



Importance of Localisation in the Didactics of A 'Comparative Language': A Study of Corpora Composed of Localised and Non-Localised Websites

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Abstract

The exponential development of new information and communication technologies has revolutionised various aspects of everyday life. The dialogue among people has moved to a different dimension through the improvement of the Internet and computing tools (Kartal & Uzun, 2010). The way in which people maintain contacts is not immune. These new tools make it possible to maintain contact with people anywhere on the planet, whatever their language, beliefs or culture. This situation has brought all these differences face to face and has had a negative impact on mutual understanding within this digital space. This mutual misunderstanding, even between speakers of the same language from different countries, is due to the fact that each social group remains attached to its own linguistic-cultural customs without being able to decipher or try to understand the customs of others.

While, in the business world, major companies have been able to overcome this stumbling block by using localisation (L10n) in their digital communications, which aims to adapt their communication content to the linguistic and cultural practices of their target markets, the education sector does not yet seem to have grasped the importance of localisation to adopt its model in language teaching. What localisation could bring to language teaching is essentially the different standard forms of the same language.

Teaching a language in its different standard forms, such as French between France, Canada, Belgium and Switzerland or Spanish between Spain and Latin American countries, would give the speaker of the language in question the opportunity to communicate with speakers from other countries while overcoming pre-existing discrepancies.

This paper attempts to demonstrate the importance of opting for a kind of 'comparative language' didactics by taking advantage of the achievements of localisation, through the analysis of a number of localised and non-localised websites.

Keywords: *localisation- language didactics- comparative language- websites.*

1. Introduction

Language learning and teaching have always been important. Language learning is the main basis for acquiring different types of knowledge. There can be no knowledge or understanding that can be expressed without recourse to language. The higher and more sophisticated the level of language acquired by the learner, the more flexible the acquisition of other knowledge becomes. It is also very important when it comes to transfer international knowledge within multinational companies (Welch & Welch, 2008). This importance has led to language being the subject of endless study and research in order to design and develop the most effective and efficient learning and teaching methods.

The emergence of new Internet-based technologies has also boosted this importance. These NICTs have made cross-border communication inevitable. Internet users have found themselves faced with a cosmopolitan society that demands not only a good knowledge of foreign languages, but also other ways of using their own mother tongues. Users have realised that the same language is used differently when it is spoken in other countries. More often than not, these differences lead to misunderstandings that require middle-of-the-road solutions to bridge the gap. These linguistic variations are not considered dialects. In Canada, for example, The Canadian Association of French Teachers speaks of the standard French "of here" (Ashby, 1988).

Teaching the language in its different forms in different countries, using a comparative method, could be one of the solutions.



In this work, we will not study, in detail, the complex notion of didactics, which is not simply the art of teaching (Tardieu, 2021); the size of this study does not allow it.

Drawing on our experience in the field of website localisation, as a PhD student, we will examine the question and attempt to answer the following question:

How important and useful could localisation be in comparative language teaching?

2. Notion of Comparative Language

The notion of Comparative Language used in this study was inspired by other disciplines such as comparative literature, comparative law or comparative grammar. While comparative law involves comparing different legal systems, and comparative grammar involves comparing the grammatical moulds of different languages in order to find a relationship, comparative language is conceived, in this context, as a model for language learning and teaching by comparing the different 'standard' forms of a 'same language'. For example, French in France compared with French in Canada and Belgium, American English compared with British and/or Canadian English, Spanish in Spain compared with Spanish in Latin America, and so on.

In this sense, the name Comparative Language could be further reduced in the classroom to become more precise, i.e. to speak of comparative French in French language courses or comparative English in English language courses.

This would even make it possible to avoid a possible confusion whereby Comparative Language would tend to compare two different languages in the same course, French and English for example. This practice already exists in a discipline called contrastive linguistics (Hasselgård, 2010).

3. Localisation - Definition and Overview

Localisation refers to the adaptation of the content of the user interface of a digital text to the culture and different standards of the target audience. It is part of a wider process known as GILT (Globalisation, Internationalisation, Localisation, Translation), but sometimes the whole process is referred to as 'localisation' (Hariyanto, 2016).

