Translation, Localization, and Transcreation

(from the FIT Research task force, 2020-01-23)

Introduction

The language industry differentiates between translation, localization, and transcreation as distinct activities. Nevertheless, many professional translators are engaged in localization and transcreation projects as members of a team, which raises the question of the role of translation in these multilingual language services. The purpose of this paper is to provide an answer to this question from the perspective of FIT, as the representative of professional translators on the world stage. The main audience is everyone in the multilingual language services industry, including buyers and providers.

The first section is an overview of FIT's position on translation, localization, and transcreation. This position depends on a fourth multilingual activity that is given the name “conventional translation” in this paper. The second section consists of definitions of these four multilingual activities. The third section is an appendix consisting of a diagram and a brief description of it, to complement Section 1.

The scope of this paper is multilingual language service activities that involve humans. Therefore, unedited machine translation (UEMT), sometimes called raw machine translation, which is pervasive in today's society, is not treated here.[1]

Section 1 Overview

The position of FIT is that translation is best viewed broadly as a cover term for the creation of textual material in a target language that corresponds to content in a source language, according to agreed-on specifications. FIT identifies three equally challenging language services that involve translation: Conventional Translation – Localization – Transcreation. The names for these three types of language services, as well as the cover term, Translation, will be capitalized in the rest of this paper.

Conventional Translation is a label for an activity that consists only of text-to-text translation and thus is not part of a Localization, Transcreation, or any other activity that includes non-textual adaptation. Conventional Translation projects treat a broad range of areas, including science & technology, business, health care, law, and literature. If a project is focused on marketing material, it is often called Transcreation. If it is focused on a website or a software app, such as a productivity tool or a video game, or even focused on audiovisual production and post-production, it will probably be called a Localization project, when Localization is understood broadly to apply to both text and non text.

By simply adding the term Conventional Translation to the discussion, false dichotomies can be avoided. For example, contrasting **Translation** with Localization & Transcreation implies that Localization does not involve translation, which is false, while contrasting **Conventional Translation** with Localization & Transcreation is consistent with FIT's claim that some type of translation is involved in all three of these activities. This may be obvious to some readers, but it is common to encounter someone in the language industry who believes that translation and localization have nothing to do with each other. That is one reason FIT has developed this position paper.

All types of language services that involve Translation require carefully matching the skills of the translator with the type of source content, the subject matter, and the audience and purpose of the translated text, as indicated in the specifications, to achieve the objectives of the requesting organization. Of course, there are also multilingual language services that do not involve Translation.

[1] If you are interested in FIT's position on machine translation, please see the position paper on this topic, available on the FIT website. A position paper on post-editing is forthcoming. Full (as opposed to light) post-editing of machine translation is expected to result in output similar to professional human translation.

Examples are (a) multilingual content creation that is not based on a source text, sometimes described as a type of copy writing, and (b) interpreting, which results in spoken output, rather than written.

Source content can include non-textual as well as textual material. Many types of language services, Localization and Transcreation in particular, go beyond text-to-text translation by treating non-textual aspects of the source content, for example adapting colors, sounds, graphics, designs, layouts, and images (Localization). Transcreation adapts colors, images, slogans, and logos to be compatible with a target locale or a market. A locale is the intersection of a language and a region, including culture.

Localization began before the Web and applied to desktop software applications that were offered in various locales. The messages in the user interface of localized software were translated with the end user and target locale in mind, and other aspects of the software product were adapted to provide the look and feel of a product created in the target locale. The application of the term Localization has expanded to include websites and audio-visual translation, such as adding foreign-language subtitles.

Transcreation began rather recently as an activity on its own. It is found most often in advertising content, or brand-oriented content, where the principal aim is to sell to customers. Transcreation may or may not include text-to-text translation, as the purpose is to adapt information to the tone and style of the audience or market. This process often needs re-conceptualization. Transcreation has been referred to as “multilingual copywriting,” “marketing translation,” and “international copy”. It can also consist of a "Translation Plus" activity. The label Translation Plus[2] can also apply to summarization.

Another aspect of language services, one which applies to both textual and non-textual content, is the contrast between source orientation and target orientation. This contrast has been given various names[3]. A source-oriented translation intentionally, not through lack of skill, leaves traces of the source language and culture, while a target-oriented translation attempts to hide the fact that it is a translation by making adjustments, sometimes at the expense of exact correspondence with the source text, to ensure that the target text appears to have been authored in the target language for the target region and culture.

