

Localization

In brief



 **SPA Localización**

origins

From "Locale" in computing: the combination of region, language and culture as established in the ISO 638-1. In translation studies, "localization" as a theoretical construct was used before the emergence of digital products to denote strategies of adaptation to the local. Its meaning was similar to "domestication" (Venuti 1995) or "adaptation" by Vinay and Dalbernet (1958).

other names

L10n, translation of digital products. The term "localization" is widely used both in the language industry and in translation studies. The acronym L10n is used in the language industry, but it is often used together with the term "Localization (L10n)".


abstract


The digital revolution led to the emergence of a large number of novel digital genres, such as software programs, websites of all kinds, video games, mobile apps or intelligent assistants. These novel texts led to the development of "localization" processes, mainly due differences in how they were developed, produced, stored, distributed and used, as well as differences in how they were translated. Localization is now a complex technological, textual, communicative and cognitive process by which these digital interactive texts are processed in order to be used in linguistic and socio-cultural contexts other than those of production (Jiménez-Crespo [2008](#): 40, 2013). Localization involves a specific comprehensive interprofessional cycle in which translators, localization engineers, programmers or project managers collaborate flexibly depending on the type and scale of the project (Pym [2011](#): 410; Jiménez-Crespo 2013). It is a highly profitable consolidated area within the language industry, as well as one of its main growth engines where the "digital

technologies and processes" industry amounts to over 30 billion dollars yearly (GALA [2016](#)). This chapter reviews the origins of localization process and the "localization industry", as well as how they have contributed new concepts and paradigms to Translation Studies, such as the notion of GILT or digital accessibility. It then reviews its different subareas areas depending on the digital platform (e.g., computer, tablet, console, WWW) and its continuous expansion with new emerging digital genres (Santini et al 2011). It is followed by a critical analysis of its gradual reception within Translation Studies, the evolution of its definitions and theoretical models, as well as the research areas with the highest volume of research. It then analyses the introduction of the theoretical paradigm of "localization" applied to other sub-disciplines such as journalistic or advertising translation. The chapter then offers a critical review of the main research directions, such as applied studies on didactics or quality, as well as descriptive corpus studies. It ends with an overview of developing approaches, as well as localization as a key process in the ever-growing digital transformation, including areas such as localization crowdsourcing online or the application of post-editing machine translation in this area.

record

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Entry



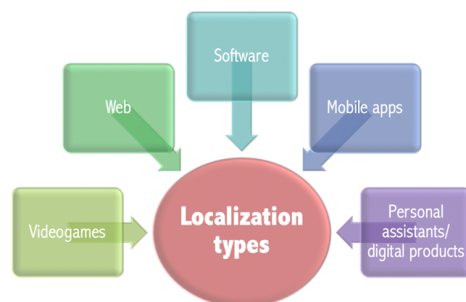
SPA Localización

contents

[Introduction](#) | [Defining localization](#) | [Historical evolution](#) | [An overview of localization research](#) | [Research potential](#)

Introduction

Localization is now a complex technological, textual, communicative and cognitive process by which these digital texts are processed in order to be used in linguistic and socio-cultural contexts other than those of production (Jiménez-Crespo [2008](#): 2013). "Localization" processes emerged due to the specificities of the development, production, storage, distribution and consumption of these novel textual forms, as well as the need to translate digital and interactive genres. It comprises an integrated, interprofessional cycle in which translators, localization engineers, localization managers or developers collaborate dynamically depending on the type and scale of the project (Pym [2011](#): 410; Dunne 2014). It is a highly profitable consolidated area within the language industry, as well as one of its main growth engines where the "digital technologies and processes" industry amounts to over 30 billion dollars yearly (GALA [2016](#)). It represents a consolidated area with specialized associations and forums, such as the Globalization and Localization Association ([GALA](#)) and its annual conference, the [Localization World](#) conference series (since 2003), as well as others such as the [Translation and Localization Conference](#) (TLC). It is also a distinct area of study within Translation Studies (TS), where "localization studies" as an interdisciplinary has been proposed (Sandrini [2005](#); Jiménez-Crespo 2013; Munday 2016). Research in this area dates back to the 1990s, with specialized research journals such as the



