

# A Comparison of Professionalism Between Freelance Translators and Translators in a Product Localization Team

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**Abstract:** The language barrier is the first impediment that most companies confront when selling their products abroad. Products trying to convert their content into a new language will often settle on two options: translation and localization. Although similar — both are about converting messages into a new language to reach a new audience — translation and localization are two distinct procedures. Therefore, this paper adopts methods of literature analysis and corpus-based research to study how localization differs from translation, in terms of work content, process and skills required for practitioners. Based on literature analysis, the paper concludes that translation is a subset of localization, a broad term encompassing several strategies for adapting information to a new audience. Localization is a more profound and complex conversion procedure than translation. Localization is done with specific target market needs in mind; therefore, it is not only about content, but also a significant aspect of marketing. This article demonstrates through corpus analysis that, while traditional translations place a premium on the literary quality and accuracy of the translation, localized translations place a premium on the translation's fit with the local language idiom and ability to reach a broader audience for the product. Thus, this article summarizes that while freelance translators place a premium on bilingual abilities, self-management, and marketing capabilities, localization group translators place a premium on their ability to flexibly use their cultural background knowledge to adjust translation content to customer tastes.

**Keywords:** Localization, Translation, Professionalism, Translation Strategies

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, with the expansion of the translation market, the demand for qualified translators is increasing. Therefore, what kind of professionalism the translation practitioners has become a topic that is often discussed. At the same time, as a new industry, localization is also often the subject of research.

Although there are many pieces of research looking at the differences between translation and localization, for example, R Schäler investigates the distinct process of localization and translation in his book [1], and P Sandrini focuses on the different tools and software used in translation and localization works respectively [2]. Jiménez-Crespo has also done a corpus study on the diverse output of localization and translation works [3]. However, there is currently a dearth of study on the distinct characteristics required of translators and localizers. As a result, this essay intends to discuss what

professionalism would entail for freelance translators and those who work in a product localization team.

According to Freidson, "Professionalism entails a commitment to apply knowledge and skill to do good work, and to perform it well for the benefit of others." [4]

In the case of translators, to have sound output, they must equip themselves with sufficient background knowledge and skills, and to do good work, they must have an accurate working attitude and work ethics. This essay will explore the differences in professionalism according to the above mentioned four criteria for translators in the localization team and freelance translators.

## 2. Differences in the Knowledge and Skills

Before discussing professionalism, it is necessary to

clarify the relationship between localization and translation.

The localization industry originates from the needs of enterprises to explore international markets. In 1990, the Localization Industry Standards Association was founded in Switzerland and became the most important association in the localization and globalization industry. According to LISA, "Localization is the process of modifying products or services to account for differences in distinct markets." [5]

Localization is the process of translating and adapting the language materials of products or services to meet the needs of specific countries and regions.

So, localizers and translators have different aims. The ultimate goal of translators in a product localization team is to help a product or service open the market of an area, while the goal of freelance translators is to produce a smooth, accurate and fluent translation based on respecting the original text.

According to Fry, translation can be seen as an integral part of localization; localization is more than just translation [6].

Compared with freelance translators, those in the localization industry consider more issues, which inevitably requires them to acquire more knowledge and skills than traditional translators. Translators in localization teams need to do post-translation adaptations to ensure their translation can fit the culture of the target market.

### **2.1. Cultural Knowledge**

Translators working in the localization team need to have in-depth cultural considerations, which enable their translation to be fully understood and accepted by the target audience.

They need to avoid cultural taboos in their translation and post-translation stages because such a mistake can have serious consequences. Mistakes such as inaccurately translated product names can be staggeringly costly for firms, not only result in just the loss of revenue but also cause damage to a company's reputation [7].

For example, in 2009, HSBC bank's catchphrase "Assume Nothing" was mistranslated as "Do Nothing" in various countries. HSBC bank then has to spend \$10 million to repair the damage [8].

Chandler has given another example of the devastating result of failed localization caused by cultural and religious taboo in his book, which is also a case we have discussed in class. A game named *Kakuto Chojin* was banned in Saudi Arabia and other muslim countries because an audio track incorporated a chanted portion of the Qur'an in the game, which of course negatively influenced the sales volume of the game [7].

Although cultural background knowledge is an essential part of professionalism for any translator, freelance translators may not need to have in-depth cultural understandings. While translation provided by translators in a localization team should not involve cultural barriers and misunderstandings for the target audience, freelance translators' translation is not necessarily for commercial

purposes and can involve cultural issues. In some kinds of translations, a good translator needs to give readers "the feeling of the foreign", "the impression that they have the foreign in front of them" [9].

### **2.2. Technology Skills**

Translators in a localization team shall have the ability to make good use of information and communication technology and tools such as spell-checkers, terminology bases, machine translation systems, etc., to facilitate their work. Many professional translators still tend to reject computer-aided translation tools. Nevertheless, in real work, automation can, to a significant extent, help translators to save their working time. Working efficiency is rather vital for translators in a product localization team. Due to fierce competition between rival developers, new products must reach the market as soon as possible to create the most significant impact, as any delays can potentially lead to a severe loss of revenue [6, 7]. Thus, using multiple translation tools is a must-have skill for translators working in a product localization team.

