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MUCH MORE THAN WORDS:

TRANSLATION AND VIDEO GAME LOCALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Video games are one of the most relevant audiovisual products in the global market. The main reason for their success beyond their country of origin is the process of localization, that is, their translation and adaptation into a target language and culture. Due to its complexity, the processes of internationalization, review and linguistic quality control are also pillars of success for the cultural adaptation of video games. The aim of this study is to present the characteristics and peculiarities of this branch of audiovisual translation and its importance for the successful global marketing of video games like *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*, whose Spanish localization is analyzed as a practical example that complements our theoretical framework.

Keywords: localization, translation, audiovisual translation, cultural adaptation, video games, Animal Crossing.

RESUMEN

Los videojuegos son uno de los productos audiovisuales más relevantes en el mercado mundial. Su éxito fuera de las fronteras de sus países de origen se debe principalmente al proceso de localización, es decir, a su traducción y adaptación a una lengua y cultura meta. Debido a su complejidad, los procesos de internacionalización, revisión y control de calidad lingüística son también pilares fundamentales del éxito de la adaptación cultural de videojuegos. El objetivo de este estudio es presentar las características y peculiaridades de esta rama de la traducción audiovisual y su importancia en el éxito mundial de videojuegos tales como *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*, cuya localización al español es analizada para complementar nuestra base teórica.

Palabras clave: localización, traducción, traducción audiovisual, adaptación cultural, videojuegos, Animal Crossing.

Aknowledgments

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor for all the support and confidence in my work, without which this research would not have been possible. I also thank my family, in special Alberto Maraña and Andrea González, for lighting up my path when everything seemed lost.

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important subsectors in the audiovisual industry is video games. Its importance has experienced an exponential growth during the last decades thanks to the continuous technological advances that have opened the door to the creation of complex video game products. According to AEVI – the Spanish Videogames Association –, the video game market became the first audiovisual entertainment industry in Spain in the year 2015, with a turnover of 1,083 million euros.

However, in the general rankings of the most popular video games in Spain shown in the AEVI website, we cannot see any video game originally created in our country. All of them have been designed and produced by foreign companies like Japan's *Game freak* or the American firm *Electronic Arts*. For this reason, as claimed by Lucila María Pérez Hernández in her doctoral dissertation, most of the products that we consume come from other countries and therefore need to be not simply translated but also culturally adapted to their target markets (150).

The relevance of video game localization has steadily increased since the start of the 21st century thanks to the advances in globalization. The companies are aware of the importance of adapting their products to the different cultures and languages in order to popularize them and maximize their profits. In fact, as Diaz Montón points out, a large number of video games draw as much as 50% of their earnings from international markets – as for example Japanese Nintendo, whose annual report indicated that 80% of its sales in 2008 corresponded to the international market (qtd. in Pérez Fernández, 150-151).

In this paper, we intend to put the focus on the concept of video game localization, by highlighting the peculiarities that make it different from the more conventional types of translation, whether communicative, technical or literary. Against this background, we will then analyze one of the best-known video games by Nintendo, *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*, as a case study that conveniently illustrates the cultural, linguistic and extra-linguistic aspects of this modality of translation.

2. THE PROCESS OF VIDEO GAME ADAPTATION TO DIFFERENT CULTURES.

Adapting a video game from a source culture into a target one is not a simple process. In our paper, we are going to focus on the steps involved in the localization and translation of a video game, but this cannot be studied without taking into account the overall process of adaptation. For this reason, in this section we will characterize this framework and the several stages of a process that supplements and makes easier the work of the localizer in order to safely market video game commodities in locations and cultures other than the ones where such commodities were originally created.

2.1 Internationalization

The first step in this process starts during the stage of video game design. The internationalization of a game "involves making such elements as the code base, core feature set and User Interface (UI) generic enough to minimize re-engineering when the product is localized" (qtd. in O'Hagan 2005, 3). As stated by Pablo Muñoz in his blog on audiovisual translation, the software developers follow a set of guidelines in order to work in the creation of interfaces that make the process of adaptation easier for the translators in many ways, for instance eliminating worries over the space available on screen for translated text (qtd. in López and Muñoz, 17). A clear example of this kind of software internationalization procedures is the availability of download, installation and help wizards or assistants. The setup guidelines provided by these tools ensure uniformity in interface design regarding space constrictions, size and the font of the characters, use of conventional words or phrases, etc.
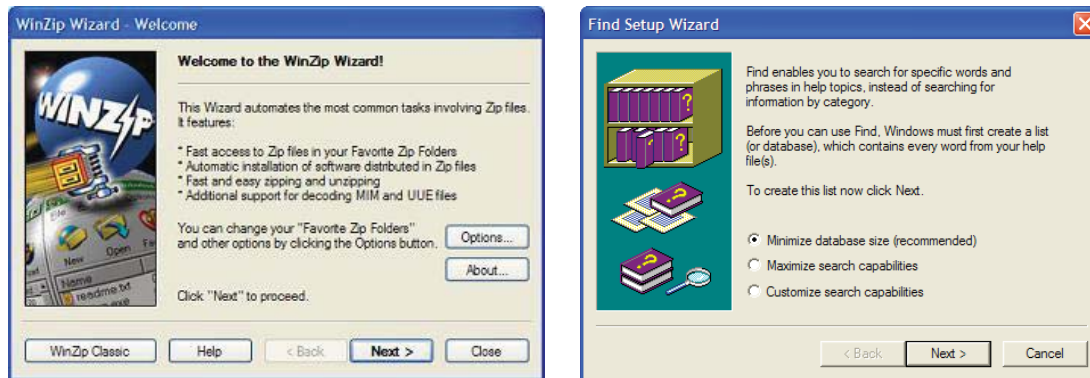
Figure 1: WinZip Wizard (left) and Windows Help Wizard (right).

