Web Internationalisation strategies and translation quality: researching the case of "international" Spanish[1]

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Abstract

The goal of the Localisation Industry is to produce sites that "look like they have been developed in-country" (LISA 2004, p. 11), even when due to cost-effectiveness considerations international versions are frequently released for languages with multiple locales. Thus, the industry's discourse links quality in localisations to texts that are received as local productions, while its internationalisation strategies strive to erase certain dialectal and cultural differences. This paper researches the strategies applied by multinational corporations when dealing with neutral international version of localised websites. After a theoretical review of the interrelated notions of internationalisation, quality, neutral language version and localisation level, the empirical study researches the case of Spanish, one of the languages with the greater number of different locales. Following a corpus-based approach, the Spanish localisation strategies of the 600 largest US companies are analyzed. Detailed statistics for each model and locale are provided. In a second stage, a longitudinal study is presented that contrasts data collected in 2006 with the localisation strategies observed in 2009. The results show that multinational companies apply different strategies for the European and Latin American markets, while the largest US companies have gradually increased the Spanish localised versions of their websites. Additionally, the fuzzy US Spanish locale continues to grow despite the fact that this locale is not still internationally recognized and standardized.

Keywords: *website localisation, internationalisation, neutral language, translation quality, corporate websites, corpus-based translation studies.*

1. Introduction

DURING recent years, multinational companies have embraced the Internet as their main communicative platform to reach an ever-expanding global market. Globally, the number of Internet users has grown by 380% in the last decade (Internet World Statistics 2009), and this means that corporate websites have ubiquitously become the main communication instrument between companies and their customers (Yunker 2003; Kennedy and Shepherd 2005). It was earlier on in the development of the Internet that companies recognized the users' preference to access web content in the native languages (Yunker 2003) and since then, multinational corporations have been increasing the number of localised versions of their websites. In order to cope with this increasing demand, companies constantly need to develop and implement different localisation strategies.

This paper researches one of the main strategies in the industry: creating an *international* version for a language that is spoken in different countries and cultural regions. The point of departure for this study is the existence of two seemingly contradictory tendencies in the discourse of the Localisation Industry. On the one hand, the goal for the localisation process is to release websites with "the look and feel of locally made products" (LISA 2003, p. 5), and on the other hand, the goal of the internationalisation stage is to develop products that are language and culture independent. In a sense,

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there are two tendencies that run in opposite directions, the former focused on user-based quality approaches, with the latter centered on localisation as a time and resource-constrained activity that depends on ROI decisions. This paper represents a first step in a wider study of the the impact of these contradictory tendencies on the quality and usability of localised websites. These internationalisation strategies for languages with different locales are studied through a representative analysis of *neutral* Spanish localisations. This language was chosen because it has the highest number of different standardized locales, that is, the combination of a language and a specific sociocultural region where it is spoken.

As a first step towards understating the potential impact of internationalisation strategies on quality, it is necessary first and foremost to establish a theoretical base. The following sections review several concepts and how they interrelate, such as internationalisation, localisation models and levels, localisation quality, and finally, a discussion on whether a *neutral* or *international Spanish* variety exists.

After this theoretical review, the empirical study will analyze and compare industry strategies and trends, as well as contrast 2009 data with a previous corpus study in which data were compiled in 2006 (Jiménez-Crespo 2008a).

2. Defining the relationship between internationalisation and quality: from process to product

The global localisation process has been normally known by the acronym GILT, Globalization, Internationalisation, Localisation and Translation (Dunne 2006). While globalization mostly deals with organizational and business aspects, internationalisation is mainly understood as a technical stage in which a product is enabled for localisation (LISA 2007, p. 17). The goal of this stage is to guarantee to the highest possible degree that functional and development aspects are not culture-specific, so as to not pose any problems while localisation and translation take place. The Localisation Industry Standards Association also defines the goal of this process as:

> [A]bstracting the functionality of a product away from any particular language so that language support can be added back in simply, without worry that language-specific features will pose a problem when the product is localised (LISA 2004, p. 14).

The rationale behind this technical process is that products should be developed in a culturally neutral form, something that is theoretically impossible as there are culture and language specific variables that cannot be fully controlled (House 2001; Shreve 2006). Normally, this process requires a collaborative effort between developers and translators in order to produce the most neutral possible source website. This internationalisation process at a development stage should not be confused with the internationalisation of languages with multiple regional varieties. This effort to establish a neutral version of the multinational language entails a completely different linguistic and cultural process. The development of a product using an international language is normally carried out at the translation stage of the global GILT process. It is also performed by terminologists and translators, while the technical cycle is informed by translators and implemented by developers. Figure 1 shows the interrelated nature of this global cycle.

