

EXPLORING TRANSLATION STRATEGIES IN VIDEO GAME LOCALISATION¹

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of video game localisation focusing on the different strategies to be used from the point of view of Translation Studies. More precisely, the article explores the possible relation between the translation approaches used in the field and the different genres or textual typologies of video games. As the narrative techniques and the story lines of video games have become more complex and well-developed, the adaptation of games entails a serious challenge for translators. Video games have evolved into multimodal and multidimensional products and new approaches and insights are required when studying the adaptation of games into different cultures. Electronic entertainment provides an interesting and barely explored corpus of analysis for Translation Studies, not only from the point of view of localisation but also concerning audiovisual translation.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza el campo de la localización de videojuegos centrándose en las diferentes estrategias utilizadas desde el punto de vista de los Estudios de Traducción. En concreto, el artículo estudia la posible relación entre los enfoques traductológicos utilizados en este campo y los diferentes géneros y tipologías textuales de los videojuegos. La mayor complejidad en las técnicas narrativas y el argumento de los videojuegos ha provocado que su adaptación proporcione un reto considerable

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para los traductores. Los videojuegos han evolucionado hasta convertirse en productos multimodales y multidimensionales, por lo que nuevos enfoques son necesarios cuando se estudia su adaptación a diferentes culturas. El entretenimiento electrónico proporciona un corpus de análisis interesante y apenas explorado para los Estudios de Traducción, no solo desde el punto de vista de la localización sino también en lo que respecta a la traducción audiovisual.

Keywords: Video games. Transcreation. Localisation. Translation strategies. Multimodality.

Palabras clave: Videojuegos. Transcreación. Localización. Estrategias de traducción. Multimodalidad.

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1. Introduction

The evolution of video games has run in parallel with the progress of new technology and the availability of electronic appliances for the wide audience. The very first titles developed in the decade of the 60s –like *Spacewar* or *Pong*– (Bernal 2006, O’Riada 2007) have nothing to do with the current multimedia and multimodal titles where the involvement and the interaction of the player with the game is a key element. Similarly, the concept of video games has evolved regarding not only technical issues, such as graphic and audio components, but also as long as the own story lines of the video games are concerned. The introduction of more complex narrative techniques has allowed for the creation of more compelling and thought-provoking plots.

Currently, video games are one of the most common forms of entertainment for millions of users around the world² and in many countries they have already overtaken the music and film sectors according to the figures of the sector. Moreover, the game industry has enlarged the horizon by addressing more and more different types of players: the profile of the games has changed and the new features included in the games –together with well-planned marketing campaigns– has allowed to reach new targets and markets. The so-called casual gaming, with new kinds of video games designed for mature people and multiplayer titles to be enjoyed by the whole family have broadened the arena for computer and game companies. Also, the evolution of the Web to its 4.0 version –the ubiquitous Web– has promoted the creation of thousands of online platforms and applications for casual gaming that are used on PCs and also on mobile phones. Indeed, according to statistics there are more than 200 million users of online casual games³.

Regarding hardcore games, the promotion and optimization of online gaming with cooperative modes has enabled players from all over the world

2. According to the Entertainment Software Association, 67% of American households play computer or video games. Source: <http://www.theesa.com/facts/index.asp>. Accessed on October 27th 2011.

3. Source: the Casual Games Association. <http://www.casualgamesassociation.org/news.php>. Accessed on October 27th 2011.

to compete and collaborate with each other in massive campaigns and open games: according to Steve Ballmer, Microsoft's CEO, the number of registered users of Xbox Live in 2011 amount to 30 million⁴.

In the framework of globalisation, new technologies and digital natives, video games provide an interesting and trendy corpus of analysis for academia, as this type of entertainment can be addressed from different disciplines. However, even when the figures of the game industry have shadowed other art forms like cinema, this field has been largely ignored by scholars since video games "are easily and readily denigrated as trivial" (Newman 2004: 5). The analysis of electronic entertainment from an academic and scientific point of view is still in an initial stage and many of the research lines in the field have not been sufficiently explored so far.

Research has been conducted on video games from the point of view of ludology (Frasca 2011) and studies have been published focusing on the localisation process and workflows (Chandler 2005). As long as Translation Studies is concerned, video games have been studied by several scholars (Bernal 2006, 2007, 2009; Mangiron & O'Hagan 2007; Muñoz Sánchez 2008; O'Hagan 2007 & 2009) and this can be regarded as an emerging field at the moment on the basis of the number of workshops and international congresses where this topic is being addressed. However, the true potential of video games and the possibilities they can pose for research in translation-related issues have not been fully approached yet: the relation between audiovisual translation and video games can be further studied, as the introduction of voice over, dubbing, subtitling and lip-sync techniques are still to be analysed; similarly, the question of accessibility in audiovisual translation can also be applied to the case of electronic entertainment (Orero 2005, Tercedor 2005).

