

TRANSLATION –TRANSCREATION – TRANS-ADAPTATION FOR EFFECTIVE E-COMMERCE LOCALIZATION

Mariana COANCA¹

Abstract: *In this paper, e-commerce localization is understood as a strategic approach for adapting a site to the local language and culture of target markets. It definitely influences and shapes online consumption globally. Based on previous research, we explore the benefits of translation support technologies for localization. Then we focus on the multi-language experience in international shopping, highlighting the impact of language on global audiences.*

In addition, we provide an example of webpage texts that are culturally and linguistically resonant with the target markets. Similarly, we highlight an example of product description translated by resort to Google Translate, which proves to be an unreliable tool as the grammar rule for forming the plural in Romanian is not applied.

As for the cultural localization, the paper highlights the need to combine machine translation with a human translator who has transcreation and trans-adaptation skills to ensure efficient and ethical communication to clients or site visitors from overseas markets. The affective and linguistic processes can influence human behavior in a consumption context. Thus, in the e-commerce localization project, translation is carried out on several levels to ensure that the writing style, tone and other important elements of the original material are translated correctly. The paper concludes that translating content and conducting multilingual keyword research with the audience in mind, proper linguistic management of texts, cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity represent the most feasible approach to make content available to international communities and consumers.

Keywords: *translation, e-commerce, localization, transcreation, trans-adaptation, multi-language experience*

1. The context

Online businesses need to improve the efficiency of their online advertising to reach global audiences. The *localization* service is the process of adapting an existing site to the *local language and culture of target markets*. Also, adapting website content to local audiences that speak the same languages but in different ways is one of the most challenging tasks of localization. This process of adapting a website in a different *linguistic and cultural context* requires much more than just translating texts. Therefore, the factors that can influence the location of a site are *programming* and *linguistic/cultural knowledge*.

¹Associate Professor, Ph.D, Romanian-American University, coanca.mariana@profesor.rau.ro

Content localization for e-commerce is a mandatory task that any brand should achieve nowadays. The localization process should ensure correct translation in the languages of targeted markets. Translation has become an essential requirement for any e-commerce that aims to connect with potential customers. Using solely machine translation, without partnering with human translators to accelerate the translating process, will create situations that cast doubt on product names and descriptions, poor text construction, serious errors in the content about legal and security aspects, which damage a company’s reputation.

Adapted websites reduce the amount of cognitive effort required by site visitors to process information, which makes navigation easier creating favorable attitudes towards the website. Cookies play an important role in facilitating access to and delivery of multiple services so that the user can have an enjoyable browsing experience. They also provide site owners with valuable feedback on how their sites are visited so that they could make them even more efficient and accessible to users. Online businesses need to improve the efficiency of their online advertising to reach the global consumer.

Online shopping has grown tremendously in the European Union because of the COVID-19 restrictions and the consumers’ habits and preferences for goods and services for private use. According to Eurostat, for the 2015-2020 period (see Figure 1), online shopping among internet users increased in Romania (+27 %), in Czechia and Croatia (+25 %) and Hungary (+23 %).

