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FUN FOR ALL

Translation and Accessibility Practices
in Video Games

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Fun for All: Translation and Accessibility Practices in Video Games

Video games have evolved to become a pervasive format which is beyond entertainment, enjoyed by a broad group of people rather than as a niche activity by hardcore gamers. More recently casual and social games have been further pushing such a trend, turning digital games into a universal phenomenon. Recent game statistics in developed countries indicate the ratio of people in the population who play digital games surpassing well over the 50% mark. For example, the US-based Entertainment Software Association reported that 58% of Americans play video games in 2013 (ESA 2013). This suggests mainstreaming of video games and their potentially significant influence on societies as a whole, providing further impetus to research.

This edited volume arose from the first International Conference on Translation and Accessibility in Video Games and Virtual Worlds held at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) on 2–3 December 2010, organised by the TransMedia Catalonia Research Group of UAB, which is part of the Centre for Ambient Intelligence and Accessibility in Catalunya (CAIAC). The focus of the conference was unique in its comprehensive approach combining game accessibility, game translation and localization and also related issues in broader environments of virtual worlds. Such combination was due to a broad view of accessibility, which not only encompasses users with functional diversity, but also those who due to age or skill are not able to play a game successfully, those who do not speak the original language of the game, and those who due to socioeconomic conditions cannot access games or virtual platforms. In addition, both game localization and accessibility are issues that ideally need to be taken into account early in the development process of a game, in order prevent costly modifications at a later stage. If accessibility and localization are considered since the conception of the game, it should not be too costly or cumbersome to translate the game into other languages or include accessibility

features, such as the possibility to remap the controls or have intralingual subtitles.

Gathering together researchers in academia as well as practitioners from the industry, the conference provided an ideal forum to exchange different perspectives to add to the emerging areas of research in translation and media accessibility of digital content. The conference demonstrated how research on game localization and research on game accessibility are gathering momentum, albeit they are still relatively unexplored academic fields. To date, most of the research conducted on game accessibility has been carried out by academics from engineering and computer studies backgrounds, such as the Universally Accessible Games (UA-Games) Research Group at the Human-Computer Interaction Laboratory of ICS-FORTH in Greece, who have developed a number of universally accessible games, and a handful of industry professionals interested in the topic, such as the Game Accessibility Special Interest Group (SIG) at the International Game Developer Association (IGDA). Most information and guidelines on game accessibility can be found on specialised blogs and websites, and are addressed to developers, to help them make their games accessible to the widest range of population. However, there seems to be a lack of awareness by mainstream developers and publishers about accessibility issues and due to the pressures and time limits associated to the release of a game, accessibility features usually are not a priority. It could be argued that by not taking into account accessibility, developers are leaving behind an important segment of the population: people with disabilities, who according to the UN account for 15% of the world population (The World Bank, 2013). People with sensorial (visual, auditory), cognitive, and physical disabilities also can enjoy playing video games, as they are fun and provide hours of entertainment.

As regards the topic of game translation, we wish to share a few observations on the development of the domain that is beginning to emerge as a legitimate research field in Translation Studies. Following the official declaration of year one of game studies in 2001 (Aarseth, 2001), academic research on video games has multiplied, helped by its increasingly ubiquitous presence in modern life and, most of all, by its inherent richness, inspiring many a research avenues. When *The Game Localization Handbook* (Chandler, 2005) was first published, the domain was a somewhat esoteric practice, little known beyond the immediate circle of practitioners and gamers involved in fan translation of games. Despite its close link to

software localization, which has been integrated into translator training at many universities for some time now, localization practices applied in video games have remained under-reported until recently in academia. Similarly, the localization industry has focussed mainly on business-oriented productivity software. For example, in the early days games were not even included in the official statistics of the software industry as they were categorised as consumer goods and part of the entertainment sector (Berry, 2008: 66).

After Game Localization found early difficulties gaining recognition both in industry and academia, it is now an essential part of the game industry which relies on global sales while rapidly establishing itself as an interdisciplinary area of research in academia. Contemporary games are sophisticated technological as well as cultural artefacts with multiple perspectives that lend themselves to study and analysis from many and distant fields: from Psychology to Neuroscience or Sociology. In Translation Studies game localization is often introduced as a hybrid mode of Audiovisual Translation (AVT) and Software Localization (Munday, 2008: 190) in an attempt to locate this newly emerged practice within an established category. The research trajectory so far in game localization illustrates how the field tagged itself to these pre-existing domains, motivated by the fact that video games are indeed audiovisual media and also that they are pieces of software. In the sense that both Audiovisual Translation and Software Localization are dynamic fields sensitive to advances on technology, the boundaries between the two currently separate divisions are increasingly becoming blurred. Game Localization is an illustrative example of such a practice encroaching into both territories.