The translation of video games is a key element in order to allow more players to enjoy a game in their own language, and nowadays most titles provide high quality translations, far away from the poor standards of the well-known English adaptation of *Zero Wing*, which turned the famous sentence "All your base are belong to us" into a popular icon of the game industry. As it happens in software localisation, game developers are investing more and more human and economic resources aiming to localize games into different locales and the simultaneous-shipment of a title into several target markets is a must to succeed in achieving a global echo with a video game. However, the adaptation of games into a different culture is not a straightforward

4. Source: Gamespot. http://ces.gamespot.com/story/6285921/xbox-360-sells-50-million-kinect-8-million?tag=top_stories;title;2. Accessed on October 27th 2011.

process and it goes beyond the simple language transfer from one language into another.

In order to keep the game experience and the “look and feel” of a title into the target locale, translators have to face different challenges (Mangiron & O’Hagan 2006). The advanced technology and the introduction of more multimedia features like cut-scenes and spoken dialogues make video games an appealing area for audiovisual translation (Bernal 2006, Mangiron & O’Hagan 2006) and include them in the framework of constrained translation (Mayoral *et al.* 1988). On the other hand, the manifold cultural references and technical challenges to be faced also suggest that games have to be on the radar screen of localisation. Besides providing more appealing products, the addition of new features to the games has contributed to achieve more creative and well-developed plots that improve the game experience and promote the involvement of players in the story they are interacting with.

To this regard, this paper focuses on the different translation strategies that can be observed in the adaptation of video games. The starting premise is that different types of games require different translation strategies (Bernal 2007). Therefore, the core issue to be discussed here is whether the adaptation of different genres and textual typologies may require relying on different translation approaches. In other words, is it possible to associate particular translation strategies like transcreation, domestication or literal translation, with specific genres or types of games like RPGs (role-playing games) or first person shooters? As it will be argued in the paper, modern games are more difficult to classify under one single category. Hence, an opposite hypothesis could be formulated stating that the hybridity of game taxonomies leads to the use of a combination of translation strategies when dealing with games of the same genre or even in the adaptation of a single title.

This paper is intended to analyse which of the two approaches seems to be more reliable from a scientific point of view. In order to shed some light on this issue, several games belonging to different genres have been analysed and examples will be provided to explain the main translation strategies used in the localisation of video games.

The article is structured as follows: section two focuses on the relevance of multimodality and multidimensionality for the development of more creative story lines. Section three comments on the different textual genres and typologies of video games, while section four explains which are the main translation strategies in video game localisation. Finally, section 5 includes the main conclusions of the paper.

2. Video games and multimodality: in the beginning was the video

The multimodality of video games has bridged the gap with other art forms such as cinema and has allowed players to interact with the story and get involved in the game at a higher level (O'Hagan 2005). Indeed, as it is explained by O'Hagan (2009), video games "create a polysemiotic and multimodal environment where the player interacts with the game system via different communication channels". Modern titles are pieces of art that combine video, audio and narrative techniques to make compelling stories in which the players do not observe the advance of the game but take part and perform an active role in the development of the story. The current level of interaction has been achieved by a number of technical breakthroughs and also by means of a combination of narrative techniques. Obviously, translation is the driving force that allows to represent an original atmosphere in a foreign culture.

In the beginning, video games consisted on basic and simple interfaces that allowed users to perform certain (reduced) functions. The development of graphic design and programming techniques set the basis for more complex games where players could assume more and more functions that promoted the interaction with the machines. However, games only included rudimentary synthesized sounds and music, and special effects were progressively integrated and optimized until reaching the current situation in which players can notice the position of an enemy by means of the sound of gunfire (Tavinor 2009: 77). Nowadays, video games rely on original soundtracks composed by renowned musicians and recorded by recognized orchestras. The audio component of video games turns to be more relevant for translation purposes as we concentrate on spoken dialogues. The primitive on-screen texts displaying the dialogues of the games' characters have been replaced by the real voices of actors who record the spoken dialogues in professional studios (Chandler 2005: 186; Mangiron & O'Hagan 2006). The fact that the characters of a game "speak" contribute to create real settings and scenarios and are a turning point in order to improve the interaction of the user and the engagement of the players in the story.

Similarly, the use of cut-scenes is a common resource in modern games for the purpose of showing certain parts of the story (O'Hagan 2009). In other words, cinematics are used as a narrative technique to build and develop the plot or the story line of modern games. These video sequences can be easily compared to the scenes of animation movies like *Monsters, Inc.* or *Finding Nemo* and pose an additional challenge in the translation of video games. As there are close-ups of some of the main characters, special lip-sync techniques are used by game developers to fit the facial expressions of the characters with

the phonemes they utter (Chandler 2005: 121). As most companies develop games in Japanese and English the localisation into the FIGS (French, Italian, German and Spanish) or any other language must tackle the adaptation of the dialogues taking into account the usual features applied in dubbing, subtitling or voice over (Bernal 2007, Mangiron & O'Hagan 2006).