*Different areas of research within localization.
Adapted from Jiménez-Crespo (2011b: 4)*

[Localization Focus](#), the [Journal of Internationalization and Localization \(JIAL\)](#), special issues of the journal [Tradumàtica](#), as well as monographs on its different types, e.g. software localization (Esselink 2000; Pym 2004; Dunne 2006; Roturier 2015), web localization (Jiménez-Crespo 2013) or video game localization (O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013).

[back to top](#)

¶ Defining localization

The term "localization" (L10n) was coined within the language industry to refer to in translation processes operating on digital and interactive texts and genres. Its origin is the concept "locale", a combination of a language, region and culture. These "locales" are regulated by [ISO 639-1](#) and often overlap in international business settings with the notion of "markets" (Pym 2004: 40). They include information linked to specific geographic regions and languages, such as elements related to culture, law, ethics, ideology, politics or technology (keyboard layout, date formats, measurements or numbers) (Microsoft 1994). Historically, one of the most widespread definitions of localization was proposed by the Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA). According to the LISA primers, localization involved "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" (LISA 2003: 2013). This process aimed "to provide a product with the look and feel of having been created for the target market to eliminate or minimize local sensitivities" (GALA 2011, cit. in Jiménez-Crespo 2013: 14). This definition separated localization from translation, understood here as a simpler process of linguistic equivalence to translate textual strings within a software program or video game. In this reductionist approach, localization implied a "broader and more sophisticated" process than translation per se (Pym 2004: 25), and it included specific cultural, technical, legal or visual adaptations, interprofessional collaborative processes, as well as technological/development practices. These industry discourses and conceptualizations were initially adopted by TS scholars in the so-called "technocentric" descriptive branch (e.g., Esselink 2000; Dunne 2006, 2014).

The first theoretical approaches to integrate localization within TS emerged within the field of Audiovisual Translation. Some proposals included localization within what was known as "restricted - subordinate" (Mayoral [1997](#)), "screen" or "multimodal" translation (Hurtado 2001). These were types of translation in which the actual process of translation depends on existing restrictions such as the available screen space or multimodal elements. Multimodality refers here to the fact that a text is an integrated whole that includes textual, visual, sound or kinesthetic information. The first theoretical approach paved the way for the development of a distinct area within TS (Pym 2004, [2011](#); Mazur 2009; O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013; Jiménez-Crespo 2013, 2016, 2018). These publications conceptualize localization as a translation modality with its own specificities, just like subtitling or dubbing. The unique processes of this new modality include technical adaptations, management processes and distinct testing procedures. These issues require interprofessional collaboration to complete the localization process (Pym [2011](#): 414). In addition, localization is different from other translation processes and modalities in that it operates on specific digital genres that run on interactive digital platforms (e.g., word processing software, online or corporate shopping website, action or role-playing video games, mapping mobile application, etc.) (Jiménez-Crespo 2016). Within this theoretical approach, localization has been defined as a translation modality:

A translation modality that includes a complex textual, communicative, cognitive and technological process by which a text in digital format and in an interactive environment is modified for use in a language and sociocultural context of reception different from the original, according to the expectations of the target audience and the specifications or degree of localization commissioned by the initiator

(Jiménez Crespo [2008](#): 40).

This proposal is in line with the different theoretical approaches to translation (Hurtado 2001: 40) as a textual, cognitive and communicative process, as well as a modality with its own characteristics (Hurtado 2001: 58). In addition to this, localization includes a technological component to accommodate (1) specific development and processing components, (2) the digital and interactive nature of the texts, as well as a (3) user-based perspective based on functionalist approaches.

