

Access to public information through localisation

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Abstract

The paper analyses language policy in Ireland and the extent to which multilingual information is provided on public service websites.

1. Introduction

Localisation has been researched and applied generally as a set of activities for the adaptation of digital content to the cultural and linguistic requirements of foreign markets. It is applied to digital products to gain a competitive edge in the global market. Therefore, languages that possess the potential to balance the cost are chosen for localisation. In parallel, the global digital divide in communication is reflected on “profitable” and “less profitable” languages. By “profitable” we mean the languages which have higher penetration on the Web and one of the outcomes is that its speakers can easily find a workplace and increase their profits having the advantage of speaking this language.

Localisation as an industry flourished in Ireland in the late 1980s and thus Ireland became one of the centres of software localisation (Schäler 2003). Ireland also became one of the leading countries in the research of localisation at third level. The research and educational initiatives in localisation such as the

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Localisation Research Centre (LRC) (see 4.3) and the Centre for Next Generation Localisation (CNGL) project (see 4.2) undertake research to meet the demands of a digital multilingual society.

Irish economic prosperity in the 1990s, along with EU expansion, has attracted newcomers into entering Ireland. This paper will survey the localisation of digital content in official websites in Ireland to measure the level of accessibility of public information for the benefit of newcomers to Ireland. The discussion of the results will point to new ways to exploit localisation services and accommodate foreign speakers within a multicultural community.

The paper is laid out as follows: in the initial sections (sections 2 and 3), we will provide an overview of the changing cultural landscape of Ireland and its current language policy. The Irish policy will also be examined in relation to the EU multilingual policy and will emerge as an emblematic example of integration into a historically multicultural society.

In line with EU concerns for multilingualism, education and research, the Irish state has invested massively on such key areas as technology and localisation. The LRC and CNGL will consequently be presented in section 4 as leading institutions for the attainment of such goals. Within this framework, the concept of localisation will be investigated in a new perspective: not only as the adaptation of software to appeal to foreign customers, but as the linguistic transfer of public information to integrate foreign speakers.

Given these premises, in section 5 we will introduce and analyse a number of Irish websites providing public information, in order to test how and to which extent multilingual information is offered. The results of our experiment are provided in section 6. We close this paper with discussion, conclusions and future prospects in sections 7, 8 and 9 respectively.

2. The changing cultural landscape of Éire

In this section we focus on censuses in Ireland from 2002 onwards and highlight the constantly changing cultural settings.

Over the past 30 years, the Republic of Ireland (Ireland) has gone from a country of net emigration to a situation where about 10% of the population consists of non-Irish nationals. Our calculation is based on *2006 Census preliminary reports* (Government of Ireland 2006) and *The population of each Province, County and City, 2006* (Central Statistics Office 2008b). The former states that “there were a total of 420,000 non-Irish nationals living in Ireland in April 2006”, the latter states that the total population of the state is 4,239,848 persons.

While prior censuses did not ask about nationality, for the first time in the 2002 census the questionnaire raised this issue. The Irish national people are no longer represented only by the traditional trademark of the shamrock, but also as citizens of a multinational country with high economic growth. Ireland has become a multilingual, multinational and multicultural society in the European Union. According to *Census 2006. Non-Irish Nationals Living in Ireland* (Central Statistics Office 2008a), non-nationals represent 188 different countries and 82% of them are from just 10 countries (UK, Poland, Lithuania, Nigeria, Latvia, USA,

China, Germany, Philippines and France). Begley *et al.* (2005) report that Eastern European immigrants who applied for working permits in Ireland are estimated at 50,000 in 2004 consisting of 1.25 % of the population.

However, this economic growth only lasted until 2008. *The Population and Migration Estimates April 2010* reports “the highest level of net outward migration since 1989” (Central Statistics Office 2010). This report provides an indication of the changing trend of migration from 2008, declining immigration to Ireland and increasing emigration from Ireland.

