in making the thing being localized appear *as if* it were created in that language, and human intervention is required for that magic, since cultural adaptation is a human skill. Given this desired outcome, as literary translators and scholars of literary translation, we might benefit from considering to what extent we judge the effectiveness of a translation based upon the same standard: *as if* it were created in the target language. In other words, is the illusion of local origin one to which we aspire, and the standard upon which we judge the quality of a literary translation? Perhaps in some cases and with specific genres, such as film or theater, this is true, but there are other situations, such as translating written narrative, in which, as Lawrence Venuti emphasizes, we often inflict violence upon the target language, demanding that it adapt to the original, rather than the other way around. One example of this might be Paul’s Latinized English in the King James translation of the Bible; another would be the emergence of the tortured sub-dialect of English used to translate Schopenhauer, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein.

Conversely, another question we as comparatists might pose from the existence of the localization industry is this: *To what extent does the more discriminating consumer demand for locally-adapted products and texts reveal the hubris of our assumption that we alone*

are qualified to pass judgment on what is and is not a “good” translation? Put another way, has our multi-lingual and multi-cultural uniqueness narrowly circumscribed, in some ways, the domain of what we might or might not consider “accurate,” let alone “good,” translations?

In trying to answer that question, or at least present the beginnings of an answer, I would like to suggest that localization is a new name for an old phenomenon. I see localization as a new appellation for *adaptation* (or perhaps *remediation*), what we often mean when we talk about translation in the academy but that is easily rejected for an artificially narrowed subset of translation that I call “correspondent translation” and Mieke Bal sees as “the stronghold of literality.” I will use the example of late-19th-century Japan to articulate this distinction.

Over 150 examples of Western literature made their way into Japanese translation between 1868 and 1888. Realize that, prior to opening to the West in the 1850s, Japan had remained isolated from the Western world for approximately 250 years, allowing only a slight trickle of technological and cultural goods to flow into the country through the tiny Dutch outpost at Dejima in Nagasaki. So, when Japan began to open its ports to Western goods in the mid-nineteenth century, it had the unusual chance to react to and dialogue with centuries of cultural production within a relatively short span of time. Looking over a list of what was translated, we find that it reflects, if imperfectly, a kind of “Great Books” collection, including writers who exercised a profound influence in the Western, especially nineteenth-century, world. Among the authors translated into Japanese are long-dead Greeks (Aesop) and more recently departed Germans (Lessing, Schiller and Goethe); Western literary luminaries such as Shakespeare, Cervantes and Boccaccio; a few other recently-dead writers of English (Dickens, Poe); and some very-much-alive authors, including Jules Verne, Tolstoy, Wilkie Collins, and the French mystery writer Fortune de Boisgobey.

Few, if any, of these Japanese renditions, especially for the first three decades, were correspondent translations; those that tried to be literal, such as an early 1880s translation of Poe's *The Black Cat*, required interlarded comments, like guide posts, to help the reader through the culturally allusive terrain. In the case of *The Black Cat,* this included a clunky and distracting, but necessary, textual aside on the cat's name, Pluto, since Japanese readers had no background whatsoever in Greek mythology. The more successful translations, on the other hand, capitalized on the prior history of Japanese adaptations of Chinese narratives into a Japanese geographical, historical, and cultural context, and readers who, like contemporary theatergoers, enjoyed reading a familiar story reset in a new, localized, version. So, the early, successful translations of Western fiction likewise included unique combinations of exotic foreign elements with familiar enough Japanese protagonists and satisfied the localization goal of appearing *as if* they had been "made in Japan." In fact, they seemed so Japanese that there are many purported "translations" of Western literature published during the latter part of the nineteenth century whose original sources, if they exist at all, are yet to be discovered.

Adaptations were both popular and lucrative for their publishers, and that success proved the effectiveness of their translation strategies: the more a translation appeared to originate locally, the more successful it would be. I should mention here that, from the perspective of literary history, these *localizations*, specifically mystery stories and proto-detective fiction, played a crucial role in the modernization of Japanese literature itself through instilling in the newly educated masses the habit of reading literature.

What we can learn, then, from the Japanese example is that commercial interests influence the development of literature, and that literary translation in the form of adaptation or remediation—in effect, literary localization—can spread and enhance that development, whereas direct, correspondent translation, with its manipulated

language and assumptions of cultural awareness, can fail, languishing instead within in narrow circle of multicultural readers.

