

FIT Position Paper on Translation, Localisation and Transcreation

Introduction

The language industry differentiates between translation, localisation and transcreation as distinct activities. Nevertheless, many professional translators are engaged in localisation and transcreation projects, which raises the question of the role of translation in these multilingual language services. The purpose of this paper is to provide an answer to this question from the perspective of FIT, as the representative of professional translators on the world stage.

The first section introduces the term conventional translation and presents FIT's position, which is that translation is the backbone of all multilingual language services that involve source text and corresponding target text. The second section consists of definitions of four multilingual activities (translation, conventional translation, localisation and transcreation). The third section features a diagram about these activities and a brief description of the diagram, to complement Sections 1 and 2.

The scope of this paper is multilingual language service activities that involve humans. Therefore, unedited machine translation (UEMT), sometimes called raw machine translation, which is pervasive in today's society, is not treated here.¹

Section 1 Overview

This paper focuses on three equally challenging language services that involve translation: conventional translation, localisation and transcreation. The names for these three types of language services, as well as the cover term, translation, will sometimes be capitalised in the rest of this paper.

Multilingual language services involve both textual and non-textual content. Translation is crucial because it produces the textual output in all types of multilingual language services based on source text. Conventional Translation projects treat a broad range of areas, including science & technology, business, health care, law and literature. Localisation projects initially treated only software applications and, later, websites. Now, the term Localisation is applied more broadly. The boundary between Localisation and Conventional Translation is determined by how non-textual aspects of the source content are treated. Conventional Translation can include non-textual source content, such as images, but this is passed through to the target content, not adapted to the target audience. When non-textual content is adapted, we cross over to Localisation. Transcreation applies primarily to marketing material, including banners and slogans. The boundary between Transcreation and other types of multilingual language services is somewhat fuzzy. When the source content is other than marketing material, a multilingual project involving an extreme degree of adaptation could be described as Conventional Translation (if there is no adaptation of non-textual material), Transcreation or Localisation. When output is based on other than source content, the project could be described as multilingual copywriting. A conventional translation can include a section of text that is transcreated.

By adding the term Conventional Translation to the discussion, false dichotomies can be avoided. For example, contrasting **Translation** with Localisation & Transcreation implies that Localisation does not involve translation, which is false, while classifying translation in Conventional Translation, Localisation and Transcreation as subtypes of Translation is consistent with FIT's claim that some type of translation is involved in all three of these activities. This may be obvious to some readers, but it is common to

¹ If you are interested in FIT's position on machine translation, please see the position paper on this topic, available on the FIT website. A position paper on post-editing is also available. Full (as opposed to light) post-editing of machine translation is expected to result in output similar to professional human translation.

encounter individuals in the language industry who view Localisation narrowly as an activity that does not include Translation. That is one reason FIT has developed this position paper. Translation is crucial to Localisation projects.

All types of language services that involve Translation require carefully matching the skills of the translator with the type of source content, the subject matter, and the audience and purpose of the translated text, as indicated in the specifications, to achieve the objectives of the requesting organisation. Of course, there are also multilingual language services that do not involve Translation. Examples are (a) multilingual content creation that is not based on a source text, described as a type of copywriting, and (b) interpreting, which results in spoken output, rather than written.

An important aspect of language services, one which applies to both textual and non-textual content, is the contrast between source orientation and target orientation. This contrast has been given various names². A source-oriented translation intentionally, not through lack of skill, leaves traces of the source language and culture, while a target-oriented translation attempts to hide the fact that it is a translation by making adjustments, sometimes at the expense of exact correspondence with the source text, to ensure that the target text appears to have been authored in the target language for the target region and culture. There is a spectrum from highly source-oriented to highly target-oriented.

Choosing a point along the spectrum from source to target orientation of textual material is non-trivial. Indeed, all aspects of high-value Translation, especially when intended for public consumption and relevant to the image of an organisation or to the health & safety of the intended end users of the translation, are intellectually challenging. Conventional Translation projects can be anywhere on the source-oriented to target-oriented spectrum, whereas Localisation projects are typically oriented towards making the result look and feel natural in a target locale (language in a region). Transcreation projects are typically very much oriented towards the target locale. The same source vs target orientation contrast applies to non-textual aspects of language services. A target-oriented project involves more adaptation than a source-oriented project. The decision regarding degree of adaptation of non-textual material is based primarily on the intended audience and purpose of the target content.³

In summary, Translation can be Conventional, part of a Localisation activity (Localisation-centric) or part of a Transcreation activity (Transcreation-centric). This view, which contrasts three types of Translation, not only answers the opening question of this paper but is also compatible with the fact that professional human translators are found in all types of language service activities that include source and target text. All three activities require a human translator's ability to tease out the requirements, follow agreed-on specifications, determine appropriate strategies and apply those strategies to produce a target text that best fulfils the aims and needs of the person or organisation requesting the Translation, based on the purpose and intended audience of the target content.

