LOCALIZATION: A TRANSLATION STRATEGY OR A SEPARATE TOOL?

Abstract. The article discusses different approaches to localization – as one of translation strategies and as a separate tool for rendering language messages in another language. The study is done with the help of comparative linguistic analysis of original movie titles in the English language and their official Russian versions. We study ways of rendering of the film titles in the target language and reveal some reasons for localization. In conclusion, we provide a list of motives for language localization of the movie titles: 1) tendency to build the name of a new film into the system of films already known to the Russian viewer or other cultural realities with the help of so-called "references" to familiar nominations; 2) give additional advertising to the film, 3) make the film more attractive to a specific target audience.

Introduction

The difference between localization and translation is currently one of the most discussed issues in linguistic papers. The problem is mainly developed by theorists of translation who interpret localization as one of translation strategy aimed at adaptation to cultural peculiarities and regional reality of the target language audience. Most theorists mention that “localization” is a term adopted from the field of information technology and marketing but emphasize chiefly language communication problems in their works without going into discussion of technical details and the broad context of localization of a language product.

The aim of this paper is to reveal the wider range of problems that localization specialists face beyond language communication. The study is based on the comparative linguistic analysis of original English movie titles and their official Russian versions.

Movie titles are considered as language items that need localization solutions due to the fact that the popularity of the film and the amount of money earned may directly depend on the impact of the title on regular film-goers. That’s why information technology issues and marketing issues take a higher priority than language translation problems. In this article we compare original English titles and their Russian versions in order to reveal the reasons for the resulted language solutions.

Material and methodology

The material of the study consists of 50 original English movie titles, mostly names of 2020-2021 movies, and the Russian titles of the same movies. We used the method of comparative linguistic analysis based on the predisposition that similar translation or localization techniques are applied to the titles of different movie genres. This consideration let us examine random movie titles as appropriate material in order to find out the employed translation and localization techniques.

Currently, cinema is one of the most popular areas of our lives. The popularity of the film is often largely determined by its title, because the spectacular title is much easier to attract the viewer than the film annotation. Studies show that about eighty percent of newspaper readers pay attention only to the headlines. This is true with movies as well. A viewer may determine his/her attitude to the film by its name and decide whether it is worth watching or not.

Creating a movie title is a tough problem because it must be catchy and render the content of the film. Transferring the film title to a different language is, in a way, even more difficult and responsible task. The resulted title not only should reflect the original name of the movie, be catchy and render the content of the film, but also arose target language audience’s interest. Greater success and stronger communication effect may be achieved by adapting the title to the specifics of the target language cultural environment. That’s why
the problem of title rendering is viewed in the context of translation and localization in comparison.

The problem review

The term “localization” overlaps with the term “translation” in its semantics, which causes researchers’ attempts to distinguish these terms. Some researchers declare that localization and translation are two alternative processes, as, for instance, R. Schäler [1]. Some others suppose that localization should be integrated into the theory of translation, though it may require changing some principles of the latter, as M.G. Odacioglu, R. Melnik and V. Semenova, O. Sorokina and other researchers [2, 3, 4].

The principle difference between translation and localization is mostly discussed from cultural point of view [5, 6]. Translation is supposed to be an oriented to original language process – that is, a translator is bound to render the original text as faithfully as possible. Theorists of translation discuss transformations made by interpreters in the course of rendering language communication from one language into another and the levels of equivalency translators can reach.

Localization is considered as cultural adaptation of the original text to the characteristics of a particular country, region or population group. The main idea of localization is not only to make the content of the text available in the target language as if it were the original language of the message (in this respect, localization purposes are in agreement with translation purposes), but to make it in such a way as if it were the source culture of the message as well.

Such interpretation of localization provides the bases for ideas that “localization” is just another term for “pragmatic adaptation” – a translation strategy widely used by translators and discussed by translation scholars long before the term “localization” appeared. This point of view is expressed in V.V Sdobnikov’s work, who supposes that “the so called localization and transcreation presented by many scholars as specific forms of translators’ activity do not deserve this status, and must be viewed as types of translation proper” [7, p.1448]. We should mention, that most references in this paper are from translation studies and only a few are on the problems of localization, retrieved from the sites of translation agencies and blogs, not from scientific papers.

