

The Moving Text.
Localization, Translation, and Distribution

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Photo: Authors' hands at The Mission, Kellerberrin, Western Australia, August 2002

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Internationalization is the preparation of a generic text for multiple localizations. The concept can be extended to include terminology databases and controlled languages, occupying the guiding position once accorded to the source text.

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Internationalization can enhance rather than restrict the differences between locales, as is suggested by the language varieties that computer programs are marketed for.

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The principle factor determining how many texts move may be the relative size of locales. It is possible that the larger the locale, the greater the percentage of texts moved *from* that locale and the smaller the percentage of movements *into* that locale. It is also possible that the distribution a locale receives without localization tends to be directly proportional to the distribution it receives with localization.

Against complete localization 40

Localization is rarely complete, since asymmetries remain in the technical terminology. This incompleteness potentially allows end-users to move to the locales of production.

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Complete internationalization may be an ideal, but it could involve saying as little as a message sent into space.

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Translation can be defined in terms of a maxim of first-person displacement and a maxim of quantitative equivalence.

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In these terms, translation or non-translation can be used to change the status of second persons, as seen in the French newspaper advertisement.

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In some cases, the need to select between third-person terms must itself position the translator. This is yet another instance where translation can be used to modify and direct discourse.

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The maxim of representational quantity contradicts Zipf's rank-frequency law, making it difficult to maintain in practice.

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Transliteration 72

The straight use of source-text material attains a degree of equivalence so absolute as to be often unacceptable.

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If a translation is presented alongside its presumed source, the presumed source will tend to be accorded more value than the translation, although this relation may undergo ironic inversion in cases of extreme quantitative discrepancy.

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Reductive strategies are difficult to justify, since most distributions are away from the centers of highest frequency and thus require longer, more explicit terms.

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 The use of local variants can have a performative effect, resisting distribution by creating implicit knowledge. The movement of such texts may require extreme explicitation, creating textual worlds through the use of narrative.

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 Natural languages use terms in many different locales, and thus embed language within cultural complexes. This embedding resists distribution.

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 Everything can be localized into every locale if and when unlimited effort can be invested in the localization processes. Real-world projects then require calculations of how much effort is justified in each case.

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Medieval mediation was also characterized by unstable source texts, which allowed the mediator greater professional responsibilities. This too returns in the age of constantly rewritten electronic texts.

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Ethical principles also build professional identity, but should not do so on the basis of idealist understanding or assumed neutrality. An ethics of cooperation can avoid those essentialisms.

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If humanization involves working at local levels of discourse, it should be the ideological aim of localization. Localization technology, however, brings about significant transformations in the way language is used.

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One of the main effects that internationalization and localization have on discourse is the relative loss of linearity. This may not be dehumanizing in itself.

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Technical discourse, like translation, tends to avoid first and second persons. This can be reinforced by the loss of linearity and is felt to be dehumanizing.

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Professional technical texts are less accessible than technical texts for general users. This might be dehumanizing if localization locks the user into one kind of text or another.

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Renaissance humanism sought exchanges between many types and levels of discourse, working against segmentation. Humanizing discourse might be that which pedagogically enables users to move between locales, and uses linearity to this end.

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Professional technical discourse is more explicit than non-professional discourse. Explicitness, however, may be pedagogically empowering and should be regarded as a positive value.

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Localization and translation can be used to humanize discourse in all these aspects. Complete localization, however, which would position users in just one locale, does not promise the necessary mobility.

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