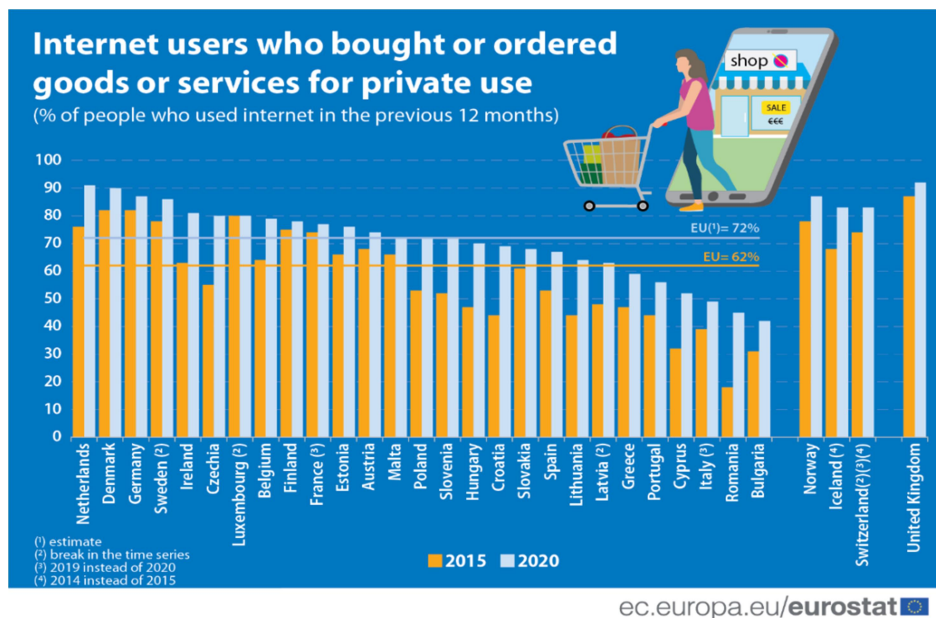


Fig. 1: Percentage of Internet users who did online shopping at EU level from 2015 to 2020 (“Source datasets: isoc_ec_ibuy and isoc_ec_ib20”)

In everyday life, buyers talk with sellers about certain products using naturally their mother tongue. What happens to online shoppers who do not prefer or do not even understand site content in other languages? The number of consumers of online products and services has increased significantly in recent years, mainly due to the increase in Internet users in developing countries, but also due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Even large e-commerce companies do not offer efficient multi-language service on their websites. Why? Most often, the answers to this question highlight that these companies have already created their network of consumers internationally and their profits are huge. On the other hand, the reason is that a multilingual service involves very high costs, because only by people, who have diverse and relevant specializations for e-commerce localization can produce this service. In this regard, linguists, terminologists, translators, site developers and administrators, project managers, communication managers, technical communicators/writers and marketing specialists can work closely to provide an undisputed multi-language service.

2. Translation support technologies for localization

Discussion and collaboration can drive effective localization services. People with different expertise can meet, present their specific challenges and work together in a supportive environment and a collaborative peer-to-peer environment where they can lend their experience to one another. A clear and coherent strategy for the management of multilingual and multicultural content will boost the global presence of companies and revitalize their corporate social responsibility. In his comprehensive study, [1] identified strategies to organize a global website, according to a three-fold approach:

- the monarchist approach focuses on the content, which is translated but seldom adapted leading to the website's lack of sensitivity to local markets,
- the anarchist approach is applied to multiple local sites using a different design, which requires high costs but no coordination and no corporate strategy,
- the subsidiary approach is a compromise between the first two approaches, in the sense that the global content is produced at central level; regional content is translated and used worldwide while the local content is created in the local language.

Nowadays the human translator needs to have *terminology management skills* and *cultural awareness* to reach global audiences. For example, according to [2], the professions of translator-terminologist and terminologist are recognized in France. A translator-terminologist carries out the following activities [3]:

- designing and applying working methods in translation and terminology,
- organizing, coordinating and following the activity of a team of terminology translators,

- defining and proposing terminological projects,
- choosing and adapting terminology management tools,
- defining the ways of collaboration with the subcontractors,
- controlling the quality of translations and terminological activities performed by internal or external collaborators,
- integrating and adapting IT tools to assist translators,
- developing partnerships with national and international networks,
- capitalizing on terminological activity in education, publications and databases. It is imperative to add here the business environment as well.

Translations made using translation support technologies, the so-called *translation memories*, differ from translations made using a text editor because they reduce the percentage of human errors that are inevitably made during a translation. This materializes in the provision of tailor-made, specialized services, for example, when a client wants a multilingual service of its e-commerce website. Therefore, the computer-assisted tools should not be confused with *automatic machine translation*, such as Google Translate. In this case, the computer does the translation whereas a human translator who uses CAT tools does the translation himself/herself, based on the translation memory, which works as a support tool, complementing the activity of the human translator.

The CAT software gradually stores in its memory the translations as the translators work in that program, so that it will automatically suggest the right words and phrases when a similar text needs to be translated. This ensures the consistency of the terminology, an extremely important parameter for achieving optimal translation quality as a whole, especially when it comes to the content of an e-commerce website. The advantages of using CAT Tools are: the undisputed quality of the translation, which results primarily from the uniformity of the terminology used and faster delivery of translations because this technology reduces not only the time but also the costs of the client as repetitive words are charged at a lower rate than new ones.

Using CAT Tools involves the use of key terms such as *perfect match*, *repetition*, *partial match* and *no match*. In all cases, a human translator needs to either revise or verify the results if they are correct or modify them, always aiming at translating the phrase or segment correctly. Undoubtedly, the result of the translating process is good when it comes to the content of an e-commerce website in several languages because a great part of the e-commerce terminology is similar in many fields of activity and industries.