The neutralization or language internationalisation is therefore carried out after the technical *internationalisation* stage, once the source website is localised into all requested locales[2]. Nevertheless, when a language-neutral strategy is adopted, the industry implicitly associates one international language with a supranational culture, i.e. the Spanish culture in the case of Spanish, even when the underlying principle behind the adoption of locales was the need to separate languages from sociocultural regions and their specificities. In this context, the industry normally applies a fuzzy definition of language in which linguistic aspects can be separated from cultures, even when all languages are culturally situated and they form a unitary whole (Bassnet and Lefevre 1990). The differences between locales exist not only at the linguistic level, but many other levels are also culture dependent, such as the pragmatic or discursive ones. Locales from a single language can thus differ in certain culture-dependent textual aspects, such as digital genre conventions that can differ from from culture to culture (Nord 1997; Jiménez-Crespo 2008c, 2009a). These digital genres, such as corporate or social network sites, are highly conventionalized communicative instruments that represent the functions and goals involved in a particular web interaction as well as the purposes of the participants in them (Hatim and Mason 1990, p. 69). One of the main applications of genre theory to

translation and localisation is that contrastively, textual structure, phraseology and terminology associated with each constituent communicative block or section in a genre, such as contact forms or the terms in a privacy page, can show differences between source and target cultures (Jiménez-Crespo 2008c). The same can be said of languages that do not fully share the same culture, such as Spanish in Mexico and Spain or English in the UK and South Africa. Thus, language-neutral strategies are mostly concerned with linguistic aspects even when discursive, rhetorical and textual aspects dependent on genres can also be differently conventionalized.

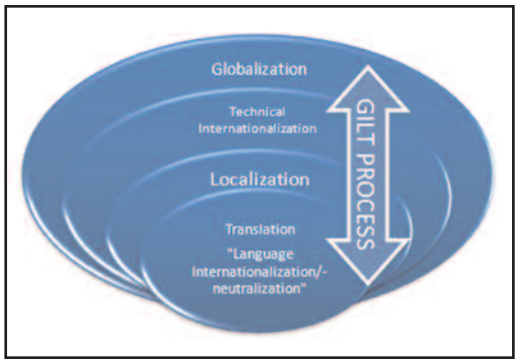

Fig. 1. GILT process. Adapted from Dunne (2006).

Conventions play a vital role in web usability, as it has been empirically shown that websites that do not follow conventions lead to lower usability, comprehension, recall, etc. (Nielsen 2000; Nielsen and Tahir 2002; Nielsen and Loranger 2006; Vaughan and Dillon 2006). In part, this is due to the fact that websites are instrumental texts that are not necessarily written to be read linearly; quite on the contrary, websites are normally scanned in order to identify the information that the user is looking for (Nielsen and Loranger 2006). Thus, when deviating from cultural and linguistic conventions in order to internationalise any website, the subsequent potential impact on web usability should always be taken into consideration.

Nevertheless, producing a neutral language version does not automatically mean that certain culture-specific adjustments will not be made, as this depends on additional localisation decisions regarding the level of cultural adaptation or *localisation level.*

2.1. The degree of customisation or localisation level and its relationship to localisation models.

In localisation, which is a business process with finite time, human and economic resources, the degree of customisation always depends on the importance of the local market for the business activity of the company. Normally, the decisions about the level of customisation for different countries that share the same language always depend on Return on Investment (ROI). These economic and business decisions result in a localisation level, a concept that has been defined as:

> The amount of translation and customisation necessary to create different language editions. The levels, which are determined by balancing risk and return, range from translating nothing to shipping a completely translated product with customized features (Microsoft 2003, p. 15).

In the first publication that mentioned the notion of localisation level, Brooks (2000, pp. 49-50) described the practices of Microsoft, where the software products were localised according to three distinct levels:

> 1. Enabled products: Those in which users can write and use their own language and scripts, but the software and the accompanying help and guides appear in a different language.
>
> 2. Localised products: Those in which the user interface and all help files are localised, but some language-specific tools such as spell checkers and dictionaries are not available.
>
> 3. Adapted products: Those in which all linguistic tools, functionalities and content are fully adapted to the target language/locale.

In the case of web localisation, Yunker (2003) and Singh and Pereira (2005, pp. 10-15) have proposed a different categorization for web localisation levels. The latter is the most detailed proposal:

> 1. Standardized websites: In which a multi-national company simply offers a site in one language for all countries/markets.
>
> 2. Semi-localised websites: In which the only locale/specific content is a contact page in the target language with information about local

[2] Some larger companies, such as Microsoft, develop their "neutral" language versions both during a preliminary stage in their terminology departments, as well as in a post-localisation stage using QA feedback and crowdsourcing through their linguistic portals, http://www.microsoft.com/language/mtcf/mtcf_default.aspx.

branches, contacts, etc.

3. Localised websites: In which most content and pages are localised, but the original functionalities and back-end are not modified.

4. Extensively localised websites: In which there is a global localisation and all content and site structure/ functionalities are fully adapted to the target locale.

5. Culturally adapted websites: This is the most advanced level of localisation, the one that the authors advocate, and in which there is a total immersion in the target locale. Sites are adapted to the levels of cultural descriptions proposed by Hofsteade (1991): perception, symbolism and behavior.

