Localisation in The Netherlands: Training and Career Opportunities

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Abstract

This article gives an overview of localisation in The Netherlands, both in education and industry. The discussion on education is further narrowed down to the area of training institutes that offer courses on the translation aspects of software localisation; the discussion on industry comprises the whole spectrum. On the education side, the article gives an overview of localisation courses offered in The Netherlands and the tools used in such courses. On the industry side the article gives an overview of the localisation market in The Netherlands, i.e. its players, the systems used and produced, etc. The discussion also focuses on the participation of industry in training. Finally, one of the authors, who is a graduate himself, briefly discusses his expectations and experiences.

Keywords
localisation, translation, The Netherlands, education, training, industry

1. Activities Involved in Localisation

According to Esselink (2000:3) the following activities are involved in a localisation project: "(1) project management, (2) translation and engineering of software, (3) translation, engineering, and testing of online help or web content, (4) translation and desktop publishing (DTP) of documentation, (5) translation and assembling of multimedia or computer-based training components, and (6) functionality testing of localised software or web applications." These activities show that there are two distinct major roles to be played: engineering and translating. Each of these roles has a number of sub-roles. What these are can be derived from the more useful survey of the various aspects of localisation in Esselink (1998:6) where the people involved in a typical localisation project are given: "(1) Project Manager, (2) Translator, (3) Localisation Specialist/Senior Translator, (4), Proofreader/QA Specialist, (5) Localization Engineer, (6) Testing Engineer, and (7) Desktop Publisher."

For the education side of this article, the role of translating is understood to include – next to translating proper – project management and proofreading, and desktop publishing to a marginal extent only.

2. Education

2.1 Translation Training Institutes Offering Localisation Courses

The Netherlands has six major translation training institutes, one of which is the Department of Translation and Interpreting, Maastricht School of International Communication, Zuyd University in Maastricht. Of these six institutes, the Department of Translation and Interpreting in Zuyd University is the oldest (founded in 1981 by HM Queen Beatrix) and is the only one offering courses on localisation (i.e. both translation with the help of CAT tools and localisation in the strict sense). The objective of these courses is not only to give students an introduction to the various aspects of localisation, but also to serve as the basis for actual work using a wide range of localisation and translation tools; in particular the courses strive to train the students to become skilled users of localisation tools and novice translation professionals (see [2.2]).

2.2 Courses Offered

The Department offers a four-year course in translation and interpreting at BA level. In *Year Two* of this course, there are four modules on translation that serve to introduce and instruct students in the use of CAT (Computer Assisted Translation) tools, namely Trados/SDLX. Almost all translation work to be done after the introductory modules has to be done with the help of these CAT tools. At the end of the second year, students work as junior translators and revisors (for three-and-a-half weeks full-time) for an in-house simulated translation bureau that is staffed and run by fourth year students under the supervision of a senior lecturer. During this period of working for the in-house

translation bureau the students benefit greatly from using CAT tools (the use of CAT tools is made compulsory so that the students' work in the simulated translation bureau mirrors as closely as possible that of a real-life translation bureau). As for the regular exercises and assignments throughout the second year, CAT tools are becoming household tools more and more. The same holds for the third and fourth years of the course.

In *Year Three*, there is an introductory module on localisation proper, i.e. an introduction to localisation tools and working with these tools. Although culture and institutions are already part of the regular language programmes, culture also plays an important part in this introductory module on localisation – focusing on the aspects of culture that are present in localisation and in particular the technical side of these aspects.

The bulk of the work on localisation takes place in *Year Four*, where there is a further specialisation in localisation, which takes the form of a project. This project can be practical (i.e. on the *actual* localisation of help files, software and documentation/manuals) or more theoretical (i.e. on the comparison of various localisation tools, the evaluation of a particular tool, etc.).

As can be seen, by the time of their graduation all students are skilled users of CAT tools and have enough knowledge to work with localisation tools, with a number of them even specialising further in localisation. What counts is that both groups are prepared and ready to work in translation bureaus (or start one themselves) and have the skills needed to work with CAT tools and localisation tools.