Localisation, as part of this process, involves a number of aspects that need to be adapted to the culture, customs and tastes of the target audience. These aspects are generally: images, colours, date and time formats, units of measurement, currencies, digital formats and others (Sandrini, 2008). These aspects must be adapted to the culture and uses of the target user, so that the latter does not realise that the site has already been designed in another language and under the umbrella of another culture (Corte, 2002).

4. Corpora

Our corpora is made up of websites localised for French-speaking and English-speaking countries. These are generally the sites of world-renowned companies in the electronics, automotive, textile, etc.

The use of localised websites is justified by the fact that they are the only comparative language support available at the moment. In other words, within the same site we can find the same language used differently. This is the case of the company websites mentioned above. These websites teach us not only about linguistic differences, but also about non-linguistic differences such as the way numbers are written, currency symbols (position) and the different conventions of use in each country targeted by the localisation. In the context of localisation, websites are conceived as a type of text with a digital nature.

However, given that the selected sites deal with similar themes in the economic sector, such as the automotive and electronics industries, it seems to us that localised sites cannot suffice as the sole corpus for our study. We want to diversify the themes in order to extract as much useful information as possible, particularly in terms of linguistic specificities and terminological differences. To this end, we



have also adopted a corpus made up of non-localised sites dealing with themes such as sport and real estate.

5. Results of the Study

After analysing the websites in question, we arrived at the following results:

After examining the web pages of the localised sites of these great companies, we realised that the world's leading companies attach great importance to the specific features of the language used in the countries they target. We have concentrated mainly on the localised versions for the UK and the USA as far as English is concerned, and on the localised versions for France and Canada as far as French is concerned.

These specificities are first and foremost linked to the language itself. For example, the website of a famous American brand specialising in the manufacture of sports equipment uses different names for the same garments in British and American English (see Fig. 1 and 2).

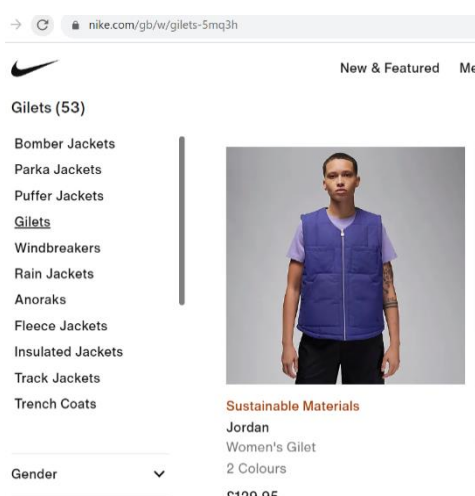


Fig. 1. UK version of a localised site for a major fashion brand

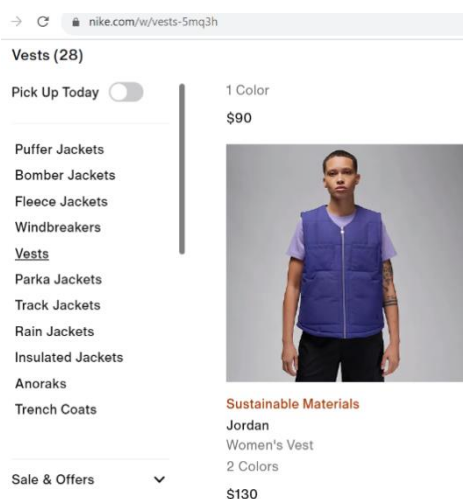


Fig. 2. USA version of a localised site for a major fashion brand

This website uses the word 'gilet' on the British version of the site and the word 'vest' on the American version to designate the same product, in addition to the difference in the way the words 'colour' and 'color' are written. This example is not the only one on the same site; there are others, such as 'jumper' in British English and 'sweater' in American English.



The website of another major German company of sports equipment uses 'maillot de foot' in its French version and 'chandail soccer' in its Canadian version to designate 'the shirt of football'.

In the field of electronics, the website of a South Korean electronics multinational uses 'fridge' on its British version, while it uses 'refrigerator' on its American version.