Besides hi-fi music and spoken dialogues, modern games also include the option of turning subtitles on at any given point. Intralingual subtitles (i.e. subtitles in the same language of the dialogues of the game) allow the deaf and hard of hearing to fully enjoy the gameplay while interlingual subtitles address those people who do not speak the language of the title they are playing (Díaz-Cintas 2003: 200; Gottlieb 2001: 247). The former types of subtitles are the standard in the industry, although examples of interlingual subtitles can be exceptionally found in some titles which have not been fully localised and keep the voices and the dialogues in the source language (e.g. *Grand Theft Auto IV*). In any case, subtitles must be synchronized with the actual dialogues of the game according to the basic rules of audiovisual translation (Agost & Chaume 2001; Díaz-Cintas 2001: 41).

The introduction of audio components is intended to create more realistic and compelling stories that provide a more intense game experience. This aim is also pursued with the use of more complex narrative techniques and more creative plots. In addition, emerging trends like online gaming or the marketing of motion sensitive devices (e.g. Kinect and PlayStation Move) will contribute to foster and consolidate the multimodality and multidimensionality of video games.

In this context, translation turns to be a key process to adapt the game into different cultures and preserve the game experience. Similarly to video game development, Translation Studies is a young discipline that has evolved and progressed in the last decades with the recognition and the integration of new branches –like interpreting studies or audiovisual translation– and the interaction with related areas (e.g. IT and computing in the case of localisation). In the particular case of video games, translation is no more exclusively related to the transfer of language strings from the origin into the target language. Beyond the translation of textual contents, translators have to cope with the adaptation of non-textual and semiotic elements that configure the “translatable assets generated by the game industry” (Bernal 2007): besides the aforementioned audio components such as the dialogues and the spoken sentences uttered by the characters, games also include cultural and legal elements –e.g. games depicting gore or violent scenes have to be modified to comply with the German national laws that also demand to remove blood or

turn it green (Chandler 2005: 26)– and even with marketing questions, as the documents, licenses and all the materials that are sold with the game must be localised into the corresponding target locale. Beyond the box in which the video game is distributed, official websites and trailers are a major concern for studios, as they might have a relevant influence in the turnover of a particular title.

In a nutshell, the evolution of video games and the introduction of new audiovisual features have bridged the gap with other art forms such as films or music, and nowadays video games are complex multimedia and multidimensional products. Therefore, the adaptation of games into different cultures is not a straightforward process and requires different approaches and strategies. The translation of video games is fully within the scope of Translation Studies and it can be studied from different points of view.

3. Different genres and typologies in video games

This section is not intended to provide a complete classification of the different genres of video games, as it is a rather wide question to be addressed here and it would fall out of the scope of this paper. The main purpose is to analyse the idea that different genres configure different textual typologies and, therefore, different translation strategies may be required for each particular case (Bernal 2007). Moreover, the well-defined and clear game categories of the 80s and even the 90s have become blurred and opaque due to the development of more complex plots and storylines and many modern games cannot be easily tagged; indeed, many titles can be regarded as crossovers due to the impossibility of categorizing them under a single umbrella: these are the ‘mixed genre games’ or titles that do not fall in only one category (Scholand 2002). Consequently, the hybridization of video games can be a determining factor in order to support the hypothesis that translation strategies cannot be strictly associated to a single genre or textual type but they are usually combined to preserve the game experience of video games. In other words, the translation of video games may require a functionalist approach where particular strategies will be selected according to the context and the particular purpose or *skopos* to be fulfilled (Nord 1991, 1997).

Even when there are some ‘standard’ taxonomies used in the game industry by developers and specialized magazines, the categorization of games is not a simple question due to the number of genres, sub-genres and titles breaking or transgressing the boundaries of these labels and providing exceptions and ‘irregularities’ to the established classification.

Games can be categorised according to the platform they have been designed for –there are PC-based, console-based, handheld or arcade games (Mangiron & O'Hagan 2006)–, the analysis of the concept of video games (Bernal 2006), or even the distinction between casual and hardcore games. Also, other criteria can be applied in order to define video game categories: Frasca (2001: 6-9) reformulates Callois' terms and Piaget's rules to redefine the concepts of *ludus* and *paideia*, establishing a basic two-category system on the basis of ludology. While the former category refers to those games whose result establish a winner and a loser, the second one does not define these roles.

Focusing on more narrative-related elements, the content and the nature of some titles allow to define certain textual categories: as in the case of cinema or literature, different genres can be established to classify the different types of video games according to their specific features. The fact that several typologies can be set in the study of video games is a relevant issue from the point of view of translation, as some types of games –such as RPGs– rely on more complex story lines, are heavily narrative-driven and they may include more text and translatable assets (Mangiron 2004).