However, in the special case of gaming software it is not possible to follow a single specific design pattern. Creators aim to design original video games with unique interfaces that make them different from the other products in the market. Nevertheless, Rafael López and Pablo Muñoz point out some aspects that the development team has to keep in mind within the process of internationalization (17):

- **Selection of appropriate fonts for the video game texts**: Choosing adequate fonts is important, since some of them do not include special characters like the Spanish 'ñ' (17). Video game developers tend to choose fonts that include the biggest number of special characters of any language, so as not to restrict the product's future translation with a view to marketing the game in other countries.

- **Selection of an appropriate coding for the video game texts**: a similar problem occurs with regard to the codification of video game texts, considering that many of them are not compatible with some languages. López and Muñoz state that the most useful standard is Unicode, which allows the codification of more than fifty-thousand symbols compatible with most languages (17).

- **Design of an interface that adapts to the text or provides plenty of space**: we must remember that the text usually appears in speech bubbles, text boxes and menus. Again, according to the above-mentioned authors, these formats should be able to

adapt themselves to the content rather than setting a maximum number of lines. If this was not possible, however, the interface should be designed so as to provide plenty of available space (17). If game designers follow these indications, restrictions on creativity in the future process of translation will consequently be lifted.

- **Use of special tags for gender, sex or number**: most video games are aimed at a wide range of potential users, regardless, among other things, of their gender. Gamers are allowed to choose between a male and a female character as the protagonist of the game. This explains the need to include gender-neutral expressions – like the Spanish "¡qué atractivo tienes!" instead of "¡qué atractivo eres!" (17). But taking into account that the designing team aims at immersing the user in the plot of the game by making him - or her - the protagonist of the story, the use of tags is necessary. These tags "allow changing the message in real time, depending on whether the interlocutor is a man or a woman (López and Muñoz, 17). An example of such tags in a heavily gender-marked language like Spanish would be: "<gender> <masculine> Bienvenido <feminine> Bienvenida <end_gender> a la fiesta".

2.2 Translation and localization

The second step in the process of video game cultural adaptation is the one known as localization. But, what are we referring to when we talk about localization?

2.2.1 What is localization?

Before probing into the activity named video game localization, we have to agree on the meaning of this concept. We can find many definitions in different types of publications representing a great diversity of points of view (e.g., industrial or holistic approaches), but we are going to follow the one proposed by Dunne – which a definition sourced from the field of translation studies. Dunne's definition of localization is as follows:

The processes by which digital content and products developed in one locale are adapted for sale and use in another locale. Localization involves: (a) translation of textual content into the language and textual conventions of the target language, and (b) adaptations of non-textual content – from colors, icons, packaging, etc. – to take into account the cultural, technical and regulatory requirements of that locale. (qtd. In Jiménez Crespo, 17)

Fry, in turn, highlights that the basic principle of localization would be that the localized products should have the "the look and feel" of the equivalent local product in the target market." (qtd. in O'Hagan 2007, 4)

As a standard activity, localization emerged during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and has since developed into several typologies. Miguel Ángel Jiménez Crespo lists five different types of localization: Web localization, software localization, multimedia localization, video game localization, and small device localization (28). All of them share some points in common, like the digital and interactive nature of the text and its presentation on screen, but there are plenty of elements that make each "one of a kind".

2.2.2 Video games and localization

The specific brand of localization known as video game localization possesses unique characteristics. At first sight, we may think that video game localization is not such a far cry from software localization, since the ordinary definition of the term video game allows us to consider it just another kind of software. Frasca, in a master's thesis titled *Videogames of the Oppressed: Videogames as a Means for Critical Thinking and Debate*, defines a video game as a "computer-based entertainment software using any electronic platform (…) involving one or multiple players in a physical or networked environment" (4).

In fact, localization as practiced in the video game industry shares a lot of points in common with the same job as applied to the production of software for our laptops or smartphones. In both cases, as highlighted by Pérez Hernández in her doctoral research, localization professionals carry out the codification of characters, make use of different variables, have a restricted number of characters due to the limited space in which they

usually operate, and share a similar launch process which tends to be targeted at a simultaneous shipment around the word (153-154). This *simship* – simultaneous shipment - implies that the original and the localized versions start to be commercially available at the same time, creating a big deal of strain in the work of localizers. Both types of localization, on the other hand, are usually performed on an unfinished product, which may possibly entail that the localizer does not fully understand the context of what he is localizing. In the case of video games, Finegan points out that the ideal situation would be one where the localization professional works with the product's final version– a situation which can be extrapolated to any localizable software -, so that the localizer must first become familiarized with it in order to reduce the probability of introducing any kind of errors in the translation (qtd. in Pérez Fernández, 162). The last issue that these types of localization share is the process of localization as such. In video games, the process of cultural adaptation pursues the characteristic functionality that we can find in any software localization, but with a slightly difference: "in a game this functionality must be achieved with a high degree of creativity and originality" (Mangiron and O'Hagan, 13).

The latter purpose — that of creating a product that must above all entertain the potential user — is the main feature that makes video game localization different from software localization at large. For this reason, we may argue that the translation of video games, even though the latter can also qualify as software, shares more properties with the translation of literature, movies or TV series and therefore may engage aspects of expressive/semantic translation.