Rather similar to the initial passage of audiovisual research, studies on Game Localization are developing from a largely descriptive nature to a deeper conceptualisation both by practitioners reflecting on their work and researchers applying theoretical frameworks borrowed and adapted from Translation Studies. So far the work conducted in Game Localization has highlighted game-specific features in relation to other types of translation work. For example, they may be regulatory and operational constraints under which this practice is customarily performed, including age ratings as well as censorship implications and the severe limitation on the availability of contextual information, as is the case for Dubbing, Subtitling and Voice-over practices where translators have partial access to the visual text or they translate preproduction material (Orero, 2005).

This practise is also shared in game translation for games released under a sim-ship (simultaneous shipment) model, where localised games are released together with the original game. In a sim-ship model, translators work with a product under development. In translation research contexts, three key facets of modern games, i.e. technological, socio-cultural, and its didactic dimensions, are starting to attract scholarly attention. Research may be directed towards implications of new types of user interface, sophisticated use of cinematics or audio channel, and the use of games to learn languages to name but a few. Similarly, socio-cultural issues are increasingly addressed by researchers focusing on aspects of gamer culture, such as fan translation, and also a wide range of cultural transformation required beyond the verbal dimension during the localization process. We believe that a more systematic and interdisciplinary approach bringing together academics from different disciplines with various research backgrounds and methodologies, such as Translation Studies, Media Studies, Psychology, Usability, Engineering and Computing, is required to promote further meaningful advances in both game localization and accessibility and also to avoid duplication of efforts and ideas.

The collection of papers we have assembled in this volume focuses on game translation and accessibility and includes some of those presented in the I International Conference on Translation and Accessibility in Video Games and Virtual Worlds together with fresh contributions received from elsewhere that are relevant to the conference theme. Because of the emerging nature of the topic and the academia-industry mix of contributors, we have applied a strict academic convention to research-based contributions selection, while deciding to also include valuable articles which had the origin in professional practices and industry-based observations. The emerging nature of the field is such that contributions by reflective practitioners are a complement to theoretically-supported arguments in academic papers, and the book aims at bridging the gap between academia and industry, theory and practice. In presenting this volume we aim to provide a snapshot of varied research interest on the topic in an attempt to further establish game localization research in Translation Studies while building on the increasingly diverse media accessibility research methodologies, formats and platforms.

The volume is divided in two sections: the first section includes four contributions on Game Accessibility and the second nine contributions on different issues affecting game translation and localization. The open-

ing paper in the accessibility section is *From Game Accessibility to Universally Accessible Games* by Dimitris Grammenos. His contribution introduces the concept of universally accessible games as an approach to creating games which are designed to be concurrently accessible by people with a wide range of requirements and (dis)abilities. Universally accessible games can adapt their interface, gameplay and content, so that they can best serve the requirements of each gamer, under specific gaming conditions. Grammenos also provides an overview of a design methodology for creating universally accessible games, and introduces the concept of parallel game universes as a means of supporting multiplayer sessions amongst people with diverse (dis)abilities, so that players share the same game and are fully aware of each other while at the same time experiencing the game in a way that is optimally adapted to their needs.

The second contribution *Translating Fun for All: Promoting Accessibility in Video Games*, by Alberto Fernández Costales, highlights the important role Translation Studies can play in promoting Game Accessibility. Fernández Costales underlines the importance of a broader concept of accessibility aimed at promoting e-inclusion and allowing access to video games to the widest possible audience, including those who speak a different language and those who have special needs. He argues that the relationship between translation and accessibility in the context of the gaming industry needs to be further explored, and supports the idea that translation is a key element to fostering e-inclusion.

The third contribution in the accessibility section, *Accessible games and education: Accessibility experiences with <e-Adventure>*, is by Javier Torrente, Ángel del Blanco, Pablo Moreno-Ger, Iván Martínez-Ortiz, and Baltasar Fernández-Manjón, members of the <e-UCM> research group at the Department of Software Engineering and Artificial Intelligence at the Complutense University of Madrid, Spain. Torrente et al. engage with the topic of accessible educational games and explore the use of game creation tools with built-in accessibility features, an efficient way of including accessibility features that does not compromise development costs. In their article they argue that accessibility for educational games is a must, as this type of games must be inclusive and available to everyone, regardless of their capabilities, and present *eAdventure*, a game-authoring platform designed to facilitate the creation of educational point-and-click adventure games with built-in accessibility features. They also describe a pilot case study which consisted of adding the accessibility features available at the

eAdventure platform to an existing game, *1492*, an educational game about Spanish history, which was tested by a blind player and a player with reduced mobility.

The fourth and last contribution in the accessibility section is by professional developer and accessibility expert Javier Mairena, author of the Spanish blog *Videojuegos Accesibles*, which provides information, news, and guidelines regarding Game Accessibility. Mairena outlines a set of recommendations for developing accessible video games, and lists the different accessibility features any game should include. He also provides a classification of the main disability user groups, the needs of whom should be taken into consideration when developing a game, and proposes solutions for different accessibility challenges.

