

TRANSLATION PROBLEMS IN WEBSITE LOCALIZATION FROM ENGLISH TO BULGARIAN: THE CASE OF FERRYHOPPER.COM

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The paper deals with a case study of the Bulgarian localization of the ferry ticket platform Ferryhopper, aiming to shed light on the current processes of localization in terms of technology and on the localization-specific issues translators and reviewers encounter as part of the website localization process from English into Bulgarian. The study covers some of the main technological factors affecting the linguists' work in localization: the translation environment, the role of internationalization, and the navigation between the textual and the digital levels. The study further illustrates the resulting translation problems and the respective solutions adopted.

Key words: website localization, internationalization, translation problems, English-Bulgarian translation, GILT

In industry discourse, translation is commonly described as a mere step in the localization process – its indispensable nature has always been admitted, but only with the aim of showing how much more there is to bringing your product to an international market than linguistic concerns (Jimenez-Crespo 2013: 14) or merely limiting it to “artificial equivalence” (Pym 2004: 3–4). Opening a random recent industry article on localization solidifies these claims: localization professionals Rikkert Engels and Maiju Nurminen discuss the importance of integrating and connecting localization to other business modalities such as UXD (user experience design) and marketing and conclude that “we cannot reduce localization to translation or transcreation” (Engels, Nurminen 2021). While such an expansive approach to localization is absolutely logical from a business perspective, things look a bit more complex from the perspective of translation studies and translator training. The interdisciplinarity of localization is undeniable, this is why it is all the more relevant for everyone in the localization chain to be aware of it

and of the ways it affects their own tasks. When it comes to languages with small online influence and presence such as Bulgarian, the question comes of how well language professionals are prepared for the localization process. A quick overview of academic language programs in Bulgaria shows there are no courses dedicated solely to localization, meaning graduate Bulgarian translators either seek further international training or they “learn the ropes” with real projects they get contracted for, the latter being more likely and inevitable since foreign courses and trainings could only provide the bigger technological picture of localization but would not link it to the local linguistic and cultural contexts.

Jimenez-Crespo finds that the aspects additional to translation which the industry focuses on in its definitions of localization often already belong to other translation modalities, thus, such distinctions could hardly bring localization out of the scope of translation studies. What can definitely be singled out, however, is the “active co-operation between translators-localizers and development engineers, and the need for a comprehensive understanding of technological issues on the part of translators.” (Jimenez-Crespo 2013: 16–17). Furthermore, the bidimensionality of the website genre is reflected in the bidimensionality of the translation process. The same way the website works on two levels both as linear chunks of text and as a medium to navigate (Askehave, Nielsen 2005: 127–128), the translator has to always be aware of the two levels of translation: linguistic and technological. Therefore, the dynamic equivalence of the solutions offered does not only rely on linguistic and cultural considerations, but also on pure technologically functional adequacy. If we only look at the superstructural technological restrictions (i.e. restrictions in the product’s code), however, no ubiquitous solutions can be offered. Instead, the technological factors should be approached through the lens of a contrastive analysis of the language pair at hand combined with a thorough understanding of the product context. The current case study aims to illustrate this correlation between the textual and the digital levels in translation for localization from English into Bulgarian and the respective translation and interdisciplinary solutions that apply to it.

TYPES OF PROBLEMS & INTERNATIONALIZATION

The paper is based on observations made during the review of the Bulgarian translation of the Ferryhopper platform’s user interface. The user interface (UI) of the Ferryhopper website consists of approximately 8,500 words grouped in almost 1,300 keys. In TMS terms, a key is similar to what a segment is in standard CAT tools – an individual translation unit, which in most cases serves one purpose in the UI of the product and cor-

responds to one UI key in the code of the product. This correlation between translation units and the digital superstructure of the product is one of the main factors affecting decisions in the translation process and it will be the focus of the current paper.