Choosing a point along the spectrum from source to target orientation of textual material is non-trivial. Indeed, all aspects of high-value translation, especially when intended for public consumption and relevant to the image of an organization or to the health & safety of the intended end users of the translation, are intellectually challenging. Conventional Translation projects can be anywhere on the source-oriented to target-oriented spectrum, whereas Localization projects are typically oriented toward making the result look and feel natural in a target locale. Transcreation projects are typically very much oriented toward the target locale. The same source vs target orientation contrast applies to non-textual aspects of language services. A target-oriented project involves more adaptation than a source-oriented project. The decision regarding degree of adaptation of non-textual material is also non-trivial and is based primarily on the intended audience and purpose of the target content.

[2] Translation Plus is described in a 2016 *Tradumàtica* article titled "Defining the Landscape of Translation" [downloadable from http://revistes.uab.cat/tradumatica/issue/view/5]

[3] Alternative names for the source-target contrast in orientation include Overt vs Covert translation (Juliane House, prominent in translation quality assessment), Documentary vs Instrumental translation (Christiana Nord, the main English-language proponent of Functionalism in Translation); Foreignized vs Domesticated translation (Lawrence Venuti, prominent in literary translation); Formal vs Dynamic translation (Eugene Nida, remembered in Bible translation); and Verbatim vs Gist translation (The US Interagency Language Roundtable).

The above view, which contrasts three types of text-to-text translation, rather than contrasting Translation with Localization & Transcreation, not only answers the opening question of this paper but is also compatible with the fact that professional human translators are found in all types of language service projects that are based on source content. All three activities require a human translator's ability to tease out the requirements, follow agreed-on specifications, determine the appropriate strategies, and apply those strategies to produce a target text that best fulfills the aims and needs of the person or organization requesting the translation.[4]

The bottom line is that translation and translators play an important role in many multilingual language services, including Conventional Translation, Localization, and Transcreation.

Section 2 Definitions

In support of Section 1, based on our observation and consideration of the multilingual language industry, we present definitions based on a published article and standards from ISO[5] and other bodies.

Translation as used in this paper is a cover-term for text-to-text correspondence in various activities.

Translation is the creation of target content with a focus on textual material that corresponds to source content according to agreed-upon specifications. Translation a component of several language services.

Localization

Localization (also referred to as "L10n") is a cross-cultural communication process of preparing locale-specific versions of a product, content, or service, consisting of Translation of textual material into the language and textual conventions of the target locale, and adaptation of non-textual materials as well as input, output, and delivery mechanisms to meet the cultural, technical, and regulatory requirements of that locale or market. [6]

Transcreation

Transcreation is the process of using creativity for adapting or re-creating content in order to deliver the same emotive impact as with the original to a new audience. It may result in a hybrid of straightforward text-to-text Translation, new content, and adapted content and imagery.[7]