Yet, the economic situation in Ireland facing the downturn from the economic prosperity nicknamed “Celtic Tiger” does not exclude Ireland from the multinational, multilingual environment as the recent EU-funded survey *Pathways to Work* reported that “63.6% of immigrants surveyed intend staying in Ireland” (Niedzielski *et al.* 2010). Some of these immigrants are fluent in English as a common language, while the rest of the people perhaps learn English in Ireland. Ireland as a member state of the EU experiencing linguistic and cultural diversity continues to face challenges of social integration of new comers. In our opinion, the social service information needs to be translated in more than the two languages Irish/English for those who may not have the same proficiency in those two languages as the rest of citizens.

Characteristically, the *Irish Independent* reported the issues in dealing with multilingual society by referring to the legal cost as “it cost €3m to provide interpretation in the courts last year – with translators required in more cases involving Swahili and Lingala, the Bantu language of north west Congo (DR), than for cases heard in Irish” (Reilly/McArdle 2010). Moreover, the *Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2008* states that “as in 2007, almost one third of persons committed in 2008 were non-Irish nationals”.²

In the following chapter, the EU and Irish current stance towards linguistic policy is examined.

3. Language Policy

According to the National Centre for Languages, language policy is the means by which governments and other groups (e.g. some local authorities in England) set out their intentions to safeguard, develop and exploit the capacity in languages among the people they represent (CILT 2010). Bodies such as the Council of Europe support groups in developing language policy.

3.1 Language policy in the EU

The EU expressed its ideal formation of diversity in unity with its policy for multilingualism as Europe enjoys unprecedented unity and expansion in its recent history.

2 For an overview of this topic, see Waterhouse (2009).

At the moment the EU has 500 million citizens across 27 member states, 3 alphabets in 23 official languages, and 175 nationalities present in the EU (of the European Commission 2008). The EU Commission presents its plan of action towards assisting EU citizens in enjoying the benefits of multicultural and multilingual environments, and overcoming its obstacles. “Opportunities, access and solidarity” are stated as the key principles. More precisely, there will be opportunities offered to cultivate life through the ability of communicating with others, access to language education, and support and integration of those who are not in a position to learn other languages as a means of communication (*ibid.*). Education is one of the most important fields of language policy. The EU Commission implemented the policy of education in two languages plus mother tongue: “a language of communication and a personal adoptive language” (*ibid.*). Education aims to lower language barriers in future society. However, education takes time before it shows the merits. To fill the gap, technologies such as machine translation and multilingual semantic web are being researched and developed; these technologies are outside the scope of this paper.

3.2 Language policy in Ireland

This subsection refers to the current language policy in Ireland. It also refers to concerns and a recommendation for the Irish government expressed by a research group who participated in “a conference to discuss the need for and role of a language policy for Ireland” (Ó Dochartaigh/Broderick 2006).

As far as the official languages in Ireland are concerned, the Constitution of Ireland states in Article 8 that Irish is the first official language and English the second, and also that provision of those languages may be regulated by law. This indicates that the provision of language can be in Irish only, in English only, or bilingual depending on information that particular documents reference.

The objective of the official Language Act 2003 is to protect and promote the Irish language. Another goal is to regulate the provision of quality of services to the public in Irish. It concerns the language use including the use in executive and legislative authority, dealings with public bodies, and publication. However, its concern focuses on only those two official languages of the Republic of Ireland as stated by the *Official Language Act 2003 Guidebook* (An Coimisinéir Teanga 2008) and the Official Language Act 2003. The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht states the objective of the Act as follows: “the primary objective of the Official Languages Act 2003 is to ensure the improved provision of public services through the Irish language”³

The Irish Government set the official language scheme 2009-2012 with the official Language Act 2003 to enhance the provision of services in its first official language. Even though this scheme only concerns its native language, it covers a wide area of methods to provide information to the public from road signage to town names and websites. It is worth noting from a localisation viewpoint that

3 <<http://www.pobail.ie/en/Consultations/ReviewoftheOfficialLanguagesAct2003/TermsofReference/Terms%20of%20reference.pdf>> (accessed 21 January 2012).

the *Official Language Act Guidebook* acknowledges websites and emails as well as conventional means of communication such as letters and leaflets as the methods of communication between the public and the public bodies. Thus the intention and effort of the Irish government towards its native language is clear. The idea originates in the protection of the language as well as the protection of the rights of its citizens. Constitution and law provide protection for the Irish people and the Irish language.

