Careers in localization

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As a career advisor in the language industry, I spend a lot of time looking at résumés. Résumés, if written correctly, can tell a lot about someone. Along with experience and length of service in various roles, I am always sure to take a peek at what education and training someone has had.

I am a big fan of education and school in general. Taking extra courses, even while we are working, helps us keep up-to-date on current trends in our field and supports better performance in our jobs. Educational programs can get us ready for advancement, or help us transition to another job altogether. When I coach people and see that they are planning to move to something new, I like to be sure that they know what kind of job they really want before they start to move in a particular direction. This is doubly important to know before someone invests in educational programs. A job may sound inviting, but until it is really understood what the day-to-day tasks and responsibilities will be like, we can risk going for something that didn't appeal to us much in the first place.

To this end, here is a brief summary of the different kinds of jobs in the language industry, and the core skill sets and responsibilities that each require. There are various educational and training programs that can go along with each position.

Linguistics

As the core of the language industry, linguistic professionals provide direct translation from language to language for any content that their clients require. Many people who start in a linguistics-based role either have a natural bilingual or multilingual background and have studied for many years to make their talent in languages marketable to clients who need their services. Linguists fall into several different job categories or roles in the language industry, such as interpreters, translators, editors or proofreaders.

Linguists may work on an independent, freelance basis or be employed by either a language service provider (LSP) or client company. They are generally responsible for translating textual works and information from one language (the source) to another (the target) in a timely manner. Linguists who work in translating written text are required to interface with various tools and technologies that support the translation process, such as translation memory (TM), translation workflow tools and other computer-aided translation (CAT) tools. Interpreters are responsible for interpreting between languages for spoken presentations, conversations or other verbal exchanges. They may interpret onsite, over the phone or simultaneously for conferences or events.

Linguists must possess an aptitude for language and global cultures in their specialization. Sensitivity to nuance and contextual meaning is important. Strong communication skills, attention to detail and precision are a must in translation work. If translating written text, a translator will spend every day in front of a computer converting text from one language to another so the translator must be comfortable with tools and technology as well as be able to concentrate and focus for long periods of time. When interpreting verbally, over the phone or simultaneously through a service, interpreters must be highly flexible and knowledgeable in various subjects. They have to work to refine the skill of translating verbally on the spot, in real time. Domain knowledge in a certain field of expertise will make a linguist marketable and specialized.

Technical roles

The language industry has a strong technical component, as information and content is developed in a wide range of digital formats. From software to documentation to websites to devices and various other technical products and platforms, any content requiring translation needs to be managed specially in the translation or localization process.

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Technical roles require specialization in several, if not all, major technical software development platforms. Additionally, expertise in translation-related technologies is a must. There are several technical roles in the language industry and each discipline has coursework that complements the various levels of responsibility.

Localization quality assurance (QA) professionals are responsible for quality, functionality and precision of a finished technical product. They craft and perform test plans before a final product is released to flush out any errors or defaults. They work closely with development, engineering and localization teams in their process. These positions exist both at LSP companies as well as client companies. A localization QA professional must have an exceptional attention to detail, systematic approach to working in a unified fashion and strong technical expertise. He or she must possess the ability to concentrate for long periods of time.

The primary role of an internationalization engineer, on the other hand, is to have all technology products developed in a way that facilitates and considers localization and translation processes and requirements. These individuals work closely with developers on a code level to be sure that anything that affects the success of localization (date/time formats, Unicode compliance, font com-

patibility, design for text expansion and so on) be addressed in advance at the beginning of development. This position is separate from a localization engineer, though a localization engineer may be responsible for internationalization. An internationalization engineer is most often a consultant, provided by an LSP or company specializing in this area, but sometimes is a member of an LSP localization engineering team or occasionally in a client company.

Skills that successful internationalization engineers must possess include a solid understanding of software and technology product development, coding and various technical development languages, and the ability to identify flags for internationalization issues. They need to have a strong comfort level working with technical engineers in software, technology development and localization engineering. Clear communication and the ability to teach and inform peer groups and management of this area of expertise is important.

A localization engineer works directly with any product, document, website or device that requires translation. At an LSP, localization engineers will be responsible for many things. They assess files for quoting localization and translation work. They dictate how files for localization be received by the client company. They take in files, process

them, work with translation and localization tools and help execute all necessary preparation of the files for translation. When files are translated, they recompile the files in any development format or system for reintegration into the final localized product. They work with localization QA to verify and fix errors. And they collaborate with client development and localization teams as necessary.

At a client company, localization engineers work as an integrated member of a development team to ensure that localization happens seamlessly. They alert the development teams of necessary localization requirements, receive files and special instructions on development and get to know the product that is being developed inside and out. They may work with an LSP company and their engineering team to answer questions and facilitate the technical aspect of the overall process.

Both LSP and client localization engineers must have an exceptionally high knowledge of development technologies that they are working with and how they play into the localization process. They too must be able to integrate various localization and translation tools such as TM, translation workflow tools and other CAT tools.