Berens and Howard (2001: 25-27) provide an initial taxonomy on the basis of seven categories: action and adventure, driving and racing, first-person shooters, platform and puzzle, roleplaying, strategy and simulation, and sports and beat'em ups. Obviously, this classification system can be broken into further sub-categories in order to sort out all the possible approaches and stories that developers can create: therefore, additional labels can be established for fighting games (e.g. *Tekken*), real-time strategy (e.g. *Command and Conquer*), hack and slash (e.g. *God of War*), graphic adventures (e.g. *Sam and Max*), education or information games (e.g. *Brain Training*), sandboxes (e.g. *Red Dead Redemption*), survival horrors (e.g. *Resident Evil*), etc. A thorough analysis of the particular features of the previous categories could lead to establish a specific textual type or genre for each of them.

On the basis of the narrative techniques and the plot of some games, it can be stated that certain genres –such as RPGs like *Final Fantasy*– include more translatable assets and therefore have more implications as long as translation is concerned (Mangiron 2004); graphic adventures or RPGs seem to have more translatable contents than football or racing games. However, the development of video games and the introduction of more features in many titles (i.e. cut-scenes, archive files, databases with technical information, etc.) has contributed to reduce these differences: while classic racing games did not contain many translatable strings beyond the menus and some in-game

screen messages, current titles like *Forza Motorsport 3* contain dialogues and voices and complete databases with information regarding cars, circuits, history, companies, etc., providing virtual encyclopaedias for car lovers.

The game industry and the specialised media define new categories and sub-categories to fit the modern and complex types of video games, and the flexibility of English allows for the creation of neologisms on a regular basis (Scholand 2002). In this sense, the game industry feeds back from the magazines and the game reviews where new tags and labels are frequently coined and updated. However, no scholarly classification has been defined, since the taxonomy of video games can be “extremely nebulous” and it does not include all the fixities and the nuances of certain titles (Newman 2004: 12).

In any case, it can be concluded that different genres can be established on the basis of the specific features of video games. This is an element to be taken into account from the point of view of Translation Studies, as different textual typologies may require different approaches and strategies in order to preserve the gameplay in the target culture. The next section describes the main strategies observed in the translation of video games and discusses if the selection of these strategies can be clearly associated with specific genres, creating tendencies or regularities.

4. Translation strategies reviewed

Translation is a context-sensitive process and, as any human activity, it is also highly conditioned by the particular decisions and the choice of the translator who has to convey the meaning from the source culture to the target audience. The adaptation of multimedia products also entails the idea of constrained translation (Mayoral *et al.* 1988) as the particular characteristics and restrictions of the text being transferred will have to be taken into account. In this sense, this paper relies on the idea that the translation of video games is a rather functionalist process where keeping the game experience is the main priority to bear in mind when adapting the game (Bernal 2006, O’Hagan 2009). In other words, a Mexican, French or Chinese player should enjoy a similar gameplay and experience than somebody playing in the original American or Japanese version. However, this statement poses a number of questions regarding translation. First of all, is it *always* necessary to keep the look and feel of the game, or is it possible to adopt a strategy in which this can be modified in order to meet the expectations of the target audience? Secondly, is it always possible to keep the same game experience without losing any shade or nuance? The use of humour and puns in some video games makes

it almost impossible to adapt the message without suffering a loss in meaning and compensation strategies may be required (Di Marco 2007).

As long as video games are concerned, the concept of 'right' or 'wrong' translation does not apply and translators focus on achieving the objective of meeting a functionalist objective: preserving the game experience. Therefore, fulfilling the expectations of the users in the target audience is the underlying principle. This is not a straightforward task, as translators might need to know all the meta-textual references of video games (sometimes to previous editions of the same title or to other sagas and game-related material) in order to meet the expectations of experienced players.

4.1. Domestication vs. Foreignization

The classic distinction defined by Venuti (1995) is intended to establish a difference between translations aimed to keep a 'foreign flavour' or those texts adapted to the particular features and standards of the target culture. This is an approach that can be clearly applied to the case of video games. Indeed, it can be argued that this is one of the most relevant decisions to be taken in the translation process since it may influence the whole localisation strategy of a video game into the target locale and will also lead to the application of other particular strategies (for instance, the 'non-translation' of certain names or items). Foreignization strategies are intended to keep the look and feel of the original game and transfer the atmosphere and the flavour of the source culture into the target locale.

A fairly good example of a successful foreignization strategy can be observed in *Assassins' Creed*, where the original atmosphere and flavour of the Italian culture has been effectively preserved in the destination locales. The game is based on several Italian cities and regions, and a huge number of local names, places and cultural references are mentioned in the story. In different moments, certain characters use Italian words or expressions that have been preserved in the English or Spanish versions. Also, the professional actors recording the spoken dialogue apply a gentle Italian accent in some of the cut-scenes, contributing to create the compelling atmosphere of the game. Similarly, *Grand Theft Auto IV* includes different accents to represent the ethnic origin and the nationalities of many of the foreign characters of the game like Nico Ballic and some of his relatives coming from Eastern Europe.

