Teletranslation

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INTRODUCTION: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The translation industry developed in response to the need to assimilate or disseminate information across different languages where the text in one natural language had to be converted into another. Strictly speaking, "translation" deals with written text, whereas "interpreting" handles spoken dialogues, although the latter is often subsumed in the former in common terminology. Translation services are called upon when the sender and the receiver of the message do not share a common language. Although translation is not a new area of professional practice, the industry as a whole has been transformed due to the recent advancement of information and communication technology (ICT). While computer applications ranging from text processing tools to Machine Translation (MT) have affected the production of translation, telecommunications technology has changed the operational dynamics of translation services. The development of electronic networks and computer applications to translation gave rise to the concept of teletranslation (O'Hagan, 1996). Furthermore, ICT is creating new types of content which becomes subject to translation, driving new types of language support. Teletranslation can be characterized by increased reliance on ICT in terms of transmission, storage, and processing of translation in contrast to conventional translation which dealt with off-line text distributed in print. Today modern translation operators are using the Web as a customer-interface and also as a platform to interconnect a team of translators and tools in different locations, dealing with the new types of text embedded in various electronic forms.

Prior to the 1980s, physical transportation systems underpinned the translation business by providing the link among translator, customer, and translation agency that acted as an intermediary. As such translation services were constrained by physical distance, thus operating primarily as a regional business. However, the arrival of fax machines allowed them to become less location-bound. The nature of translation work primarily being text-based and asynchronous (i.e., translation does not usually have to be done instantaneously) suited telework mode in which translators receive and return text at a distance. Fax machines facilitated telework by allowing freelance translators to work on text remotely without incurring additional delivery delays. During the 1980s and into the early 1990s, text transmission via fax was gradually replaced by use of modems with text transmitted directly from computer to computer. This provided the advantage of text arriving in electronic form with flexibility for further processing, as compared with a faxed hard copy. Into the 1990s, the power of computer networks began to see translation businesses operate internationally, linking translators and customers worldwide.

In the mid-1990s, the Internet began to permeate the physical national borders representing different languages and cultures and make information available online in multitudes of languages, in turn driving the need for translation. For example, a user stumbling across a foreign language Web site would seek indicative translation on the spot without having to leave the computer terminal, preferably at little or no cost since the value of the information is uncertain. Tapping into such needs, online MT became commonly available to translate Web sites or search engine results on the fly and provide the user with the gist of the content in a requested language. MT found a niche market which was not suited to human translation (HT) in view of cost, speed, and logistics. In this way, the Internet boosted the demand for MT applications (Tanaka, 1999). In the meantime, businesses that started to leverage the Internet to reach customers on a global basis realized the need for their Web sites to be available in different languages. This led to a new type of language service called Web localization which became the fastest growing area within the translation sector in the late 1990s (Lockwood, 1999). In this way, ICT has significantly altered the landscape of translation which was originally developed on the basis of translating non-electronic text in non-real-

time for off-line consumption in the least computer-aided environment. Teletranslation can be defined as new modes of translation dealing primarily with digital content in computer-aided translation (CAT) environments, operating over global communications networks.

BACKGROUND: ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENTS OF LOCALIZATION

ICT has had the effect of generating new types of translation work. The prime examples are computer software products whose needs for language support led to the development of the new sector called localization, which has developed since the early 1980s (Esselink, 2000). The localization industry came into existence to meet the demands of the opening international market for computer products; software and hardware needing to be adapted to the requirements of local customers. In addition to print-based translation of manuals and packaging, software localization integrates translation into the software engineering process and thus departs from the original nature of translation work. During the 1990s localization evolved continuously in response to new demands driven by globalization of a diverse range of products and services. Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA) lists fourteen sectors as localization service users, including medical/pharmaceutical and telecommunications in addition to software (Fry, 2003). Although localization incorporates translation, the former developed largely independently of the existing translation model with its own workflow and processes. This reflects the different nature of the task involved in localization as a whole; it has often been linked more closely to software engineering than to translation (O'Hagan, 2004). However, more recently, the two have begun to come together, reflecting the new areas of translation demand arising from digital media, in turn requiring localization beyond conventional translation. Today, language support is increasingly placed in the context of so called GILT (Globalization, Internationalization, Localization and Translation)—a term recently used by the localization industry. Localization, once considered as an esoteric sector within translation, is now rapidly being mainstreamed, subsuming translation. Teletranslation is therefore significantly influenced by the localization model which developed on the direct link between language and ICT.

The traditional concern of translation scholars, the translation process performed by human translators unaided by ICT, does not adequately account for the transformation of the industry outlined above (Sager, 1993). The dynamic nature of today's translation market and the role of translation in the context of GILT are calling for a framework in which the impact of ICT can be considered.

DISCUSSION: TELETRANSLATION AND TRANSLATION-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

Teletranslation attempts to capture the significance of the driving force of ICT behind the transformation of conventional translation. As an analytical framework for taking account of the changes driven by ICT, an approach based on translation-mediated communication (TMC) was introduced (O'Hagan & Ashworth, 2002). While any communication mediated by translation can be regarded as TMC, the term is used specifically in analogy with computer-mediated communication (CMC). TMC is therefore concerned more with communication taking place in a CMC mode than with conventional modes un-mediated by computer. This approach incorporates the examination of translation as communication. Various translation scholars (Bell, 1991; Nida & Taber, 1969) have applied the communication model to translation, not always without criticism (Robinson, 2003), because of the model's primary focus on the mechanistic assessment in accuracy of transmission. In TMC, the correct transmission of the signal does not always mean the message intended by the sender was adequately conveyed through translation; it is concerned with the role of technology in terms of its impact on the sender, the receiver and the message as well as the translator in a qualitative, rather than a quantitative manner.

In the context of teletranslation, the communication model provides a useful basis whereby TMC can be examined as a process in which the sender of the message in the source language communicates with its receiver via translation which converts the message into the target language. Furthermore, the factors relating to ICT such as how the message is transmit-