It can be observed that the former proposal does not mention explicitly the existence of international versions for specific languages such as French or Spanish, while the latter refers mostly to cultures, that is, the combination of a language and a sociocultural region or locale. It is also interesting to note that, in the latter description, the lower levels tend to mention *languages*, while as the localisation level increases the terms *locale* and *culture* are preferred. Thus, an analysis of these models suggests that lower levels tend to deal with languages, while higher levels require the more in-depth linguistic and cultural adaptation to specific locales.

Additionally, the industry implements two distinct models in web localisation depending on whether the website for a specific market is the result of a localisation process or an original production. These are the so-called *centralized* vs. *decentralized* models (Yunker 2003, p. 128; O´Hagan and Ashworth 2003, p. 74). In the former, a company produces an international site that is localised and customized for any targeted locale from a centralized location, as it is the case of Google or Microsoft. All versions that result from this model can be considered the result of a localisation and translation process in which linguists are involved. In the "decentralized model", companies such as Pfizer develop a "shell" and the resulting websites for Spain, Mexico or Argentina are the product of a local production, and therefore, the resulting web content is not the product of a translation process but rather natively produced content in each locale.

It is obvious that the importance of the market and decisions taken in regards to the localisation level will have some impact on one of the most important goals of the localisation process: producing quality localised websites. The notion of quality is a highly debated and researched notion in Translation Studies, where more and more researchers are trying to create bridges between research and the professional world. In order to understand the potential impact of these strategies on quality, the following section reviews how the industry conceptualizes and operationalises this concept.

2.2. Quality in the Localisation Industry

The localisation industry has implemented quality standards and metrics directly based on international norms, such as ISO, TQM or the European Union EN-15038 quality standard. In them, quality is generally defined as the capacity to comply with a set of parameters pre-defined by the customer. For example, the ISO 9000 defines quality as: "the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs" (ISO 1993). With a very similar perspective, TQM (Total Quality Management) defines quality as "fully satisfying agreed customer requirements". Nevertheless, it would be theoretically and methodologically impossible to predefine the notion of "quality" in all translated texts: for this reason, common definitions of quality usually focus on procedural aspects (as above) as opposed to establishing what could be considered a "quality" translation. Basically, such definitions govern procedures for achieving quality, rather than providing normative statements about what constitutes quality (Martínez Melis and Hurtado 2001, p. 274). Additionally, they are generically process-oriented instead of product-oriented (Wright 2006, p. 256; Corpas 2006). Again, quality in the industry is understood as a construct that can be controlled in the process, irrespective of characteristics that are reflected in the product.

If published literature by the Localisation Industry is thus analyzed, a quality localised product equals a website with (1) a limited number of previously defined errors (Bass 2006), which (2) looks like a natively produced website (LISA 2004), and (3) whose functionality is not compromised. An additional item should be also added, (4) the ability to effectively satisfy web users' implied needs and attract repeated visits, an objective related to web usability (Nielsen and Lorangar 2006). In order to achieve this goal, the industry uses time-constrained evaluation QA processes that are carried out by one

or more evaluators. As with many translation evaluation processes, these evaluators might lack the necessary theoretical framework in order to separate their own subjective judgments from more objective interrater criteria (House 2001; Hönig 1998, p. 14). Additionally, the notion of quality is understood as the relative absence of errors (Bass 2006), despite the fact that current research in translation evaluation has shown that relying solely on error based approaches is insufficient to fully assess quality (Jiménez-Crespo 2009b).

Moreover, if the objective of the industry is to produce texts that are received as if they had "been developed in-country" (LISA 2004, p. 11), localisation strategies should in principle guarantee that websites serve their purpose efficiently and share whichever characteristics are conventional in each locale (Nielsen 2000; Nielsen and Tahir 2002; Nielsen and Loranger 2006) . It is therefore logical to argue that, apart from eradicating any transfer and language errors in the target language, a quality localised website should share the characteristics of a similar locally made website. In order to accomplish this goal, compliance with existing cultural and linguistic conventions in natively produced texts becomes an essential aspect of quality (Jiménez-Crespo 2009a; Nielsen and Tahir 2002). This issue then goes beyond error identification and requires full active competence in the genres in question (Gamero 2001), that is, translator-evaluators should have the ability to produce these highly communicative instruments. Additionally, quality evaluation procedures should be able to guarantee that underlying or "hidden" conventions from the language/culture of development can be identified and controlled (House 2001). Therefore, in terms of quality analysis, the questions that these issues pose are many, and future empirical investigations will focus on them: does the existence of *internationalised* sites mean that there is a global *internationalised* Spanish corporate site genre? Can corporate websites be similar in all 20 Spanish locales? Is it possible to produce a localised version that all Spanish-speaking users can perceive as directly addressed to them? And finally, can textual and cultural aspects of an internationalised or *non-culture specific* site look the same or be equally received in twenty different countries? In order to establish a framework to research these questions, the methodology and principles of corpus-based translation studies can be extremely useful.

