

Bert Esselink, *A Practical Guide to Localization*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2000. ISBN 90 272 1956 7 (Europe Pb.), 90 272 1955 9 (Europe Hb.). 488 pp.

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This revised version of Esselink's *A Practical Guide to Software Localization* (1998) has been brought out just two years after the first edition. The main change, expressed in the dropping of 'software' from the title, is the addition of information on HTML and XML documents, websites, and online help files and manuals. This is ostensibly to cater for the rapid growth in web-based localization providers, which would indeed appear to have changed everything in the recent heyday of 'new economy' enthusiasm. Yet the additions also include new sections on internationalization, quality assurance and desktop publishing, all addressing traditional communication formats as well. The result is a rather complete set of introductory materials that, I suspect, respond rather more to the demands of students-sitting-in-front-of-computers than they do to radical economic changes over a two-year period. Esselink is responding to the training market, and responding very well.

The broadening of focus nevertheless leaves a few stretch marks in the fundamentals of the text. Although 'localization' is loosely defined as "the translation and adaptation of a software or web product" (1), this specification is then lost when adopting the definition given by the Localisation Industry Standards Association (LISA): "Localization involves taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale (country region and language) where it will be used and sold" (3). From 'software' we have gone to 'a product', any product; from IT engineering we have moved to global marketing. The various components of localization are then detailed as project management, translation, engineering, testing, desktop publishing, assembly of multimedia products, and testing. Clearly there is much more than language replacement ('translation') involved; from translation studies we have moved to the techniques of something like intercultural studies, albeit never named as such. On both these fronts—the shift to marketing and the expansion to multitasking—, one senses that translation scholars might benefit from taking a good close look at the potential imperialism of localization... if only to protect our own long-term hides.

This is not to say that the theoretical future is mapped out at all transparently. For instance, to pick up the basics of the discourse, 'localization' goes hand-in-hand with 'internationalization', which LISA defines as "the process of generalizing a product so that it can handle multiple languages and cultural conventions without the need for re-design" (2). That is, much of the work that used to come after production in the source locale is now done during the production process itself. Software and documentation—or indeed 'any product'—is developed with its future localization in mind. So should localization then only refer to what happens after internationalization? I have found no clear answer in Esselink. Further, since 'globalization' is then glossed as covering "both internationalization and localization" (4), as in talk about 'globalizing a website', why shouldn't it be the title of this book, rather than just 'localization'? A few innocent questions quickly show the basic terms to be quite slippery. Yet the book is not a search for solid theory. Esselink is much more concerned with how to get things done.

Having sketched out its definitions and terms of reference, the book devotes its second chapter to 'internationalization', applied to language choices, software engineering, website design and multilingual documentation (here referring to online and printed manuals). There follow three chapters on the translation, engineering and quality assurance of software, usefully commenting on Mac OS as well as Windows and other environments, and emphasising the importance of testing at various levels and with electronic tools. Then we have two chapters on the translation, engineering and testing of online help files, referring to the same environments and making much the same points. By the time we get to 'documentation translation' and 'desktop publishing' (chapters 8 and 9), there seems remarkably little left to say. In fact, for as much as the thunder would seem to have been taken by online modes of communication (which does indeed justify the book's new title), one is left wondering if the fundamental problems are really any greater simply because they are web-based. No matter, we push on to 'graphics localization', basically on the uncomplicated techniques of screen captures and various fairly obvious ways of editing graphics. And one suspects that the book's practical worth might have finished there. But no, we are treated to a very quick rush through 'translation technology' (the basic electronic tools) and 'terminology' (only 16 pages for all of it), both of which should really have become separate books. The final section is on project evaluations and project management, a mix of common sense and homely advice that nevertheless comes with the window-dressing of necessary dependencies and brief notes on project-management software.

For desert there is a useful glossary of key terms. Note, though, that a non-native reader looking for the meaning of 'string', for example, will not find one (the term is apparently too basic). And a translation historian looking up 'pseudotranslation' (a non-translated text presented as a translation) is likely to be disappointed: here the term means "An automated or manual process where each translatable text string in the software is replaced with a longer string or series of accented characters, in order to spot any potential problems in compiling and executing the localized files" (472). The localization terms have not developed within mainstream translation studies, so a few such clashes are only to be expected. And then an ignoramus like myself, looking for something as banal as the meaning of CGI (those little letters at the end of the URL you use for internet library searches) will not be helped. Yet in an age of arcana we should perhaps be grateful for the glosses that do answer our questions.

