

Multi-language communities, technology and perceived quality

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Abstract. With thousands of language communities worldwide with ever growing access to technology and internet communication, the demand for translation of content has been growing steadily. Technology like machine translation and computer assisted translation, among others, offers partial solutions for increased production of translated content. However, other challenges like the question of how quality should be defined and measured require active, practice oriented and purposeful collaboration of translation and localisation communities.

This paper outlines on-going PhD research to investigate quality perceptions related to volunteer translations, as well as how translation quality is defined, measured and managed in volunteer translation communities.

1 Introduction

With the ubiquitous presence of the English language on the web it is easy to forget that there are in fact thousands of languages used throughout the world by their respective language communities. (Lewis et al. 2015) While contact between language communities and subsequent translation of content is certainly not a new phenomenon, the increased use of technology has not only increased demand for translation of content and localisation of software, but also offers partial solutions for increased production of translated content. Such solutions like computer assisted translation and machine translation, among others, are already utilized

within the translation and localisation industry to varying degrees. However, productivity is only one part of the equation.

One of the great challenges in today's translation and localisation industry is quality. Apart from the question of how to achieve quality and balancing it against cost and time, the difficulty is in how to define and by extension measure quality due to a lack of a single, objective, agreed upon measurement approach. (Drugan 2013)

While numerous attempts to define and measure localisation quality have been made, progress has been slow on an industry-wide level as well as in academia. (Drugan 2013) One explanation can be found in the great diversity of organisations, individuals, contents and projects with diverse needs and requirements. (Drugan 2013) An opportunity to move towards a solution to these challenges can be found in the technological advances made that enable social localisation and translation crowdsourcing since they have the potential to enable open, collaborative decision-making. (Dombek 2014) However, the mere introduction of technology is unlikely to produce the desired results without the active, practice oriented and purposeful collaboration of its users.

One platform that offers both, a technological solution and a large, focused user community is Trommons (Translation Commons). Due to this combination, the platform and its focused user community has the potential of being used to define localisation quality and ways to achieve and measure it. Trommons is an open source, web-based platform that connects more than 8000 registered volunteer translators with communities that require their services free of charge through nearly 200 non-profit organisations registered on the platform. However, the members of the user community communicate and interact with each other very little overall. As a result, Trommons offers the rare opportunity to trace perceptions of quality in volunteer work prior to knowledge management mechanisms, during their implementation as well as their effects. In order to preserve the autonomy of the community and thereby not impair motivation, the instrument proposed for managing knowledge is that of a Community of Practice (CoP) (Wenger et al. 2002), which will in addition allow comparisons between how the localisation industry views quality from a generally top-down perspective compared to a bottom-up approach with involvement of a community of practitioners as a whole.

This paper introduces on-going PhD research that utilizes these opportunities.

2 Overview of PhD research

The focus of PhD research and primary research question is the impact of a quality focused CoP on the perceived translation quality of volunteer translations. Research will be presented in a series of papers, which have the following focus areas and will be focused around the Trommons community.

Focus area 1: To what extent does the community have a shared understanding of localisation quality as well as a shared terminology to describe localisation quality?

Focus area 2: How does information on translation cost change reviewers' perception of quality? What attitudes and emotions do reviewers and buyers have towards translation based on the information on cost they have?

Focus area 3: How is translation quality defined, managed and measured in other volunteer translation communities? What is the process through which the volunteer community defines and discusses these areas with the implementation of a CoP?

Focus area 4: How is cost-based perception of quality influenced by additional information on processes and guidelines, generated through the CoP?

Potential alternative for focus area 4: How is cost based perception of quality influenced by additional information on processes and guidelines, generated through a survey of quality definitions in other volunteer translation communities and those used in the localisation industry?

3 Past research

To answer question 1, feedback comments provided by volunteer and partner organisation reviewers for volunteer translations on Trommons were labelled to categorise the quality issues described. The number of occurrences of those labels was then used for further quantitative analysis.

Feedback comments that use label names, synonyms of the names and terminological subsets were labelled in a separate step. The number of occurrences of such labels was then contrasted with the findings for the first research question to show quality issues that reviewers tend to describe in more definitive terms vs. those where they use descriptive phrases or a wider range of terms instead.

Through the analysis of feedback comments we showed a degree of shared understanding of quality aspects. Some (stylistics, grammar, spelling and

terminology) were mentioned significantly more often than others (design, verity, register, and the aspects of accuracy that concern missing or erroneously added text). Of those that were mentioned more frequently, stylistics stood out since the terminology used to describe such issues was significantly less consistent and precise than for grammar, spelling or terminology.

These findings were consistent with O'Brien (2012), who showed in her analysis of eleven Quality Evaluation models that the highest level of consensus was found for the category which commonly included grammar, syntax, punctuation and spelling. The "Style" category was present in seven out of eleven models and ruled out explicitly by one (J2450). "Of the top four 'Language' errors, 'Style' is the one with the least consensus across models." (O'Brien 2012)

4 Future research

To answer question 2, a future study will consist of two parts: A survey questionnaire and a translation evaluation part. In addition to basic demographics (level of involvement in the Trommons community, experience in localisation and language background of the participant), the survey questionnaire will provide an opportunity to gain insights into attributions, emotions and "naive theories" (Deval et al. 2012) towards translations depending on the information participants have about them.