In video games, on the other hand, we find an audiovisual product that has evolved drastically over the last decades: we all remember the first arcades – like *Pacman* or *Space Invaders* – in which text was restricted to indicating our score, the game over countdown or the player's time limit. In the course of time, however, we have growned accustomed to playing video games in which the player must engage in a storyline that is usually told by one or many characters whose interventions are often subtitled in text boxes at the bottom of the screen, as in the case of the video game series *Pokémon*, or even incorporate human voices that are dubbed in the several localized versions – a feature first introduced with the

arrival of PlayStation 2 in the year 2000. These narrations, as Pérez Hernández points out, usually contain another characteristic feature that we find in this type of localization, which is the regular use of idiolects, vulgarisms, regionalisms and cultural references in the video games' verbal component (152): an additional demand on localizers as they carry out the game's adaptation to another language and culture.
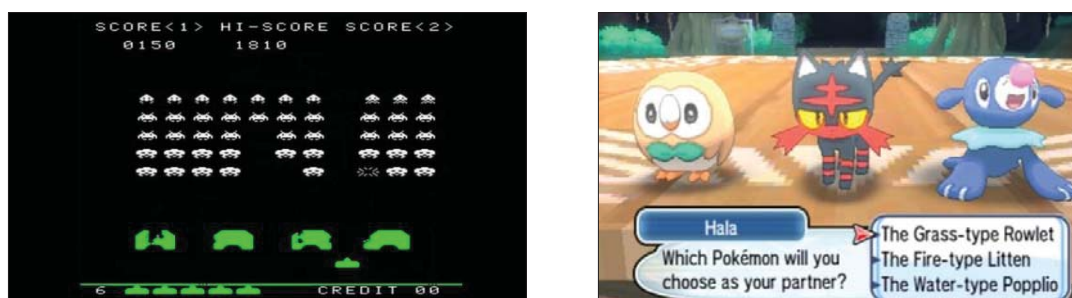

Figure 2: Image of Space Invaders (1978) on the left, and Pokémon Moon (2016) on the right.

Finally, we cannot forget some other non-software materials that also play a part in the video game experience like the game packaging, the manual, the read-me files containing the guides for the installation, etc. These materials show that in video game localization it is not just one type of text that is involve, but a great variety of text types – as it showed in the following section.

It is obvious, therefore, that we are not describing an easy task, but one that requires the localizer to be familiarized with diverse fields of knowledge. For this reason, it is necessary for the localizer to have the support of a team that accompanies him/her during the hard process of the game's cultural adaptation.

2.2.3 Multitextuality and translatable aspects of video games

As we have just mentioned, the video game localizer works in a multitextual environment due to the great variety of materials that make up the video game experience. In *Translation and Localisation in Video Games*, Bernal-Merino points the presence of seven main categories of texts (109 – 110): narrative – which reflects the information about the video

game world and its characters –, oral/dialogic – the transcription of the character speeches –, technical – showing the hardware and software requirements to play the game –, functional – the one that allows the player to choose between different options within the game –, didactic – used to explain the users how to play the game –, promotional – to attract people in order to make them buy the product –and legal – used to advise people about the licenses, right and duties attached to the product.

All these different types of text appear in the different elements that make up the final product, and all of them have to be adapted during the process of localization. Pérez Fernández points in her doctoral dissertation that we can divide these materials in two groups: software and documentation materials (156).

First, within the software materials we can find all the elements that are related to the interface of the game, such as all kind of in-game text that may appear and the audio.

When we talk about in-game text we refer to both the text that appears before the gameplay and the one that appears during its development. Following this distinction, on the one hand, we have the game installers as a pre-gaming text. These installation assistants are formed by technical texts that are characterized by their functionality, since they are simple and precise in order to help users perform a correct installation of the game. In addition, they usually contain the license agreements and the copyright warnings of the game, which are made up by legal texts with a very technical language. On the other hand, we have the text that appears after running the game, in which we can distinguish between verbal contents included in the user interface and those others that are part of the video game plot. Within the user interface we can find a "functional text type that can take the form of a reader-friendly language" (Bernal-Merino 2015, 110), since its main function is to guide the gamer through the different options that the game offers, such as starting a new game or changing the difficulty label. Finally, the text that makes up the game's storyline is characterized by both narrative portions and oral/dialogic exchanges between the characters. It usually appears as subtitles or in text boxes at the bottom of the screen.

We cannot forget about the audio, which is usually the video game script brought to life by dubbing actors. For this reason, it consists of the same types of text as the written text that appears in the game: narrative and oral/dialogic. However, as Pérez Fernández states, the audio may require the adding of some special features such as regional accents, shouts, moans, etc. [my translation] (157). In the course of time, the importance of audio in video games over the written text has increased, as we can see in the frequent incorporation of cinematics.

Secondly, within the documentation materials we can find all the external elements that complement the video game experience, such as the packaging, the manual, the read-me files and the website.

Specifically regarding the game packaging, we can identify different types of text on it. The most important type of these are the promotional contents, since the main purpose of the packaging is to attract possible buyers. For this reason, these promotional texts are characterized by the presence of "an exhortative second person pronoun and the imperative form of the verb" (Bernal-Merino 2015, 134). However, we cannot fail to mention the presence of technical text in some sections, like the hardware and software requirements or the age rating labelling of the product.

The principal aim of the manual is to show the basics of the game: rules, objectives and controls. Consequently, the principal type of text of manuals is didactic. As stated by Bernal-Merino, these texts are simple because they want people to focus more on enjoying the game rather than on deciphering information (2015, 134). In addition, we can also find technical information dealing with the requirements of the game – an extended version of the kind of phrasing that appears on the packaging. In contrast with the didactic texts, the technical ones, even when simplified, are difficult to understand because of their rich technical jargon. Finally, we can also see some legal texts dealing with license agreements, copyright warnings, guaranty conditions and the rights associated to the purchasing of the game. As stated by Pérez Fernández, these legal texts are originally associated to the source country, so they must be adapted to the culture of the target one (2015, 158-159). These

manuals are traditionally provided to the user in a printed format, but we can see how, increasingly often, the information that they compile appears implemented in the software's user interface.