2.3. Localised texts as a distinct third code

In the light of over two decades of corpus-based translation studies (Baker 1993;Laviosa 2002; Olohan 2004), it can be stated that, even when users might perceive a translation as a natively produced text, translated products do possess different characteristics from natively produced texts (Baker 1993). This is due to the fact that translation is "a communicative event which is shaped by its own goals, pressures and context of production" (Baker 1996, p.175), upon which several specific constraints operate, which can be social, cultural, ideological, technological or cognitive in nature (Baker 1999, p. 285). It is therefore understood that translated websites are the result of a distinct process that results in texts with differentiated characteristics from natively produced ones. Following several scholars that have coined terms for this result, such as *third code* (Frawley 1984), *the third language* (Duff 1981) or *hybrid language* (Trosborg 1997), localised websites can be said to show a specific *language of localisation* (Jiménez-Crespo 2008a; 2009a). This implies that the language of localised websites might be intrinsically different from that of natively produced ones. This is similar to the language of dubbing or *dubbese* that can be found in dubbed movies worldwide (Romero Fresco 2006). Moreover, internationalisation strategies and their push to provide international language versions might represent an additional layer of distinction between original and localised sites; a localised website exclusive for Argentina could have different features from a site originally produced in this country and addressed to Argentinean users, and clearly, it will show even more distinct features if it is a global international Spanish localised version for the Argentinean users. Obviously, compromises need to be made in order to provide this neutral version. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that different countries and cultures possess diverse degrees of tolerance towards foreignization in translation (Venuti 1995). One of the possible means by which translators can identify the most frequent and conventional uses of languages in each specific locale is through corpus analysis (Jiménez-Crespo 2009b; 2008a). Corpus studies based on carefully selected representative collections of web genres in each locale can also lead to descriptive style guides where conventional items in a specific digital genre can be identified (Jiménez-Crespo 2009b). Additionally, there are two more possible ways to analyze users' quality expectations for internationalised sites, crowdsourcing localisation such as the Facebook model (O´Hagan 2009), and

web usability research (Adkisson 2003; Nielsen 2000; Nielsen and Loranger 2006).

As an example, the conventional lexical unit that corresponds to contact us in Spain is *contacto* (2009a), while in Argentina and Chile it is appropriate to use *contáctese con la empresa.* The use of the Spanish reflexive form of this verb would be identified as a syntactical error by users in Spain, thus affecting any potential Castilian Spanish user´s perception of quality. A website explicitly directed at users in Spain that would use the latter term might be perceived as a low-quality site, mostly due to the low tolerance for grammatical errors in websites (Jeney 2007). Nevertheless, the conventional form in Spain, *contacto*, would be accepted as a natural and conventional term in all these Spanish speaking regions. Thus, most decisions taken in internationalised language sites require extensive research in order to guarantee the best possible localisation.

2.4. In search of *international* Spanish

Spanish is the official language in 21 countries and it currently has over 400 million native speakers. It is the third most used language in the Internet after English and Chinese, with 137 million users in 2009. This represents around 8% of the global Internet population (Interent World Statistics 2009). Spanish is also extremely suited for this study as it is the language with the most number of standardized locales. According to Microsoft's locale registry, there are currently 20 Spanish locales, followed by 18 English ones, 16 Arabic and 15 French. The norm that is used by all Spanish speakers is referred to as *international neutral Spanish* (Castro 2001), and this refers to the international norm that is used in specialized and semi-specialized domains, such as science and technology. This is also referred to as *castellano general, español común, español internacional or español estándar,* and García Izquierdo (2006, p. 152) suggests that the most common denomination for this concept is *español neutro or simply neutral* Spanish.

The origins of this concept can be traced back to either the US film and cartoon producers in Puerto Rico in the 50´s, or the Mexican film producers of the 60´s (García Izquierdo 2006, 2009). That is, the first failed attempts at establishing a common neutral Spanish version were due to economic issues related to establishing neutral versions for audiovisual products. These initial attempts in the film industry are gaining a new momentum among the web and software producers of the 21st century. This issue is also being researched from new perspectives, such as funsubs and crowdsourcing in order to record which is the most widely accepted terminology, phraseology and other linguistic and cultural conventions (O´Hagan 2009).

Currently, the main vehicles for the standardization of the non-specialized Spanish norm are the Internet and media productions. On the Internet, users around the world can constantly access contents in all other Spanish dialectal varieties, including the emerging US Spanish variety and different types of neutral versions. It should be mentioned that the Spanish norm is mostly different at the phonological and lexical level, with no differences whatsoever at the typographic and spelling levels (García Izquierdo 2006, 2009). The differences in the Spanish varieties that can have an impact on web content are therefore mostly terminological and phraseological (such as the terms *inversores-inversionistas*), morphosyntactical (such as different forms in the 3M site for the term contact us: *contácte* a 3M [Honduras], *contáctese con 3M* [Perú, Bolivia, etc.], *contactar con* 3M [Spain]), or stylistic (*descubra cómo* [discover how], *sepa cómo* [learn how]). The main problem in establishing a *neutral* variety for web localisation process relies on the fact that websites are *complex digital genres*, that is, a single website or webpage incorporates different textual types and registers. As an example, any homepage will incorporate *interface* texts (Price and Price 2002) such as navigation menus and search options, advertisements, excerpts from other parts of the site such as technical or legal descriptions, etc. Normally, specialized domains such as technical descriptions are easier to develop and translate in neutral Spanish, while others in a general language such as marketing texts show greater differences and therefore pose greater difficulties in the neutralization process (García Izquierdo 2009).

