Terminology in Game Localization: Guidelines for Terminological Standardization in Video Games

Miguel Ferreiro Valencia
(University of Salamanca, Spain)

Abstract: Since the beginning of the rise in what refers video game translation, it was a common practice that several video games of the same franchise were translated by a different translation team depending on the product. This leads to what we call an "overtranslation" of terms in source language to the target language. The video games analyzed in this ongoing research consist of a large terminology with no official database. Therefore, the goal of this research is the creation of a terminological glossary from some products of the same video game franchise and after that, to create some guidelines for the terminological standardization in video games localization. We made a list of several terms extracted from the games. For each term, we created a terminological chart. We discovered that many terms were translated in a different way depending on the game, which shows the lack of terminology standardization. In order to avoid so in the future, it is necessary to elaborate a terminological database which ensure the proper translation of terms, so as to preserve the already official translations. We consider the standardization and support of terminological databases as something essential, especially in such a specific field as video games. This would benefit professional translators to make a correct use of terminology. Therefore, we strongly recommend that companies and professionals consider what is exposed here in order to translate a product as complex and complete as a video game.

Key words: database, guidelines, localization, standardization, terminology, video games

1. Introduction

This ongoing research is aimed to show the importance of terminology studies in video game localization and the practical use of this knowledge in order to establish some simple but useful standardization guidelines for video game localization. The aim is to make known the need to follow certain standards when localizing different products from the same franchise, so that their localization maintains continuity. In this way, unnecessary over-translation, the absence of reference corpora — terminological databases or specific glossaries, when translating and the loss of quality of the final product would be avoided.

In short, what the research we are doing in the University of Salamanca, suggests as its main goal is:

- To show the diversity of unnecessary translations of the same term in video games.
- To show various translation errors resulting from the absence of detailed product information.
- To explain the origin and the reason for these inconveniences.

Miguel Ferreiro Valencia, Translation and Interpreting Degree, University of Salamanca; research areas/interests: linguistics. E-mail: traduccionesferreiro@gmail.com.

- To establish guidelines to solve the problem.
- To establish protocols and guidelines to prevent the reappearance of the problem.
- To promote the use and standardization of these protocols in the field of translation.
- In order to achieve the propositions mentioned above, we would establish the following measures:
- To create a terminology database that collects terms with contextual information for translators.
- To create "contextual resources" for the translation of conflicting textual elements (subtitles and hyphens).
- To promote communication between the client and the translation team when dealing with these problems.

If we want to achieve all these objectives, we must bear in mind a series of points: What do all the video games in the same franchise have in common? How do we keep those elements in common when localizing them? Which guidelines should we follow to do so?

2. Study Motivation

Globalization affects to almost every economic and academic project which we work on, since the first draft to the final product, and its possible future actualizations or derived subprojects. If we add to this the extra task of translation and internationalization, we deal with lots of information which have to be properly displayed in both source language and target language. In the particular case of video games, this task is especially important since we are coping with entertainment products from large companies which move billions of dollars each year. Only last year, the Global Games Market Value was more than $134 billion (source: Newzoo). This means millions of people viewing and playing video games yearly. And many of them are not English native speakers or they even do not use English in their daily life. They need and want to play in their mother tongue, so developers have to take that into account in order to prepare their products to be translated. This process is called *internationalization*. This, combined with translation, provides millions of non-English speakers with famous games such as *Fallout*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Pokémon Go* or *Fortnite*, among others, in Spanish, French, Italian, German, etc.

However, sometimes this work raises some linguistic issues, especially after their translation. Some of these products have been translated throughout the years with some errors which undermines the final quality of the products. This means, sometimes, quite a deception from the gaming community and the loss of income for the industry. Usually, the games already translated are not corrected or modified after their release unless the company which owns its license wanted to make a new version of them. In that case, players would have the opportunity to acquire the game corrected and enhanced. But it is more common that most products stay with those linguistic mistakes forever.

Despite the fact that many translated games have some translation errors among other linguistic issues ant they will probably remain so, this does not mean that we could not do anything to change the situation. The current research which I am doing along with the University of Salamanca, in Spain, has the main goal to establish some basic guidelines in what refers to the linguistic normalization in video games in order to avoid — or at least minimize significantly, the number or linguistic errors in localized videogames.

