Interpro
TRANSLATION SOLUTIONS

Localizing eLearning Programs for an International Audience

eLearning is here to stay - globally

Because of the numerous advantages that eLearning-based education provides to organizations, eLearning is not only going to remain an effective delivery platform for training, it is projected to show significant growth in the coming years.

In 2011, the worldwide market for self-paced eLearning was $35.6 billion.[1] At that time, the annual growth rate was projected to be 7.6%, or $51.5 billion by 2016. Although 7.6% was the estimated average growth rate, different regions around the world have been experiencing much higher growth rates:

Asia	17.3%
Eastern Europe	16.9%
Africa	15.2%
Latin America	14.6% [2]

Revenues will reach $53.0 billion for the worldwide market for self-paced eLearning by 2018.[3]

What is fueling this growth? Primarily it is a combination of three points:

1. Course design and implementation speed
2. Savings to organizations in terms of capital expenditures
3. Reduction in operational expenses

Given the above growth rates, it is universally accepted that self-paced eLearning is not going away anytime soon. It is also universally accepted that while English is the primary language of eLearning course development, eLearning localization is critical to reaching a wider audience and overall program success.

Today's tools facilitate localization

In the early days of Flash-based eLearning localization, developing eLearning courses was a time-intensive, manual process, and this was one of the major roadblocks to multilingual eLearning course availability. Thanks to development tools available today, eLearning localization is now relatively straightforward.

Popular state of the art tools such as Adobe Captivate incorporate XML file export and import for a simplified and streamlined localization process.

For example, Captivate functionality includes the export of captions to a text or an XML Localization Interchange File Format (XLIFF) file as well as the subsequent import of the translated text file into a copy of the original project file. Tools such as Articulate StoryLine support right-to-left languages including Arabic and Hebrew. These tools also support double-byte character sets for languages such as Chinese (Simplified and Traditional), Japanese, and Korean.

Technology available today eliminates many of the barriers that organizations used to face when localizing their eLearning programs into multiple languages, making eLearning localization more feasible to those who may have previously been apprehensive about localizing their courses.

eLearning components to be localized

Organizations differ in their approach to eLearning course design and to the components they include therein. Examples of common features that most eLearning programs include are as follows:

- Content/narrative translation and formatting
- Graphics
- Mouse cursor movement captures
- Navigation/action buttons
- Quizzes/assessments
- Subtitles/voice-over recording

eLearning components to be localized

Content/narrative translation and formatting

The program content will include all on-screen text which will need to be translated and formatted. For example, text that is translated into languages that expand such as French, German, and Spanish, will need to be reformatted so that it appears properly on the screen originally designed for English text. This can present quite a challenge with more complex screens and is best done by an experienced multilingual desktop publishing (DTP) specialist.

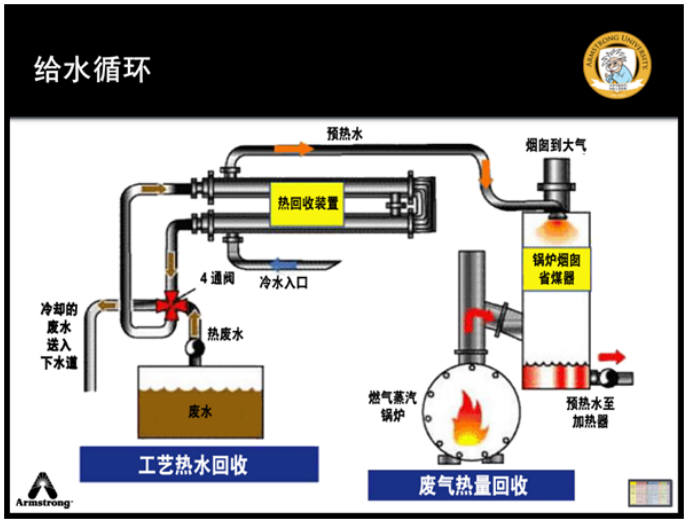
The content and presenter notes typically make up the course narrative which will include descriptions of what is being discussed, as well as instructions and tips for the user. The narrative may take the form of a true voice narration, or may be in the form of on-screen subtitles.

Whether using voice narration or subtitles, the timing of the localized application will need to be adjusted in order to account for matching the voice or subtitles with the on-screen text. It wouldn't make much sense for the narrator to be speaking about items in one slide when a different slide suddenly appears. The cadence of each language will dictate the timing of how long a screen appears, and must account for the amount of time it takes to narrate the translated text or for someone to read the translated subtitle before a new slide appears.