On the other hand, Freelance translators usually would not be under pressure to complete their translation in a short time. Besides, freelance translators often translate literary content, which is "works of art" [10]. One of its characteristics is the condensed wisdom of the author (translator). In this regard, machine translation assistance is limited, so some translators insist on not using machine translation. People without computer skills can also become good freelance translators from this perspective.

### **2.3. Marketing Skills and Financial Ability**

Corinne McKay Said in her book that freelance translators should not only work as translators but also "department head for sales and marketing, customer relations, accounting, and facilities maintenance." [11]

That is to say, freelancers, besides language skills, should have marketing skills and financial ability.

They need to know how to promote themselves to attract customers. Negotiation with customers also matters, as there are many issues negotiable, such as wages, formats, due, before translators and employers finally sign the contract. "A good grounding in marketing, management, and accountancy will not harm this respect." [12]

Besides, freelancers have to manage their money themselves and deal with tax issues. This requires freelance translators to have the financial ability to look after their accounts.

Translators in a localization team may deal with different texts, such as game titles, product advertisements, etc., but their ultimate purpose is to allow the audience to accept and like their translations without cultural barriers. As a result, they need to gather information about the preferences of customers in the target market and cater to their needs, which means that they must have a particular research ability and publicity skill.

## 2.4. Team Skills VS Independent Working Skills

Team translation is an essential part of localization, especially considering that products such as video games contain tens to hundreds of thousands of words or characters of text and tight deadlines. Chandler and Deming state that team translation is an unavoidable fact due to the high demands of the video game localization industry [7].

Teamwork skills would be relatively crucial for localization works. They need to cooperate with teammates during the translation process. As they will only have one output together, they must work closely to ensure that the translation style is consistent. Besides, group work may inevitably involve disputes, so they need to handle disputes rationally and maintain good interpersonal relationships. After the translation is completed, further refinements and modifications to the product marketing plan will also involve cooperation between the translation team and other departments.

A professional freelance translator, by contrast, must have the ability to work on their own. Freelance translators usually do not have teams, so no review team will help them correct the translation. This requires freelance translators to have the ability to complete translation tasks independently with quality and quantity. Nevertheless, this does not mean that freelance translators do not need interpersonal skills.

According to Daniel, a translator should be able to “relate effectively and smoothly – both professionally and personally – with numerous partners: clients, colleagues, suppliers of information and terminology, revisers, employers, tax and social security officers, Internet access providers, and many more” [12]. Therefore, freelance translators need to deal with various parties – on their own.

## 3. Differences in Ethics and Attitudes

Although freelance translators should always respect the fidelity of source text, translators working in a product localization team tend to emphasize adaptation. Sometimes localizers can even change the content of source text to achieve a better outcome. Just as an example provided by the lecturer in class:

ST

常饮绿茶能防癌，降脂和减肥，对吸烟者也可减轻其受到的尼古丁伤害。

LT

Regular drinking of green tea can prevent cancer, burn fat aid weight loss, and can also reduce nicotine damage from the smoking.

TT

Green tea is a powerful source of antioxidants, it may also help with weight loss and fat burning and may help to reduce blood sugar.

In the above example, though the literary translation of source text is Grammarly correct and makes sense, it tends to be not culturally acceptable for target readers – those from western countries. Advertisements in Chinese sometimes

exaggerate the effectiveness of products for higher sales volume. In this example, there is no exact scientific basis to show that green tea has anti-cancer effects (there is only relative suppose). However, in western culture, practical evidence is always required, even in advertisements. So, in the second translation version, translators used “a powerful source of antioxidants”, which is the fact, to replace “prevent cancer”. Besides, due to the eating habits of Westerners, many of them suffer from overweight and Hyperglycemia. As a result, the function of “reducing blood sugar” will inevitably be more attractive than “reducing nicotine damage from smoking” for Western target readers. Translators in localization teams should consider the purpose and expectations of their translation and flexibly choose the translation principles they follow according to different situations.

In terms of working attitude, freelance translators and translators in the localization team serve different people. For freelance translators, they do not have a fixed client, so they may often need to comply with the requirements of different clients. Therefore, freelance translators need to have a relatively flexible attitude and prepare themselves to satisfy different needs at any time. By contrast, translators in a localization team, if in a fixed company, need to abide by the company's requirements, rules and regulations [13]. Those working in an outsourcing translation team need to make corresponding changes according to different cases.

## 4. Conclusion

This essay holds the view that because translation is part of the localization process, the professionalism of freelance translators and translators in the localization team overlaps. But relatively speaking, the professionalism of freelance translators still mainly emphasizes their bilingual skills and self-management and marketing capabilities, while the localization group translators emphasize their ability to flexibly use their cultural background knowledge to adjust translation content to meet customer tastes. The ability to collaborate with team members is also more important for translators in localization teams. Since localization also involves post-editing and localization of text, translators in the localization team should be more efficient in translation, which requires them to have the ability to use various translation-related tools.

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