3. Methodology

In order to show the need to elaborate a detailed register of the terminology used in these products, the

objective of this research will consist of two main parts. First we will create a terminological glossary where several specialized terms will be registered. After that, we will analyze the obtained data in order to establish the main points of our standardization guidelines.

The creation of a brief glossary of terminology will take as "raw material" several products of the a particular series of videogames, in which it will be possible to observe how the same term has been translated or adapted in a different way according to the product in which it appears, which highlights the absence of an adequate standardization or regulation of the terminology. The selected terms have been extracted from three videogames belonging to the saga called *The Elder Scrolls*, originated with the premiere of its first installment, *The Elder Scrolls: Arena*, in 1994 by the company Bethesda Game Studios (formerly known as Bethesda Softworks). This work focuses in particular on the three video games released in the decade between 2002 and 2012 (*The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind, The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* and *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, along with their respective expansions or DLC). Since the aim is to show the need for as complete a glossary as possible for the translator/localizer, it has been decided that the cards will be multilingual, so that each term in the source language will have its equivalent in both the Spanish and French languages.

The first problem we have faced for the moment is the absence of any official database of the terms which appear in the different products which we have selected. This situation led us to extract the terms directly from their original source — that is, the video games themselves, and then check compare the information which we can extract and deduce from the *ingame* with that present in some fanpages previously selected for its terminological and contextual utility. One of the most complete pages for this task has been the well-known *The Unofficial Elder Scrolls Pages*, created in 1995 and which gathers a great deal of information about all the games in the series. After observing all the terms of the three games analyzed in this research, it was decided to choose those that appear most often in the saga, that is, those that are repeated in more than one of the games. After those terms are chosen and checked. We have elaborated a sheet template with different fields of information to be filled in with the data extracted from each term. This is what is called a terminological chart. To analyze each term directly in their context we have run the games on various platforms (computer and video console), and we have observed which elements of the game they refer to, their definition, an image or several of each, possible synonyms, etc. Fortunately, in the European version for game consoles, the last two games — chronologically speaking, were a Multilanguage version, so it has been possible to see firsthand the terms both in the source language (English) and in the chosen target languages (Spanish and French). Once as much information as possible is collected for each term, it is incorporated into the corresponding cell, until all the terminological charts are completed.

4. The Terminological Chart

In order to classify and analyze the selected terms, we have to choose first what will be considered as a useful piece of information and reference from each term. To do so, we will take as a model several information fields from the ISO 12620 Standard from 2009 (International Organization for Standardization). Although this standard is currently withdrawn, we will still use it until the new ISO/PRF 12620 is approved. Naturally, the ISO 12620 Standard has many more fields in order to classify the terminology in more detail according to the needs of each product. In this case, the most essential ones have been chosen, although the number of fields could still be modified.

Below these lines there is a brief description of the fields in the terminology sheets used in the current study:

10.16 - Record identifier: The language format of the two-digit code card will be used.

2.1.1 - Main entry term: The term under analysis will be included here.

10.7 - Language symbol: Language of the main term and, by extension, of the card. The language will be identified by the ISO 639-1 language symbol.

2.2.1 - Part of speech: Here the grammatical category of the term will be determined according to whether, in a simplified form, a name, a verb or an adjective (noun, verb, adjective).

2.2.2 - Grammatical gender: In this section we will indicate the gender of the term analyzed (masculine, feminine, neuter, others).

2.2.3 - Grammatical number: Indicate here if the term is singular or plural.

2.2.5 - Noun class: We will differentiate between proper noun, common noun.

2.10 - Degree of synonymy: This section will show the synonyms of the term analyzed, if any. If synonyms are not available, the abbreviation NA (not available) will be indicated in italics.

3.1 - Degree of equivalence: This will show the equivalent or equivalents that the term may have in the other languages analyzed. If there is no equivalent4s, it will be indicated with the acronym NA in italics.

5.1 - Definition: Brief description of the term analysed in the file. It should be written in the language in which the card is written.

5.3 - Context: Will be extracted from the game itself whenever possible and will show the main term as it is included in the term field.

10.19 - Source: This will indicate the citation of the source from which the information on the term will have been extracted. As with context, the product itself will often serve as a source.

10.2.1.1 - Origination date: Date on which the card in question will be created. The format dd/mm/yyyyy will be used.