CAT tools are very useful in projects in the IT sectors, the hospitality industry or in any other industry, and the documentation can consist of technical guides, user manuals, marketing materials, e-commerce website content in several languages, among many others. They give human translators the great advantage of using previously made translations that have been quality-approved in a system that stores and provides access to translation memories easily and rapidly.

3. The multi-language experience in international shopping

Creating multiple language versions of web pages is the most appropriate approach for making content available to global communities and their Internet users. Each language version of the site includes a Hreflang tag, which informs search engines about the language version. Thanks to this option, search engines offer users results from the language version of the site, according to their preferences. Additionally, subpages of additional language versions include appropriate URLs. Yet some platforms use the automatic translation of the text (the content of the web pages), with the help of Google translate, which is a completely wrong approach, because this application does not ensure an efficient automatic translation.

A relevant example is the content of the online store ZOOT (www.ZOOT.ro), whose site has several language versions - Romanian, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, Bulgarian and Slovenian. The Romanian version reflects that the content translation contains a lot of mistakes - *inappropriate vocabulary choice and grammar mistakes such as the order of the words in a sentence and in product descriptions, the absence of the specific ending for the plural of nouns in Romanian* (see the screenshot below), etc. Generally, in Romanian, the plural is formed by adding (i) to the masculine and (e) to the feminine. Romanian has also the third gender, called “neuter” which is chiefly used for objects. In the screenshot below, the correct translation of the *Dorothy Perkins black ballerina shoes* is “*pantofi negri de tipul balerini, marca Dorothy Perkins*” or the popular Romanian version “*balerini negri, marca Dorothy Perkins*”.

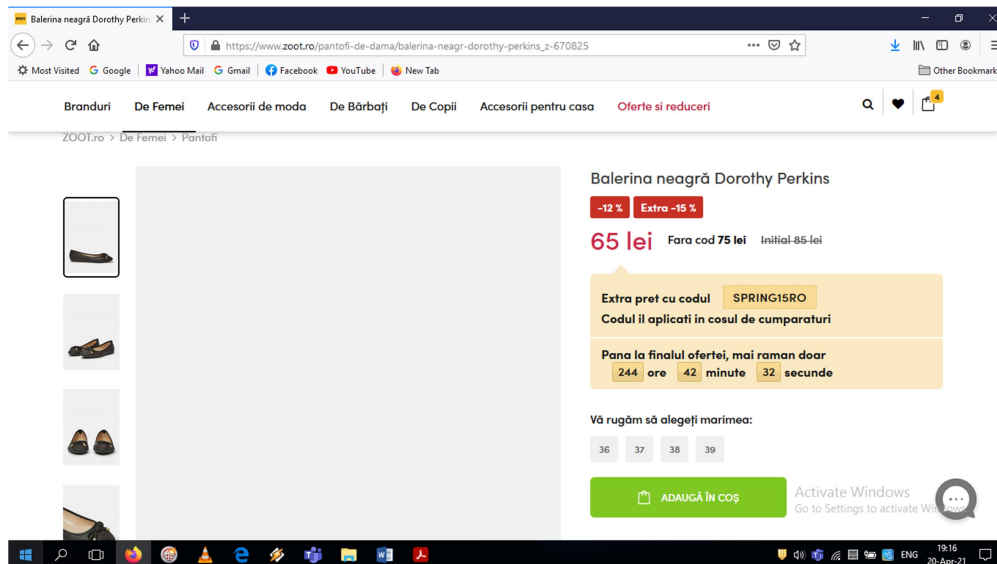


Image 1: Grammar mistake in the description of a product

On the other hand, Amazon, the largest online retail company, has its well-known website (www.amazon.com), which displays nine language versions. English has been set as the initial language for the content of the web pages, including the Terms of Use. The company informs users about its availability to translate the most important information to ensure an easy browsing, good shopping experience and efficient communication with site visitors or potential customers. It also expresses its commitment to improve the *multi-language experience* on Amazon.com, noting that many of the site's features are in Simplified Chinese, German, Brazilian Portuguese, or Spanish, but other communications are not available now. However, to remove this linguistic barrier, the company highly recommends that Internet users contact the Customer Service, which can communicate with them in these languages.

H&M is a great example of how to localize an e-commerce site to specific markets. Unlike Amazon whose website in the UK has a different design from the website in the USA, H&M websites targeted toward visitors customers worldwide have the same design and focus on the same products regardless of the market they are being targeted. The product descriptions are accurate and contain specific information about the products. To exemplify, I analyzed a description of a dress on three markets – the British, the Romanian and the Italian one and I noticed the use of key phrases to highlight the quality and uniqueness of the dress (e.g. *organic cotton, our hand-made meadow flowers, print designers, bumbac organic, colecția noastră cu flori de câmp pictate manual, i motivi dell'abito, dipinti a mano*). However, I noticed that the description in Italian does not contain the detail about the ecological cotton from which the dress is made, which could lead to clients' lack of the interest in buying this dress. In the following, I presented the description of the dress on the websites targeted toward consumers in Great Britain, Romania and Italy to justify my finding.