Other important documentation materials are the read-me files, which are technical texts usually included in PC games that inform the gamer about last minute changes and corrections, contact details or the serial numbers needed to run the game; and the website, which includes promotional texts aimed to attract potential customers, and similar information as the one included in the printed documentation.

		Narrative	Oral / Discursive	Technical	Functional	Didactic	Promotional	Legal
Software	**In-game text**	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	Audio	✓	✓					
Documentation	**Packaging**			✓			✓	
	Manual			✓		✓		✓
	Read-me files			✓				
	Websites			✓			✓	✓

Figure 3

It is necessary to point out that not all these elements must necessarily appear in every video game. In any case, we have seen how the process of localization does not only deal with the narration of the video game plot, but with a larger number of elements that highlight the importance of a proper training in different areas of knowledge for localization practitioners.

2.2.4 Classification of video games

The existence of such a large number of video games makes possible the existence of numerous video game classifications according to different criteria. For example, we can classify them depending on the platform in which the gamer is going to play: PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox or Nintendo 3DS among many others. Another method of classification is the one drawn up according to genre: action, action-adventure, first person shooters – also known as FPSs –, racing, role playing-games – also known as RPGs, which are the most relevant for translators since they present a large amount of text and are heavily narrative-driven, as Minako O'Hagan states in her work *Videogames as a New Domain for Translation Research* (2007, 3) –, simulation, strategy, etc.

This latter classification of video games by their genre is very useful in terms of preferences in the different markets, and it consequently makes easier the work of localizers. As an instance, Minako O'Hagan shows how US gamers prefer the sport and action games, Europeans tend to play games with interesting rules, in Korea and China the PC-based online RPGs rule above the others, and in Japan the most famous genre is the console-based offline RPGs.

However, there is a classification of video games that is more relevant for our paper, which is the one that concerns the way the translation is performed, as Miguel Ángel Bernal-Merino points out in his article titled *Challenges in the Translation of Video Games.* "There are only two types of games, based on the degree of freedom translators are given. Effectively, some games require more research than creativity, and others require more creativity than research" (Bernal-Merino 2007, 3). For this reason, we are going to divide video games into two main types: research-based video games and creativity-based video games.

First, we are going to focus on the research-based video games. They are built taking as a reference products from the popular culture, such as literature, comic books, films, TV series, or previous video games. Bernal-Merino points out that the translator does not have freedom in the process of translation, since these games are constrained by a pre-existing

common knowledge (2017, 3). For this reason, the first step in the translation of this kind of video games is the documentation of the translator about the product he is working with. For instance, if the translator is working with a product based on the literary saga of *Harry Potter*, he must get familiarized with the terminology - including proper nouns - used in the original works and, what is more important, how this has been adapted in the already translated publications in the target language. However, not only the jargon is relevant. The translator has to be also aware of the writing style, in order to reproduce the narrative and the dialogues in the same way which the audience is accustomed to. We can here quote the words of Alberto Fernández Costales when he claims that "a tension can be observed between the aim of adapting the title to sort preferences of a particular audience and preserving the original essence of the story, considering all the interrelated sources or universes to which it may refer" (Fernandez Costales, 227). As we can see, the translator must take into account the expectations that the audience has in relation to the video game. If the translation does not fulfill these expectations, it "will result in discontent fans and poor sales" (Bernal-Merino 2007, 3).

Some instances of video games in which this type of translation is carried out are the *Fantastic Four* for the PlayStation 2 platform, whose translation is based both on the film by Century Fox and the Marvel comics; and Shrek 2, a PC-game in which the player can follow the storyline of the homonymous film. This latter case is a clear example of how the translator has not only to transfer the meaning of the words, but also the characteristic style of the game – on this occasion, a colloquial style crammed with jokes and puns.

Moving on, we also have games that are not constructed on external projects. These games are based on original and innovative ideas, and this leads to a bigger freedom for the translators at the time of adaptation. We refer to them as creativity-based video games, because the translators are attached to the concept of transcreation. Transcreation is understood as the "'quasi absolute freedom' to modify, omit and even add any elements which the game localizers deem necessary to bring the game closer to the players and to convey the original feel of gameplay" (Mangiron and O'Hagan, 10). In the translation of these video games, the translator has to let fly his imagination with the aim of reproducing

the same game experience as the original – more than create a faithful translation to the text as seen in the research-based games. In fact, Richard Honeywood points out that sometimes the changes introduced in the video games are so impressive that the developers decide to extend the content of the video game with more information or extra scenes to improve the presentation of these changes (qtd. in Bernal-Merino 2007, 3).

Thanks to the carte blanche the translators have in the process of translation, they are able to perform a process known as hybridization. This means creating an adaptation of the game that may differ from the linguistic references of the original version, but one which is closer to the cultural and marketing values of the target culture. However, we are not saying that the translators can create a totally different new game by means of their renderings, since "no game is produced in a vacuum and they may have elements of existing creations" (Bernal-Merino 2007, 3).

A popular technique in the translation of creativity-based games is the one known as compensation. When the translator decides to remove an element that is thought to be inappropriate in the target culture – or simply does not evoke the same effect that the game tends to transmit in the original game –, he or she introduces a new item in order to make up for the loss of meaning. But the professional must bear in mind that "the customization of the text can be considered appropriate only when it helps to maintain the underlying textual intention of the original source" (Di Marco, 7).

An example of this type of video games is *The Legend of Zelda* saga, in which its characteristic style is maintained in the localized versions due to the freedom of translation in aspects such as regionalisms – jokes and puns – or names of the items and weapons available in the game.

An aside before finishing this division of video games by the freedom of its translation: we are not talking about a binary division. Not all video games can be classified as 100% research-based or creativity-based. This freedom of translation can vary depending of the product, which may require a specific percentage of researching and creativity skills. An example of this phenomenon is the case of the *Yo-kai Watch* games, which are inspired

by the Japanese mythology – and for this reason some aspects of this culture must remain in the localized versions –, but they present some innovative aspects which allow for a bigger freedom in translation – like the names of the different yōkai.

