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Teaching localization in the 21st century

Uwe Muegge

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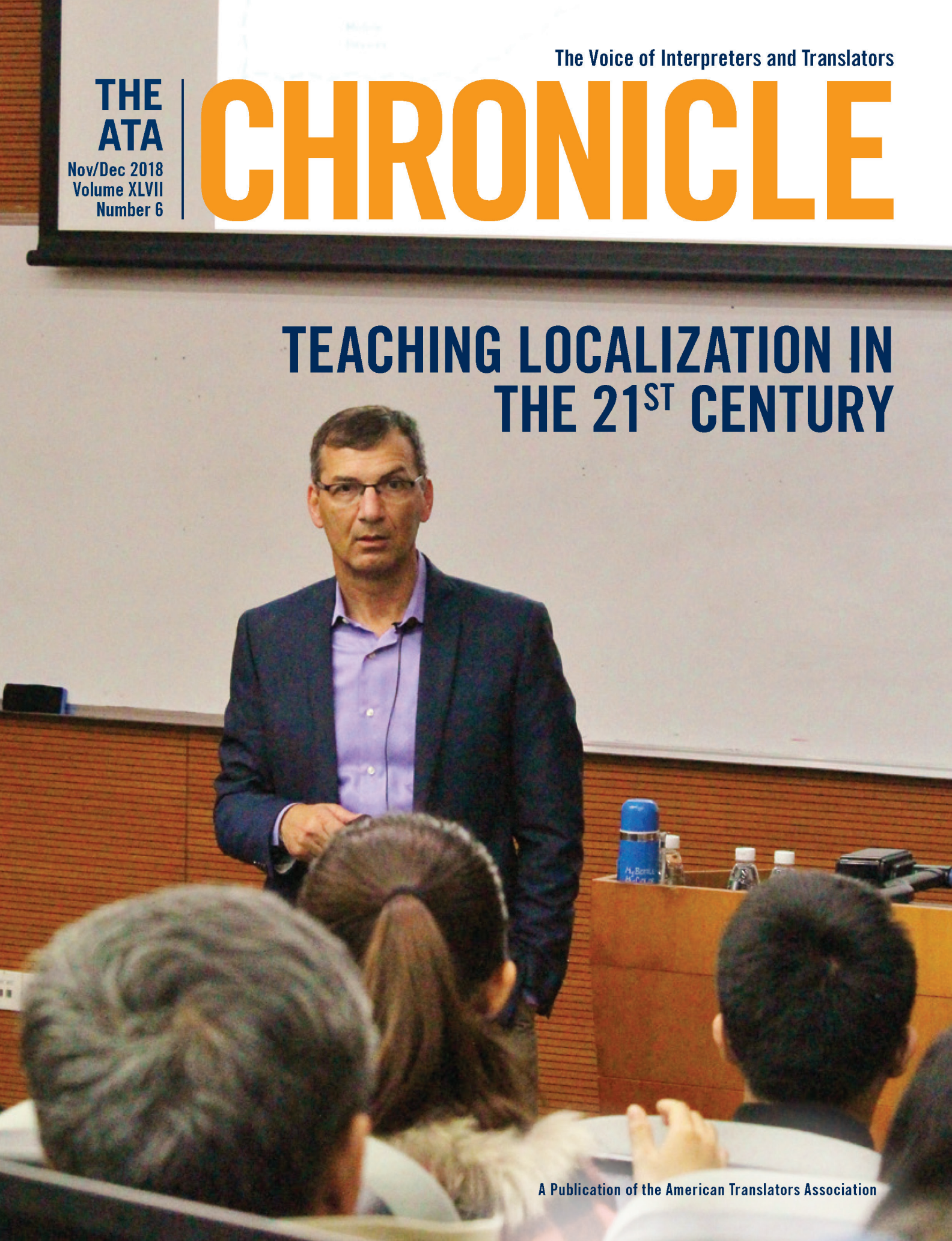
TEACHING LOCALIZATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY



A Publication of the American Translators Association

The author introducing students at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen to the concept of product-centric translation.

Teaching Localization in the 21st Century: Six Practices That Make a Difference

Translation skill is no longer the key differentiator in the various careers available in the localization field.

For more than 10 years, I've been working full-time in leadership roles in the localization industry and have been sharing the insights I gained in the real world with newcomers to this still rapidly evolving field. Here are the main principles I've developed for my own teaching practice.

BRING THE CORPORATE WORLD INTO THE CLASSROOM

I believe the best way to prepare aspiring language professionals for a career in the localization industry is to expose students to real-world problems and solutions. As the vast majority of participants in my courses seek in-house employment, I go beyond the translatable text to examine localization in the context of business transactions. These transactions typically involve roles other than that of the translator.

In my current position as manager of the language management program at a global enterprise, I provide guidance to content creators on how to write translation-ready texts, manage a team of terminologists who maintain a multilingual corporate terminology database, and manage a team of analysts who manage translation projects from end to end using a powerful and highly automated translation management system. I'm also responsible for the overall relationship with our external language and technology service providers.