The other main group of localization-specific translation problems encountered during the project implementation were genre-specific problems – where the solution depends on the salient communicative purposes and moves/links (Askehave, Nielsen 2005: 132–133) in combination with the technological setting and/or the respective linguistic asymmetries. Such problems included the choice of form of address (formal, informal singular, informal plural); the translation of call-to-action buttons, which in English use the infinitive, but in Bulgarian localization practice the choice is between formal imperative/informal plural imperative, informal singular imperative, and a verbal noun; issues with gender neutrality in addressing the platform users, as well as SEO-related issues which are integral to the website genre. Due to the relevant volume restrictions, these are not discussed in detail in the current paper and remain as an incentive for further research in translation problems in localization from English into Bulgarian.

The rigidity of the superstructural level, which we will be focusing on, is directly dependent on the extent to which the internationalization of a product has been implemented. Anastasiou and Schäler elaborate on LISA's¹ definition of internationalization and highlight its importance within the GILT² paradigm, placing it as a step at the development stage, before localization, that prevents a great many consequent problems and waste of resources in localization (Anastasiou, Schäler 2009: 2).

In practical terms, this process involves all steps from simply building the product with the idea to allow texts to be extracted for translation to predicting any cultural and linguistic asymmetry and making the digital superstructure as flexible as possible as to allow the inclusion of new linguistic paradigms. Some standard internationalization practices involve allowing for a diversity of fonts, date formats and currencies to be used. On the linguistic level, however, internationalization should allow for even greater flexibility as linguistic asymmetries vary between any two pairs of languages, requiring translation shifts in one that will not be needed in the other. Oftentimes, localization translators find themselves with their hands tied due to lack of flexibility in the macrostructure which could have been avoided on a coding level, but has not been predicted by the development team or has not been considered a priority. In such situations, knowledge of the technological re-

¹ Localisation Industry Standards Association

² Globalisation, Internationalisation, Localisation and Translation

restrictions as well as of all linguistic asymmetries and the opportunities they offer is key to finding the most appropriate functional equivalent (and making the least compromise).

We will further see this interplay between text, context and technological blueprint illustrated as well as the respective strategies applied with some examples from the Ferryhopper project. In order to paint a full picture of this interaction, the environment in which the translation and revision of the texts took place is presented first.

TRANSLATION ENVIRONMENT

The tool of choice was Lokalise – a translation management system (TMS) for linking developers, product owners and translators. Currently, there are 36 such TMS platforms on the market (Nimdzi 2021) with Lokalise usually rating among the top ten³. Translation management systems build upon standard CAT tools and their text segmentation, focusing on and enhancing the features salient in localization, while also adding some that are either not common or entirely non-existent in standard CAT tools. Some of the localization-salient features include integrations with different software development platforms, multilingual projects, context features, in-context communication between stakeholders across all teams involved – technical, management, marketing, product etc.

Target text functionality (and purpose) in UI localization is of utmost importance – the translation could be semantically equivalent and culturally appropriate, but if it does not perform its inherent function in the overall digital structure, it cannot be deemed successful nor correct. Given that UI strings are taken out of their context in order to be translated, providing the translators with relevant details about positioning, functionality and restrictions for each string is crucial for the final quality and proper functioning of the localized product. In the case of Lokalise, these are realized through the following features:

- screenshot add-ons – help the linguist see the text they are translating in its most immediate context;
- tagging – allows the text uploader to tag keys, choosing any category they find useful; this can help sorting texts by the feature or page they are a part of;

³ <<https://blog.andovar.com/10-best-translation-management-systems-tms-on-the-market>> (07.11.2021); <<https://www.atltranslate.com/articles/translation-management-systems-review>> (07.11.2021); <<https://rubric.com/en-US/translation-management-system-comparison/>> (09.11.2021)

- key descriptions – allow adding any extra information that was taken into account into the UI creation or should be considered in translation. (Fig. 1)