Japanese translators of Western literature faced challenges worthy of modern localization specialists, including a diglossia that precluded the option of colloquial narrative voice in writing, lack of a convention for the elaborate physical descriptions of characters and landscapes then in vogue in the West, and unfamiliar geographic, cultural, and historical allusions (such as the Pluto example). All these obstacles favor solutions typical of adaptation rather than corresponddent translation, and the market bore this out, with the wildly popular and commercially successful localizations of Western literature directly founding the fortunes of Kodansha, Hakubunkan, and other Japanese publishing magnates throughout the twentieth century.

The localization industry’s rise in today’s world seems new, but has certainly been an important, if not central, dynamic in translation over time. We take notice of it now because globalization’s commercial needs have given a new name to adaptation, a mode of translation that has always been part of the process but has not always been esteemed. Given that the narrow definition of correspondent translation has held the academic gaze for a few centuries, it might be interesting to speculate why this is the case. Perhaps, as Sinkwan Cheng notes in another article in this special issue, it has something to do with the anxiety to control meaning that is reflected in the Christian Reformation and the rise of competing authoritative interpretations of the Bible.

In any case, correspondent translation often assumes a high level of cultural literacy on the part of its readers, whereas the commercial publishing world favors adaptation. This is certainly the case in both theater and, more recently, film, which depend in part on remediation of written texts for their survival and rely upon adaptation to give them immediacy, relevance, and power. Witness the very recent example of a performance of *Julius Caesar* in New York

that was set in contemporary America with a Donald Trump-like Caesar, a Shakespeare play redone *as if* it were made for today’s American audiences, complete with the real-world commercial drama taking center stage as some of the play’s sponsors bailed after criticism from the White House. That level of social and political engagement would have been unimaginable if the Central Park version had been cast in the “authentic” mode rather than localized to a contemporary time and place. Will such willful adaptation find a place, let alone esteem, among our colleagues in the academy? I believe it has in some genres and perhaps will in more over time.

The emergence of the ‘localization’ industry in a global marketplace today helps us reconsider the importance of adaptation’s time-honored role within the translation spectrum. Perhaps we might nudge adaptation a bit closer to the center of that spectrum even as we recognize that correspondent translation as we have come to revere it may be more of an outlier than we had suspected. To conclude, then, let me adapt Shakespeare’s famous line from *Romeo and Juliet* to make it appear as though it was, indeed, written for this particular set of articles: “What’s in a name? that which we call a rose/ By *many other names* would *sell* as sweetly!”

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Abstract:
The rise of the fast-growing new language services industry referred to as “localization” represents an interesting cultural phenomenon. I examine this industry from the perspective of variant cultural practices orbiting around the notion of translation and adaptation, identifying a strong correspondent-versus-adaptive polarity. Using examples of 19th-century Japanese adaptations of Western texts, I note how contemporary market dynamics favored adaptations over correspondent translations. Mapping these onto contemporary localization practices, I suggest that the emergence of the ‘localization’ industry in a global marketplace today helps us reconsider the importance of adaptation’s time-honored role within the translation spectrum.

Key words: Adaptation, Remediation, Translation, Localization, Japanese translation, Poe, Commercial translation, Correspondent translation

“UNA ROSA DE MUCHOS OTROS NOMBRES: TRADUCCIÓN, ADAPTACIÓN Y LA ‘NUEVA’ INDUSTRIA DE LA LOCALIZACIÓN”

Resumen:
El surgimiento de la nueva industria de servicios lingüísticos de rápido crecimiento conocida como "localización" representa un fenómeno cultural interesante. Examino esta industria desde la perspectiva de prácticas culturales variadas que orbitan alrededor de la noción de traducción y adaptación, identificando una fuerte polaridad corresponsal contra adaptativa. Utilizando ejemplos de adaptaciones japonesas del siglo XIX de textos occidentales, observo cómo la dinámica contemporánea del mercado favoreció las adaptaciones sobre las traducciones correspondientes. A la luz de las prácticas de localización contemporáneas, sugiero que la aparición de

la industria de la "localización" en el mercado global actual nos ayuda a reconsiderar el importante papel que juega la adaptación dentro del dominio de la traducción.

Palabras clave: Adaptación, Remediación, Traducción, Localización, Traducción al japonés, Poe, Traducción comercial, Traducción correspondiente