Conventional translation

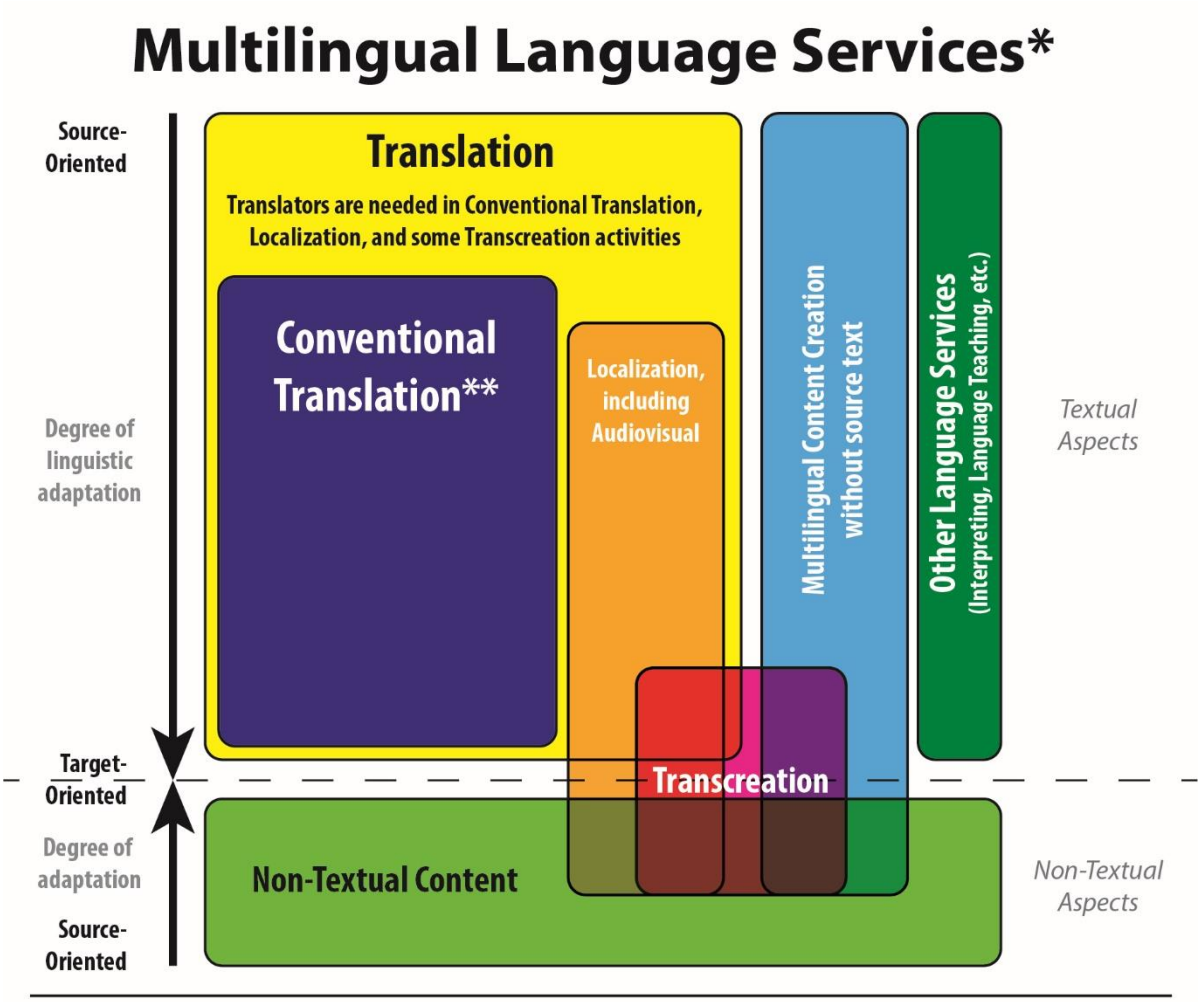
Conventional Translation is an activity involving only text. Thus, it is not a part of a Localization, Transcreation, or any other activity that includes non-textual adaptation. It transfers a written source text into a written target text of roughly equivalent length and conveys all the source text's intended meaning, making only those adjustments necessary to comply with the translation specifications.[8]

---

[4] Converting to local requirements (such as currencies and units of measure) or using proper local formats for dates, addresses, and phone numbers cannot be criteria of differentiation between the activities that fall under Translation (Conventional Translation, Localization, and Transcreation) because adaptation is found in all three.
[5] The 2016 Tradumàdica article (note 2) and ISO 20539:2019, a standard about language industry terminology
[6] ASTM F2575-14 ASTM International (www.astm.org) and ISO 20539; GALA (the Globalization and Localization Association -- see https://www.gala-global.org/industry/intro-language-industry/what-localization).
[7] a CSA-Research document, "Which Level of Transcreation Works Best for You", 2013; TAUS (https://www.taus.net/) "Transcreation Best Practices and Guidelines", 2019
[8] 2016 Tradumàtica article (See footnote 2)

Section 3 Diagram

The following is a Venn diagram that depicts the same information found in Section 1 and goes further by suggesting how Translation relates to other Multilingual Language Services.



* The size of boxes is not indicative of the number of people involved in each activity.

** A label for text-to-text translation that is not part of a Localization, Transcreation, or any other activity that includes non-textual adaptation. Examples of conventional translation include scientific and technical, business (including financial), medical, legal, and literary.

The focus of this Venn diagram encompassing all multilingual language services is the yellow box (Translation as a cover term), which includes the three types of text-to-text translation treated in Section 1: Conventional Translation (blue), which has been around for at least 5000 years, text-to-text translation within Localization (orange), and text-to-text translation found in some Transcreation (red).

A lower level of transcreation is much like Localization (except that Localization is typically associated with software while Transcreation is typically associated with marketing material); however, high level (extreme) Transcreation crosses into the blue box, Multilingual Content Creation without source text, which includes more than Transcreation. For example, consider a Japanese company that authors two manuals, one in Japanese and one in English (which will serve as the basis for translation into other languages). Although the company may coordinate content between the two in some fashion, this is not transcreation because the two versions are in simultaneous development and neither is based on the other in any fashion. Another example would be locally developed content in several countries.

Bottom line: Translators *are needed for all language services within or overlapping with the yellow box*.