The bottom line is that translation and translators play an essential role in many multilingual language services, including Conventional Translation, Localisation and Transcreation.

² Alternative names for the source-target contrast in orientation include Overt vs Covert translation (Juliane House, prominent in translation quality assessment); Documentary vs Instrumental translation (Christiane Nord, a leading proponent of Functionalism in translation); Foreignised vs Domesticated translation (Lawrence Venuti, prominent in literary translation); Formal vs Dynamic translation (Eugene Nida, remembered in Bible translation); and Verbatim translation for overt translation (The US Interagency Language Roundtable).

³ Converting to local requirements (such as currencies and units of measure) or using proper local formats for dates, addresses and phone numbers cannot be criteria of differentiation between the activities that include Translation (Conventional Translation, Localisation and Transcreation) because they are found in all three.

Section 2 Definitions (to support the overview in Section 1 and the diagram in Section 3)

Translation as used in this paper is a cover term for the creation of written output that corresponds to source content according to agreed-upon specifications. When the output is spoken, the language service is called interpreting. Signed language is not treated in this paper. The subtypes of translation featured in this paper are Conventional Translation, localisation-centric translation and transcreation-centric translation. Other subtypes of Translation include summary translation, where the output is substantially shorter than the source text, audio translation, where the source content is typically an audio recording, and audiovisual translation, which consists primarily of creating subtitles in a language different than what is used in the source content (typically a video for entertainment or training).

Conventional Translation, which is focused on text and excludes adaptation of non-textual material

Conventional Translation is the main type of translation in the language industry, applying to many types of source content (including science & technology, business, health care, law and literature) and resulting in a target text that corresponds to the source, mostly segment by segment. Conventional Translation can range from being highly source-oriented to highly target-oriented, depending on the purpose and intended audience, but does not involve adaptation of non-textual content.⁴

Localisation, which includes localisation-centric translation and adaptation of non-textual material

Localisation, (L10N)—cross-cultural communication process of preparing locale-specific versions of a product or service, consisting of translation of textual material into the language and textual conventions of the target locale, and adaptation of non-textual materials as well as input, output and [other] mechanisms to meet the cultural, technical and regulatory requirements of that locale. Localisation encompasses not only the translation and adaptation of computer software, but also the preparation of many types of products and services for particular locales. The abbreviation consists of the first and last letters of the term, with the number 10 inserted between them, signifying the ten letters between the L and N. (This definition is from the standardisation body ASTM International.)⁵

Locale—in common practice, the language and [where needed] the geographic region (for example, Spanish in Colombia versus Spanish in Spain) of a given target audience for a translation. Locale can also relate to other items of information such as time and date formats, legally binding format restrictions, international telephone codes and writing system. (Also from ASTM International)

Transcreation, which often includes transcreation-centric translation

Transcreation is the process of adapting or re-creating content in order to deliver the same impact as with the original. It may result in a hybrid of new content, adapted content and imagery, and [conventional] translation. Transcreation is also commonly referred to as “multilingual copywriting”, “cultural adaptation”, “marketing translation” and “international copy”. (This definition is from a report produced by CSA Research, which is focused on the multilingual language services industry.)⁶

⁴ Conventional Translation has, of course, been around for thousands of years. Until recently (approximately the 1980s), it was simply called translation. With the appearance of terms such as localisation (initially applied to desktop software applications and later to websites), transcreation (which applies to both creative translation and copywriting in a multilingual context) and audiovisual translation, there is a need to distinguish Conventional Translation as one subtype in a taxonomy where Translation is used as a cover term.