2.3 Review

Once the translation of the video game has been completed, there begins the third step of cultural adaptation. The aim of the review process is for the product to achieve an acceptable quality in order to be sold in the market. In the words of Parra and Arevalillo, "translation quality requires standardization and the use of unified criteria to overcome language's arbitrariness" (qtd. in López and Muñoz, 26). This standardization process will be conducted by the reviewers, who will follow a series of guidelines compiled in the UNE-EN15038 norm (López and Muñoz, 26).

Both Brian Mossop - in *Reviewing and Editing for Translators* – and Rafael López and Pablo Muñoz – in their article on "The ins and outs of the video game localization process for mobile devices" – provide a recap on the most common problems that video game reviewers must be aware of and which can be divided into two different groups – textual problems and technical problems. The textual problems are shared with other types of translation – such as literary or technical translation – as they are related to difficulties encountered in the process of translating the source text. Mossop, in turn, makes emphasis on the following categories as most representative of textual problems:

- **Problems of meaning transfer:** the reviewer must be sure that the target text achieves accuracy and completeness. The reviewer's text must reproduce the same meaning as the source text – accuracy -, and no element of the original message may be left out – completeness (99). Therefore, the reviewer's objective must be to check if there are errors that distort the original meaning of the game, and in that case, eliminate them.

- **Problems of content:** the reviewer must be sure that the target text presents an internal logic (99), meaning that it must contain the same arguments as the source text, which must follow the logical sequence without including nonsense or contradictory elements.

- **Problems of language and style:** The characteristic style of the original video game must be reflected in the translation. Consequently, some elements like idioms, the register, and the use of specific terminology or sub-language – among others – should be checked in order to provide the same game experience.

- **Formatting and layout:** there are a large number of problems regarding the video game's outward layout, including onscreen content arrangement, typos, text structure (99). These often result from the translators' inability to work in the ideal situation proposed by Finnegan (see above, section 2.2.2), where they operate with the already finished product (qtd. in Pérez Fernández, 162).

On the other hand, the technical problems are caused by the regular requirements and criteria that this kind of localization has to comply with. The following technical problems can be highlighted in this regard:

- **Character limits:** in the process of revision, any excess in the number characters that the video game screen space allows must be avoided. The set limits must be strictly observed.

- **Segmentation:** due, one again, to the limited space on the video game screen, "the text's line breaks must be inserted in the correct places" (Muñoz and Sánchez, 28) in order to preserve a correct text layout.

- **Use of tags:** as seen when discussing the internationalization stage, the use of tags within the video game text is very useful. For this reason, the reviewer must make sure that the tags are correctly phrased and edited and that they perform their function in the right way.

- **Use of variables:** we have to take into account that video game plots do not have to happen in a linear way. In many video games, the user has the freedom to choose

between options that make the plot go move on one way or another. For example, if we are solving a puzzle in the strategy game *Professor Layton* involving the character of Luke Triton – the little Professor's trainee – and we get the correct answer, he will say: "Professor, I've solved it!". But, if we introduce a wrong answer he will say: "I've let you down, Professor". The use of variables is responsible for this phenomenon, and "the reviewer must make sure that the variables have been placed in the correct location so that the meaning and style of the text are not altered" (López and Muñoz, 28).

- **Help and additional content:** the reviewers must make sure that the files containing help texts – both embedded in the software like the read-me files or in printed form like the manual –, promotional texts on the packaging and the website, and legal texts informing about the warnings, regulations and rights attached to the game, are visible for the consumers and that they are correctly translated.

In the translation industry, we can find different methods that are used in order to solve the above problems created during the process of localization. In this paper, we will focus on some recommendations that are frequently followed in the process of culture adaptation undergone by video games. Muñoz and Sánchez refer to three main techniques: self-review, comparative check and change validation (27). In the self-review technique, as its name indicates, the translators themselves review their own production. This is common practice, but it is recommended that the review task should be performed by an external person to the process of translation. For these reason, the translator can trust a professional reviewer to perform the comparative check and the change validation. In the former, the reviewer compares the original text with its translation, in which he/she can introduce changes that will be included in the final version. In the latter, the reviewer sends a suggestion report to the original translator with some advice and suggestion for amendments. The translator will have the final say as to whether or not these changes should be included in the translation's final version.

2.4 Linguistic quality control

The last step in the process of cultural adaptation of video games is considered to be the most important. The linguistic quality control – also known as testing – "is the stage of a video game localization process consisting in verifying how the translated texts looks on the screen to detect possible problems" (Muñoz and Sánchez, 29). Testers check the translation as it shows in the final product in the same way as the potential users would see it.

The job of the testers differs from that of the reviewers in the way they work with the video game text: the reviewers must look for errors before the text is implemented in the video game, and the testers work with the text once it is inserted in the video game, which usually happens at advanced stage in the game's development known as the "beta version". In other words, testers work directly on visual contents, which were not available to reviewers.

The purpose of linguistic quality control is to create error reports – also known as "bugs". These errors can be classified in the same way as we showed in section 2.3 when we dealt with the review stage.

Different techniques for bug-spotting can be developed, and these are classified according to how the procedure is carried out. Some of the most common ones in video games —to follow again the neat description by Muñoz and Sánchez — are the step by step and the screenshot testings (32). In the former, the testers must follow a set plan in order to check every nook and cranny of the game; in the latter, they will have to make suggestions following some screenshots previously sent by the developers of the game. Claudio Redavid and Adil Farid, in their article "An Overview of Game Testing Techniques", discuss other techniques like ad hoc testing, in which the tester has to examine the game based on his intuition; or play testing, which expects the tester to play like the buyers will once the product is on the market (7).