The British version

“Long dress in a crinkled weave with a square neckline and voluminous, 3/4-length sleeves with deep armholes and narrow elastication at the cuffs. Pearly buttons at the back, a seam with pleats at the waist and a flared skirt. *Lined. Made from organic cotton, this dress is part of our hand-painted meadow flowers collection.* The pattern was developed by our print designers Kavita, Abigail, Holly and Florentin, who picked their favourite wild flowers and recreated them in watercolour.” (H&M UK, https://www2.hm.com/en_asia3/productpage.0978256001.html)

The Romanian version

“Rochie lungă din țesătură creponată, cu decolteu pătrat și mâneci trei sferturi voluminoase, cu răscoiala adâncită și elastic îngust la manșete. Nasturi

perlați la spate, cusătură cu pliuri în talie și fusta evazată. *Căptușită. Rochia este confecționată din bumbac ecologic și face parte din colecția noastră cu flori de câmp pictate manual.* Motivul a fost elaborat de designerii noștri de imprimeuri, Kavita, Abigail, Holly și Florentin, care au ales florile lor sălbatice preferate și le-au recreat în acuarele.”

(H&M Romania, https://www2.hm.com/ro_ro/productpage.0978256001.html)

The Italian version

“Abito lungo in tessuto goffrato. Scollo squadrato, maniche voluminose a tre quarti con giromanica ampio ed elastico sottile in fondo. Cucitura con pines in vita, gonna svasata. Bottoni madreperlato sulla schiena, foderato.

.....I motivi dell’abito, dipinti a mano, sono opera dei nostri designer Kavita, Abigail, Holly e Florentin, che hanno scelto i loro fiori di campo preferiti e li hanno ricreati all’acquerello.” (H&M Italy, https://www2.hm.com/it_it/productpage.0978256001.html)

For the sake of clarity, experts in technical communication recommend the correct implementation of Controlled Language to reuse and create content that meets the needs of global audiences. Thus, a *controlled language* initiative is applied when writing for localization aiming to select a set of simple and clear vocabulary to improve communication for specific purposes. By incorporating Simplified Technical English or other controlled language practices in translation, companies can save more than 20% on the *localization* costs. In addition, this initiative increases readability and comprehensibility, maximizes content reuse, helps to manage terminology across disciplines more effectively, enhances quality control and efficiency, for example, the editors will focus on the organization, intelligence and internationalization of the content, and uses specific tools that enable benchmarking prior to and following the content editing for compliance.

The language control approaches are effective when they choose simple terms and restrict grammar, syntax, and verb forms. For example, the use of Standard English word order (a subject, a verb, and an object with an associated modifier) facilitates simpler translations from English into Romanian. Likewise, the use of relative pronouns “which” and “that” can ensure a better understanding and a smooth translation from English into Romanian. As for the concept identification, only the use of a single term ensures not only the overall consistency of translation in Romanian but also increases the related translation advantage.

High quality translation requires a high-quality content. For example, a very important aspect in the translation and transcreation for e-commerce localization is a proper description of the products in a convincing way to get website visitors to place orders. In the first stage of preparing the text, it is necessary to estimate the

expectations of the target audience regarding the products and to find out their preferences by collecting information through surveys, Google analytics, Google Data Studio, Google Optimize and Facebook insights. Next, the use of an adequate register can ensure text uniformity, a pleasant reading and a unique style of expression. Therefore, at this stage, all these elements can arouse the reader's interest:

- Writing style (formal or informal); informal expressions and jokes can lead to very good results for certain types of products and stores while formal writing is recommended to show seriousness and quality.
- How to address (direct, polite pronouns, etc.)
- Use of style figures
- Humorous elements can be used very carefully because visitors from different cultures may perceive them differently.
- Text length.

The third stage aims at specific information, explanations and constant evidence to present the advantages of the products and the benefits of the users. This presentation can have a positive impact on the global public if appropriate terminology and grammar is used for advertising such as precise verbs, descriptive adjectives and adverbs. Moreover, the use of terms that stimulate the olfactory and gustatory senses can encourage the site visitors to place an order.