The "localization" paradigm and its use in other areas of TS

Theoretical and epistemological advances in TS over the years led to the emergence of "localization" as a theoretical paradigm (Pym 2009). It involves extending the construct of "local adaptation" or "adaptation to local culture" in areas such as the translation of film, theater, news, advertising (Declercq [2011](#)) or comics (Zanettin 2008). This expansion occurred primarily in audiovisual translation and it was due to common features such as screen/ stage presentation of the translation, multidisciplinary collaborative teams or theoretical debates centered on adaptation or domestication to the local audience (Gambier 2013). Moreover, other factors that initially linked audiovisual translation and localization were related to comprehensibility, accessibility or usability being key to assess quality (Gambier 2013: 58). Nevertheless, Gambier (2013: 46) rightly points out that localization in general is not strictly a form of audiovisual translation (AT). He indicates that videogame localization could be broadly categorized as a type of AT as it contains key components such as subtitling, dubbing or "voice-over" (O'Hagan 2019). As far as the translation of comics, researchers proposed the notion of localization to denote the "publication of target products designed for markedly different audiences" (Zanettin 2008: 200). The localization paradigm was proposed for comics books due to the use of collaborative teams, cultural or product adaptations, as well as the role of market or economic forces that shape what type of adaptation strategies are adopted.

[back to top](#)

Historical evolution

Localization dates back to the early days of software for personal computing in the 1980s in the United States (Esselink [2006](#)). It was defined then as "the process of altering a [software] program so that it is appropriate for the area in which it is used" (Microsoft 1994). Localization processes can be traced back to companies such as Microsoft, Oracle or Sun Microsystems when they tried to expand their markets beyond users that spoke English. The video game localization industry started in the 80's with popular video games such as Pac-Man or Donkey Kong. These first moved from arcades to consoles or personal computers such as ATARI, Commodore or Spectrum. The 1980s saw the emergence of worldwide localization hubs, such as Ireland. In the 1990s the so-called "localization

industry" (O'Brien [1998](#)) was consolidated as a specific area within the language industry. Software localization processes gradually expanded and adapted to other platforms where new digital genres were emerging, such as websites in the WWW in the 90's, applications for smartphones and tablets, or even devices such as "wearables" or those connected to the "Internet of things" (IoT): self-driving cars, digital home assistants or smart refrigerators.

From the point of view of the process itself, it can be argued that localization emerged when difficulties around in the introduction of the classic cycle known as TEP (Translate - Edit - Publish) to translate software or video games. Developers and project managers saw the development stage and the translation of textual strings extracted from the programming code as two consecutive stages. The software program, video game or digital product were first developed and then textual strings were translated and reintegrated. Soon, all parties involved noticed separating the development process from the translation stage led to complex and hard to solve problems. As an example, translated text segments were longer than the original ones and did not fit in the allotted space. Some textual strings immersed in programming code (so-called hard-coded strings) lacked contexts making it impossible to translate due to grammatical issues such as gender, number of declension agreement. Other times, it was cultural elements, metaphors or Western worldviews that complicated the interaction between the digital product and the end user. Gradually, these problems were solved by means of separating the textual elements to localize from the programming code, as well as preparing for localization from the start in a broader development cycle known as GILT (Globalization, Internationalization, Localization and Translation) (LISA 2003; Dunne 2006). In this integrated process, globalization (G10n) refers to the overall adaptations of organizations and business structures to effectively meet the challenges posed by localization. For example, if a product includes the Spanish-translated segment "Please call XXX for more information," the company will have staff available to address that request in that language or the product can be shipped to any specific region in the target locale. Internationalization (I18n) refers to changes in the development of digital products to subsequently facilitate the localization processes into different locales. In this stage, Pym (2004, 2010) proposed the notion of "internationalized texts": digital texts that are produced directly with the localization process in mind. The next stage is localization, a process that includes translation as one of its stages. Localization is supposed to process that encompasses, translation as it also includes specific development, quality analysis or adaptation processes. Industry publications emphasize the need for adaptations and the collaboration among different agents to separate "localization" from "translation". Translation, the last step, may or may not be separated as a distinct process performed by external translators. In the evolution of localization, specific visual localization tools emerged, such as [Alchemist](#) or [Passolo](#), which allowed working in WYSIWYG (What You See is What You Get) visual environments. The GILT process is thus understood as an integrated multidisciplinary cycle in which developers, managers, internationalization experts, localization engineers, localizers or localization specialists and/or translators collaborate to ensure the overall localization of digital products. This cycle has been developed over the years through feedback loops from translators-localizers as experts in intercultural communication. These experts have over the years identified the singularities, problems and possible solution strategies that are implemented by globalization, internationalization or development agents (Jiménez-Crespo [2008](#): 27).