I'm happy to say that a number of my former students are already in similar positions where they're not only responsible for translation, but for a much larger portion of the multilingual content life cycle. Preparing students for these bigger roles requires teaching staff that have a perspective that goes beyond that of the freelance translator.

FOCUS ON THE PRODUCT

One of the key differences between traditional translation and localization is the fact that in localization there is typically a strong link between translatable text and a commercial product. When translating a newspaper article, context is important, but the text itself stands on its own. In a localization project, however, a given text is usually part of a product launch or update. And a product launch typically involves multiple texts and text types (e.g., user manual, tutorials, specifications, marketing materials, etc.).

Teaching product-centric translation means emphasizing the importance of the consistency of a translation with other translations of the same launch, previous launches, as well as launches of related products. In my opinion, the only way of addressing the consistency problem that is particularly challenging in product-related translation projects is through the effective use of translation tools—in the real world and in the classroom. And that means teaching more machine translation, post-editing, and above all, terminology management skills!

TAKE THE CLASSROOM INTO THE CLOUD

The cloud has had a dramatic impact on how I teach localization. Using cloud-based software as a service (SaaS) applications, my students now have access to the latest translation technology from any device, from anywhere. In other words, students can use a laptop,

tablet, or smartphone that runs Windows, MacOS, iOS, or Android in class, at home, or from any place with an internet connection. And 24/7 access is not limited to software applications. In fact, I've moved all teaching materials to the cloud: reading materials, assignments, instructor slides, exams (with instant feedback!), as well as student-generated content (groups capture their deliverables in wikis). And since most SaaS tools neither require a heavy up-front investment nor technical support from the educational institution's information technology department, these cloud-based solutions can be rolled-out very quickly. Note: In the courses that I've been teaching, students work with cloud-based translation memory, translation management, terminology management, machine translation, post-editing, and translation quality assurance systems. (See Figure 1 below for the types of course content I deliver via the cloud.)

TREAT TRANSLATION MEMORY SYSTEMS PRIMARILY AS QUALITY ASSURANCE TOOLS

Translation memory (TM) systems have become commonplace in today's translation courses, sometimes for the wrong reasons. If students are told that the only reason for using a TM is to leverage previous translations, these students will not use a TM system for non-repetitive texts. That teaching approach might also be frustrating for students who start with an empty TM, as these students may not get any immediate benefit from using TM technology. If, however, students are introduced to the TM as a quality assurance tool, the return on investment is instant. From translating the very first sentence in a TM system, students can take advantage of functions like completeness control, formatting control, and terminology control. (See Figure 2 on page 22.) Note: In my opinion, any translation project where formal translation quality is a consideration (e.g., stylistic, numerical, and terminological consistency, formatting, etc.) should be processed in a TM or translation management system.

TEACH PROJECT MANAGEMENT AS THE NEW KEY SKILL

Most of the students I've taught in recent years seek in-house, salaried positions after graduation. The reality of the job market in the U.S. is that unlike in the past, very few organizations, including language services providers (LSPs), have internal translation staff. Today, the overwhelming majority of translators work as freelance linguists for LSPs or direct clients. But LSPs and a growing number of organizations that buy translation services are hiring translation and localization project managers. In fact, the majority of students I've been teaching over the years now work as project or program managers, and as such, they manage localization projects instead of translating documents. Therefore, to prepare students for success in the localization industry means shifting the focus from teaching translation skills to teaching project management skills.

Yes, localization students need a basic understanding of the translation process, but more importantly, these students need to be aware that translation is just one piece in a long chain of processes that begins (ideally) with authoring for translation (and using author-assist tools like terminology management and automatic style checkers), translation preparation (including pre-translation), translation and revision (including automatic quality assurance), and (ideally) client review, publishing, and translation maintenance.

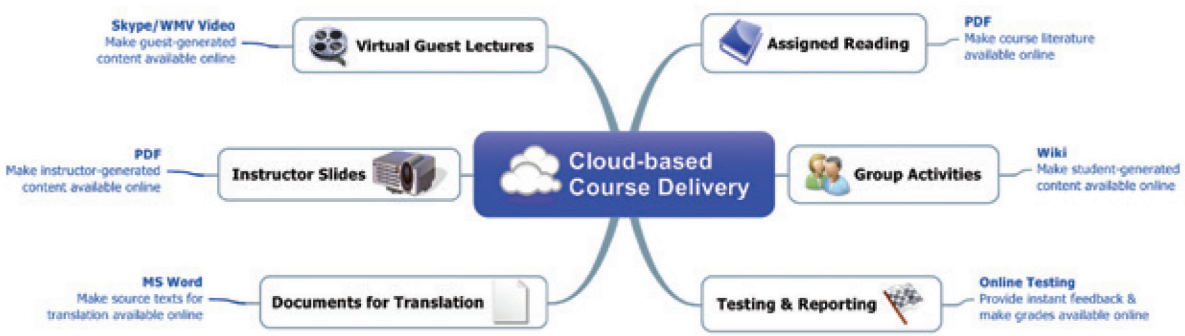
The best way to prepare aspiring language professionals for a career in the localization industry is to expose students to real-world problems and solutions.