For coffee, Esselink includes an efficient two-level index. Indeed, I thought it had everything until I tried to locate where I had copied the following from: THE FATAL FLAW: 'When projects run into trouble, people believe that the problem can be solved simply, e.g. by working harder, extending the deadline, or adding more resources.' I suspect most readers will appreciate why I made the note; I think the title might even be mine. But I'm damned if I can find where I found it in the book. Nor in the previous edition. So much for indexes.

After all of which, for reflexive cigars, Esselink proffers a four-and-a-bit-page vision of the future of localization (actually Appendix B). Production will be in structured content creation or controlled language; everything will go into a multilingual database where it is automatically processed by a translation memory; only new information will actually go out to human translators. So instead of working on projects as such, translators will be working on information flows, rendering updates rather than full texts. The vision makes sense; it is worth talking about. But the nature of this discourse is not to discuss, or argue, or assess any human values beyond efficiency. Esselink is apparently unworried by the way the localization

software is separating out translatable language, in fact outsourcing translation, keeping translators from entering the more lucrative parts of the business, maintaining a cottage-industry ideology in the post-industrial age, ensuring that we no longer see or read whole texts, that we no longer have direct contacts with clients, that we can only foresee a highly managed image of any real communication partners. Most of those concerns are out. Esselink's prophecies remain unnervingly dehumanized, based on reading only the technological stars.

The book's back cover has a nice photograph of the author laughing and holding his chin (the same photograph appeared in his 'updates' in *Language International*, of which the man is now co-editor). The chin-holding should indicate thought of some kind (although it does seem to have disappeared in a more recent photograph). So what is this guy so happy about? He is clearly not looking at a computer screen all day (full head of hair, no glasses), and one doubts he would be so happy if he were (software translation is tremendously boring and repetitive and redundant). Perhaps he is just overjoyed to have mastered the petty mysteries of technology. But no, that well-fed smile is not to be confused with the nerds or geeks that once got off on this stuff. Could this joy possibly ensue from spending the millions that the magazine hype associates with the localization industry? Yes, that must be it, if and when he is clever enough to avoid the above FATAL FLAW.

Then again, he could simply be pleased to have written a book that most readers could have pieced together themselves. Much of the information given here can indeed be found on company websites; much more is in the help files of the software described. In fact, the one general complaint I might have about these 488 pages is that, on almost all fronts, there is not enough there. This is indeed no more than a guide, an initial chart of the heavens. To apply the knowledge, or to learn the game, users will find themselves using it as a constant point of departure.

I suspect most readers, no matter how hard-bitten, will learn something from this book. Professionals will probably quibble over odds-and-ends that still vary from market to market. For instance, on p. 434 we have a breakdown of the way translations are costed according to 'industry standards'... but those standards are by no means consolidated in the bit of industry I know in Barcelona. Esselink occasionally assumes he is at the one true centre of the world; a few grains of salt come in handy. Yet he, and more particularly LISA, will probably be more successful in turning prophecies into standards than has any other group working in the vicinity of translation.

I would like St Jerome Publishing to piece together a better localization handbook than this one, but I honestly do not know how that could be done. In fact, I am using Esselink 2000 as a textbook for my graduate translation and localization group, where it works as an invaluable reference to the many things I don't know. Relatively free of superfluous jargon, it gives the basics and lets the student discover the rest. Yet is it not a textbook; it lacks pedagogical order. For example, we want our students to work in groups of three or four, with most students on separate tasks, so some notion of project management has to be given at the beginning of the course. That means starting from somewhere near the end of Esselink's book. And then, as we progress with the tasks, taking on each piece of software and seeing what it can do for us, learning through our collective mistakes, the other chapter divisions soon fall by the wayside. Or again, if you want to spend some time teaching website localization, you will have to jump between several locations in this book. The useful advice is indeed there, for when students need the security of printed signposts. But Esselink's is by no means a good in-class text. So do not be misled by the author's generosity in having

the book followed up by a website (www.locguide.com) that gives links to the software and includes a set of exercises for students. The idea is brilliant. But many features on the site do not work with Netscape, and the multiple-choice exercises, still based on the previous edition when I visited, were fairly basic. You will have to do your own teaching (and learning, as the case may be).

In sum, Esselink 2000 is very useful for the basics of software localization, deceptively quick and too introductory to be much real use for areas like terminology management, yet as good as we have in the way of guides to where the money moves.