2.3 Tools Used
During the second, third and fourth years of the course, a number of tools are taught and used. In *Year Two*, the CAT tools that are used are WordSmith, Trados MultiTerm, Trados Translator's Workbench (including the translation memory) and MultiTerm, TagEditor and WinAlign. There is also a course on HTML, albeit a basic course which reflects the ease with which students grasp this markup language. PASSOLO is covered in the introductory module on localisation in this year. The module contains a number of exercises on the use of this tool.

No further tools are introduced in the fourth year, but this may well change in the near future.

2.4 Input From Industry
Input from industry takes a number of forms. Currently these are:

1. Guest lectures on CAT tools, localisation and the industry,
2. Third-year work placement – for 19 working weeks – in a country where the first foreign language of the student is the language of habitual use, and
3. Fourth-year work placement – for 10 working weeks – most often at a professional translation bureau in The

Netherlands, although it is also possible to go abroad. Both the third-year and fourth-year work placements are compulsory.

This input from industry will be expanded greatly in the very near future, after which it will also include the following:

4. Collaboration in the development of teaching materials,
5. Participation in the more commonly termed skills laboratory (the in-house simulated translation bureau), participation in the more commonly termed 'learning company', and
6. Placements for lecturers.

Participation in the in-house simulated translation bureau entails sending translation and localisation jobs for further processing and giving feedback on the products delivered.

The 'learning company' is a new phenomenon where the Department of Translating and Interpreting actively searches the market for (innovating, if possible) real-life projects of varying durations for students to work on. On successful completion of such projects, students will earn credits. The idea behind this is knowledge circulation: industry gains from the work that is done by the students for the Department and the Department will be able to enhance its knowledge by closely cooperating with the industry experts.

2.5 Cooperation With Industry
The Department of Translation and Interpreting actively seeks to cooperate closely with industry. The type of training given at the Department is vocational by nature. Therefore, it is one of the main objectives of the Department to cooperate with industry in the areas of the curriculum and placements – both for students and lecturers. As already described in Section 2.4, the Department is already rather successful in this respect (with plans in place to further expand industry input in the near future). See also Section 2.6 for further discussion on this cooperation. The Department already liaises with both localisation producers and localisation translation companies in The Netherlands and abroad. One of the objectives for the future is to give industry a greater role in the area of assessment.

2.6 Employability of Graduates
The Department of Translation and Interpreting has a number of instruments to measure the employability of its graduates.

Firstly, the third-year and fourth-year placements are very important factors in the employability of students. It happens very often that students doing their third-year placement are offered a job that will commence after their graduation, especially when doing their placement at a translation bureau. As for the fourth-year placements, it is a regular occurrence that placements lead directly to employment, with many placements being continued in the form of regular jobs. The Department works very closely with a number of renowned companies that offer such placements: SDL, Microsoft Ireland, Trados, various

'ordinary' translation bureaus in The Netherlands and abroad (mainly the UK), Lionbridge, Eclipse, RWS, and Philips Eindhoven. Also Medtronic (the world leader in medical technology) offers jobs to graduates at its translation and communication division in The Netherlands.

A second important instrument is the Department alumni scheme, central to which is an alumni website. More and more companies submit their vacancies for publication on this website and more and more graduates find jobs through this very same website.

It is noteworthy that one of the former graduates from the Department of Translation and Interpreting, Maastricht School of International Communication, Zuyd University in Maastricht has now become one of the world's leading localisation authors, namely Bert Esselink.

3. The Localisation Industry

The localisation industry has been growing rapidly and continuously in The Netherlands since the 1980s when the world witnessed the first personal computer, for which various types of content needed translation. The localisation industry received a boost a few years later when the first translation memories appeared, making translation much cheaper, faster and more consistent. The third boost came from the emergence of the Internet. Suddenly, data was accessible anytime, to anyone, anywhere. This opened up the international market for literally everyone, creating a huge growth on the translation demand side. And the market is still growing. It is a market that is growing for every area of the industry; and one that is growing constantly for all areas (notwithstanding seasonal peaks, e.g. higher sale of electronic goods at Christmas).

Over the past two years, various factors have contributed further to this growth. On the IT and multimedia side, we have the upcoming Microsoft Office 2007 suite and Microsoft Windows Vista operating system, plus the rise in sales of home networking products, gaming products and domestic appliances. On the automotive/mechanical engineering side, new EU environmental directives have led to the development of new engines and vehicles, and more localisation work as a consequence. Another factor is that companies realise more and more that they will lose out on sales if they do not continue or start localising their products.