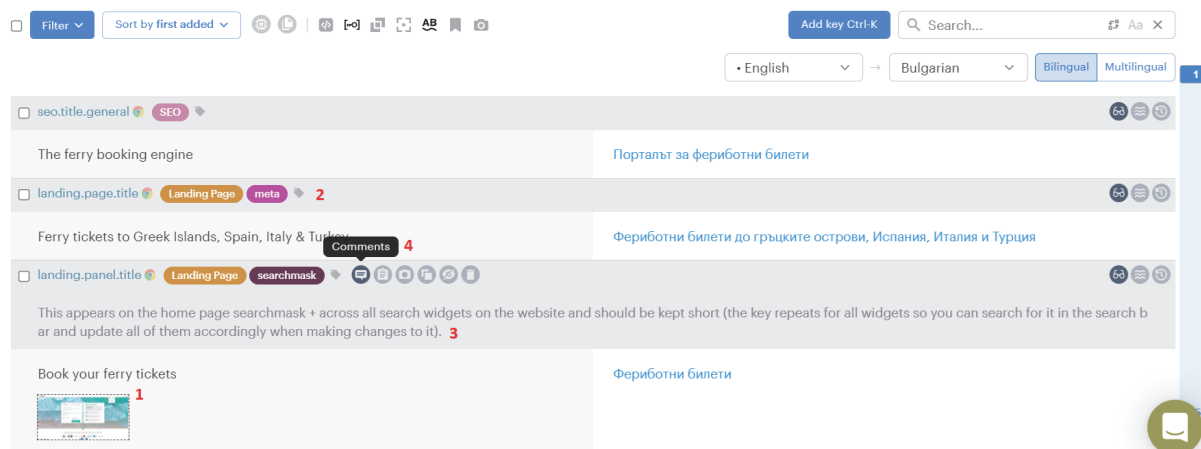


Fig. 1 Translation environment with functionalities: (1) screenshot add-ons; (2) tags; (3) key descriptions & (4) comments.⁴

In the beginning of the Ferryhopper project these functionalities had not been made full use of and after the project was finalized and the website launched, special measures were taken to optimize the process utilizing all TMS features. The alternative – when the context you, as a linguist, are provided with is not sufficient – is to send queries to the client until you are able to render the original in a fully-informed way. To this end, project participants made use of Lokalise’s comments functionality which creates a direct channel between the linguist and all other stakeholders involved. The result is a quicker, streamlined process as the need for additional query channels is eliminated. Integrating this extra step helps the linguist move between the textual and macro product structures within a universal environment – thus, they can keep their focus on the task at hand without sacrificing quality.

Another language-specific problem was that, as a minority language, Bulgarian had not been integrated into the automated spell-check function and an additional out-of-tool step was required for this. This was yet another proof of minority languages’ presumed insignificance from a commercial point of view – a factor which inevitably leads to lesser quality in localization into minority languages.

Ultimately, despite some setbacks due to the occasional rigidity of the tool as well as the need for all parties involved to know it thoroughly in

⁴ User interface of Lokalise’s editor <<https://lokalise.com/>> (04.11.2021)

order to take advantage of the functionalities and automations it offers, the localization of the platform only benefited from the use of a TMS. From the linguists' perspective, not using such a platform would have translated into much more hours of sourcing information on queries and navigation external to the translation environment.

TRANSLATION PROBLEMS

The three types of problems due to limitations on the superstructural level in combination with lack of linguistic symmetry illustrated here include character limitation, hardcoded word order and/or lack of linguistic variation, and issues related to the use of dynamic placeholders for variables.

1. Character limitation

This proved to be the most “prolific” restriction in the localization of the Ferryhopper platform. In many keys, the length of the translation could not exceed a certain number of characters because, design-wise, the text would “break” and fold to a new line, outside of the visually appropriate space for it, or just not show fully. There were also some similar instances where the text represented a meta tag and SEO good practices suggest specific ranges for meta titles and descriptions respectively. This is representative of yet another additional aspect of websites as a digital genre and, respectively, a competence the localization professional needs, but it will not be covered for the purposes of this paper.