On the other hand, domesticating strategies aim to bring the game closer to the target culture. Even when some of the games developed in Japan rely on foreignizing approaches in order to meet the expectations of manga and anime supporters, one of the best-known video game sagas developed in Japan,

Final Fantasy, provides a good example of domesticating strategies, as it has been concluded by Mangiron & O'Hagan (2006):

As an overall strategy for localising these FF titles, the translators opted for a domesticating approach in a Venutian sense (Venuti 1995); or, to follow Toury's terminology (1980), an acceptable translation which aims to bring the game closer to the target culture. This domestication is achieved mainly by the use in the target text of idiomatic and colloquial language, the adaptation of jokes, sayings and cultural references, and the re-creation of new cultural references and plays on words. All this gives a distinctive, original flavour to the localised version.

Similarly, one of the most relevant and famous characters created by Shigeru Miyamoto has been effectively adapted to local cultures: Mario Bros and his brother Luigi have been designed with an "international flavour" and their names, jobs and even physical appearance have been thought to be suitable for the wide audience without having to go through major changes. Also, the names of the worlds, characters and items of "Mario's universe" have been translated with a great amount of creativity into different languages. Similarly, jokes and colloquial expressions have been adapted to bring the games closer to the target audience. An example of this might be observed in *Super Smash Bros Brawl*, a title including several characters of Mario's world, where the use of colloquial expressions, jokes and puns in the target language is a strategy consistently used in the different locales in which the game has been translated from the original Japanese (USA, UK, Spain, France, Germany and Italy). For example, one of the characters of the game –Wario– has to eat some garlic in order to launch a special attack: in the Spanish version of the official website of the game (<http://www.smashbros.com/es>), this transformation is explained with the idiom "el que se pica, ajos come", which is intentionally used to create a pun based on the fact that Wario has to eat some garlic to upgrade his performance and become "Wario Man". The domesticating approach used in the translation of the game can be also observed in the adaptation of some of the weird and rude special movements of Wario since he relies on his flatulent nature to create an explosive wave that blows his enemies away. This attack has been translated as "Tufo Wario", "Wario Waft", "Folata di Wario", "Vent Wario" and "Wario-Wind". Accordingly, it is described in the different languages of the website as "cuesco", "cute little poot", "bella puzzetta", "gentil petit prout" and "kleines Püsterchen".

Another example can be found in many sports games, like *Fifa* or *Pro Evolution Soccer*. These titles can be regarded as clear representatives of domestication strategies, as they are localised, adapted and tailored to meet the expectations and the preferences of the users of the corresponding markets

where the games are sold. In the case of Spain, for instance, both games are always promoted by stars of the two most representative football teams (Real Madrid and Barcelona). However, the game distributed in England or Italy may include a player of Manchester United or Juventus in the cover of the game. This does not only affect the trailers and the promotional materials, but also the menus and the user interface that may be adapted to display a particular league and nation by default.

Finally, examples of domesticating approaches can be found in graphic adventures like the classic *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge*. When the main character goes to the library looking for a book, the librarian asks a series of questions to issue a temporary card. When the player is enquired about his or her personal address, several false answers can be provided, including “Palacio de la Moncloa S/N” or “La Zarzuela”. In the English version, users can choose among “Baker Street”, “10 Downing Street” or “1600 Pennsylvania Avenue”.

4.2 No translation

Beyond the different levels of localisation a game may have –no localisation, partial localisation, docs and box, complete localisation–, a non-translation strategy can be used by the translator at any given point of the game. The non-translation of certain names, terms, places or expressions may be subject to a wider foreignization strategy. Again, this may be the case of many Japanese titles in which the game experience would be hampered if all the dialogues, names and expressions were translated into a European language.

A well-known case of a non-translation strategy can be found in the widespread saga *Street Fighter*, where the combos and the special movements of many of the characters are not translated into any language. If expressions like *Hadouken*, *Shoryuken*, *Shoryureppa*, or *Tatsumaki Senpukyaku* were transferred into English or French, the expectations of the players would not be fulfilled since they are used to the specific terminology of this fighting game saga. The use of English expressions like “Blastwave” or “Fireball” to describe Ken’s or Ryu’s martial attacks could be regarded as suitable from the linguistic point of view but would not be acceptable translations according to the expectations of the players, who would reject this domesticating approach.

Even when some fighting games like *Tekken* also include examples of non-translation strategies, it cannot be concluded that this is an approach to be extended to the whole genre as some other titles like the already mentioned *Super Smash Bros Brawl* rely on a rather domesticating strategy in which all the combos and movements are translated and adapted into the corresponding

locale. These differences can support the idea that the domestication of foreignization approaches in the translation of a game will influence the rest of the strategies selected by the translators.