If localization is viewed only as a particular translation strategy of adaptation to a particular culture or region, as it is described in many papers on the theory of translation – of cause, it must be understood as a translation device, not as a different from translation activity. From this point of view, localization, or domestication, is an opposite strategy to foreignization, also widely used in translation practice and considered by translation theorists as another possible approach to translate culture-bound elements. In this perspective, localization, domestication, and foreignization were mentioned in the book by U. Eco [8].

The thing is that localization exists nowadays mostly as a special cross-language and cross-cultural activity which has not received a comprehensive scientific foundation yet. As A.Levitsky and A. Kondakov point out, there is an obvious “lacuna” (a gap) in scientific consideration of localization practice (quoted from the work of T. Fedulenkovа [9, p. ]). It should be noted that many papers on localization are written by undergraduate and postgraduate students or young scientists, at least in Russia.

The key to this dilemma lies in the fact that both activities – translation and localization – are considered mainly in language-and-culture perspective, whereas as we mentioned before, localization incorporates technology and marketing issues which are often ignored by translation theorists.

Localization is not only about how to render words in a different language, it is more about how to make the target language audience pay for the product containing these words. If translation theory concentrates its attention on the translator’s activity and his/her choice-making, in localization perspective the choice-making is probably least of all falls on the translator.

Localization integrates a product in a complex system of interdependent elements which may be called “culture” only in a very general sense – this system may include legal aspect, technical aspect, marketing aspect and global knowledge. The correlation between localization and globalization is discussed in the work by Ying-ting Chuang [10]. It may sound paradoxical, but localization is a particular way of internationalization and globalization. Probably, that’s why localization has started as a special practice in the field of communication technologies (for websites, mobile apps, software, video games, multimedia content) – to help global achievements become local. In this respect, translation as an activity of rendering words in another language makes only a little part in the big localization process.

Results and discussion

Taking into consideration the description of the problem given above, we may say that the task of transferring movie titles into another language can also be discussed in two perspectives: 1) from the translation point of view which makes the translator to be responsible for exact wording in the target language; 2) from the localization point of view which implies some methods of choice-making regardless the translator’s position and abilities.

We may discussed movie title translation from transformation point of view. If transformation of the title is done because of difference in the language structures, we consider this type of transformations as translation; if there is a complete change in the title wording though a direct translation is possible, then the reasons may lie in the field of localization needs.

Analysis of the practical material shows that there are at least three main ways to render the original English names of films into Russian.

Direct (literal) translation of the film title. For example, the name of the movie Raya and the Last Dragon is rendered into Russian as Райя и последний дракон where direct translation of the words is used. Other examples of literal translation of movie titles
include: *Dune* – Дюна; *Nobody – Никто*; *Godzilla vs. Kong – Годзилла против Конга; Oxygene – Оксиген; *Reminiscence – Воспоминания*; *Eternals – Вечные; The Virtuoso – Виртуоз*, and many others.

The cases of literal translation of film titles meet the criteria of localization the least of all, as there is virtually no change of name associated with the peculiarities of the culture or film market of the recipient country.

The cases of direct translation can be attributed to the methods of transferring the name by transliteration or transcription if the names of the films include words representing personal names: *Cruella – Круэлла; Tom and Jerry – Том и Джери*, etc.

Partial transformation of the film title. There can be different reason for this type of title change. The most obvious is connected with the structural peculiarities of the target language which make it impossible to keep the original grammar or word order. For example, Zack Snyder's *Justice League* translates as *Лига справедливости* Zaka Snydera, there is a change of the word order according to grammar structure of the Russian language. In the titles *Wrath of Man – Гнев человеческий, Chaos Walking – Поступь хаоса*, there is a change of the part of speech (conversion).