An example of such a superstructural restriction is the case with the words *vehicle/vehicles* and the phrase *no vehicle* (Fig. 2). If we apply what Pym calls “artificial equivalence”, the translation would be *(без) превозно средство/превозни средства*. However, the Bulgarian equivalent is more than double the size of the English source and the design does not allow for such a long phrase to be used. A standard strategy which can often be seen applied in mobile phone UI is the truncation of words and phrases, but this approach still proved futile (Fig. 3). After a consultation with the product team to determine what is covered by the term (cars, campers and motorcycles), the abbreviation *МИЦ* was chosen. To this end, the abbreviated word *бп.* was also added to cover the plural forms (Fig. 4) instead of using the visually heavy *МИЦ-ма*. At the testing stage, it was discovered that the addition of *бп.* was impossible in the singular because the same key (*vehicle*) had been used in two different places in the code

with different context (Fig. 5). It was also further decided to solve this on the superstructural level at a later redesign stage.

In addition, this restriction proved double-fold in tests because size and design depend on the device of access. With almost half of users accessing the platform from a mobile device, bugs in it could not be overlooked. Some of the translation shifts which worked for the website were still not enough of a solution for its mobile version. Since Bulgarian target equivalents generally prove longer than English source text, these extreme cases required the omission of whole words or phrases (Fig. 6). In these translation shifts, most crucial to the decision process was the functionality of the product (i.e. will the remaining text provide enough information to the user navigating the platform) which required thorough knowledge of its digital nature as well as close collaboration with the product and development teams.