10.2.2.1 - Originator: The name and surname of the creator of the corresponding file will be included in this field.

5.5.1 - Figure: An image or diagram representing the concept in question shall be included.

Once we have gathered all the information of each term, we fulfil the cells of our terminological chart according to the fields we have previously mentioned. The results would be as the example we show below these lines.

10.16 EN_26	**2.1.1** Mudcrab		**10.7** EN
2.2.1 Noun	**2.2.2** Neuter	**2.2.3** Singular	**2.2.5** Common noun
2.10 Mud Crab			
3.1 (ES) Cangrejo del fango, (ES) Cangrejo del barro; (FR) Crabe des vases, (FR) Vasard			
5.1 Small hostile creatures primarily found near water. Their corpses may be looted for Mudcrab Chitin which can be used as an ingredient in alchemy […].			
5.3 The common **Mudcrab** can be found by the northern shoreline or along the banks of any lakes or rivers. When not moving, it is easy to mistake for a rock, and uses this natural camouflage to ambush unwary prey.	**10.19** Humphrey, D. (21 Feb. 2017) Morrowind: Beasts. The Unofficial Elder Scrolls Pages. Obtenido el 7 de marzo de 2017, desde http://www.uesp.net/wiki/Morrowind:Mudcrab#Mudcrab		
5.5.1	Humphrey, D. (2 Jun. 2015) Oblivion: Animals. The Unofficial Elder Scrolls Pages. Obtenido el 7 de marzo de 2017, desde		

	http://www.uesp.net/wiki/Oblivion:Mud_Crab#Mud_Crabs Humphrey, D. (3 Jun. 2015) Skyrim: Mudcrab. The Unofficial Elder Scrolls Pages. Obtenido el 7 de marzo de 2017, desde http://www.uesp.net/wiki/Skyrim:Mudcrab Howard, T. (Director y productor), (2002). The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind [videojuego]. EEUU: Bethesda Game Studios. Howard, T. (Director y productor), (2006). The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion [videojuego]. EEUU: Bethesda Game Studios. Howard, T. (Director), (2011). The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim [videojuego]. EEUU: Bethesda Game Studios.
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	10.2.1.1 07/03/2017

5. Conclusion

As it can be seen from this example file, in many cases the original English terms had several equivalents for Spanish and French versions. This leads us to believe that there was a clear absence of prior coordination between the translator team of each video game with the translators of previous games or with the client. Or there was an impossibility of establishing such coordination at that time, all that for various reasons which are unfortunately mere speculation yet. What is clear is that in order to avoid further errors in the translation/localizing of these terms, it is necessary to have a glossary or terminological database which would be extensive and complete enough to ensure the correct translation of the terms in the source language as well as the correct conservation of the already official translations. It goes without saying that the video game sector moves a large volume of money every year, the result of not only the direct sale of video games on different platforms, but it is also the result of the sale of products derived from these games (t-shirts, figures and reproductions, books, comics...). All this merchandising attached to the game will have the same terminology and therefore it is essential to keep the original and accepted translation of this.

Luckily, it is not all bad news. Just as it is known that there is still a long way to go in the field of translation of multimedia products and especially video games, it is also true that much progress has been made in just twenty years in this same field of translation. Without going any further, you only need to take a look at the oldest of the games analyzed in this work. In Spain, the *TES III: Morrowind* has never had an official translation. We only have the user manual and the game box in that target language. Everything else has been kept in English, and the only translations we can find today come from fans and non-professional translators. However we do have an official French localization of the same video game, which lead us to question why the company decided not to localize the game in Spanish but to do so in French.

On the other hand, in the following parts of *The Elder Scrolls* saga, we do have a translation of all the texts of the game, and even a Spanish dubbing in the case of the *TES V: Skyrim* (whereas we find the three games of the saga fully translated and dubbed in French). It is for the sake of progress in the quality of translations of audiovisual products that the use of glossaries and terminology databases should be standardized and encouraged in such specific fields as videogames, which despite their relatively short existence, have experienced incredible growth and expansion. This sudden blossoming is partly the reason why many work sectors have not been able to adapt quickly to the needs of this new world, including the translation sector. Only by applying measures such as the one proposed will it be possible to ensure a quality and consensual translation on a permanent basis; a fact that has a positive impact on the product, the company that conceives it and the professional in charge of its localization.

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