This theoretical review has attempted to define the interelated and inseparable concepts in this investigation: internationalisation, international Spanish, quality and usability. The next section presents the initial empirical investigation in the wider study into the impact of internationalisation strategies on localisation quality and usability. The underlying rationale behind the wider study is therefore that sites subject to an internationalisation process to neutralize a multilocale language will enhance those characteristics that differentiate localised products from natively produced ones. As a

first step towards empirically testing this hypothesis, this specific study into current strategies in the industry is required.

3. Empirical study

This particular study focuses on current localisation strategies of US multinational companies when dealing with languages that are shared with a number of countries or locales. The starting point is previous studies by the same author into the distinct characteristics of localised sites if compared with natively produced sites (Jiménez-Crespo 2008a, 2009a, 2009c). These studies provide the analysis of a corpus of localised websites from US corporations compiled in 2006. Among other findings, it was observed that, even though users might not identify the language of a site as a translation, many of the linguistic and cultural features that appear in these sites will never be spontaneously produced by a target locale web developer. Following a corpus-based methodology, the current analysis will concentrate on researching the Spanish localisation strategies of the largest US companies in 2009.

3.1. Methodology

As previously mentioned, the methodology for this study was based on a previous corpus-based study that analyzed the websites of the 600 largest US companies according to the Forbes List. The corpus data compilation took place in 2006, and the same list was used in order to contrast the current localisation strategies in 2009. In the latter analysis, only the first 100 companies were studied. From the original 2006 Forbes list, four companies had disappeared, three of them due to mergers and one to bankruptcy. The next four companies in the list with a Spanish version of their website were added to the list.

A detailed analysis of the localisation strategies for the Spanish speaking locales was carried out in the 2009 list, and the process can be summarized as follows: (1) recording the number of Spanish locales that were used in each global website, (2) analyzing whether the site was a localisation exclusively for one locale or what kind of locale groupings were made in their Spanish language websites; the analysis was carried out on the terminology in navigation menus, web banners and visual elements, (3) whether the localised version was presented as a custom local production for a specific locale or, on the contrary, the localised website was presented as an international Spanish site. The analytical process to identify whether a website was an original production or a localisation followed the 10 step criteria previously developed (Jiménez-Crespo 2008a, pp. 233-234), such as the existence of an English and a Spanish version, the existence of frames in another languages, analysing potential translation errors, and most importantly, analysing the source code to identify whether the comments (<!), image names etc. are in Spanish. This last step indicates that the website as a whole was originally developed in Spanish, as normally localised sites maintain developers´ comments in the source language.

In a second stage, the results from the previous corpus analysis compiled in 2006 are contrasted with the current results in order to identify current industry trends. The 2006 and 2009 data will be compared both for the percentage of companies offering localised versions of their sites and the relationship between company size and the adopted localisation model.

4. Results and discussion

In the first place, the websites of the 100 largest US companies with Spanish localised versions were analyzed in order to identify the number of locales or markets targeted by the industry. Figure 2 presents a summary of the percentages of Spanish locales that the websites explicitly indicated in their localisations, that is, that a website was directly aimed at at this specific country. This is done by means of indicating the country/language combination (e.g. Español-Honduras), the country site (e.g. 3M Bolivia), or a map with the specific region. Three additional locales were added as the websites showed that the versions were addressing the *Caribbean region, Latin America* and *Central America*. Thus, the industry did not exclusively use the standardized locale IDs consisting of the combination of country and language, but rather, geographical denominations other than countries were used in lieu of standardized country codes. Additionally, the locale Spanish-US was added given that many of these corporations present a Spanish site for their Spanish-speaking customers in this country. It can be clearly observed that the largest targets for Spanish localisation are: Spain (42%), Mexico (32%), the United States (27%) and Argentina (27%). This analysis also indicates that the top 100 US companies directly present their localisations as country-oriented, rather than language-oriented, even when many of the localised versions might be shared by many of those countries. Obviously, the strategy of those companies is not to

produce a Spanish localised version for each of those countries, but rather, to combine and group the countries in different ways depending on their market shares.

