

The digital tenor in Website translation: a Spanish web corpus study.

The translation of websites, known as website localization (Dunne, 2006; LISA, 2003), represents a new translation process that has grown exponentially during the last several years. Website localization, whose economic importance has already surpassed software localization (Schäler, 2005), was developed by modifying and adapting processes that were already set in place by software localizers (Yunker, 2003). At the same time, a new kind of language has emerged on this medium (Crystal, 2001), a language characterized, among other aspects, by a reduction in the level of formality. This has been referred to as “digital tenor” (Janoschka, 2003; Posteguillo, 2003), or in other words, texts that are distributed in written mode but that are characterized by “conceptual orality” (Janoschka, 2003). This reduction of the level of formality might not be equally shared in different languages, especially when translating from English into Romance languages, such as Spanish, with formal-informal markers. During website localization, the question about whether using “tú” or “usted” arises. The results from an extensive (28,000 web pages) parallel corpus study shows that the formal form “usted” and nominal forms are preferred in original Spanish websites. Nevertheless, a genre-based approach to website localization demonstrated that some sections or blocks showed a clear preference for informal “tú” forms. This raises interesting questions about both power distance in these types of texts, as well as the differences between translated vs. original websites in the context of corpus-based translation research (Baker, 1995; Kenny, 2001; Laviosa, 2002).