In February 2006, Ó Dochartaigh and Broderick, two researchers who concern themselves over the interest of the public and the country of Ireland in relation to languages, organised the conference *Language Policy and Language Planning in Ireland in 2006* to propose a “comprehensive and well integrated” language policy for Ireland to enjoy the benefit of being a multicultural and multilingual society. The concerns and proposals put forward in the conference report cover a wide range of matters. Proposals include the need of a policy, the upgrading of language education, teacher training, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in language teaching, awareness of business incentives, social integration with new comers as well as synchronisation with the policy of the European Union. The interesting point from our research viewpoint is that Ó Dochartaigh and Broderick (2006) suggest in the report the need for “analysis in current cultural, social and demographic areas in Ireland” to upgrade social and cultural education through languages. The proposal in this paper reflects the need for language policy in modern Irish society.

4. Localisation

4.1 Overview

Language barriers constitute a formidable obstacle to the free flow of information, products and services in an increasingly globalised economy and information society.

“Localisation” refers to the process of adapting digital content to local, a combination of culture and linguistic environment, at high quality and speed. According to the the Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA),

*localization refers to the actual adaptation of the product for a specific market. It includes translation, adaptation of graphics, adoption of local currencies, use of proper forms for dates, addresses, and phone numbers, and many other details, including physical structures of products in some cases.*⁴

Localisation is a key enabling, value-adding and multiplier component of the global software and content distribution industry. Localisation seeks to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers.

4 <<http://www.lisa.org/What-Is-Globalization.48.0.html> (accessed 27 October 2010).>

4.2 CNGL

The Centre for Next Generation Localisation (CNGL)⁵ is a dynamic Academia-Industry partnership with over 100 researchers developing novel technologies addressing the key localisation challenges of volume, access and personalisation. CNGL is funded by the Science Foundation Ireland (Grant 07/CE/I1142) under the category “Centre for Science Engineering and Technology (CSET)”.

The University of Limerick is an academic partner, along with Dublin City University (DCU), Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and University College Dublin (UCD). The Centre consists of four research tracks: Integrated Language Technologies (ILT), Digital Content Management (DCM), Next Generation Localisation (LOC) and Systems Framework (SF).

CSET was set up in 2008 to pursue the objective of producing substantial advances in the basic and applied research underpinning the design, implementation and evaluation of the blueprints for the Next Generation Localisation Factory. Its mission is to revolutionise localisation via breakthroughs in automation, composition and integration, focusing on:

- Integrated machine translation technology,
- Speech-based interfaces and more personalised speech output,
- Multilingual digital content management for personalised multilingual content access and delivery,
- Localisation workflows and system integration.

4.3 Localisation Research Centre

The Localisation Research Centre (LRC)⁶ was established in 1995 as the Localisation Resources Centre at University College Dublin (UCD) and moved to the University of Limerick (UL) in 1999 where it was re-constituted as the Localisation Research Centre (LRC) – the information, research and educational centre for the localisation industry.

Following a thorough review of its operation in 2005, the LRC continued to work with worldwide digital publishers and their partners who are interested in future technologies and processes for Globalisation, Internationalisation, Localisation, and Translation (GILT) (Schäler, 2003); it now focuses its activities on the provision of relevant well-researched content-rich information on future trends and technologies within a framework of a unique industry and academic collaboration which provides an unparalleled network of expertise. The LRC cooperates at national and international level with researchers and students, the media, consultancy firms, government agencies and the European Commission.

The LRC is also host to the UL Localisation (LOC) research strand of the CNGL CSET, where 15 researchers focus on Next Generation Localisation. This will offer the advantages of both Enterprise Localisation and Personalised Localisation in a scalable and adaptable structure. Research is being carried out in supporting

5 <<http://www.cngl.ie/index.html> (accessed 27 October 2010)>.