Localization is nowadays a dynamic process described in detail in a number of publications

{page-name} has {The number of new posts} new posts
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Select variations

	Gender	Number
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{The number of new posts}		<input type="checkbox"/>
Subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Viewing user	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Save Cancel

Textual string with programming variables from the collaborative and volunteer localization application [Facebook Translate](#). [The application includes the option to flag translation issues related to gender or number agreement within the textual string to be localized. It also includes an explanation to contextualize the textual string within the overall text, the Facebook platform as a whole]

machine translation post-editing, to identify updated textual elements that can be distributed for translation to volunteers. These segments, in turn, are then reintegrated into the website (Jiménez-Crespo 2017: 73-76)

Localization has expanded and diversified in the 20th century thanks to the unstoppable expansion of the Internet (see [updated figures](#)), mobile technologies and the social networking revolution. The Web 2.0 revolutionized user participation and the possibilities for interactivity, thus fostering the exponential growth of crowdsourcing or collaborative translation of all kinds of digital texts. Crowdsourcing processes often involve micro-task approaches and a diverse variety of workflows and to distribute translatable material to participants, volunteers or semi-professionals (for a detailed description of innovation in translation flows, see Jiménez-Crespo 2017: 61-96). This alternative participatory paradigm emerged to address the explosion of digital content in modern societies, a demand from minority language communities or interest groups that often cannot be met by the localization industry from a business point of view.

The localization industry is now a highly dynamic with models that combine advanced and specific management systems in which localization managers, programmers/developers, professional translators, and in some cases volunteers, collaborate. They often use translation technologies and workflows that combine translation memories with machine translation post-editing. The field continues to evolve with the transition to cloud computing, where integrated software, application or web localization systems have emerged that allow clients, managers and translators to remotely interact remotely through server-based applications. These new models automatize the management of collaborative participation, technical issues, testing and integration (e.g. [Localize](#), [Transifex](#), [Smartling](#), [Weblocalize](#), [Zanata](#) or [Crowdin](#)). In this field, the aforementioned "continuous localization" plays an essential role, automating the processes of localizing updates to multilingual versions of websites efficiently and quickly.

(Esselink 2000; Schäler 2010; Dunne 2014; O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013: 111-148). As a brief summary, the most common stages in industrial processes are: (1) text and source materials analysis, (2) the preparation of the localization package and its subsequent distribution to all participants in the process, (3) the translation of textual and multimodal elements, (4) the reintegration of the translated - localized assets, (5) the testing of the assembled digital product, as well as (6) the revision of the project. In cases of dynamic websites such as Facebook or Twitter, localization involves a cyclical, dynamic and non-finite process called "continuous localization" (continuous or agile localization). Here, crowdsourcing processes are used in conjunction with fully human translation or