Non-translation strategies can also be found in many titles developed in the US or the UK. Indeed, it is interesting to mention the standard non-translation strategy regarding the titles of video games: unlike the tendency in the film industry, in which the titles of the films are usually translated, the name of video games is kept in English in the different locales, so titles like *Medal of Honor*, *Monkey Island*, *Starcraft* or *Little Big Planet* are easily recognizable all over the world. Interestingly, countries with protective policies like France, where the Toubon Law⁵ leads to the translation of most commercial materials and advertisement, also stick to this general tendency.

Non-translation strategies can be also related to the particular development of a game and its internationalization policy. Some of the weapons, vehicles or places are given a “proper noun” or they are named after a mythological place or a biblical event; therefore, they are not translated into any language as they are regarded to be specific terminology associated with the story. This is the case of the assault rifle “Lancer” or the city of “Jacinto” in *Gears of War*, the submerged city of “Rapture” in *Bioshock* or the “Covenant” alliance in *Halo*.

4.3 Transcreation

Transcreation is a concept applied to video games by Mangiron & O’Hagan (2006) in order to refer to the *carte blanche* of translators to meet the objective of preserving the game experience in the target locale. As the other approaches commented in this section, transcreation can be considered as a cross-wise strategy that might be used and applied at certain points in any title. However, some genres would be more likely to be adapted using the freedom of the translator in order to achieve a suitable game experience and preserve the look and feel of the title. As it is suggested by Mangiron (2004) narrative-driven genres can include more translatable assets; this statement can be further commented, as the narrative of games might be directly linked to the freedom of the translator or the degree of creativity that they may have when adapting the game. In a nutshell, the more complex and creative a storyline, the more useful transcreation may turn in the translation process.

5. The text of the Toubon Law can be accessed at: <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/>. Accessed on October 27th 2011.

On the basis of the previous explanation, transcreation may be observed in those genres that rely on narrative techniques and well-developed plots like RPGs, action and adventure games. To this regard, Mangiron & O'Hagan (2006) provide several examples of transcreation in the analysis of the role game *Final Fantasy X*, where American localizers created new names from scratch for weapons and armours that could not be literally adapted due to space restrictions. As long as transcreation is concerned, the language transfer between European language pairs seems to be less demanding and translators do not require such a degree of creativity as the one needed when translating from less friendly languages like Japanese. Even when the translation of weapons and items in role-playing games seems to be a challenging task on the basis of the mystic and meaningful names coined by the creators of the game, it is also possible to find examples where these objects are translated in a more literal way; this is the case of the classic *Diablo II* or the most recent *Darksiders* where the translation of weapons from English into other languages has been done following a rather word-for-word pattern: the main weapon in *Darksiders*, a sword known as the “Chaos eater” is translated as “Devoracaos” into Spanish. Similarly, the “Abbyssal Armor”, the “Crossblade” and the “Harvester” turn into “Armadura Abisal”, “Hoja Cruzada” and “Segadora”, respectively.

Obviously, those titles with an important amount of cut-scenes like *Metal Gear Solid 4* or *Uncharted 2* can be regarded as suitable candidates for the use of a transcreational strategy on the basis of their narrative pattern. It is noteworthy to mention that transcreation does not necessarily imply a rupture with the source text and a translation from zero, but the freedom of the translator to select a suitable alternative in order to preserve the game experience.

Transcreation can be observed in the translation of dialogues, subtitles or even proper nouns. A simple example can be found in the adaptation of some of the items players can use in the game *Mario Kart Wii*: a special shell that ‘attacks’ the player causing that he or she loses some time during the race is named “Spiny Shell” in the English version and is translated as “Caparace épineuse” in the French game. However, it has been adapted as “Caparazón azul” in the Spanish version, where no reference to the spines is provided but rather to the colour of the shell. This might have been caused by the extension of the text if the translators had preferred the literal “Caparazón con espinas” or “Caparazón con púas”. Indeed, space restriction is a major concern for video game translators and the limitations imposed by the number of characters that can be included in the user interface –or even in the manual– of the target locale may have some influence in the decision-taking process.

A more illustrative example of the creativity associated with transcreation can be found in the translation of the vehicles to be chosen by the players in *Mario Kart Wii*. While in the English version players can run with the “Wild Wing” –a medium size kart–, Spanish users have the “Alerón Chiflado” (the “Crazy Wing”); similarly, the “Tiny Titan” turns into a “Minitractor” or the “Dolphin Dasher” (a dolphin shaped bike) is translated into Spanish as “Velocidelfín”. The coinage of these terms can shed some light on the creativity required by translators and the freedom they have when adapting names and concepts in video game localization.