It is important to ensure the script matches the audio recording prior to having a voice talent record the multilingual course. If a script is not available, a transcribing/script creation phase will need to take place.

Graphics

On-screen graphics may contain text which needs to be translated. When text is embedded in the graphic, the text will need to be reproduced in an external file and translated. Then you can localize the original graphic. "Localizing" can be defined as replacing the source language text with the target language text and formatting it so that it appears correctly. As this step is frequently done using a graphics editing application, it is most commonly performed by a DTP resource rather than by a translator.



Graphic image localized to Simplified Chinese[4]

eLearning components to be localized

Mouse cursor movement captures

Due to the instructional nature of most eLearning programs, there can be cursor movements pointing to items and actions that the narrator is explaining. These cursor movements need to be reflected in the localized eLearning program. Timing of these cursor movements needs to be synced with the accompanying narration.

Navigation/action buttons

Depending on how they are designed, eLearning programs will often incorporate navigational or action-related buttons which will contain translatable text. Examples of these include buttons such as PREV (previous), NEXT, SUBMIT, and CONTINUE. Like embedded graphics text, this content usually needs to be manually extracted, translated, and then reinserted by a DTP specialist.

Explanation of course navigation[5]

eLearning components to be localized

Quizzes/assessments

Common components of eLearning programs are quizzes and assessments. Translation of these is usually included in the core content which gets translated, with the possible exception of any buttons which may serve as prompts for a user action. Quizzes and assessments usually incorporate a variety of questions such as:

- True/false
- Multiple choice
- Fill in the blank
- Typing in a response
- Matching items with pictures

It is important to note that especially in the case of course participants asking to type in a response, the translator and the course designer need to work closely together to “teach” the program which responses in the target language trigger a correct or an incorrect response.

Subtitles/voice-over recording

Development budgets may control whether or not subtitles or actual voice narration is used when designing a course. Subtitling is far less expensive and time-consuming than providing a narrator. The same is true about eLearning localization: it costs far less and requires less time to translate subtitles than to record the translated narration using a live voice. Studio time, directors, and professional voice talent all add up to what can be a costly proposition. The end result of a voice-over, however, is a much more professional-looking and sounding product.

Because of the cost of professional studio voice-over recording services, it is strongly advisable to provide your client a copy of the translated narrative to sign off on before the recording begins. Changes at this stage are quite harmless and cost little to nothing.

Additionally, if the subject matter being taught is complex, requiring particular attention to be paid on-screen in order to follow what the narrator is explaining, a voice-over may be the best option. Voice-over is suitable because participants will be listening (in their native language), watching, and learning instead of being forced to read subtitles and potentially miss some key elements on the slides.

eLearning localization workflow

Workflows for eLearning localization projects are somewhat alike to software or mobile app localization projects. While the language of the “user interface” changes, the course’s core functionality, look, and feel should not change with it.

Conclusion

Delivering training via eLearning platforms is a proven approach and is projected to increase year over year. Your organization spends significant resources designing, developing, and testing eLearning programs in order to more effectively educate clients on your products or services, as well as employees on internally focused topics. By providing that course in a single language only, you are excluding everyone who does not understand that language, or who does not understand it sufficiently to be able to learn in it.

Utilizing eLearning localization to make your eLearning and other computer-based training curricula available in multiple languages will serve to increase the number of people who can benefit from this educational tool. Additionally, comprehension and retention levels will be dramatically improved as people learn in a language they can understand and work best in.

References

[1] eLearning Industry. Available from www.elearningindustry.com

[2] Docebo. E-Learning market trends & forecast 2014-2016 report. Available from https://www.docebo.com/landing/contactform/elearning-market-trends-and-forecast-2014-2016-docebo-report.pdf

[3] Ambient Insight Research. Available from http://www.ambientinsight.com/Reports/eLearning.aspx

[4] All product screens displayed in this document are used with the kind permission of Armstrong, Inc. The Armstrong logo and Armstrong University are registered trademarks of Armstrong International, Inc.

[5] Ibid.

About the author

Ralph Strozza, Founder and CEO

Working in the translation and localization industry since 1982, Ralph takes a modern approach to localization in the 21st century and offers new solutions to clients in the eLearning and technology fields.