¶ An overview of localization research

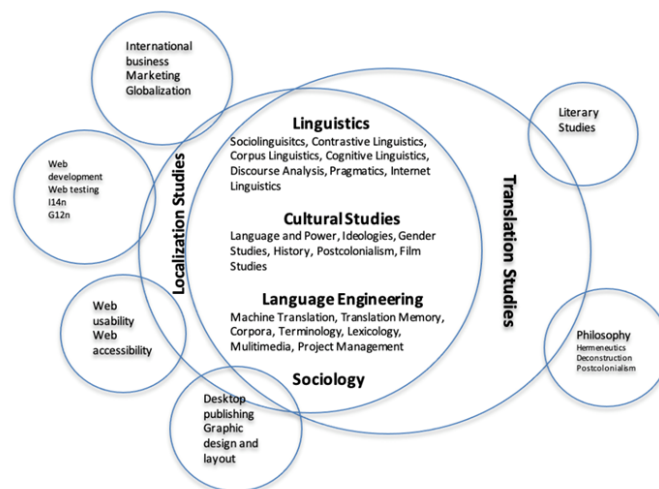
Localization research is characterized by its interdisciplinary perspective. The study combines (1) existing interdisciplinary Translation Studies intersections applied to the specifics of digital texts or localization processes, as well as (2) new inter- and multidisciplinary approaches (see Jiménez-Crespo 2013: 135). As an example of new interdisciplinary connections brought by localization research, web accessibility or software internationalization can be pointed out. It also includes a number of existing approaches shared with the rest of the discipline, such as sociological and ethnographic approaches to the localizer's profile. In general, localization research is contextualized within the so-called technological turn (O'Hagan 2013), a process by which:

[T]ranslation theories [began] to incorporate the increasingly evident impact of technology, in turn providing a relevant theoretical framework to language and translation technology researchers.

(O'Hagan 2013: 513)

This expansion can be witnessed by publications aimed at other disciplines such as technical writing (Maylath & St. Amant 2019).

As for the areas with the higher research output, they can be broadly grouped into two large areas. First of all, (1) applied approaches such as descriptive studies with a "technocentric" perspective with up-to-date knowledge from leading practitioners in the field of localization, those focused on didactics of localization, or studies on quality. Secondly, (2) theoretical and empirical-descriptive approaches, such as studies focused on different components of localization, contrastive corpus studies on digital genres, as well as experimental approaches.



Interdisciplinarity in the study of Localization within Translation Studies. Adapted from Jiménez-Crespo (2013: 135).

Descriptive publications from an industry perspective have been instrumental in providing the necessary foundations for the development of theoretical or empirical studies, as well as to provide guidance for localization training (Esselink 2000; Reineke 2005; Schäler 2010; Dunne 2006, 2014; Roturier 2015). These publications have described production cycles in the industry or the terminology used, as well as industry quality models that have provided the necessary groundwork to consolidate localization as a distinct area within Translation Studies. The significance of these publication is evidenced by the wealth of new concepts that have been progressively incorporated into TS, such as GILT, "locale" or "localization level" (Jiménez-Crespo 2012). They have also helped

incorporate into other areas the impact of interprofessional collaboration and its impact on the process and product.

As far as applied research, localization training emerged as the first area of interest among TS researcher in order to respond the urgent need for university-level training (O'Brien [1998](#); Schäler [2001](#)). This has been one of the most productive research areas with different publications addressing the needs of software localization, web, videogame or mobile app training. Research has identified and described the different skills required for each type of localization or the progression in their acquisition. As an example, software and web localization are differentiated by a greater technical and development competence for the former, while the latter includes a wider range of translation skills for genres and types of translation, such as technical, legal or advertising. Similarly, video game localization also entails a unique set of skills related to audiovisual translation or specific knowledge of the most popular genres. Empirical studies in localization training are scarce, such as the experimental study by Jiménez-Crespo and Tercedor (2012) that attempted to map the acquisition of competence in website localization. The study by Sánchez Ramos (2019), for example, focuses on localization students' perception of new processes such as crowdsourcing and collaborative cloud platforms for localization

Studies on the quality of localization have brought to light issues such as the role of the overall process of globalization, internationalization and localization, or the impact of these different processes on the final products. Different aspects that could improve quality assurance have been studied. For example, error analysis in case studies in different language combinations have been produced, such as Pierini's (2006) study on Italian and British tourism websites, the proposal of error typologies (Jiménez-Crespo 2011a), and dynamic quality assessment models for software (Dunne 2009), web (Jiménez-Crespo 2013:127-131), or video game localization (Casado 2018).

