

# Adaptation in translation

*Mehdi Asadzadeh & Afaf Steiert*

It is a well-known, taken-for-granted rule that for any translation to work properly, a translator has to go beyond the superficial meanings of the words.

It is not enough to work out how best to render the words of the source text; rather, it is much more important to extract what the words mean in a particular situation according to cultural context. The cultural facet of translation studies urges us to consider the point that the translator is not the only person involved in the translation process; rather, the readers also participate, utilizing what they already have in their cultural reservoir and what they have learned to make sense of what they read, connecting meanings and evaluating them with cultural codes that exist in their minds. Eugene Nida has noted that “language is a part of culture, and in fact, it is the most complex set of habits that any culture exhibits. Language reflects the culture, provides access to the culture, and in many respects constitutes a model of the culture.”

Recently, therefore, the need for treating translation from a wide range of perspectives has been recognized. The significance of sociological settings has been emphasized in recent translation studies, and rather than mere linguistics, insights from a number of scientific disciplines such as psychology, cultural anthropology and communication theory are proposed to help explain the nature of translation.

The cultural turn in translation studies has stimulated many translation studies researchers to elaborate upon adaptation as a form of intersemiotic translation. Adaptation is in fact the least literal or the most free type of translation. It abandons the strict linguistic aspect of translation and rather concerns itself with the cultural one, though it inevitably is concerned with the linguistics also. Adaptation is one of the most appropriate and effective modes of expression when a re-creation is needed to

convey the same effect attached to a word to another culture where a same word is missing. Adaptation is usually employed to convey the equivalent in sociocultural terms.

To illustrate the point with an example, we refer to translation of a text related to a wedding, originating from a British context and aimed at Azeri Turkish speakers. During a wedding ceremony in Britain or the United States, the groom is usually accompanied by a man who is called the best man; that is part of their tradition and so a part of their culture. In Turkish culture, however, there is no best man, and the groom is rather accompanied by not one, but two men in the wedding. They are called *sağdüş* and *soldüş* and stand on the right and left sides of the groom respectively. So, when rendering a text where there is reference to a best man, anyone translating to Azeri Turkish speakers could possibly substitute it with the more familiar words *sağdüş* and *soldüş*.

We should note that though in certain situations the direct translation is not suggested much (when translating a political speech or an advertisement, for example), at the same time not all ideal translations are adaptations. A good translation is faithful to the full context of the source text in terms of meaning as well as style, appearance, register and message. Before choosing to adapt, a translator should understand that it is a must to produce a target text that seems natural and appropriate to the target language and culture while sticking to the essence of the source text; nothing may be altered, deleted or even added from and to the text unnecessarily and without an acceptable reason. A true adaptation is a reinvention that helps readers to better understand the text and its content.

Although it can happen anywhere, adaptation most often happens in the literary realm. Poetry, for example, as a very personal form of literature, has its roots deep inside the culture, and because metaphors change from culture to culture, as do stylistic preferences, its rendering will likely need more adaptation than other kinds of texts. In general, the greater the differences between cultures, the bigger the obstacles in the path of translation. To overcome these, the translator might resort to adaptation. There is a basic rule to observe: adaptation is used when there is no chance of rendering the concept correctly, precisely and appropriately by performing a usual type of translation. **M**



*Mehdi Asadzadeh is a Ph.D. research student at Hyderabad Central University, India, and a lecturer at Maragheh Azad University.*

*Afaf Steiert is the president and cofounder of Afaf Translations and works as an Arabic interpreter and translator.*



# Basic terminology

*This section offers terminology, abbreviations, acronyms and other resources, especially as related to the content of this issue. For more definitions, see the Glossary section of MultiLingual's annual Resource Directory and Index ([www.multilingual.com/resourceDirectory](http://www.multilingual.com/resourceDirectory)).*

**crowdsourcing.** The act of taking a task traditionally performed by an employee or contractor and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people, in the form of an open call. For example, the public may be invited to develop a new technology, carry out a design task, refine an algorithm, or help capture, systematize or analyze large amounts of data.

**ETSI.** The European Telecommunications Standards Institute, one of the world's most influential producers of telecommunications standards.

**Extensible Markup Language (XML).** A programming language/specification pared down from SGML, an international standard for the publication and delivery of electronic information, designed especially for web documents.

**GILT.** An acronym often used in shorthand descriptions of the global language industry, standing for globalization, internationalization, localization and translation.

**globalization (g11n).** In this context, the term refers to the process that addresses business issues associated with launching a product globally, such as integrating localization throughout a company after proper internationalization and product design.

**GMX-V (Global information management Metrics eXchange-Volume).** A standard that attempts to measure volume by establishing a verifiable way of calculating the primary word and character counts for a given electronic document, as well as establishing a specific XML vocabulary that enables the automatic exchange of metric data.

**internationalization (i18n).** Especially in a computing context, the process of generalizing a product so that it can handle multiple languages and cultural conventions (currency, number separators, dates) without the need for redesign.

**LISA.** The Localization Industry Standards Association, declared insolvent on February 28, 2011.

**localization (l10n).** In this context, the process of adapting a product or software to a specific international language or culture so that it seems natural to that particular

region. True localization considers language, culture, customs and the characteristics of the target locale.

**machine translation (MT).** A technology that translates text from one human language to another, using terminology glossaries and advanced grammatical, syntactic and semantic analysis techniques.