Once the testing process is done, the video game is ready to be sold in the foreign countries attached to the target culture into which it has been localized. Now comes the time

in which we can see how the work performed in the different stages of the process of cultural adaptation reaps its benefits from the customers' reception.

3. AN ANALYSIS OF THE SPANISH LOCALIZED VERSION OF *ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW LEAF*

In this section, we are going to analyze the in-game text localization performed in the fourth sequel of one of the most successful Nintendo video game sagas: *Animal Crossing*. This is a life simulation game in which the gamer plays the role of mayor of a town whose inhabitants are animals. While constructing new buildings and laying down town ordinances, the gamer is able to interact with the neighbors, pay bills in order to upgrade the appearance of his/her house, and obtain all the different collectibles – among other functionalities. This game has been a complete worldwide success with more than 4 million sales only in country of origin: Japan.

We should point out that, even if the game has been originally created in the Japanese language, we are going to analyze the localization made from English into Spanish. As shown in the manufacturing company's translation blog *"Translation-Traducción"*, the first translation was done from Japanese into English, which then became the source language for the translation of the video game into the FIGS – acronym used for the French, Italian, German and Spanish languages. The reason why the video game industry follows this procedure is easily summarized in three words: availability, economy and uniformity. It is easier and cheaper to find translators who work from English into Spanish than from Japanese into Spanish. In this kind of translation setting, as is the case with *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*, it often happens that the final TL version retains some of the proper nouns in the English language.

3.1 Text types in *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*

The multitextuality of the in-game text is clearly seen in this specimen. However, *Animal Crossing* is not a great example of the wide variety of text types that can appear in the in-game text, since we can only identify three of them: oral/dialogic, didactic and functional.

The most representative text of the game is the oral/dialogic. The whole text that appears during the gaming experience with *Animal Crossing: New Leaf* belongs to this type, since the game is based on the dialogues that the player has with the different characters – neighbors and sellers. It is characterized by its colloquial register and humoristic tone, thanks to the large amount of jokes, funny interjections and pet words.

Figure 4

However, on some occasions, the game shows a mixture of an oral/dialogic and a didactic text. It mostly happens in the initial part of the game, where the neighbors are the ones that teach the player the functionalities of the game – like how to pick apples from trees, how to use the several tools (like the fishing rod or the watering can) or how to save the game. The language used is characterized by a user-friendly vocabulary without any technical terms, since its main objective is to teach in a comprehensible way the basic functionalities of the game without boring the player.

Figure 5

Finally, we can also find functional text in the interface of the game. Such text enables the player to choose between different options before starting the game – like continue a pre-saved file or create a new one –, or during the game itself by pressing the start button in order to save the game. This text type is characterized by the use of simple and concise words or phrases which phrase the available options without ambiguity.

Figure 6: "Animal Crossing: New Leaf" 's start menu (left) and save menu (right).

3.2 Translation-based classification of *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*

Animal Crossing: New Leaf cannot be classified as a 100% research-based or creativity-based video game. Its translation shows that both creativity and research have been necessary during the process of translation – depending on the translatable issue.

On the one hand, we have to bear in mind that *New Leaf* is the forth sequel within the *Animal Crossing* saga. For this reason, the game shows a certain degree of continuity in relation with some aspects of the previous games, which is achieved thanks to the translators' research skills. This is the case, for instance, of the name of the most iconic characters in the saga: they remain the same as in previous games' translations to avoid confusion among the regular players of the saga by disrupting the consistency with the other games.

Another aspect that requires the translators' research skills is the issue of collectibles. During the game, the player can collect a great variety of fishes, bugs and fossils. Since they refer to existing animals or fossils, the translators have had to provide the official name used in the target culture.

However, creativity also plays an important role during the process of translation. As we will see in the following sections, humor is a key aspect in *Animal Crossing: New Leaf.* This humor results from the introduction of jokes, interjections and rhymes in the neighbors' dialogues, which on many occasions have no direct equivalent in the target language, so that a literal translation would not produce the same effect in players from different cultures. For this reason, we can see how transcreation enters the picture in order to modify jokes or reinvent rhymes with the aim of attaining dynamic equivalence with regard to the original source.

3.3 Cultural adaptation in the Spanish version of *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*

In the last step of our analysis of *Animal Crossing: New Leaf,* we are going to focus on the rendition (often via adaptation) of some specific traits of the source game that are largely responsible for the lively and relatable quality of its verbal component. While a large amount of text has undergone localization in the Spanish version, we will be targeting our analysis at two major features that localizers have focused on in order to reproduce the original tone and character of the game: proper nouns and dialogues.

3.3.1 Localization of names

Names in the *Animal Crossing* saga are more important than they seem to be at first sight. Localization in this regard pursues two main objectives: to generally bring the game closer to the local culture, and to convey the characteristic humor of the source version, which often relies on wordplay.

Let us focus our attention in the first place on the study of proper names appearing in the game, which can be classified in two groups: the neighbors' names and the names of events. When dealing with the neighbors' names, we can see how several translation techniques (mentioned, together with others, by Pérez Fernández in her doctoral dissertation) have been used in the process of Spanish localization.

The technique of repetition (transference) is the least used in dealing with proper names. It involves the graphic repetition of the English original name and is often used when the latter is easily identifiable in the target culture as a result of intertextual allusions. For instance, the repetition of "Peggy" is justified by the reference in both cultures to the pink piggy of *The Muppet Show*, while the repetition of the name "Ganon" is a clear allusion to the *The Legend of Zelda*'s main villain, who also has the appearance of a pig and whose name remains the same in both the English and the Spanish versions of the saga.