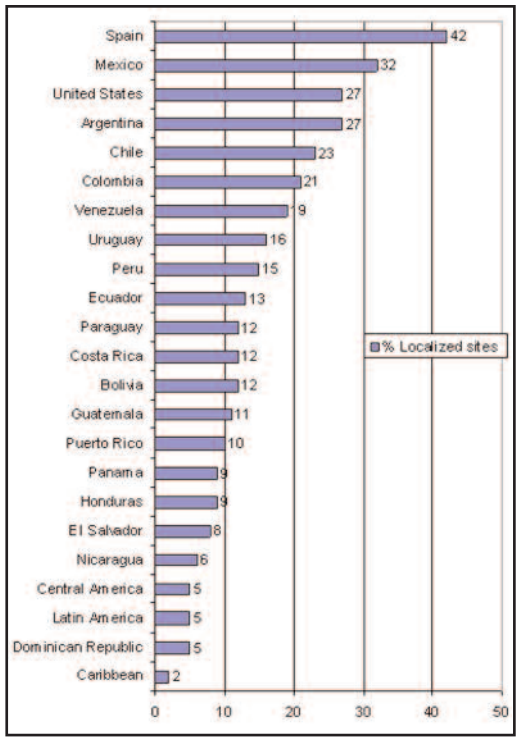

Figure 2. Percentage of Spanish locales targeted by the largest US corporations.

The next step in the analysis was to analyze what strategies the companies were implementing to deal with the multiple Spanish localised versions of their sites. Overall, four main strategies were identified:

1) A *decentralized* model (Yunker 2003) in which each website is directly developed in each locale and it entailed an original local production maintaining the corporate visual identity.

2) A *centralized* model (Yunker 2003) in which different localisations into Spanish are provided for different locales or groups of locales.

3) A centralized model in which a single localised version is presented as a local production for each targeted locale, that is, even when the localised version is the same. Users can select their own country from the locale selection option and the site is presented to them as localisation exclusively for that country.

4) A single international website for all locales presented as an international site in Spanish.

The most interesting discussion in this regard, a hypothesis that will be empirically tested in subsequent studies, is that each model adopted might entail different implications in terms of users´ quality perception. In the first model, users interact with a local production, the most expensive option, and the one that represents the highest possible level of localisation to a target locale. The next possibility, producing locale-specific Spanish localised versions, also responds to the need to adapt the content to the specificities of each country or region. The third and fourth models, the most widely used due to ROI and economic issues, presents different advantages and drawbacks. A user faced with an international version of a Spanish site is aware that the company is not directly focused on this market and therefore, is not addressing him/her directly, but at the same time, the user will be more tolerant towards any linguistic or cultural item that the user associates with a different dialectal variety or Spanish-speaking country. Therefore, the potential impact on quality of other Spanish variants should be lower. On the other hand, a localised site directly aimed at users in Argentina makes users believe that the company is committed to this market, but nevertheless, the impact on the user´s perception of quality of any non-Argentinean cultural or linguistic use might be high, as the user can feel deceived. In part, this can be due to the fact that in certain cases some dialectal variants are perceived as linguistic errors.This is comparable to a website developed in the UK with British spelling and colloquialisms that would be implicitely addressed at US users as a local production.

A detailed analysis of all localised versions was carried out to identify which of these four models were used for each company. Figure 3 shows an analysis of the adoption of these four different strategies. As the European Spanish market represents the largest share, it is separated from the rest of the locales.

It can be observed that the industry favors different localisation strategies for the European and Latin American markets. In the European Spanish locale, 30% of the companies release localised versions exclusively produced in this dialectal variety, while the most frequent strategy in the Latin American market is a single localised version that is, nevertheless, presented as an exclusive localisation for each locale (17%). Both the European and Latin