Sometimes the description of a product resembles an advertisement message, which can trigger affective responses. Interestingly “when emotions are involved, what the potential consumer sees will stick to her/his mind, which increases the chances of subsequent purchase of the product being advertised.” [4]. However, the translators need to pay special attention to the adjectives expressing emotive reactions because there is alternation between British and American English in the sense that different types of catalysts establish the use of prepositions after adjectives of this kind [5]. Specifically, in British English there is a tendency to use “with” rather than “at” when the catalyst is a person or an object rather than an event whereas in American English the use of “at” is normal in these cases.[6].

[7] contends that the adjective “new” is the most common in advertising to describe new benefits and features and is often used in the phrase “new and improved” to highlight that the brand is updated and the products are better than prior models. Another adjective, “sustainable”, frequent on websites of clothing & apparel highlights the proactiveness of brands and their progress towards a more sustainable fashion future. Translating other positive adjectives such as *dazzling, vibrant, elegant, enchanting, ravishing, glowing, captivating, lovely, shimmering, gleaming, vivacious, magnificent, alluring*, etc. to describe products is one of the most pleasant tasks of translators because they actually present a brand that conveys only positive vibes to site visitors or clients. We agree with [8], who argues that a translated text is assessed not only at the textual level, where both the form of expression and content are targeted, with the intra- and intertextual

references that belong to it but also at the peritextual level, where prejudices or socio-cultural mentality play an essential role.

To conclude this section in a proactive manner, artificial intelligence can assist translators if it finds its place in the translating process. Thus, it can increase the quality and speed of human translation. Technology developers have already tackled solutions of AI-powered applications that can enable translators to do their best work considering that it will be very challenging for Artificial intelligence to review the translated content comprehensively. In the translation industry though, it can play a significant role in assessing the localization quality, selecting the best linguist for a particular task, assisting the project manager to coordinate & develop the resource of linguists or in replacing the project manager, fully or partially, when he/she faces a convoluted localization workflow.

4. Cultural localization

Online shopping has become popular across the globe because it avoids long lines, saves a lot of time and contributes to social distancing, the major restriction in the Covid-19 pandemic. Content localization offers a business the opportunity to enter a foreign market. Local audiences, especially by young people, visit localized e-commerce websites. *Transcreation* deals with the adaptation of the website content to another language and cultural realities from that country even with information change on the website to fit the target country. It relies on good translation services and cultural knowledge, being the ultimate level of content adaptation.

Many e-commerce websites fail to convey the message in such a way that the visitor fully understands it. It is impossible to translate advertising or marketing messages *mot à mot*. While translating the website content the translator needs to feel the emotion behind the words and translate it into another language, keeping the meaning, but adapting the words to convey the same emotion. The biggest problem with advertising and marketing messages is that they must be effective, that is, to convince the target audience to place an order. The translated message needs to have the same persuasive power as the original message. In most cases, this requires, in addition to *excellent language skills, cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, creativity* and *responsiveness*. It is all about etiquette, and its rules must be respected in all fields of activity. The European Parliament has developed a new language guide for politicians and officials, with the aim of giving a clear direction to use “inclusive language” properly. According to officials, it is forbidden to use terms that may be disrespectful to certain ethnic or gender minorities (e.g. “mother”, “father”, “trans”, “gay”). Actually is a useful tool at official and political level to communicate issues about ethnicity, race, gender, disability or religion correctly.

However, when it comes to a localization strategy aligned to a company’s mission and social responsibility, marketing tools are inclusive and translation aims to meet

the requirements of producing the meaning, maintaining the initial objective of the statement and the informative content of origin. Companies that address a global audience seek to respect the cultural and linguistic features of each country. When cultural differences have their say, only *cultural awareness*, *cultural sensitivity* and *creativity* can get the translator on track. He/she needs specific competences for various translations for specific purposes, for instance, when to translate literally, when to adapt, and how to keep the meaning and message of the original text. When lacking these competences, it will be difficult for a translator to make a successful translation.

Transcreation and *trans-adaptation*, on the other hand, aim to overcome linguistic and cultural nuances, and to harmonize the extralinguistic, socio-cultural contexts of the source and target recipients through cultural sensitivity and creativity. More precisely, in my opinion, *translation* is complemented by *trans-adaptation* and *transcreation* thus leading to successful production of e-commerce localization. Sdobnikov's claims that "*Cultural adaptation* of a text performed in the process of *localization* and *transcreation* is another term for pragmatic adaptation widely used by translators and translation scholars for a long time." [9].