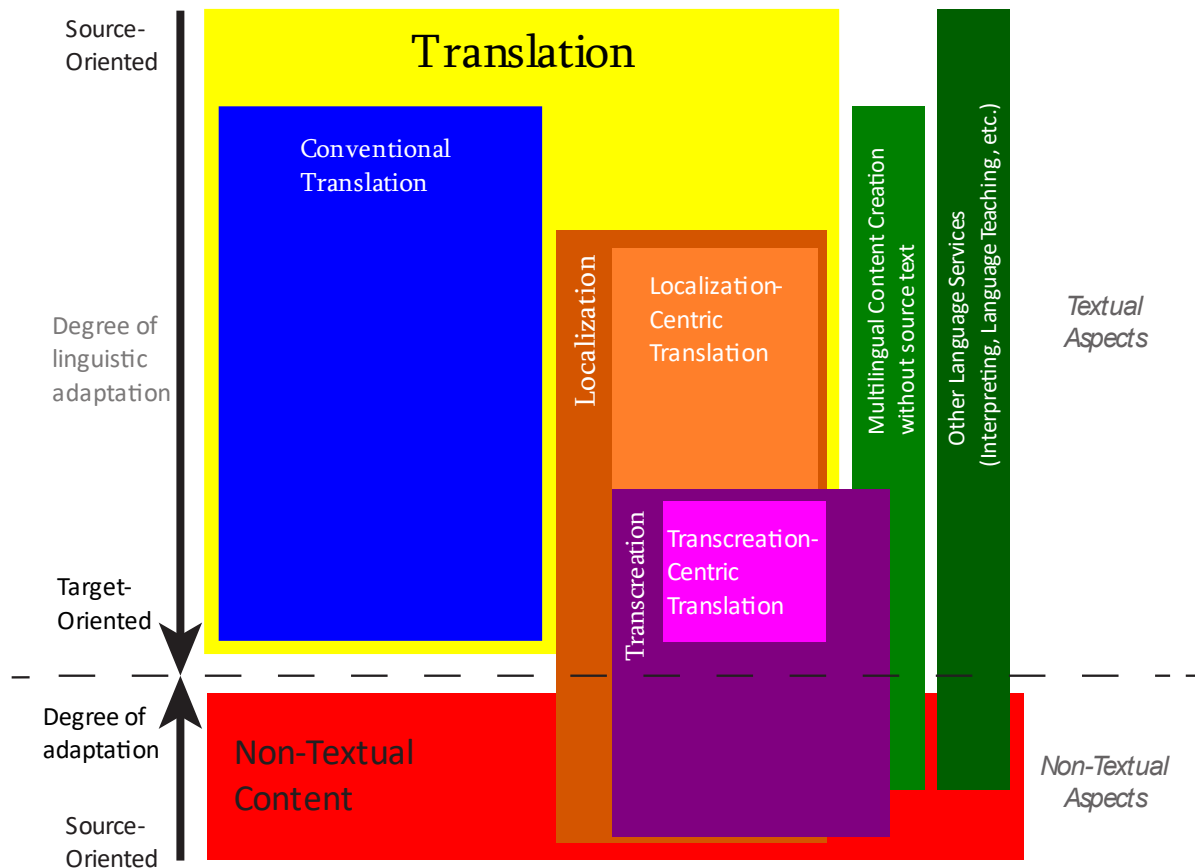
⁵ ASTM F2575-14 ASTM International (www.astm.org), quotes except in square brackets; see also the GALA definition of localisation (<https://www.gala-global.org/industry/intro-language-industry/what-localization>). For detailed locale information, see the Common Locale Data Repository (<http://cldr.unicode.org/>).

⁶ To download a copy of the report, see <https://insights.csa-research.com/reportaction/5565/Toc> and register.

Section 3 Diagram

The following is a Euler diagram that depicts the same information found in Section 1.

Multilingual Language Services



The focus of this diagram encompassing all multilingual language services is the yellow box (**Translation as a cover term**), which includes the three types of text-to-text translation treated in Section 1: *Conventional Translation* (blue), a new term defined in this paper for an activity that has been around for at least 5000 years, *translation within Localisation* (light brown) and *translation within Transcreation* (pink). **There are other subtypes of translation, such as summary translation, audio translation and audio-visual translation** (See an explanation of these subtypes in Section 2).

A lower level of Transcreation is much like Localisation (except that Localisation is typically associated with software while Transcreation is typically associated with marketing material); however, high-level (extreme) Transcreation crosses into the green box, “Multilingual Content Creation without source text”. An example of Transcreation in the green box would be locally developed content in several countries that is not based on a source text but instead on the product being marketed.

Bottom line: Translators are needed for all language services within or overlapping with the yellow box. Therefore, all stakeholders in the area of language services would be well served to start using the term **Conventional Translation**, especially when contrasting with Localisation or Transcreation.