In the context of discount stores, Zielke (2014) has shown that emotions, which can be positive (getting a good deal) or negative (shame or guilt felt through not meeting personal goal of social responsibility) mediate the impact of price perceptions and expectations on shopping intentions. (Zielke 2014) These emotions and cognitions can be influenced by attributions or causes ascribed to low prices and "(...) may help to understand differences in value perception and price-related emotions." (Zielke 2014) Among the attributions and emotions, value perception, guilt and inferior quality as well as shame and efficiency attribution have considerable total effects.

While "(t)he inferior quality attribution always had the strongest total effect, independently of the customers' price consciousness. Furthermore, the level of the inferior quality attribution is similar for less and highly price conscious customers. This underlines the importance of research on price-quality inferences." (Zielke 2014)

Such inferences are commonly made without consumers having the complete information necessary to form judgements. To compensate for this, a variety of strategies are used to fill in gaps to make judgements and choices. (Deval et al. 2012) Depending on the theories consumers have about certain attributes, they

will make different inferences from the same information. Based on the theory formed,

“(...) participants formed more favourable product evaluations when the advertisement featured a high price versus low price when quality was primed, but the reverse pattern was obtained when value was active.” (Deval et al. 2012)

Rather than repeating the study conducted by Deval et al. (2012) in a new setting, we will gather information on attributions, emotions and inferences through a survey questionnaire.

However, since the volunteer translations are free rather than low-cost and since they are produced by volunteers whose motives can be assumed to be altruistic, free translations will be introduced as an additional variable to low-cost translation. The expectation is that the free volunteer translations will be viewed in a more positive light than low-cost translations and that attributions will be more positive.

The second part of the study will present participants with multiple translations which were done by expensive, low-cost or free volunteer translators. Participants will be asked to evaluate the translations and select their preferred one, as well as rank translations according to quality. No guidelines on quality or definition will be provided. Some of the translations will include information on cost, while others will have no such information as a control set. The expectation is that the information on the cost of translation will impact the perceived quality of participants and that both, expensive and volunteer translations will be favoured over low-cost translations.

Question 3 will be investigated through case studies and literature research for other volunteer communities. For the Trommons community, a CoP has been suggested to a part of the community and its formation will be supported as far as possible by the authors. The process of forming the CoP and discussions around quality definitions and measurements will be observed and recorded for a further case study.

However, the potential limitation of this approach lies within some limitations in CoPs themselves. One aspect is that CoPs cannot be formed or established but its spontaneous emergence and development can be supported. (Roberts 2006) This means that potentially, no CoP will be emerge for the Trommons community. In addition, the predispositions of the CoP members might impact the direction the discussions take related to quality. (Roberts 2006) These predispositions could lead to the CoP becoming static or great diversity leading to conflict. A lack of diversity could lead to oversimplification and unimaginative solutions. Some, but not all, situations can be positively impacted by providing new impulses or encouraging conflict management.

Finally, a challenge to the CoP could be that of spatial reach. This is especially relevant when considering the differences in managing hard and soft knowledge. Hard knowledge can be easily articulated and captured while soft knowledge is based on experience, internalized work knowledge and tacit knowledge like how to use a word processor. While managing hard knowledge is well established, sharing of soft knowledge poses greater problems. (Hildreth et al. 2000)

Within traditional CoPs, practitioners use story telling in order to exchange information, help newcomers move from the periphery of the CoP to being a fully participating member of the community and in order to solve problems collaboratively or in short, to share soft knowledge.

To some extent, it is possible to record this soft knowledge and transfer it to a distributed environment, but it may not be as simple since the listener needs their soft knowledge to interpret the stories. (Hildreth et al. 2000)

One advantage the Trommons community has in regards to spatial reach is that the domain (translation/localisation) does not require situated knowledge creation and problem solving; instead it is inherently suited for a distributed exchange due to its contents generally being written text in digital format. However, it could be expected that facilitation of participation might pose a challenge in the creation and evolution of the CoP, as well as in the development of a sense of trust and identity. In addition, where a local CoP will face a natural element of peripherality with newcomers joining on the periphery and moving to be participating members as they gain knowledge of the domain and trust within the CoP, a distributed CoP for Trommons would also face physical and temporal periphery, which would likely have an impact on the notion of participation as well as the manner in which knowledge is shared and developed. Depending on whether the CoP will be successfully established and generates output that can then be used for further research, question 4 will be answered by repeating the study outlined for question 2, with either of the following variables added:

4.a - Participants receive information on the quality definitions formulated by the Trommons community, and will be asked to evaluate perceived quality based on whether the translator has used the quality definitions for their work or not.

4.b - Participants receive information on quality definitions based on those formulated by other volunteer translation communities as well as standards commonly used in the localisation industry. Participants will be asked to evaluate perceived quality based on whether the translator has used the quality definitions for their work or not.

We welcome and appreciate thoughts on the research outlined, especially on the questions we are asking and the approach used to answer them.

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