And let us not forget the joining of the most recent EU member states, which has led to an even greater demand for localisation, on top of the growing list of European directives which necessitate the localisation of all sorts of content. Lastly, within some agencies, the Dutch language has been added to the so-called FIGS list (French, Italian, German, Spanish), forming the tier 1 of languages for all localisation work that has priority for most clients of localisation companies. Officially, however, Dutch is still a B-language though it is coming closer to the FIGS list. This move augurs very positively for the localisation industry in The Netherlands as it indicates that the demand for localisation into Dutch is growing.

3.1 The Market Players

Since the acquisition of Trados by SDL and the acquisition of Bowne Global Solutions by Lionbridge (both in mid-2005), SDL and Lionbridge really are the two main localisation players in The Netherlands. These two market leaders make use of freelance translators and translation agencies of all sizes for their outsourcing needs. Many enterprises in various industries also run their own in-house translation departments, but regularly call on freelance translators and translation agencies when their internal resources are fully booked. There is a great shortage of translators in The Netherlands – in particular in the localisation industry, thereby putting pressure on everyone at the supply end of the global information management chain. This shortage may be due to the growing demand for translation into Dutch (see the decision some agencies made to put Dutch on the FIGS list). The problem is that in a total population of 22 million Dutch-speaking citizens (Flemish included), there are not enough qualified translators. The shortage is also felt outside The Netherlands, e.g. at Microsoft in Dublin, Ireland where there is also a great need for native Dutch-speaking employees.

3.2 Expectations and Experiences of a Graduate

In this section, one of the authors, Anne Klarenbeek – who is a graduate himself – discusses briefly the expectations he had when he graduated and his experiences since then.

"Having graduated only four weeks earlier, I started working as an English-to-Dutch translator in August 2003. I quickly discovered that the pace was a lot higher than what we were used to at university. As I am working in a team that is specialised in the localisation of IT and multimedia content, I also noticed that, even though I had a greater than average knowledge of computer and networking hardware and software, I had a lot to catch up with. Personally, I found a great challenge (but also enjoyment and fulfilment) in jobs which require translators who are more skilled in 'transcreation' than translation – typically required for marketing pieces – and I noticed the same applies to newcomers who have joined the localisation industry over the past three years (albeit not everyone likes marketing pieces as much as others do). This area wasn't covered at university so I had to revert to my talents and the assistance of my co-workers.

My daily tasks also include file handling and resourcing. You could call it account management to some extent. My translation/review to account management ratio is around 70%–30%. This makes for a nicely varied pattern and a welcome change after a number of hours of concentrating on a piece of Help material or a user guide. The daily life of a localiser takes a lot of concentration and discipline and is often dynamic in the sense that one moment you are playing with words trying to sell a body groomer, and two hours later you are fixing the length of a handful of software strings, having just spent half an hour in-between

outsourcing work, issuing purchase orders and answering translators' questions on the work they are helping you out with. There is never a dull moment if you like this kind of work."

4. The Future

The prospects for localisation look promising in The Netherlands. Gradually, more training institutions are including localisation as a subject in their curricula, and in particular the Department of Translation and Interpreting of the Maastricht School of International Communication goes even further in that it is adjusting its curriculum to make it possible for industry to actually take part in the training of prospective localisers (see Section 2.4). In addition to this, The Netherlands can boast to have the world leader in localisation, namely Lionbridge, and the world number two, SDL. Lionbridge once started as a small Amsterdam-based localisation company named INK that gradually developed and expanded, changing its name once in a while until 1996 when the company became Lionbridge. Now the corporate headquarters are in Waltham, Massachusetts in the USA. The Amsterdam office is now a Lionbridge subsidiary. SDL is originally a UK-based localisation company, with its headquarters in Maidenhead. Over the past years SDL expanded and took over other companies, among them Alpnet in 2001. Since then SDL has a subsidiary in The Netherlands (Hengelo). Both Lionbridge and SDL attract the world's greatest companies for localisation work: Lionbridge has the job of localising Microsoft's Vista and SDL has the job of localising Microsoft's Office 2007. Both companies are determined to strengthen their world position. All of these factors give the localisation industry an even stronger position in The Netherlands.

References

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