4.4 *Literal translation*

This is an acceptable approach in video games and it may turn to be particularly effective in the case of sports titles, racing games or simulators, where there is a good amount of technical words and specific terminology. Racing cars like *Forza Motorsport 3*, *Gran Turismo 4*, *Formula 1 2011* or the *Test Drive* series provide databases with complete information about car design and development and the game preferences allow users to adjust the car to fit their preferred driving style. These menus usually include terminology on spark plugs, tires, flaps, catalysers and exhaust systems that are normally literally translated into the target languages. To this regard, the adaptation of certain kinds of games can have some similarities with technical or specialised translation, where terminological issues are one of the main concerns of localisers.

Similarly, in flight simulators technical terms abound together with English expressions that are not translated into the target language because they are used in the professional sector on a regular basis (e.g. “heading”, “cockpit”, “rotate”, “taxi”, “may day”, etc.). To this regard, *Jane’s Combat Simulation* games or *Microsoft’s Flight Simulator* series are clear examples of technical translation specialised in the fields of the aeronautics. The high ratio of repetitions in many “technical games” –as many of the specialised terms are used in different parts, menus and windows of the user interface– could raise the question of the usage of Computer Assisted Translation in video games, although this is a topic out of the scope of this paper.

It could be argued that many simulators and sports games do not rely on complex storylines or plots and the narrative load is lower than in other genres such as adventure games or RPGs. Therefore, the degree of creativity of translators can be somehow reduced and literal translation seems to be a suitable and acceptable strategy in order to keep the game experience into the destination locale. This does not signify that the translation of these games is

an easy process, as expertise relevant to the specific genres and subject matters of the games is required (Dietz 2007).

4.5 Loyalty

Most video games present stories created by the studios developing the title. However, there are games that have been designed on the basis of a literary work, a comic book or a film. This is the case of *Indiana Jones*, *James Bond*, *Star Wars* or *Harry Potter* games or the superhero titles based on the original comic books like *Spiderman* or *Batman Arkham Asylum*. In the case of these titles, there are metatextual references to the films, books or other art forms related to the story being depicted in the game. Therefore, translators must keep a balance between the transcreation or the freedom to adapt the contents in order to achieve an appropriate game experience in the target audience with the loyalty to the original source of the video game. Superhero games, for instance, should be adapted taking into account the editorial policy of the destination locale: while in Spain there is a no translation strategy and names like “Lois Lane” or places like “Small Ville” are kept in the target text, in Central and South America they could be adapted as “Luisa Lane” and “Villa Chica” since this was the strategy followed by the publishers distributing DC comics in the area.

In this sense, the concept of loyalty (Nord 1997: 125) or the fidelity to the source text might be relevant in the adaptation of those video games based on literary works or other materials, as the preservation of the atmosphere of the story will be a key element in order to meet the expectations of the target audience. The team involved in the production of the video game *The Lord of the Rings* had to read the novel by Tolkien and pass a test on the contents of the book previously to the development of the game (Bernal 2009). As the game recreates a universe that has already been invented and represented in a novel, the strict preservation of the elements of the original story suggests that the loyalty or the faithfulness to the source text are a suitable strategy to be applied.

To a lesser extent, loyalty can be also seen in games recreating historical events or settings, like *Age of Empires* where a good number of civilizations like the Persian, the Phoenician or the Egyptian ones were represented trying to keep a certain degree of accuracy as long as the items and the features of these people were concerned.

4.6 Loss of meaning and compensation strategies

The creativity and current narrative techniques used in video games can pose additional challenges in the translation of certain titles. In case there is a partial or total loss when translating the text, translators may engage in partial rewriting in order to “negotiate functional equivalents” that will allow to compensate for the loss of meaning (Di Marco 2007).

The adaptation of humour is a particularly difficult feature to be achieved by translators, as the use of word plays or puns is becoming more and more usual in video games and they may be extremely difficult to translate from the source into the target culture; this may be observed in the adaptation of *Batman Arkham Asylum* into Spanish, where there are a number of puns and riddles that cannot be effectively transferred into the target language without suffering a partial or a total loss in meaning. The impossibility to convey the message into the target culture might be frequently seen when puns, word-play or humour are involved.

Even though compensation strategies seem to be preferred on the basis of providing a more intensive and compelling gameplay, the omission of contents is another alternative that can be observed in some games in which certain references to the origin culture cannot be easily adapted. Many of the puns and references of the game *Torrente* have been omitted in the English version, as jokes regarding Atlético de Madrid football club can be extremely difficult to adapt to other cultures.

Another example can be observed in *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge*. Although the game was successfully localised into Spanish, some particular examples of meaning loss can be found: the tavern where pirates usually joined in the game was the “Scumm Bar”. This name created a pun with the word “scum” and the scripting language SCUMM (Script Creation Utility for Maniac Mansion) which was a game engine specifically designed for developing graphic adventures. The “Scumm Bar” was not translated into any target language. Similarly, the name of the main character, “Guybrush” –which was not translated into any language– was coined by the developers of the game to refer to the draft file where they saved the development of the character (“guy.brush”).