On the empirical side, studies on the localization of digital genres have emerged within corpus studies in translation. These studies have used different methodologies as comparable and parallel corpora. A large number of digital genres have been studied, such as corporate, institutional, social network, commercial, or tourism websites. They have studied what is referred to as "the language of localization". As an example, issues such as intratextual coherence (Jiménez-Crespo 2009b) and technological limitations are more significant in hypertextual localized texts than in text translated for publication on paper. In addition, web localization often entails the loss of content or pages in the global website (Jiménez-Crespo 2012). This is explained by economic constraints related to the dynamic nature of websites, as opposed to finite and linear printed texts. "Universal features of translation", such as "conventionalization" (Jiménez-Crespo 2009a) or "explicitation" (Jiménez-Crespo 2011b) have been studied. Corpus studies of digital genres such as software, apps or video games (Casado 2018) could be of great interest, even when these studies are difficult to conduct due to issues such as property rights or restricted access.

Different components of the localization process have also been investigated from a descriptive-applied and theoretical point of view, such as image localization, the role of culture, as well as social and political issues. Studies with a sociological or ethnographic approach in the discipline are still very scarce. For example, Risku, Rogl and Pein-Weber's (2016) studied translator networking using a social network analysis and translation perspective that included a description of volunteer networks that localize user guides or small smartphone apps. Special mention should be made of research on the intersection between localization and web accessibility. In this area, studies have

appeared with descriptive approaches, empirical studies based on corpora and even experimental approaches based on processes (Rodríguez Vázquez 2015, 2016).

[back to top](#)

Research potential

Localization research will undoubtedly continue to grow. As indicated by the consultancy [Common Sense Advisory](#) in 2019, users prefer information in their own language and meeting these expectations in the context of the "global digital transformation" or global digital transformation (GDX) will make the growth of the localization industry unstoppable. Here, a special mention should be made to the never-ending expansion of mobile and social networks, the convergence between machine translation, post-editing, artificial intelligence and volunteer participation. Three important areas within TS can provide a broader view of the phenomena discussed here, such as advances in cognitive translology, sociological and ethnographic approaches or the study of corpora of localized texts. To date, very few process-based studies have been carried out, despite their growing impact on the discipline. Likewise, ethnographic approaches could shed light on the professionals who make up the localization industry. One example of this approach is the focus group study with translation and localization professionals and managers by Dam and Zethsen (2019). The researchers identified that localization is still a phenomenon that does not share a common conceptualization by different stakeholders

Special mention should be made of the research on "localization for development" (Anastasiou & Schäler [2010](#)). Localization for development is based on the premise that access and presence in the digital world is a right of speakers of any language and should not depend on their income. It seeks to bridge the social divide, provide equal opportunities for access to information in electronic format and ensure cultural and linguistic diversity. Several initiatives based on crowdsourcing have tried to provide creative solutions to this problem, such as the mobile application [Kanjingo](#) (Moorkens, O'Brien & Vreeke 2017) the Rosetta Stone platform, now reconverted into the [Kato](#) platform, or initiatives with volunteers to translate Wikipedia pages for non-majority languages. Initiatives aimed at the use of localization in crisis or emergency situations, such as the Covid-19 pandemic (Anichini and Nemeth 2020), will continue to be of interest in the field.

As a whole, the symbiotic relationship between the world of translation, localization and technology will continue its unstoppable growth, with new developments within the expanding localization world related to Internet 4.0 (Gilchrist [2016](#)), the "Internet of Things" (IoT), as well as the continuous expansion and integration of processes, technologies and innovation.

[back to top](#)

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Credits



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