6 <<http://www.localisation.ie/> (accessed 27 October 2010)>.

instant, on-the-fly linguistic, cultural and targeted adaptation (personalisation) of digital content with a high quality of service. LOC will satisfy the requirements of users coming from different cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds and preferences. It will also provide standardised services for the management of multilingualism across the digital global information flow and ultimately realise the commoditisation of translation services.

5. Examination of public information access

The statistical Yearbook of Ireland 2004 “contains a chapter documenting Ireland’s economic and social change from 1973-2003 to mark thirty years membership of the European Union”. The chapter describes how it has been long since Ireland was an emigrating country and became a country of “increasing inward migration”, also confirmed by further research: “Ireland has experienced positive net immigration since 1991” (Central Statistics Office 2004).

Living in a community certainly requires access to information. There are public rules to adhere to when living in a community as a private individual. Conflicts within a community can develop from misunderstandings, which are often caused by lack of information. There can also be a problem distributing the information. Information may be available, but it cannot be found and reached easily. This is a matter of structure management. In addition, it may be a matter of language barriers. The information available might be only in one language or in the official languages of the country, but not in more. This can often create confusion and disappointment, for example when someone requires a visa or needs an emergency doctor, but he/she does not speak the official language of the country or the *lingua franca* English.

Community leaders are sharing information with members for the benefit of the community as well as for the benefit of the individual. However, providing and accessing appropriate information is not an easy task. The reports and plans of the government in relation to improving the provision of information are the evidence of this difficulty. In a modern society such as the European Union, political expansion, economic growth and technological evolution add multicultural, multilingual, and multinational aspects to this difficulty. Requesters of information may not understand the content when the information is provided only in the official languages of the state.

The EU addresses this issue in its e-inclusion policy for its Information Society (European Commission 2010). The objectives of the e-inclusion policy address the current shortcomings of accessibility of information. One of them refers to “socio-cultural e-inclusion”. This policy explains its aim to “enable minorities, migrants and marginalised young people to fully integrate into communities and participate in society by using ICT” (*ibid.*).

The article “Supporting cultural diversity and social inclusion” (European Commission 2010b) explains the need to support the vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens in the EU, and also explains that ICTs are meant “to make it easier to access public and commercial good and services”. It also refers to the

linguistic difficulties those immigrants may encounter while ICTs can help immigrants to share in Europe's cultural life.

However, immigrant users encounter barriers in accessing services as much as other disadvantaged groups, due to the lack of technical and language skills or due to digital technologies which are difficult to use. The efforts of this inclusion policy are carried over to the latest initiative on e-inclusion called *European i2010 initiative on e-Inclusion – to be part of the information society*.

The Irish government also acknowledges the difficulties and the social benefits of better communication. Its statements for the transformation to information society and to eGovernment present the direction for the future of an affordable information society in Ireland (Government of Ireland 2008). The statement refers to the inclusion of socially excluded groups whose voices are seldom heard, and to its investments in research in localisation through Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) and CSETs such as the previously mentioned CNGL.

Referring to the subject of localisation as “taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate” (Esselink 2000), it supports various definitions. However, the general understanding of the orientation of localisation so far is that localisation is a product-oriented task and indeed its origins lie in the desire of digital content publishers to supplement their income on existing products by selling them overseas (cf. LISA 2010).

The software publishers have made significant efforts in advancing localisation techniques to integrate their products in foreign markets by localising their products and surrounding materials, providing information such as manuals, websites, advertisements etc. Localisation is considered a vital process for success in foreign markets. Beside the commercial trend, there are symbolic movements taking localisation from “operational affordances to localising for social affordances” (Sun 2004). One of these organisations, called the Rosetta Foundation,⁷ proclaims “access to information as a fundamental right” and aims at social contribution through translation and localisation services.

It is interesting to examine the current accessibility of public service information for small languages (in numbers) in a community. Provision of information in “minor languages” can be viewed as the ideal in a multinational society. For example, provision of information on social services, education on integration and awareness over cultural differences in the early stages are vital for building up a harmonious society.