TECHNIQUE: REPETITION		
ENGLISH VERSION	**NEIGHBOR'S IMAGE**	**SPANISH VERSION**
Ganon		Ganon
Lionel		Lionel
Peggy		Peggy
Teddy		Teddy
Tom Nook		Tom Nook

Figure 7

The technique known as terminological adaptation is applied when the English version of the name is transformed so as to reflect its official TL version. This technique attempts to bring about the necessary rapport with the local culture and occasionally, although this may not be always available, to render humor in cases where wordplay or punnage is involved. Examples of this are the names of the neighbors called in the English version Octavian – Octavio in the Spanish one (which involves a clear allusion to the animal genus known as Octopus); Cesar – César in the target game: an allusion to the character in *Planet of the Apes.*

TECHNIQUE: TERMINOLOGICAL ADAPTATION		
ENGLISH VERSION	**NEIGHBOR'S IMAGE**	**SPANISH VERSION**
Broccolo		Brócoli
Cesar		César
Joan		Juana
Octavian		Octavio
Ruby		Rubí

Figure 8

Linguistic translation is known as the technique in which the original name is replaced by another in the target language in order to convey – totally or partially – the semantic content of the original. We have several examples of the use of this technique in *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*, like the case of the neighbor called Baarbara, whose name involves a manipulation of the female name Barbara to incorporate the English onomatopoeia for a sheep's bleat – baa. Following the Spanish localization, the wordplay is preserved in the TL name Beelén, which similarly embeds the corresponding Spanish onomatopoeia – bee –into a regular Spanish female name. Another instance involves the neighbor named Static in the English version and Protón in the Spanish one: both names, suitably enough, refer to electricity since the character has a lightning bolt drawn on his head.

TECHNIQUE: LINGUISTIC TRANSLATION		
ENGLISH VERSION	**NEIGHBOR'S IMAGE**	**SPANISH VERSION**
Baarbara		Beelén
Drago		Dragonio
Lobo		Lupo
Pinky		Violeta
Static		Protón

Figure 9

The next technique is known as naturalization. It deals with the substitution of the original name with one that is exclusive of the target language. As we can see, its main objective is to inconspicuously bring the game closer to the Spanish culture by using names that the gamer can easily relate to as common in his/her speech community. This is the most often used technique in the translation of the neighbors' names in *Animal Crossing*.

TECHNIQUE: NATURALIZATION		
ENGLISH VERSION	**NEIGHBOR'S IMAGE**	**SPANISH VERSION**
Caroline		Mariló
Gabi		Piluca
Queenie		Marujita
Rizzo		Jimena
Tammy		Aída

Figure 10

Finally, mention must be made of we are going to focus on the translation technique that involves the greatest freedom: creative translation. It happens when the translator makes use of his creativity in order to create an original name that has nothing to do with the source one. It is mainly used with humorous purposes, as seen in the Spanish rendering of English names as Cábralex or Vacarena. The name of the former neighbor is a comic blending of Asturian cheese "Cabrales" and the male name Alex, whereas Vacarena is a clear reference to the famous song *La Macarena.*

TECHNIQUE: CREATIVE TRANSLATION		
ENGLISH VERSION	**NEIGHBOR'S IMAGE**	**SPANISH VERSION**
Kidd		Cabrálex
Lucky		Pupas
Patty		Vacarena
Vic		Artorito
Winnie		Soonia

Figure 11

On the other hand, when dealing with the names of the events that happen in our city during the course of the game, we can only trace three of the techniques mentioned above: repetition, terminological adaptation and linguistic translation. Repetition or direct transfer (i.e., importing the SL term unaltered) is found in the reference to the Halloween festival, since it is also a common loan in the Spanish language due to the increasing popularity in Spanish society over the last decade —a side-effect of globalization. Terminological adaptation is the most used technique, since the events that feature in the game's script quite often have conventional adaptations in Spanish: Mother's Day – Día de la Madre; Father's Day – Día del Padre; New Year's Day – Día de Año Nuevo; New Year's Eve – Nochevieja; Summer solstice – Solsticio de verano; April Fool's Day – Día de las bromas, etc. Finally, within the broad category of linguistic translations, we have some examples where the renderings have been done somewhat freely, yet partially maintaining the meaning of the English version: Harvest Festival – Día del pavo; Bunny day; Caza del huevo; and Weeding Day – Día del hierbajo.

There also some special common nouns that demand the same special treatment as proper ones and therefore fall within the scope of localization. Under this category, where we can group the names of the different collectibles in the game, we are going to highlight the presence of two techniques: terminological adaptation and free translation.

Terminological adaptation is the technique that prevails in the translation of these common nouns. The strategy allows gamers to be completely immersed in the game, since all the names used for collectibles correspond to a familiar nomenclature in the Target Culture. This happens with such fish species, deep-sea creatures, bugs or fossils as the player can collect during the game and whose English names have been duly adapted so as to mirror official versions in the Spanish language: yet another evidence of the hard research work that the translators/localizers must perform in many and different fields of knowledge in order to culturally adapt a video game.

TECHNIQUE: TERMINOLOGICAL ADAPTATION OF COLLECTIBLES	
ENGLISH VERSION	**SPANISH VERSION**
Giant snakehead	Cabeza serpiente
Ocean sunfish	Pez luna
Red king crab	Cangrejo boreal
Spotted garden eel	Anguila jardinera
Darner dragonfly	Libélula caballito del diablo
Orchid mantis	Mantis orquídea
Iguanodon Skull	Cráneo Iguanodón
T-Rex Torso	Cuerpo T-Rex

Figure 12

Further-fetched cases include the unlikely name for some objects known as *gyroids*, a geometrical term inspired by some Japanese clay statuettes used in funerals. The English names for some specific subtypes of these strange figures, which were invented by the English localizers and do not have an easy Spanish equivalence, demand some form of free or creative translation:

TECHNIQUE: CREATIVE TRANSLATION OF COLLECTIBLES	
ENGLISH VERSION	**SPANISH VERSION**
Mega Percoloid	Mega cafetoide
Tall Bovoid	Gran becerroide
Tall Droploid	Gran flipoide
Warbloid	Gorgojoide

Figure 13

3.3.2 Localization of dialogues

As said before, *Animal Crossing: New Leaf* is critically made up of oral/dialogic text. Most of the game's playability results from the interactions we have with neighbors, who talk to the players about life issues or challenge them with different games. All these interactions are characterized by a colloquial register, which is achieved thanks to the implementation of colloquialisms, idioms, puns and jokes.