Now let's look at the solutions architect, a higher level technology professional who works with development teams, clients and sales people in an LSP to craft complex solutions for localization. His or her skill set needs to be a balance of technical aptitude, client relations and people skills. Strong communication and the ability to give presentations to decision makers and groups are a must in these roles. Solutions architect positions are usually held by people who have several years of localization engineering experience and can speak and advise on a wide range of topics. A solutions architect is generally uniquely an LSP position, providing a form of technical, expert level consultation to a program or initiative requiring translation or localization.

A solutions architect, at times, may also be considered similar to a localization strategist in the context of a client company.

Skills that successful solutions architects must possess include a solid understanding of software and technology product development, no matter the client and what they are building. Furthermore,

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solutions architect positions require a firm understanding of the localization process at that particular LSP, so they can assess and recommend the best path forward to a client. They will also have to possess excellent communication and presentation skills, a high comfort level in working with decision makers and be the go-to person to solve challenging technical puzzles.

Finally, a technical manager handles a technical team consisting of localization engineers, internationalization engineers, localization QA professionals and solutions architects. This person ensures that all requirements for localization are met by assigning teams, resources, budget and expertise to any given project at any given time.

Technical managers in localization exist both at client companies and LSPs. At a client company, technical managers may be responsible for several development departments, with localization as part of it. They will need to work with the wider management organization to ensure proper and adequate resourcing with regard to budget, headcount, time allowances and other management responsibilities. They work to support that everything related to localization success is in place and available for the teams to achieve their goals.

Technical managers at an LSP will run the entire technical department of localization engineers, internationalization engineers, localization QA professionals and solutions architects to perform all technical functions to support client assignments. Similar to client-side technical managers, they focus on budget, resourcing and time allocations to ensure the success of their teams. Important skill sets of the technical manger include solid people management expertise coupled with technical expertise. A technical manager only has credibility from a technical team if he or she has actually been an engineer in the past and has a strong knowledge of the complexities of technology.

Business roles

Language industry services are, of course, business oriented as well as technology oriented. It is most commonly described as a professional services industry, though a tangible product is being delivered at the end of the day. To that end, there are several business functions that help facilitate the business of language.

Start as a...	Transition to...
Linguist	Project manager, localization QA (linguistic), or start a business and become a small business owner
Project manager	Senior project manager, operations manager, procurement manager, solutions architect or strategist
Vendor manager	HR, recruitment or manager of HR/recruitment
Localization QA	Localization engineer, internationalization engineer
Localization engineer	Technical manager or solutions architect
Operations manager	Executive or strategist
Sales executive	Senior sales executive, sales manager or executive

Table 1: There is a natural progression to job advancement.

For the purposes of this article, *executive* signifies anyone who holds a high-level management position at an LSP, or who holds any C-level position (CEO, COO or other). An executive is someone who has overarching responsibility for management of a language company.

An executive establishes the general direction of an organization, sets the tone and objectives that the larger organization must meet to ensure success and make decisions that affect the bottom line of an organization. In the language industry, which is a niche professional service, there are other skills that are especially important. An executive must be completely comfortable working across cultures and in a global context. He or she must have expertise in professional business and technical services. Executives must know just enough about the language industry to be credible, but possess all executive leadership skills to pay attention to the bottom line and financial profitability. They must know how to optimize investment in technology, innovation, resources and people to do everything that their business requires. Strong skills in presenting, motivating and representing an organization publicly are essential.

An operations manager may also be referred to as department manager, production manager or group manager. The operations manager is responsible for a

Degrees	Some examples	Applicable for
General Localization Degree Programs (MA, MBA or other)	Monterey Institute, Localization Management Programs	project manager, operations manager
Translation Degree Programs	Kent State, Applied Linguistics Programs	linguist
Localization Engineering Degree Programs	University of Limerick, MS in Localization Engineering Localisation Resource Centre	localization QA, internationalization engineer, localization engineer, solutions architect
Technical Management Degree Programs (MS)	Penn State, Master of Engineering Management	localization engineer, technical manager
International Executive MBA Programs	Thunderbird International Programs, TRIUM EMBA	operations manager, executive

Certifications	Some examples	Applicable for
Localization Certification	Monterey Institute, Localization Management Programs	project manager, operations manager, localization engineer
Localization Project Management Certification	Localization Institute Project Management Certification	project manager
Project Management Certification	Project Management Institute – Project Management Professional (PMP)	project manager
Quality Certification	Six Sigma Green Belt (CSSGB) by ASQ Certified Quality Technician (CQT) by ASQ Quality Management in Localization by TAUS	localization quality assurance (QA)
Recruiter Certification	AIRS Recruiter Certification	vendor managers
Executive Programs	Executive Certificate in Web Globalization Management — St Louis	operations manager, executive

Practical learning – Resources	Some examples	Applicable for
Translation tools and technology	Localization Institute online workshops, Cattools.org	localization engineer, localization QA, project manager, technical manager, solutions architect, strategist, linguist
Online training and seminars — general	GALA online seminars	localization engineer, localization QA, project manager, technical manager, solutions architect, strategist
Online training and seminars — linguists	Proz.com	linguist, project manager
Negotiation	Harvard Business School — Executive Program on Negotiation	procurement manager, project manager, operations manager, executive
Sales	CustomerCentric Selling, Sales Performance International — Solution Selling Franklin Covey — Presentation Advantage Dale Carnegie — High Impact Presentations	sales executive, solutions architect

Table 2: Examples of educational resources for the localization industry.

team of specialists and professionals to get work completed on time, on budget and with excellent quality. An operations manager requires general people management and development skills, must know how to recruit and retain talent, take ownership of budgets and other administrative responsibilities and keep work flowing throughout an organization.