Education takes time to take effect. Immigrants perhaps learn the community language. Hornberger (1998: 446) describes migrants' common desire to keep their native languages as well as learning the communal language “to assimilate to the languages and cultures of their new countries”.

In the next paragraphs we will focus on the website provided by the Citizens Information Board as our object of analysis (Citizen Information Board 2010).

The Citizen Information Board states in its website, where information is available in English and Irish, and partly in French, Romanian and Polish, that it “provides comprehensive information on all aspects of public services and entitlements for citizens in Ireland”. It supports the action plan for the

7 <<http://www.therosettafoundation.org/> (accessed 25 October 2010)>.

Information Society (Government of Ireland 1999) to “present and deliver information on public services and the social and civil rights of everyone in Ireland”. The site is a portal for information related to living in the Republic of Ireland, providing almost all necessary information. Examples of information available are Birth, Family and Relationships, Education and Training, Justice, Social Welfare, Employment, Health, Money and Tax, Travel and Recreation, Death and Bereavement, Environment, Housing, and Moving Country. It provides a telephone number and addresses for those who wish to discuss matters by phone or in person. The website provides relevant information efficiently through its search function.

The site declares the language provision in its Help page stating that “all information is available in English and most in Irish, while certain key documents are available in French, Romanian, and Polish”. The contents are indeed varied depending on the language. Polish and Romanian contents focus on motoring and topics related to social welfare while French contents illustrate the requirements to reside in Ireland and to claim political protection from the government.

Our curiosity in the variation of content and the selection of the languages led us to send a questionnaire to the Citizens Information Board, though the answer is yet to be delivered. The selection of contents and languages is obviously intentional. It would be beneficial for website localisation to research how information and languages are selected for contents in a public service. This logic perhaps can be utilised in the automated website localisation service in future. The website in question also expresses its willingness to increase its range of cover of contents in other languages.

In addition, other national government department websites were examined with regard to the accessibility of information in minor languages in a country. The query “Government department” is typed in the search box in the Citizens Information website, and the first thread in the search result, “Departments of State-Information from CitizensInformation.ie” provides links to the 15 relevant department websites. These are the departments whose websites were examined to see whether they provided information in languages other than the official languages: Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; Tourism, Culture and Sport; Communications, Energy and Natural Resources; Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; Defence; Education and Skills; Enterprise, Trade and Innovation; Environment, Heritage and Local Government; Finance; Foreign Affairs; Health and Children; Justice and Law Reform; Social Protection; The Taoiseach; Transport.

Regarding the availability of information in “minor languages”, we searched the availability of translated versions of information in those languages in each homepage. Then each customer charter was located and examined to find the department policy about the provision of services in other languages than the official languages. The term “customer charter” was typed in the search box. The results of our preliminary survey are found in section 6.

6. Results

In this section we discuss our findings from our examination of websites for the access to public information. There are no languages available other than Irish or English on the first page of the 15 websites of the Irish Government Departments.

The departments of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation, and Communications, Energy and Natural Resources do not provide a language selection for the Irish language. However, they do provide Braille translations of the selected page on request. The rest of the departments provide a selection of language between Irish and English.

Regarding the provision of information in multilingual style, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform provides information in Irish and English while the linked website (the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service “established in 2005 in order to provide a ‘one stop shop’ in relation to asylum, immigration, citizenship and visas”) is only accessible in English.

The department of the Taoiseach accommodates multilingualism by providing translation of the contents and also making its website compatible with *BrowseAloud* whose main function is to read web pages aloud for people who find it difficult to read online”. *BrowseAloud*, however, features “word by word” translation in written text in English, Spanish, German and French.

This application features an interesting function providing regional accents in English. The selected text is read, for example, in a stereotypical Italian accent in English. Yet, the site asks users to have a certain level of ability in the English language.

The Department of Social Protection provides “Social Welfare Services Information” as separate documents under “Services in other languages” (English, Irish, Arabic, Chinese, French, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian and Spanish). This department provides the information in two official languages. However, its customer charter does not mention languages for the provision of services while the rest of the 15 websites declare their provision of services in the Irish language in their customer charters.

