

Accessing Multilingual Public Service Information through Localisation

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Over the past 30 years, the Republic of Ireland (Ireland) has gone from a country of net emigration to a situation where about 10 percent of the population are non-Irish nationals including those from outside of EU. While prior censuses did not ask about nationality, for the first time in the 2002 census, the questionnaire asked about nationality. The 2006 census published a report “Census Non-Irish Nationals Living in Ireland”¹ stating a total of 420,000 non-Irish nationals were living in Ireland representing 188 different countries. The Irish national is no more represented only by the traditional trademark of the shamrock, but also as a country of high economic growth until 2008. Ireland has become multi-lingual, multi-national, and multi-cultural society in the European Union (EU).

This paper will examine the awareness of minority language rights in public service information in Ireland from the viewpoint of localisation as well as from the viewpoint of language policy of Ireland.

Localisation has been applied and researched generally as a set of activities for digital content to adapt 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 while the global digital divide in communication is reflected in the different level of localisation afforded to “profitable” languages and “less profitable” ones.

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

¹ <http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/documents/population/non-irish/nonirishnationalscomplete.pdf>
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localisation such as the Centre for Next Generation Localisation² and the Localisation Research Centre³ undertake research to meet the demand of a multi-lingual society in digital documents.

EU expansion and Irish economic prosperity has attracted foreign nationals as society faces concerns with minorities. Currently the Citizen Information Board⁴ provides information in English, French, Irish, Romanian, and Polish. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform⁵ provides information in Irish and English, while the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service⁶ is only accessible in English. The Central Statistics Office Ireland acknowledges new-member of society by providing census records in 16 languages.

This paper will survey localisation of digital content in official web sites in Ireland to measure the level of accessibility of new comers to Ireland.

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² <http://www.cngl.ie/index.html> (29/01/2010)

³ <http://www.localisation.ie/> (29/01/2010)

⁴ <http://www.citizensinformation.ie/categories> (29/01/2010)

⁵ <http://www.justice.ie/> (29/01/2010)

⁶ <http://www.inis.gov.ie/> (29/01/2010)