



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRANSLATION AND LOCALIZATION?

As you take your business global, translation and localization are two terms you may hear used interchangeably, but there are distinct and important differences.

Translation is the process of changing a source version (usually English) of software, documentation, multimedia, or web material into a target-language version (any language) by simply changing the words from one language to another. Unfortunately, it is rarely a word-for-word swap. A word-for-word translation yields many of the funny or offensive literal translations we've all seen in the marketplace!

Here are a few examples:

In a Tokyo Hotel

Is forbidden to steal hotel towels please. If you are not a person to do such thing is please not to read notice.

In a Bucharest hotel lobby

The lift is being fixed for the next day. During that time we regret that you will be unbearable.

In a Leipzig elevator

Do not enter the lift backwards, and only when lit up.

Source: <http://www.jnweb.com/funny/translation.html>

Localization (also abbreviated as L10n) is the translation AND adaptation of material for foreign-language markets. It involves changing words from English to the target language. It also involves analyzing the semantics in the target language to make sure the right thing is said in the target, as well as making sure that a product "works" (functionally and linguistically) in another culture. It is important to remember that the target market is different from the market for which the product was originally developed.

When localizing, a translator (aka linguist or localization professional) will:

- ➔ Adapt the language by creating a linguistic equivalent, not a literal translation
- ➔ Assess color for cultural implications
- ➔ Change telephone number formats
- ➔ Change time/date/measurements to reflect that culture's counting system

- ➔ Assess and change any icons or graphics that will not make sense in the target culture. As an example, look at these different mailbox symbols used in various countries:



The end result of localization is a product that:

- ➔ Is appropriate for the target locale business and cultural conventions
- ➔ Appears custom built for the end user's cultural and linguistic background
- ➔ Does not change the original intended meaning

If translated material does not meet the needs of the local culture, it has not been properly localized. This is no trivial task, and may go a long way in explaining why localization is costly.

Often, businesses hoping to go global ask: "Do we have to localize for each country the deliverable is going into?" Not necessarily.

There is a form of each language that is generic or standard enough to be understood by all countries and cultures of that one language. A client can choose to do only ONE Spanish translation, and send it to Spain, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, and Puerto Rico. Deliverables are "neutralized" before localization, and what remains is adapted generically for all target cultures speaking that language. In-country review is utilized to make sure there are no country-specific inflections in the documents. However, it could be important—depending on the target locale, your product, and your localization strategy and goals—to localize for THAT specific market. The main differences will be in terminology.

Example

A toy manufacturer has had wild success in the United States selling humanized cat toys for children. These toys speak slang, eat food, and are interested in fashion. The company now wants to sell these toys in Europe. However, a direct translation of the marketing materials (and even of the recorded voice inside the toy) could be inappropriate. Localization is required here, not mere translation. Also, a market analysis may be required to determine if this product will be well-received in the countries the company hopes to target.

What you Should Know

1. Localization and translation are not the same things; translation is a sub-task of localization.
2. Localization should be completed by an in-country bilingual linguist who knows intimately the language, customs, and cultural biases of the target culture.
3. Localization also involves technical knowledge of the deliverables themselves.
4. Word-for-word translation is often ineffective, and at times, utterly inappropriate or offensive.
5. Appropriate localization is a complex task requiring highly skilled resources; as with many services, you get what you pay for.

About Lionbridge

Lionbridge (Nasdaq: LIOX) is the leading provider of translation, localization, and testing services. Organizations in all industries rely on Lionbridge language and testing services to increase international market share, speed adoption of products and content, and ensure the integrity of their global brands. Based in Waltham, Mass., Lionbridge operates across 26 countries, and provides services under the Lionbridge and VeriTest® brands.

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