Habits and values are the basis of any culture, reflecting the way people think and behave at home, at work, shopping, etc. Knowing them to predict consumer behavior can therefore be of significant importance in developing an effective localization strategy. Adopting a culture-sensitive approach to understand people's preferences for colors and symbols, being transparent all the way and respecting ethical principles will always build trust with consumers.

Many localization blunders have occurred because the brand voice clashed with the cultural norms, which resulted in sales drops. Nonetheless, success stories do exist because many brands conducted multilingual keyword research and focused on cultural sensitivity campaigns (e.g. PepsiCo, Johnson & Johnson). One of the most common trends that companies from Western markets adopted is *unstereotyping*, which changed the way brands picture men, women and children in advertising. The trendsetter was Unilever, which later on urged brands to join the Unstereotyping Alliance and implicitly commit to do business better when marketing products and services to global consumers. Another approach to overcome confusion and misunderstandings in localizing content is the *avoidance of slang and idioms*. Idioms do not have equivalent translations in other languages whereas slang expressions cannot be interpreted easily because they are idiosyncratic to individual cultures.

Likewise, images, photos, logos and icons used by brands convey meanings that are interpreted or perceived, by global consumers not as intended. Thus, brands must adopt a sensible and sensitive cultural approach after investigating what causes offence to customers in overseas markets. *Translating symbols or text* from other cultures to localize content requires the employment of linguists,

transcreation and trans-adaptation specialists who can polish texts so that companies could relate to international customers.

Obviously, localizing content for e-commerce implies developing not only a multi-faceted strategy for enhancing cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, linguistic management but also innovative ways to increase traffic on the e-commerce website.

5. Conclusions

The world is increasingly interconnected due to globalization and technology. At this moment, global consumers are visiting e-commerce websites to see products, compare prices, select and purchase the desired products. Globally, e-commerce has been a consolidated area of business operating for more than twenty years, which triggers competition thus benefiting consumers because it generates lower prices and offers the possibility to choose between more products and services. In 2020, the pandemic context has led to an accelerated growth of e-commerce in Europe, which has transformed it into the most important economic sector in Romania for instance.

The paper focuses on the elements of localization that pose not only a linguistic challenge but also cultural barriers to companies expanding into new markets. As we move into a digital future, growing companies focus on transforming content to be culturally and linguistically resonant. When companies target global consumers, the choice of language for their web presence should comply with international inclusive marketing. In the translation of localized content, the company owning the website represents the communicative function. High quality content (e.g. clear information, accurate descriptions of products, culturally sensitive graphics, etc.) empower site visitors in the sense that they get all the needed answers while browsing the information and their decision to place an order occurs instantly. Yet the paper includes product descriptions to highlight an example of good quality translation, on the one hand, and an example of linguistic mismanagement due to running the text through Google Translate, on the other hand. Automatic translation produces over literal translation and has poor performance on informal, spoken language, word order and on particular genres and language for specific purposes. Hence, translating content by resort to machine translation followed by human translator's review and text adaptation with the culture of target audience in mind, and conducting multilingual keyword research to identify words that resonate with specific cultures contribute to a successful localization service.

6. References

- [1] Lockwood, R. (2000). Have Brand, Will Travel. In *Language International*. Bd. Nr. 12/2, 4/2000: 14-16.

- [2] Cherata, S. (2005). Aspecte ale activității terminologice și de documentare în traducerea de specialitate de înaltă calitate, In *UniTerm* Nr.3/2005
- [3] Cherata, S. (2005). Aspecte ale activității terminologice și de documentare în traducerea de specialitate de înaltă calitate, In *UniTerm* Nr.3/2005
- [4] Mărginean, A. (2019). The Hermeneutics of the “Emma!...” or “Paper Has a Great Future ” Advertisement. In *JISOM*, Vol. 13 Nr. 1/2019, p.156
- [5] Quirk, R et al. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, Essex: Longman Group Limited, p. 702
- [6] Quirk, R et al. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, Essex: Longman Group Limited, p. 702
- [7] Leech, N. G. (1966). *English in Advertising: A Linguistic Study of Advertising in Great Britain*, London, Longmans
- [8] Lungu-Badea, G. (2004). Traducerea științifică. Repere. In *Uniterm* Nr. 1/2004
- [9] Sdobnikov, V.V. (2018). Translation vs localization: what’s the difference? *J. Sib. Fed. Univ. Humanit. soc. sci.*, 11(9), 1487-1498. DOI: 10.17516/1997-1370-0317.