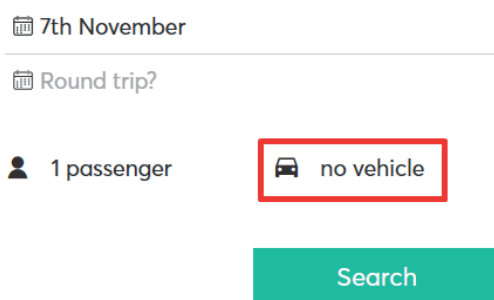


Fig. 2

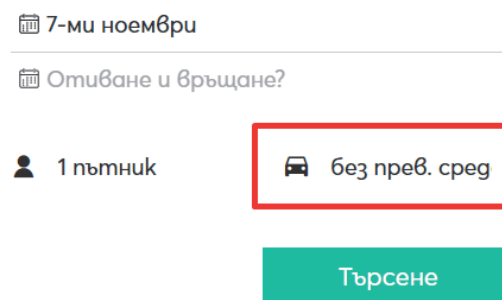


Fig. 3

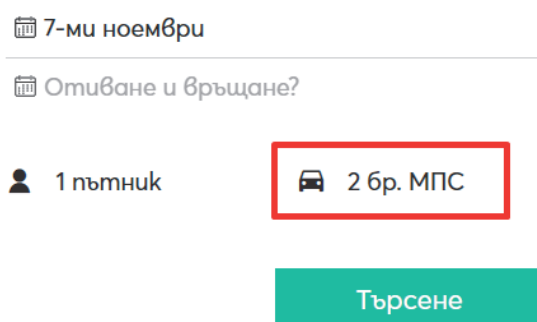


Fig. 4

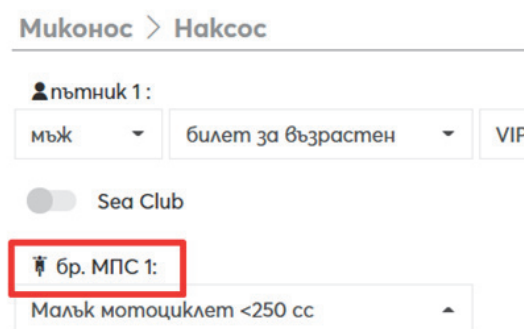


Fig. 5

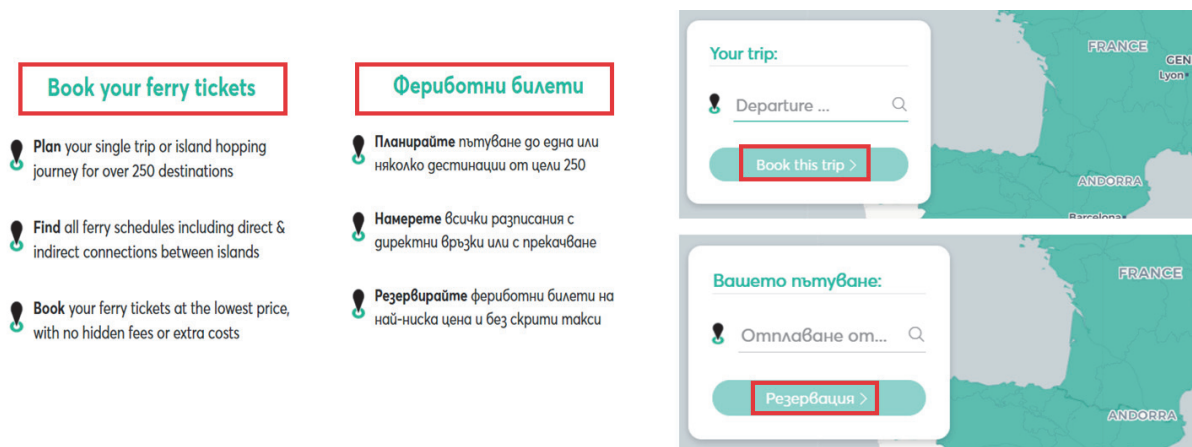


Fig. 6⁵

2. Hardcoded word order and lack of linguistic variation

These are the cases where there is a paradigm lacking in English and existent in Bulgarian, such as a plural form or variation by gender, where a word/phrase in English would require several grammatical variants in Bulgarian. Once again, a solution on the superstructural level could provide conditions for all variants possible, but the resources this would take if it has not been done in advance at the internationalization level are rarely justified.

An example for this type of restriction is the past participle *left* in Fig. 7 below. The issue here comes not only from the lack of symmetry but also, once again, from the superstructural level – the number is not integrated in the key (as it could have been done with a dynamic placeholder as illustrated in the next section), but is hardcoded instead, not allowing for change of word order. This automatically makes the use of a finite verb phrase impossible as it would have to hold initial position, making adjectives the only possible solution. A noun is also not an option because *left* is used in reference to a variety of entities (cabins, seats, etc.). The solution here was to use plural for all cases until the key is split for number, which also helped with the gender issue in the singular (Fig. 8). If steps are taken on the superstructural level to split the key, it would also make sense to make word order changes possible by integrating the number, in order to use a verb and avoid disagreement in terms of gender (e.g. instead of *1 свободно/а* for both *каюта* and *място*, the text would read *остава 1* or *остават 3*).

⁵ Figures 2–8 are taken from Ferryhopper’s English and Bulgarian booking flows respectively. <<https://www.ferryhopper.com>> (05.11.2021)