**OASIS (The Organization for Advancement of Structured Information Standards).** Formerly called SGML Open, OASIS is an IT standardization consortium based in the state of Massachusetts whose foundational sponsors include IBM and Microsoft. Localization buy-side, tool-makers and service providers are also well represented.

**OAXAL (OASIS Open Architecture for XML Authoring and Localization).** A technical committee encouraging the development of an open standards approach to XML authoring and localization.

**OSCAR.** LISA's committee for actual standardization work. The acronym means open standards for container/content allowing reuse. OSCAR was dissolved along with LISA in February 2011.

**pseudo-localization.** Translates the code strings of a product into "pseudo-strings." The resulting "pseudo-language" is designed to test the impact that different aspects of localization have on the product's functionality and appearance.

**quality assurance (QA).** The activity of providing evidence needed to establish confidence among all concerned that quality-related activities are being performed effectively. All those planned or systematic actions necessary to provide adequate confidence that a product or service will satisfy given requirements for quality. QA covers all activities from design, development, production and installation to servicing and documentation.

**rule-based machine translation (RBMT).** The application of sets of linguistic rules that are defined as correspondences between the structure of the source language and that of the target language. The first stage involves analyzing the input text for morphology and syntax – and sometimes semantics

# Basics

– to create an internal representation. The translation is then generated from this representation using extensive lexicons with morphological, syntactic and semantic information, and large sets of rules.

**source language (SL).** A language that is to be translated into another language.

**SRX (Segmentation Rules eXchange).** An XML-based standard used to describe how to segment text for translation and other language-related processes. It was created to enhance the leverage of the TMX standard.

**statistical machine translation (SMT).** A machine translation paradigm where translations are generated on the basis of statistical models whose parameters are derived from the analysis of bilingual text corpora. SMT is the translation of text from one human language to another by a computer that learned how to translate from vast amounts of translated text.

**target language (TL).** The language that a source text is being translated into.

**TBX (TermBase eXchange standard).** A standard for terminology and term exchange.

**TMX (Translation Memory eXchange).** An open XML standard for the exchange of translation memory data created by computer-aided translation and localization tools.

**translation.** The process of converting all of the text or words from a source language to a target language. An understanding of the context or meaning of the source language must be established in order to convey the same message in the target language.

**translation memory (TM).** A special database that stores previously translated sentences which can then be reused on a sentence-by-sentence basis. The database matches source to target language pairs.

**translation unit (TU).** A segment of text that the translator treats as a single cognitive unit for the purposes of establishing an equivalence. The translation unit may be a single word, a phrase, one or more sentences, or even a larger unit.

**Unicode.** The Unicode Worldwide Character Standard (Unicode) is a character encoding standard used to represent text for computer processing. Originally designed to support 65,000, it now has encoding forms to support more than one million characters.

**Unicode Consortium.** Home of the Unicode Standard and Common Locale Data Repository (CLDR). Unicode's goal is to support scripts for all languages in the world.

**W3C (World Wide Web Consortium).** W3C owns many standards, including XML and HTML.

**XLIFF (XML Localization Interchange File Format).** An XML-based

format for exchanging localization data, specifying elements and attributes. XLIFF could be used to exchange data between companies, such as a software publisher and a localization vendor, or between localization tools, such as translation memory systems and machine translation systems.

**xml:tm (XML-based text memory).** A standard for XML to allow ease of translation of XML documents.

## Resources

### ORGANIZATIONS

American Translators Association (ATA): [www.atanet.org](http://www.atanet.org); and its Language Technology Division: [www.ata-divisions.org/LTD](http://www.ata-divisions.org/LTD)

Project Management Institute: [www.pmi.org](http://www.pmi.org)

Translation Automation User Society (TAUS): [www.translationautomation.com](http://www.translationautomation.com)

### PUBLICATIONS

*Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (16th edition), M. Paul Lewis: [www.ethnologue.com/print.asp](http://www.ethnologue.com/print.asp)

*The Guide to Translation and Localization*, published by Language Line: [www.llts.com](http://www.llts.com)

*Index of Chinese Characters With Attributes*, George E. Bell, 2006: [www.multilingual.com/books/welcomeOtherResources.php](http://www.multilingual.com/books/welcomeOtherResources.php)

*Globalization Handbook for the Microsoft .NET Platform, Parts I - IV*, Bill Hall, 2002-2006: [www.multilingual.com/books/welcomeOtherResources.php](http://www.multilingual.com/books/welcomeOtherResources.php)

*Translation: Getting It Right*, published by the ATA: [www.atanet.org/docs/getting\\_it\\_right.pdf](http://www.atanet.org/docs/getting_it_right.pdf)

*Translation: Standards for Buying a Non-Commodity*, published by the ATA: [www.atanet.org/docs/translation\\_buying\\_guide.pdf](http://www.atanet.org/docs/translation_buying_guide.pdf)

### REFERENCES

CIA World Factbook: [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html)

Omniglot – Writing Systems & Languages of the World: [www.omniglot.com](http://www.omniglot.com)

Unicode, Inc.: <http://unicode.org>

LOCALIZATION • INNOVATION • AUTOMATION

VistaTEC

LOCALIZATION SERVICES FOR A SHRINKING WORLD

info@vistatec.ie

www.vistatec.ie