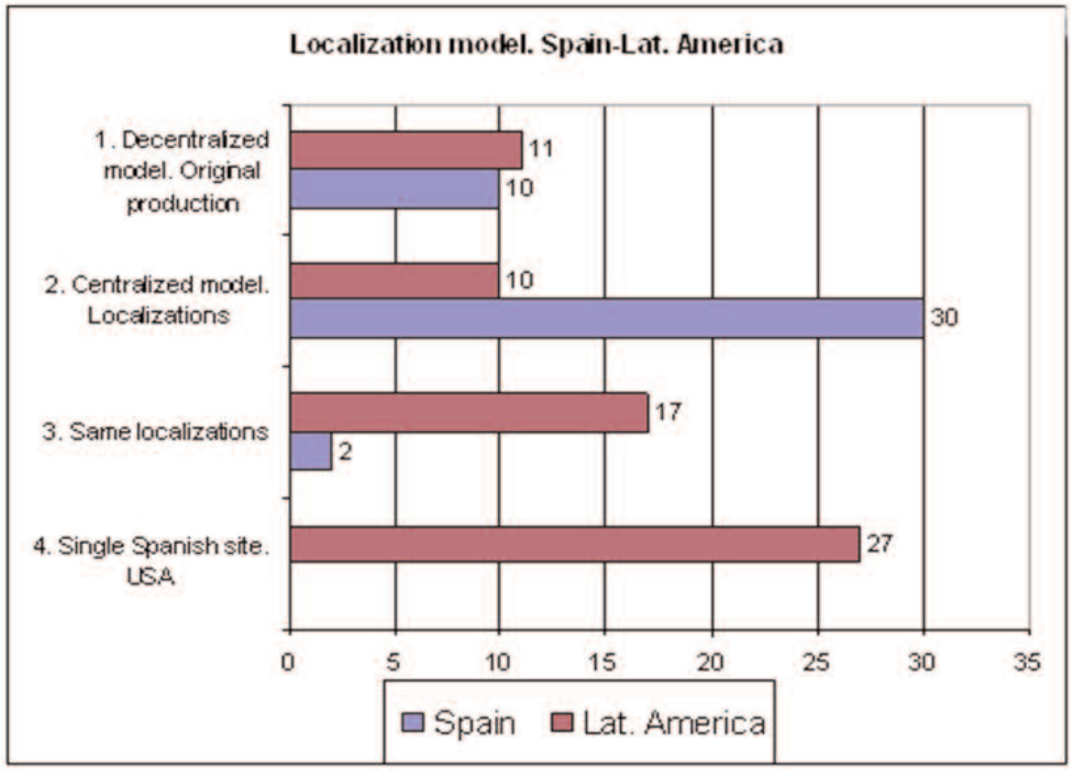

Figure 3. Localisation models for the Spanish-speaking locales in the largest US companies.

American markets present very similar percentages of websites that are not the result of a localisation process, but rather an original production for each locale: 10% for European Spanish and 11% for Latin American countries. It should also be mentioned that companies very rarely implement a single localised version for all Spanish-Speaking locales and then present it as a local production in Spain (2%). Finally, most international Spanish sites are those produced for the US market, and officially, this tends to be their global version for any other Spanish-speaking customer in the world.

4.1.Spanish localisation trends from 2006 to 2009

The last two analyses involve a comparison of the localisation trends between the results obtained in 2006 and 2009. First of all, the last analysis concentrates on the localisation trends in terms of companies offering Spanish localisation for their sites. The analysis was carried out using the data for the first 100 companies in the 2006 analysis and the 2009 list. Figure 4 offers a glimpse of how the number of Spanish localisations is constantly growing.

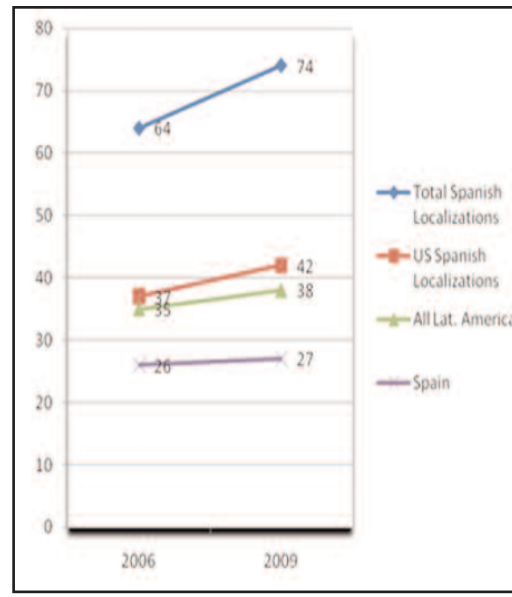

Figure 4. 2006/2009 localisation trends for US companies offering Spanish localised versions of their sites.

Globally, the number of companies offering a localised version for any Spanish locale has grown by 11.56% in these three years. The data for most locales has grown in very similar terms. For the European Spanish locale, there is an increase from 37 to 42 companies offering a site in Spanish, an 11.35% growth rate. Similarly, the increase in localisations for Latin American locales also jumped by 10.85%. Finally, the number of companies offering a site in Spanish for US customers climbed by 10.38%. largest companies in 2006 were contrasted with the 100 largest US companies in the 2009 list. The most frequent locale, European Spanish, was used in this analysis.

The contrastive analysis shown in Figure 5 shows that, despite the 11.56% increase from 2006 to 2009, the possibility of offering a Spanish localisation is directly proportional to company size. Overall, 74% of the largest US companies offer a localised version

Fig.5. Screen capture from the Spanish localisation for the Home Depot site explaining that this localisation has disappeared.

Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the real increase was larger, but it was reduced by the fact that some companies, such as Home Depot, decided to eliminate their localised versions and some other companies disappeared or merged. Interestingly, there might be a relationship between users not relating to some corporate US sites in Spanish and the lack of existence of a clearly established US Spanish variety, thus impacting on the site usability or the user's lack of response to the site.

Finally, the percentage of companies with a localisation into Spanish was contrasted in order to observe whether the possibility of offering a localisation decreases or increases according to company size. It is expected that, despite the observed increase in localisations from 2006 to 2009, the larger the company would be, the more likely it would be that it would localise its website into Spanish. For this purpose, the results for the 600 into any Spanish locale, while the frequency is reduced to 41.38% for the group of the 600 largest companies. There is also an interesting correlation between company size and the possibility of offering an original production as the local website instead of a localised version. For European Spanish, the possibility of offering an original production instead of a localisation is 2.98 times greater for the 100 largest companies if contrasted with the 600 group. In the case of localised versions of sites, the ratio is 1.71 times higher. Thus, it can be clearly observed that the most expensive localisation model, to develop an in-country website, is directly related to company size. As previously mentioned, this could be the model with the higher levels of potential quality from a linguistic standpoint.