In this type of game, the work of the localizer consists in adapting the given text to the target culture requirements in order to produce the same effect as the original game works. In *Animal Crossing: New Leaf,* we can see how the concept of transcreation is tapped during the process of translation by allowing the translator to engage in a compensation technique: the translator is free to reformulate the text, even deleting or adding words, for the sake of creating culturally adapted dialogues that preserve the comedy value of the source game. This is the reason why we can find differing dialogues in the source and the localized versions, yet both conveying the same information to the players. We can see an example in figure 14, which shows one of the first scenes of the game: the player arrives in the new city where she is going to serve as mayor – only she does not know it yet. We can see how the source and the localized dialogues, while displaying some similarities, are different in many ways. However, both texts contain similar information, as well as a humorous touch and a colloquial register that are distinct for each culture.

ENGLISH VERSION	SPANISH VERSION
??? Mayor! We're so happy you're finally here!	??? ¡Ji, ji! Veo que tienes sentido del humor. Muy bien, eso siempre es bueno en un cargo público.
??? Oh, come on! Quit joking around. You know exactly who you are!	??? ¡Eres nuestra primera alcaldesa! ¡Encantada de conocerte!
??? Oh no! You can't fool me! Things are just as you said they'd be! All is well. There's no mistake!	??? No, no, no. ¡A mí no me engañas! Eres toda una bromista, pero no me tomarás el pelo tan fácilmente.

Figure 14

One of the most attractive characteristics of the game is the implementation of idiomatic fixed expressions, wordplay and rhymes in the characters' speech. In this case, the translator's creativity is the key to the process of adaptation, since a simple transference from the source to the localized version would not produce the same effect on the player. In figure 15, we can see instances of word games and rhymes in the phrases uttered by our character after catching a certain type of fish:

ENGLISH VERSION		SPANISH VERSION	
FISH	QUOTE	FISH	QUOTE
Coelacanth	"Holy fish sticks! I caught a coelacanth! Am I saying it right?"	Celacanto	"¡OSTRAS! ¡He pescado un Celacanto! Es viejo, pero tiene encanto..."
Guppy	"I caught a guppy! I gotta show off this puppy!"	Gupi	"¡He pescado un gupi! que pequeñito ¡yupi!"
Red snapper	"I caught a red snapper! I just snapped it up!"	Pargo rojo	"¡He pescado un pargo rojo! Creo que me mira de reojo…"
See Bass	"I caught a sea bass! See? A bass!"	Lubina	"¡He pescado una Lubina! ¿Otra vez? ¡Qué mala espina!"
Tadpole	"I caught a tadpole... I'm sure it will grow on me."	Renacuajo	"¡He pescado un renacuajo! ¡Hay que ver qué desparpajo!"

Figure 15

We may conclude our inspection of this practical case by saying that the process of video game localization shows more complexities than may appear at first sight. But, if the localization team is able to overcome such difficulties, the product will fare well in the foreign markets. Indeed, the localized version of *Animal Crossing: New Leaf* has obtained high economic figures, but also very positive reviews concerning the work done by the Spanish localizers:

> "…y es que si algo destaca en Animal Crossing es el gran sentido del humor que impregna todo el juego. […] añadir la gran importancia que tiene la sensacional traducción del juego en todo esto. No es algo nuevo en Nintendo, sus localizaciones son las mejores que se hacen a nuestro idioma, pero la de este New Leaf rompe ya todos los esquemas. […] La perfecta traducción del juego a nuestro idioma enfatiza todo el humor y le dota de un carisma y un tono desenfadado y para todos los públicos al que lamentablemente no estamos acostumbrados." (García, par. 1-2).

4. CONCLUSION

Video games are one of the products in the leisure industry that are in higher demand in the current market. Thence the very important role played by the video game localization process, both for the companies that want their products to be known and played on a global scale, and for the players who want a varied catalogue of games in order to choose those that are closer to their preferences.

As we have seen in this paper, video game localization is not an easy task. However, the systematic several-stage process carried out by localizers in order to accomplish cultural adaptation provides a formula in order to overcome such obstacles. Predating localization the video game design serves a purpose that somehow works in the opposite direction —i.e., internationalization, insofar as the game must be as universal and generic as possible so that it can later be fine-tuned through localization into other languages and cultures. On the basis of such a potentially global design, localizers must then rely on their knowledge about the target language and culture, and also about the type of product they are working with: its genre, its multitextuality and its characteristic jargon – among other aspects. Finally, the stages of review and testing will guarantee that the localization process has been performed in a correct way – on both the linguistic and technical levels.

As seen in the practical case of *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*, gamers are expected to actively engage in the video game activity: one based on simulacrum and interaction. They are able to freely control their characters, interact with the surrounding world and make their own choices as they play. To make this experience as satisfactory as possible, the player must be immersed in the video game world, and this immersion is facilitated by the localization process, since the video game is brought closer to the target language and culture, and as a consequence, to the target users. Finally, the process involves multiple aspects —linguistic, visual, contextual, technical and cultural, not to mention market considerations. But at the heart of this activity we can find the same core challenges that underlie the translation of culture-bound texts.

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