As for the French language, the website of a another major Japanese electronics brand uses the word 'home-cinéma' on its version localized for France, whereas it uses the word 'cinéma-maison' on its Canadian version.

The list of different words for the two languages is not exhaustive, but it shows how useful localised websites could be as a corpus for comparative language teaching.

Nevertheless, the linguistic aspect is not the only one that is important in this respect. These localised sites have shown us that different countries use different conventions for writing large numbers and telephone numbers. Some countries use the space to separate thousands and the comma for decimal numbers, while others prefer the comma to separate thousands and the dot for decimal numbers.

However, the present study has enabled us to identify a certain number of limitations of localised websites in the event of their adoption as a corpus in Comparative Language didactics. These limitations include the limited number of themes: most of the localised websites available online have the particularity of belonging to large global companies. This means that most of the terms to be extracted are part of business jargon, and more specifically from a few well-defined fields such as the automotive industry, the electronics industry and the textile industry.

Non-localised websites could be used to fill the gap. This is what we did with the sports terminology used on different websites belonging to newspapers such as Journal de Montréal (Canada) and L'Equipe (France), which enabled us to discover numerous discrepancies in this respect. The word 'Football' in French corresponds to 'soccer' in Canadian French, and the words 'sponsor', 'buteur' and 'supporters' in French correspond to 'commanditaire', 'marqueur' and 'partisans' respectively in Canadian French.

In Canada, the word 'football' refers to a different sport, and the same is true between British and American English.

On real estate websites, we have seen, for example, that the listing of floors in the same building differs between European and North American countries. This is a real example of localisation.

It is beyond the scope of this work to list all the discrepancies that we were able to identify on the various sites.

6. Interest of this Model

The interest in opting for such a model could be summarized as follows:

6.1 Didactic Interest

The usefulness of opting for such a model in language learning/teaching lies first and foremost in the didactic aspect. The language learner would have the chance to identify new aspects of the language he or she is learning that have been ignored until now. Aspect as of semantics, orthography and sometimes even grammar, as we saw with the irregular verbs between American and British English. Only the phonetic aspect cannot be apprehended on the basis of a corpus made up of websites, which are visual interfaces displaying text in a written format without voice assistance.

6.2 Linguistic Interest

Everything that has been said about didactic interest also forms part of linguistic interest. However, in the future, the latter could encompass the dialects of the same language within the same country, and not just the standard forms.



6.3 Non-linguistic Interest

In addition to the linguistic interest, this model would enable the language learner to acquire non-linguistic skills such as the conventions for writing numbers and telephone numbers, currency symbols, units of measurement, and so on.

6.4 Economic Benefits

From an economic point of view, simultaneous mastery of the different standard forms of the same language enables companies or different service providers to target their customers and prospects in the language they speak and as they speak it. Some of the mistakes made in this area can sometimes shock the target customer or prospect and cause them to shun the proposed offer.

6.5. Technological Interest

Every improvement that is made in language teaching is an opportunity to improve the performance of technological tools in this field. These tools are constantly being updated and depend on human intervention to offer a language with a minimum of errors and a maximum of imitation of human language.

6.6. Intercultural Interest

Intercultural contact with a maximum of mutual understanding and a minimum of misunderstandings with Internet users using the same language, but from different countries.

7. Perspectives

In the light of what we have just seen in this study, we would like to propose a model for teaching and learning comparative language which draws on the achievements of localisation. In this respect, it would be appropriate to derive maximum benefit from localised websites by adopting them as a parallel corpus. This corpus facilitates immediate comparison between different versions of the same content, which saves time and effort when collecting elements useful to this teaching model.

However, given the limitations of localised sites, as we have seen above, it would be useful to use non-localised sites as a comparable corpus. This corpus would make it possible to search for themes not available in the parallel corpus, and consequently extract terminology in a well-defined domain.

On the other hand, and in the interests of making this model of language teaching as effective as possible, it would also be useful to supplement the web corpus with other sources in different media, such as paper, audio and audiovisual media. Sources such as books, magazines and videos would help to make up for the shortcomings of the two web corpora, particularly in terms of pronunciation, which varies from country to country, but also in terms of vocabulary.