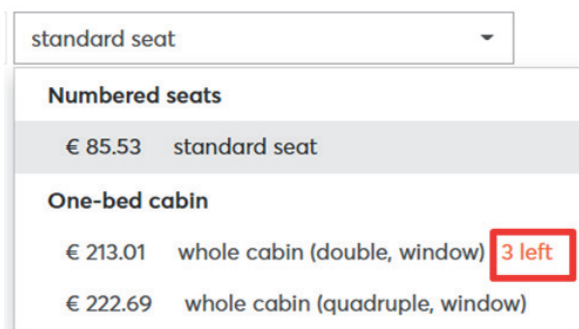


Fig. 7

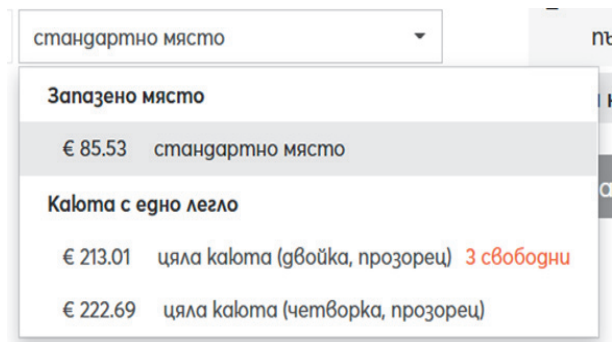


Fig. 8

3. Dynamic placeholders

Placeholders are items which are used to replace variables in text. The variables in Figure 9 are the trip ports and the respective ferry company operating the route. The linguistic asymmetry that the translator had to be aware of here is the variation of the preposition *with* (*c*) in Bulgarian depending on the initial letter of the company names that follows. Since such a variation does not justify the resources it would require to make it technologically possible for the software to “guess” the initial letter and adapt the translation accordingly, the respective solution could be to either use both forms of the preposition in the target text (using *Важно | Промяна в пътуването ви от X до X с(ъс) X*), or to find a translation shift which would not require the use of the preposition *c* in Bulgarian. The former approach can be seen in digital media in cases of gender variation (for example in Meta products we sometimes have phrases such as *неговата/нейната снимка* because the gender of the user has not been taken into account as a variable in the code of the product) however, in more simplistic software with minimalistic features, where the focus on UI design and UX is paramount to the product’s success, this would be considered a last resort as it would harm the visual experience of the user. This is all the more valid here, since the company name would be fed to the key in Latin script creating extra confusion. The solution we adopted instead was adding the company name in parenthesis. Without the linguists’ awareness of variables as a technological entity in localization and how they often interplay with linguistic asymmetry between source and target languages, however, these considerations would never be taken, leading to an ungrammatical solution. For example, when Booking uses variables for cities in Bulgarian, the combination *в Варна* can be seen (Fig 10).

English	Important Modification of your %origin% - %destination% crossing with %companyName%
Bulgarian	Важно Промяна в пътуването ви от %origin% до %destination% (%companyName%)

Fig. 9. UI key in Lokalise

Booking.com за Бизнес		
Държави	Домове	Всички видове настаняване
Области	Апартаменти	Хотели в Варна
Градове	Хотелски комплекси	Отзиви
Райони	Вили	Сезонни и ваканционни оферти
Летища	Хостели	
Хотели	Пансиони със закуска	
Забележителности	Къщи за гости	

Fig. 10. Booking.com footer⁶

CONCLUSION

In the translation of the Ferryhopper website, apart from translation issues observed in other translation modes, a specific set of problems could be defined in relation to the combination of the technological nature of the product and the linguistic asymmetries between English and Bulgarian. The respective solutions found and applied in the project implementation can be divided within two strategic groups:

- a. Continuous internationalization: adapting the superstructure to suit the respective linguistic needs (splitting translation units, rewriting code, redesign). Such solutions depend either on the developers' awareness of the respective linguistic perspective and possible textual-level issues that could arise due to superstructural rigidity; or on the communication channel between developers and linguists, where all parties coordinate and collaborate to build a comprehensive picture of the technological and linguistic factors involved and find the most adequate and efficient solution.
- b. Translation shifts which require the linguists' awareness of all superstructural limitations in the technological context and of the possible ways to overcome them within the respective language pair. Such solutions focus on functional equivalence and differ

⁶ <https://www.booking.com/city/bg/varna.bg.html?auth_success=1> (12.01.2022)

from what would have been offered had the textual units not been dependent on a higher superstructure.

Although the current case study is limited to only one website, a lot of its constituents are representative of any web service (e.g. home page, navigation, contact form, etc.). Furthermore, considering the technological factor, similar issues could be found in software localization as well. Thus, even though the paper cannot serve for exhaustive conclusions when it comes to website localization from English to Bulgarian, it provides foundation for further research into this area and could be used to inform course plans in localization from English into Bulgarian. What can be done in translator training for localization, for instance, is to put more focus on interpersonal skills and a deeper understanding of all technologies involved and on the typology of translation shifts available in situations where technology adds an extra layer to the linguist's decision-making process.

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