These people assign resources, approve timelines and work with executive teams to ensure that all work gets done as promised to partners or clients. They may have worked their way up through an organization from project management or were trained managers from the beginning.

Project managers are in charge of the execution of all the different projects that

require translation or localization. They understand what needs to be translated or localized, organize the appropriate vendor and internal resources, and also create a schedule, timeline and associated budget. They work along the way to be sure everything is delivered on time and on budget. They track and resolve issues, work with developers and various departments to be

sure that everything they are responsible for works out as planned. They usually report to an operations manager.

A project manager needs to have excellent communication skills and the ability to work with people ranging from those in management to linguists to engineers to clients and others. Organizational skill, managing complexity and being able to keep track of several moving parts at once are essential. Financial budgeting skills are required, as well as the ability to negotiate and persuade people to do what is needed. Project managers are at both LSP and client companies.

A sales executive, on the other hand, is responsible for finding clients for a company and bringing in revenue. Sales executive positions require excellent communication skills, possess the ability to identify new business opportunities, make contact with decision makers, demonstrate the abilities of the company or service organization they represent and land business. A big part of a sales position is being consistently proactive to continually generate new business and form relationships. Resiliency, focus

and natural motivation are required here. Sales executive positions are uniquely LSP positions, as LSPs — by definition — provide language services to larger companies.

Someone in a sales executive position in the language industry would do best enhancing his or her skills in selling professional services, as opposed to selling things. Furthermore, there will be higher success for someone who knows how to sell technical professional services versus services from another industry, such as financial or medical services. There is a strong focus on "relationship" selling, which means that sales executives must learn how to get to know their clients, what their client challenges and needs are, and what the solutions are. This is in contrast to other sales positions that focus on cold calling, meeting numbers and closing deals — that has to be done as well, but in the context of a larger relationship-building effort.

A strategist position is somewhat like a solutions architect position, but at a client company. If a company has a localization or globalization strategist, it means that the organization has a lot of complex-

ity in language requirements and needs someone to focus on making that organization as efficient as possible. A strategist is tasked with looking for the newest language technologies, finding ways to optimize the translation or localization process, and creating vendor and pricing strategies that create efficient and effective vendor and LSP relationships with the company. They are generally tasked with making everything in the translation or localization process go faster, cheaper and better, year over year.

A procurement manager is a client-side position, and is responsible for services agreements between the company and its LSPs. A procurement manager only really exists at large companies, as smaller or medium sized companies that need language services may just negotiate with business owners or executives.

A procurement manager must have excellent negotiation skills, be able to craft detailed pricing strategies and form legal agreements with legal professionals. They are generally sold to by sales executives, along with company translation or localization

department heads, so they require discernment in decision making. They will likely deal with the request for proposal/request for quotation process, billing, pricing and terms negotiation over all.

A vendor manager is the person at an LSP who forms relationships with third party partners, like linguists and contractor organizations.

A vendor manager is responsible for sourcing and recruiting various professionals and specialists, testing and qualifying these vendor resources, and maintaining up-to-date contact records with these vendor individuals or companies in order to call on them when their skills are required. A vendor manager is akin to a human resources recruiter, but with a specialization.

All these job titles and descriptions are offered with the intention to serve as a broad example of the kinds of roles in the language industry. There are several titles used for each of the various functions that may be more specific, and potentially signify a level of seniority. For example, a project manager as defined herein could easily have a title of senior website localization program manager or translation project coordinator. A sales executive could have the title of business development manager, life sciences or lead generator, inside sales. A localization QA person could be titled Korean language QA tester or linguistic verification engineer.

Considering education for career advancement

Many people consider education when looking to advance to another level in their existing career path. In the language industry, there is a general natural progression from one role to the next, as shown in Table 1. Of course, there are no hard and fast rules on this, but there are trends and tendencies as I've seen in my years in recruiting and advising people in their careers.

Another valuable way to use education is to transition from one professional discipline to another. If you like being in the language industry, and have done a particular job for a while, it's possible that you may want to do something new altogether. One clear way to that change is to learn the specific skills that the target position requires.

Whether looking to enhance a current skill set for a present position, or add to what you know through training and education to apply for a new position or career path, Table 2 is a compiled sample set of educational resources in the industry. These programs, be they degree programs, certifications or general learning resources, can provide information that is directly applicable to specific roles in the language industry.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but serves as a sample to provide ideas and inspiration for educational programs applicable to the work we do. **M**

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