Chapter 15
Localization for E-Learning

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Localization and translation often go 'hand in hand', as explained in the first chapter, but as this author explains and illustrates, localization requires the skills of an experienced professional or company to address cultural nuances in e-learning that could, if not addressed, have a negative impact on learners, on learning, and in some cases, on business. In this chapter, you learn how names, characters, wordplay, technical jargon, geoculturalism, etc. in e-learning courses should be addressed so that users sense that the course was developed 'locally', for them. In addition, avoid the 'technological pitfalls' related to embedded text, audio and video synchronization, and so forth.

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990s, teaching and training moved to a new platform encompassing all forms of online and multimedia technologies: e-learning. The aim of this process was to allow learners to have easy access to resources, services, exchanges and remote collaboration processes. As well as universities, e-learning is now currently used in companies to offer a specific service for employees enabling them to attend courses where they never

meet the teacher face-to-face, nor need to access any educational facilities.

Indeed, the main difference between e-learning and traditional learning lies in the fact that the learner does not meet the instructor or, in some cases, there is no human instructor at all. This means that the e-learning materials must not only carry the knowledge itself, but also all the cultural references, aspects and asides that are usually conveyed by the teacher during a class.

Furthermore, with the rapid evolution within the information technology (IT) world, the learners – who are also dedicated users of multimedia applications – require ever-more sophisticated e-

learning media including Flash animation, video, audio, and end-of-course tests and quizzes.

When it comes to making this content available to subsidiaries of companies, universities, governments, or military agencies all over the world, from Europe to the United States through Asia or even the Arabic countries, then the challenge becomes obvious! The localizers' job doesn't merely consist of translating the content, it also requires a complete localization. The technologies used by the course developers must be mastered by the localizers who need to be up to date with the latest IT tools and applications. And to fully accomplish the localization of an e-learning course, the localizer must often call upon the skills of voice talents and recording studios, to dub audio or video.

The first part of this article deals with examples from French or English e-learning content that were localized into several languages for specific countries and markets. It discusses a number of examples of the cultural aspects that needed to be pointed out and adapted for that specific market.

The second part of the article addresses the technological issues that the localizers have to face including the use of different multimedia tools and techniques.

I. E-LEARNING AND CULTURE

The e-learning course must somehow be able to replace the teacher. It must, therefore, carry all the cultural references that the teacher usually uses during his or her class. Localizing e-learning content not only means translating them from a source language to a target language, it also requires a real cultural adaptation phase. For this reason, translation memories (TMs) have to be used with great care, for some content has to be completely rewritten and ideas sometimes need to be reorganized in order to meet the target country's requirements.

The main objective of an e-learning course is to convey knowledge and skills. The learner should, therefore, be in a smooth learning environment and not feel stressed by any confusion created by misunderstood or missed cultural references. This section will, therefore, provide a few tips and hints that will help the learner feel completely immersed in an e-learning course.

The localization of some items may be quite obvious; for instance, the units of the imperial system (foot, ounce, pound, etc.) to be converted into the metric system (metre, litre, kilogram, etc.), Fahrenheit into Celsius, time and date formats to adapt according to the target country (yyyy/mm/dd, mm/dd/yyyy or dd/mm/yyyy, etc). There are, however, a number of less common cultural markers that we would like to highlight as they appear more often in e-learning courses than in software, technical or other sales and marcom documentation.

The following examples all come from projects that WhP International - a localization company based in France - has recently carried out for various customers, and are gathered by category.

Names, Characters

The first thing to do when you encounter names in an e-learning course is to ask your customer whether they want them to be localized for the target market. Perhaps a "Joe", "Bill" or "Jane" will be acceptable for the Taiwanese market, as students are asked to choose a Western name as soon as they go to the university in order to be prepared for their future international business life. However, it is wiser, if you want to market your product in other regions of China, either to translate these names into Chinese characters ("Joe" will become "喬伊", "Bill": "比爾" and "Jane": "珍") or to totally replace these names by traditional Chinese names as "Ming", "Wen" or "Yi".

Going further, a company, that is concerned with providing its learners with the best learn-

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