In spite of these two exceptions, most of the jokes and puns of this game were effectively adapted by means of compensation strategies; the conversation between Guybrush and the carpenter (see examples 1 and 2) includes a complicated tongue-twister where the alliteration of the phoneme /w/ is conveniently adapted into Spanish, where the /r/ sound is repeated.

(1) Dialogue in English:

Guybrush: How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?

Carpenter: A woodchuck would chuck no amount of wood since a woodchuck can't chuck wood.

Guybrush: But if a woodchuck could chuck and would chuck some amount of wood, what amount of wood would a woodchuck chuck?

Carpenter: Even if a woodchuck could chuck wood and even if a woodchuck would chuck wood, should a woodchuck chuck wood?

Guybrush: A woodchuck should chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood, as long as a woodchuck would chuck wood.

Carpenter: Oh shut up.

(2) Localisation into Spanish

Guybrush: ¿Cuántos robles roería un roedor, si los roedores royeran robles?

Carpintero: Un roedor no roería robles, ya que los roedores no roen robles.

Guybrush: Pero si un roedor pudiera roer y royera alguna cantidad de robles, ¿cuántos robles roería un roedor?

Carpintero: Aunque un roedor pudiera roer robles, y aunque un roedor royerá robles, ¿debe un roedor roer robles?

Guybrush: Un roedor debería roer si un roedor pudiera roer robles, siempre que el roedor royera robles.

Carpintero: Oh, cállate.

4.7 Censorship

The adaptation of a game to a different culture must take all legal issues into account. Some countries do have particular rules or regulations regarding video games showing an excessive violence or offensive language. This is the case of Germany, where blood must be turned green and the use of violence or some kind of symbols are strongly monitored and watched by the authorities (Chandler 2005: 26). The Unterhaltungssoftware Selbstkontrolle or USK –the body regulating the distribution of video games in Germany– banned Capcom's *Deadrising* or the blockbuster *Gears of War* due to the excessive violence to be found in the game⁶ (something that also happened in Japan).

Even when the game is accepted by the authorities in a foreign market, translators have to take all legal questions into account and they might have to alter their choices and decisions on the basis of the regulations in the target locale or the recommendations of the distribution companies. In this case, the

6. Source: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,227443,00.html>. Accessed on October 27th 2011.

objective of making the game suitable for the destination culture clashes with the original message of the author (the concept of loyalty) and the freedom of the translator to choose a particular strategy. However, we have to bear in mind that the adaptation of video games is a market driven activity and therefore it does not differ substantially from other sectors like cinema or TV.

The question of censorship is a controversial issue in the game industry, and violence is not the only element in the radar screen of the Pan European Game Information (PEGI) or other related agencies. Sexual connotations –like the ones included in the GTA series– can also be an issue when adapting video games, and even political elements, as many war or combat titles are banned in certain countries of Asia and the Middle East due to the historical facts or events recreated in the games.

5. Conclusions

The translation of video games is an emerging field that can be effectively approached by Translation Studies. As multimodal and multidimensional products, video games are a concerning issue for audiovisual translation, and the growing importance of the game industry suggests that this sector will gain momentum in the short term. Besides the technical development of video games and the addition of new visual and audio features, titles are more and more complex as regards the plots and the narrative techniques used to create compelling stories and atmospheres. The translation of video games into different cultures shares most of the stages to be found in any localisation process but it also incorporates additional challenges like the ones that are faced by translators in audiovisual or even literary translation.

The setting of textual typologies or genres in video games is a complicated task due to the heterogeneity of many titles and the difficulty of setting clear boundaries that separate categories from each other. This might be used to support the idea that different settings and types of games may require the use and application of different approaches and strategies. It can be stated that some tendencies or regularities may be found, as the games that have heavily narrative-driven can provide examples of transcreation, or the titles with a high ratio of technical vocabulary like simulators are frequently adapted relying on literal translation. However, even when some genres can be associated with a particular translation strategy, the narrative development of video games and the hybridization of many genres does not allow to conclude that some strategies are more appropriate for certain categories as a matter of fact.

As a functionalist process and a type of constrained translation, the adaptation of games is subject to the particular function the product has to produce in the target audience. Therefore, as it has been argued in this paper, there are differences regarding the strategies used in titles belonging to the same genre or category; moreover, a combination of different strategies can be observed in the translation of a particular title. In other words, the final objective of keeping the gameplay in the target locale is the ultimate goal to be achieved by translators. In order to meet the expectations of the final users, different resources and strategies can be used when adapting games to different cultures.

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BIONOTE / NOTA BIOGRÁFICA

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