HARNESS THE POWER OF (SOCIAL) NETWORKING

Can (localization) students be too prepared for their job search? I believe not. And that's why the very first tool I expose students to in my introduction to computer-assisted translation course is LinkedIn, the global job search engine. True, the majority of students already have a LinkedIn profile, but I've yet to see the incoming student who has a complete, let alone compelling, profile.

But can't creating a presence on professional networks wait until students are close to graduation? Not if you want the best jobs for your students. Building a LinkedIn profile that really stands out takes time, especially the tasks that most LinkedIn users neglect (e.g., creating a network of relevant first-degree connections, getting recommendations/endorsements from former managers and co-workers, and joining relevant professional groups).

Figure 1: Types of content I have delivered via the cloud in my courses



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- Translation and Interpreting
- Audiovisual Translation and Localization
- Literary Translation

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Spring Semester
- Spanish-English Translation
- Translation Theory
- Translation of Legal Texts (even years)
- Business and Finance Translation (odd years)
- Court Interpreting (even years)
- Simultaneous Interpreting (odd years)

Summer Session
- Translation Topics
- Medical Interpreting and Terminology
- Consecutive Interpreting

Fall Semester
- English-Spanish Translation
- Translation Technologies
- Literary Translation (even years)
- Audiovisual Translation (odd years)
- Translation Projects

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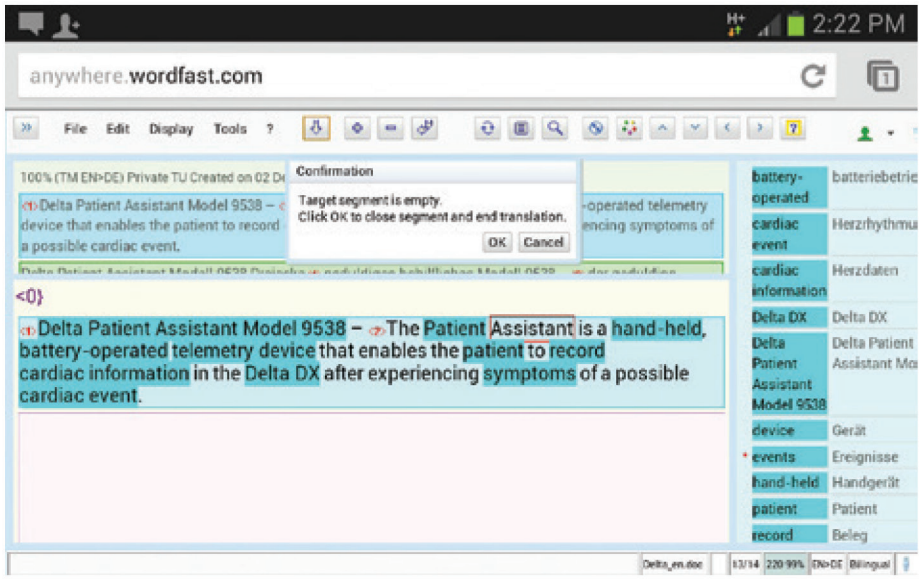
Figure 2: Example of a cloud-based translation memory system I use in class. This screenshot was taken on an Android device, displaying several quality assurance features (e.g., automatic terminology look-up, formatting placeholders, and completeness control).

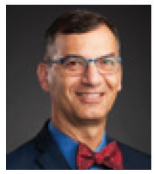


One of the key differences between traditional translation and localization is the fact that in localization there is typically a strong link between translatable text and a commercial product.

Over the past few years, I've built one of the largest networks of translators and people who hire translators/buy translation services, with more than 30,000 followers worldwide. I've always invited my students to connect with/follow me so that they can take advantage of my connections, and I'm now extending the same offer to all linguists. You can find my LinkedIn profile here: www.linkedin.com/in/uwemuegge. In addition, I maintain a Twitter account from which I tweet job opportunities, information on grants, awards, and competitions, as well as information on translation and localization events. Feel free to follow me here: https://twitter.com/uwemuegge.

IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT TRANSLATION SKILLS

As the field of localization evolves, so must the programs that prepare students for the increasing number of opportunities in this exciting field. Localization is very different from traditional translation in many ways, and I know from personal experience that translation skill is no longer the key differentiator in the various careers available in this field. I believe that it's the depth of an applicant's understanding of language processing technology and business processes, and how well that person is connected in the real and virtual worlds, that will determine their initial success in the localization industry.



Uwe Muegge is the global language manager at Arthrex, a global medical device company. He has more than 15 years of experience in translation and localization, having worked in leadership functions on both the vendor and buyer sides of the industry. He has published numerous articles on translation tools and processes and taught computer-assisted translation and terminology management courses at the college level in both the U.S. and Europe. You can find him on LinkedIn (linkedin.com/in/uwemuegge) and Twitter (twitter.com/uwemuegge).
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