Furthermore, we could not find a declaration of compliance with the Language Act 2003 in six websites. The rest had their declarations in the customer charter or in a separate link to the declaration.

The Department of Enterprise Trade and Innovation provides its charter in German and French as well. The Department of Health and Children declares its provision of a service “through sign language and other languages where possible”.⁸

7. Discussion

We examined different public access information websites in order to see how many languages were covered.

8 <http://www.dohc.ie/public/customer__service/customer__charter.html> (accessed 29 October 2010).

The departments of the Irish government are making efforts on making public service information accessible to citizens. The provision of the web portal for public information and the statements from the governments provide evidence of this. We found it to be a user-friendly and efficient system for reaching the information required. However, it made a high level of fluency in the English language a prerequisite. This is one example where there is information available, but it cannot be reached if the required criteria are not met.

We also observed evidence that public service bodies are aware of the need for the public to be provided with information in languages other than English and Irish. Thus they also provide their content in other languages. As another example, the Central Statistics Office Ireland acknowledges the existence of new members of society by providing census records in 16 languages.⁹

A government department's interest in the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in its website can also be taken as a willingness to improve access to public service information for the wider public.

In reality, rather weak provision of public information in foreign languages could perhaps be considered as a natural outcome of the Constitution, the current language policy of Ireland and the availability of tools and technologies that we mentioned earlier in this paper. The current language policy is concerned with the Irish language only. The current situation regarding the provision of languages in public service information seems to reflect this policy. The willingness to address the shortcomings is observed in the statements made by the government. Also some departments provided us with translations of selected information.

The localisation of information is cost-intensive and time-consuming. Society must balance the cost and time against the social benefits brought about by the provision. Currently the national government and the EU support this balance by providing funding on developments in ICT and setting assisting policies for minorities in society. The policies present the objectives and benefits to the public. The development of ICTs perhaps reduces the cost and time for localisation of public service information.

This observation suggests that demand by the public, language policy and research in language assistance technology, such as localisation, should be considered as one unit to improve and achieve the multilingual provision of public service information. Research activities such as the Centre for Next Generation Localisation (CNGL) in Ireland have a potential to contribute to the improvement of the current shortcomings. In addition, we requested a Braille translation of the website of the department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. It has not yet been delivered to us.

8. Conclusions

In this paper we focused on the localisation of public information. After outlining the recent cultural landscape in Ireland, we referred to the language policy of the

9 <<http://www.cso.ie/>> (accessed 1 October 2010).

EU and Ireland. The empirical study, consisting of searching for multilingual information on the Citizens Information Board website, showed that only the official languages, with a few exceptions, are supported.

The overall results of the study therefore seem to point to some weaknesses in the provision of information to those who do not speak English or Irish, although they statistically constitute a considerable portion of the implied receivers. The fact that the websites under examination comply with the current regulations (section 3), while being unsuitable to a growing multicultural and multilingual community, is an indicator of the need to improve the current policies. Research, localisation and technology have a key role to play for future improvements and can presently help bridge educational gaps by providing translated content.

History proves that the marginalisation of minorities causes trouble in the future. In a multinational, multilingual and unified society, providing basic information for living must be considered crucial, particularly for newcomers and new members. It is precisely in this context that language policy, technology and education should work together for the common goal of information accessibility in a multilingual society.

9. Further prospects

We intend to make a larger scale comparison of public information websites and focus on different parameters: 1) languages available, 2) content. Moreover, we will extend the questionnaire with more precise and detailed questions and then send it to social services.

It would be interesting to compare EU member states with regard to how their language policies are formulated and how they provide public service information for minorities such as immigrants in their society. Also it would be of interest to know how the EU provides information that has been translated into the languages of its members.

Another interesting point is to investigate how education in Ireland addresses the language barriers immigrants are facing. Eventually, if immigrants stay longer in a country, they will become adapted to, and acquire, the community language, although it takes some time.

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