Translation Talk

Interviews conducted by students in the M.A.
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Jon Ritzdorf has been working in localization since 2000 and began teaching as an adjunct university instructor in 2003. Over the years he has educated nearly a thousand students in translation technologies, website and software localization, as well as the business side of the translation industry. Ritzdorf regularly presents on localization topics at translation industry conferences and has also been interviewed and quoted by the Associated Press for his insight on the subject. When not teaching, he works as a "Solutions Architect" for Moravia (one of the world's ten largest language service providers), where he consults on globalization strategies for companies ranging from the Fortune 100 to the latest start-ups. In 2012, he received an award in "Teaching Excellence" from New York University.

What is localization to you?

Localization is an encompassing entity where business, UI/UX design, technology and translation intersect. 99% of localization projects are digital products. Working in this field also means I do not work with one specific language anymore. You need to deal with all the languages in this field.

How did you get into localization?

I studied Mandarin in the 1990s. CAT (Computer-Assisted Translation) tools were just starting to get some recognition in 2001. Then a lot of language-independent software emerged. I now have my own practice and I teach at universities on localization strategies.

What was the past of localization? How will localization be different in the future?

In the past, businesses that were doing well domestically would want to push their products to international markets. Nowadays, you see more of a trend where products are ready to go international from the beginning. This changes their business strategy significantly.
The cost of internationalization is significantly lower now. I can buy inexpensive Chinese headphones on Amazon even if their translation is not great. But for me as a consumer, that amount of internationalization was enough and is probably enough for them to keep the business going. Technology is a big enabler and with the increasing ease of distributing information, this industry is expanding rapidly.

How does localization and design intersect with each other?

There are many ways design and localization collaborate or rely on each other. For one thing, good localization work depends on insightful designers who are familiar with the local culture. Sometimes it is difficult to account for the nuance in a specific local market, so it is important to have designers who are also consumers.

How do you strategize localization?

This really depends on the product and the kind of audience you want to reach. The "traditional" way would be to market towards western European countries, North America and East Asian countries. However, the categorization still depends on the goal of the product. For example, I may need to categorize markets based on their regulation for bit coins if my client is a digital currency exchange software. To know what is really going on in local markets, we also rely heavily on our local translators and data from different search engines.

What are some good examples of localization work?

Obviously, the big tech companies like Apple do great localization work. Localization is good when companies take the time to "transcreate" for specific markets instead of just translation. Tableau invests heavily on localization work. Indeed also has different interfaces for different countries, specifically crafting their user experience for the population. Shopify, the #a startup also has very clean design and good localization examples.

This interview was conducted by CeCe Liu.