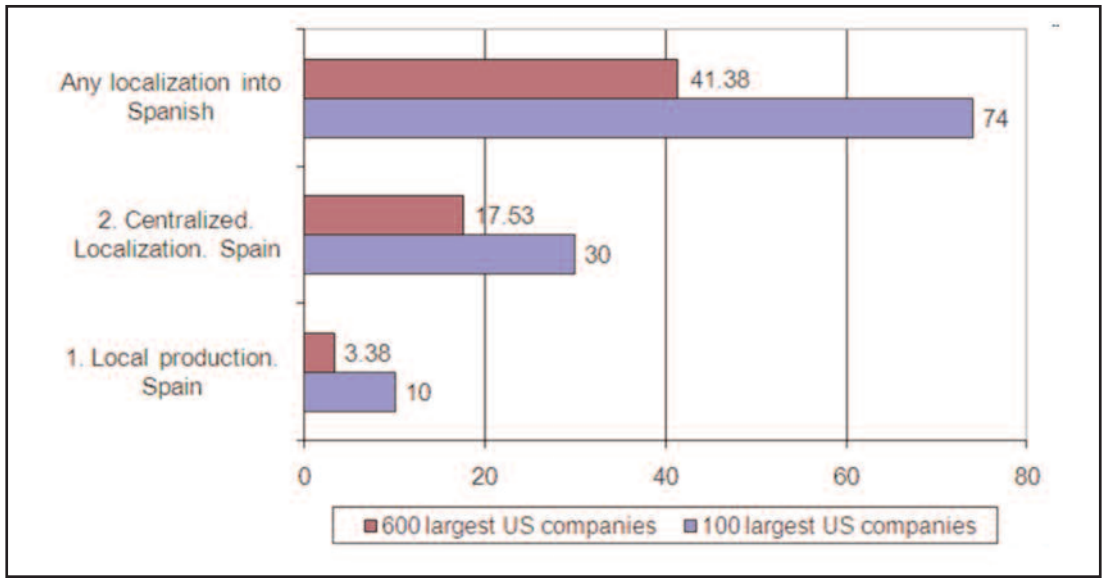

Figure 6. Contrastive analysis of localisation model and company size.

5. Conclusions

Translation quality is a multidimensional concept that can be controlled through a number of approaches, each of which presents its possible benefits and drawbacks. The approaches range from current process-oriented approaches based on international standards to user-based ones such as the web crowdsourcing translation quality implemented by Facebook. In all of them, the objective is to produce a website that complies to the user´s implied needs and that adjusts to the linguistic and cultural framework of expectations. Once established that the objective of the industry is to produce websites that users can accept as *locally made* (LISA 2003), the interrelations between internationalisation, quality and *neutral-language* versions has been explored.

In this empirical investigation, four main strategies have been identified, and an analysis of industry trends has been presented. Mainly, it is clear that the industry separates the Spanish and the Latin American markets, and different strategies are adopted in each case. For Spain, the most frequent strategy is to present a localised version of the site for this locale, while in the Latin American market the main strategy is to present a single localised site that nevertheless is presented as a local production for each targeted locale. Additionally, the main market for neutral Spanish is the United States in which 27% for the largest corporations offer a Spanish localisation. It has also been shown that the localisation model adopted is directly related to company size, thus, the larger the company, the higher the possibility of offering an original site for the market targeted; followed by a localisation for each locale and lastly, a single localisation for all targeted locales.

Finally, it has been shown that consistently in the last 3 years, the volume of web-site localisation into Spanish has steadily grown, with an average increase of around 10 - 11%. This is consistent with the unprecedented growth of Internet penetration in the Spanish language market (Internet Wold Statistics 2009). Nevertheless, the opposite tendency has also been observed, mainly in the US market where some Spanish localised versions have disappeared. This can be due to either the lack of budget for localisation or to the lack of interest by the US Spanish speaking population. The disappearance of Spanish localisations could be closely related to the difficulty in establishing a neutral version of the Spanish language for the entire US market, if the *language of localisation* does not comply with the framework of user´s expectations in regards to genre conventions at the lexical, terminological and phraseological levels, users might consciously or subconsciously find that the website is difficult to use and opt for using the English version. This presents an interesting case since many US Spanish users are bilinguals and can use the source English site, while in other locales if the linguistic quality of the site does not match their expectations or is perceived to complicate its use,

there is no other alternative for monolingual customers.

This study represents the first step in a larger study into the relationship between quality, internationalisation and the role of user expectations and the uneven relationship between dominant and receiving cultures in translation (Venuti 1995). Additional user-based studies would be needed in order to empirically assess the impact of neutral Spanish sites and the different models to deal with this issue. It is hoped that this study will be useful to practitioners, translation managers and industry experts alike, given that, despite economic and time constraints, all participants share the same goal of offering the users the highest possible quality in their interaction with their websites.

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