Complete change of the original title. One obvious reason of complete transformation of the title is connected with language peculiarities of the vocabulary of the target language, such as absence of the equivalent word, or possible connotations of the equivalent word in the target language unsuitable to the original title, or the equivalent is quite a rarely used word, so it won’t make a catchy name.

In Russian theory of translation such transformations which lead to a complete change of the original wording are described as “functional substitution” – the use of words or set collocations which have similar pragmatic functions in the target language. The functional substitution is a kind of pragmatic adaptation, based on the rules of the language use – an “in-language” solution without going out of the language semantics and words relations.

Another obvious reason for changing the title is connected with marketing goals and general cultural background of the recipient audience. This type of pragmatic adaptation is usually done with the help of localization strategy. The main idea is to make such a film title which would seem to be originally created specifically for this target audience. Here are some examples:

1) *Secret Magic Control Agency – Генезис, Гретель и Агентство Магии,*

here we see references to the famous characters by brothers Grimm in the Russian version of the title.

2) *Women – Препод*; *История Галатеи,* there is a reference to the legend about Galatea and the slang word *Препод* in the Russian version of this name.

3) *Mortal Kombat – Мортал Комбат,* the title was transferred into Russian with the help of transcription, though literal translation is possible: *Смертельная схватка.* Presumably, the version *Мортал Комбат* was chosen due to only one reason: the original name of the video game was translated this way, so it was a subsequent decision to give the same name to the film. The same is with *PAW Patrol: The Movie – Щенячий патруль в кино* (Russian kids are familiar with the cartoon series titled *Щенячий патруль* in the Russian language), etc.


5) *Queenpins – Отчаянные аферистки,* the choice-making is connected with the success of the TV series *Desperate Housewives* which title was rendered in the Russian language as *Отчаянные домохозяйки,* though the original title *Queenpins* shows no connection with *Desperate Housewives.*

In the above examples, the Russian versions of the original titles provide associations with general background knowledge of Russian viewers making the title more attractive. Other titles are changed to make the Russian version more informative to the audience, for instance:

6) *Free Guy – Главный герой,* the film tells a story of a clerk who appears to be a video game character. Speakers of Russian use the collocation *главный герой* to speak about video game characters.

7) *Outside the Wire – Смертельная зона, Jolt – Красотка на взводе, Old – Время, My Son – Исчезнувший,* these examples emphasize the plot of the movie by changing the titles in the Russian language, though literal translations of the mentioned original titles are also possible.

The discussed examples of the pragmatic adaptation of the movie titles can be interpreted from localization point of view. In this case, localization is a translation strategy aimed at adaptation of the language product (the movie title) to the target audience’s culture and background knowledge. However, since the movie title does not exist without the movie itself, pragmatic adaptation of the title is only a part of the process of the cinematic product localization – its adaptation to the market of the recipient country. In this respect, the translator’s job must be considered as integrated into the work of a big localization team, making the whole team (not only the translator) responsible for choosing appropriate words for the movie title.

The main methods used for rendering titles of feature films into Russian are:

1) direct translation,
2) partial transformation of the title, usually in accordance with the rules of the language,
3) complete change of the original title.

The latter listed item partly refers to localization (except the cases of functional substitution).

The main motives for the localization of film titles are:

1) to integrate the name of the new film into the system of films already known to the Russian audience.
or other cultural realities with the help of so-called "references" to familiar nominations,
2) to give extra publicity to the film with the disclosure of the main intrigue of the movie,
3) to make the film more attractive to a specific target audience.

Conclusion
Localization as a special practice dealing with cross-language translation is a reality of today’s life. It needs further scientific investigation from terminological point of view as well as in the perspective of its relation to translation practices, from the one hand, and different connected activities, from the other hand.

At the moment, there are at least two approaches to consider localization. The first interprets localization as a translation strategy and incorporates it into translation practices. The second refers to localization of a product which may need language localization as well. The second approach is wider and, actually, may include the first. Both approaches need further scientific development. The study of localization as a special language practice may provide a novel view on the questions of perception of language expressions and selection (choice-making) mechanisms in finding language solutions.

References