Once this material has been assembled, the only thing left to do is to design textbooks and syllabuses in such a way that texts intended for teaching are available in two (or more) standard forms of the same language. This is the only way in which we can conceive of a genuine notion of comparative language didactics. Otherwise, in English language departments, for example, British English and American English are already taught, but in separate modules. However, when it comes to Canadian English, which also has its own specific features, and the different forms of French, even this type of teaching is not really widespread.

In the following examples, we can see more precisely what the content of the texts should look like under this model:

Example1: French from France vs Canadian French

Je t'invite à un déjeuner demain au premier étage (France) = *Je t'invite à un diner demain au deuxième étage* (Canada)



In this example, the two sentences mean exactly the same thing if each is used in the corresponding geographical area. They are translated 'I'm inviting you to lunch tomorrow on the first floor'. There are two differences:

- The name of the meal 'déjeuner' in France is the equivalent of 'diner' in Canada; both refer to the midday meal. The word 'diner' is used in France, but to refer to the evening meal, whereas French-speaking Canadians use the word 'souper'.
- Listing the floors of a building, where the 'premier étage' in France corresponds to the 'deuxième étage' in Canada. In Canada, and under American influence, the floors are counted from ground level, whereas in France and Europe in general, they are counted from the floor above ground level. This means that the sentence 'Je t'invite à un diner demain au deuxième étage' in Canadian French is correct in French, but it means 'I'm inviting you to dinner tomorrow on the second floor'. In a comparative French text, if this sentence is attributed to a French speaker in France, it must be reproduced in Canadian French as follows: 'Je t'invite à un souper demain au troisième étage= I'm inviting you to dinner tomorrow on the third floor'.

An example like this illustrates the extent to which misunderstanding could even mislead people if it is used in an invitation aimed at speakers from both countries. This example is not the only one, and it sheds light on the importance of making learners of the French language aware of this issue through the didactics of comparative French.

Example 2: British English vs American English

First floor of the flat with a view of a football pitch (UK)/ Second floor of the apartment with a view of soccer field (USA)

In this example, the two sentences also mean the same thing in British English and American English, despite the following differences:

- The words 'flat', 'football' and 'pitch' in British English correspond to 'apartment', 'soccer' and 'field' respectively in American English. The word 'football' poses the biggest problem, as it refers to two different sports in the two countries. A mistake in this respect, for example, on a site offering tickets for football matches could mislead buyers and risk earning the party making the offer the label of fraud.
- Like the previous example, the list of floors in the two countries is different. 'Second floor' in the United States corresponds to "first floor" in Great Britain (Rahim & Akan, 2008).

These examples are obviously not the only ones, there are many others. In addition, English also presents many divergences, particularly in terms of spelling. Taking into account all these divergences in the context of a didactics of comparative English seems necessary to us in an era where NTICs have made intercultural communication inexorable.

8. Conclusion

This study has allowed us to discover the usefulness and interest of localization in the perspective of comparative language teaching. In this respect, we have seen that localized sites are full of linguistic, non-linguistic and cultural elements that allow us to understand many specificities related to the same language, in its standard form, when it is practiced in more than one country. We have also seen that the limitations noted on this type of corpus could be overcome by using non-localized websites used in the form of a comparative corpus.

The importance of the corpus for professional practice is due to the fact that it provides objective, quantitative and qualitative data, on which one can rely during the decision-making process (Jiménez-Crespo, 2009).

However, non-localized websites alone cannot fill all the gaps of localized sites. Like the latter, they together constitute visual interfaces where the phonetic aspect is not included, that is, they do not offer the possibility of listening to the textual content found there. Pronunciation also remains a key element in the teaching of comparative language. The use of other sources such as audiovisual media could offer learners what they would need to master the different pronunciations of the same language.



Furthermore, in some languages, there are words and terms that are considered offensive, or even insulting, by speakers of a particular country while they are not considered so by speakers of the same language in another country. These words and terms could provoke discontented or violent reactions in the event of their use in a context of intercultural exchange, and even in an advertising and commercial context. The use of various sources such as books, novels, magazines and videos could prove useful.

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