The second section of the book, focusing on game translation and localization, opens with Ornella Lepre's contribution *Divided by Language, United by Gameplay: An Example of Ludological Game Localization*. Lepre tackles the issue of cultural adaptation and remakes from Japanese games for the international markets. She proposes a ludological approach to game localization with the objective of reproducing the gameplay experience of the original for the target players. This may imply changing the graphics, the setting or the soundtrack, among others. Taking the Japanese rhythm game *Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan!* (2005) and its localised version for the North American territory, *Elite Beat Agents* (2006) as a case study, Lepre concludes that two games can provide the same experience for players as long as there are no changes in gameplay, even if the language, the setting, the soundtrack, the cultural references, or even the story are modified.

The second paper, *Translation Strategies and Video Game Translation*, by Annelies Van Oers presents the case study of the Dutch localised version of the video game *Beyond Good and Evil* (2003). Van Oers's analysis focuses on the translation strategies applied by localisers to diegetic text – text that is part of the fictional world of the video game – and concludes that the most used strategy is, unexpectedly, literal translation, possibly due to the fact that literal translation takes less time and is sometimes the safest option in game localization when there is no context and the deadlines are tight.

The third paper, *Translating the Onscreen Text Blindfolded: Possibilities and Impossibilities*, by Gianna Tarquini, deals with the challenges posed by the common practice of having to translate a video game without having access to it. After defining game localization as a form of constrained

translation, Tarquini presents a case study conducted on a relatively large database of outsourced video game translation projects, mainly from the English-Italian and English-French linguistic combinations. The author highlights the main constraints found when translating onscreen text and analyses the recurrent translation patterns applied. Tarquini concludes highlighting the need for further descriptive studies in game localization, which are crucial for supporting theoretical assumptions concerning game translation theory and are also necessary to prepare students for real-life professional practice.

The fourth paper in this section, Video Games and Fan Translations: A case study of *Chrono Trigger*, by Rafael Müller, explores the world of video game fan translation. Müller analyses the different Brazilian fan translations of the Japanese game *Chrono Trigger* (1995), which are based on the first official English translation carried out for Nintendo by Ted Woolsey in 1995. Müller also compares these translations with another fan translation by Anglophone fans, as well as the updated official English version, released in 2008. Müller's analysis focuses on the following aspects: dialogue additions and omissions; the re-creation of play on words; the renaming of characters and terminology; censored items; the deliberate use of regional expressions, and the modification of a character's speech style. He concludes highlighting the need for further studies exploring the interesting and growing phenomenon of game fan translations.

As its title indicates, the paper Terminology Management in Video Game Localization, by Xiaochun Zhang, tackles terminology management in game localization, an issue that has been to date overseen. Zhang argues that terminology management can be extremely beneficial for the game localization industry and discusses the processes and methods of managing terms in industrial practice. She concludes with an assessment of the benefits of establishing an online video game public terminology database.

Stephen Mandiberg's paper, Games, Localization, and Diaspora, approaches game localization from a Cultural Studies perspective. Mandiberg is critical about the way in which localization practices to date have failed to make games accessible to alternate populaces, such as communities in diaspora. After defining the concept of diaspora, he focuses on the example of the Chinese diaspora and argues that games localized for the Chinese locale are inaccessible to people from across the Chinese Diaspora, living in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Australia, or the United States. He proposes "omnilingual language implementation" in game localization as a solution

to this problem, which would allow players to choose different language and dialect combinations or download language packs as required. Mandiberg also explores how crowdsourcing could contribute to solve this issue and facilitate the development of diasporic games.

The following contribution, by Oliver Carreira and Eugenia Arrés, *Video Game Localization Training on Offer in Spanish Universities at an Undergraduate Level*, claims that game localization training currently on offer at Spanish universities is insufficient, as most undergraduate degrees in Translation and Interpreting do not include this subject in their curricula, despite the growing industry need for trained localisers. After outlining a number of prerequisites for working in the game localization industry, Carreira and Arrés subsequently analyze the training currently on offer in Spanish universities. They also present the opinion of several localization professionals they interviewed about the training currently offered. They conclude proposing different strategies for introducing game localization into undergraduate curricula in Spain, in the hope that these strategies may contribute to bridging the gap between the Spanish educational framework and the employment market.

The last two contributions in the game translation section are by two experienced industry professionals working in the field of interactive media and game localization. Víctor Alonso's paper, *New Challenges in Interactive Media Localization Projects*, aims at providing guidance on both successful and unsuccessful methods for approaching game localization projects in a new global environment which is also locally focused. Alonso's paper attempts to explain the environment of constant change faced by game localization due to the challenge placed by the continuous innovation of the game industry. Alonso concludes that project management is an essential and strategic competency for companies and individuals working on localization, as it allows them to adapt and adjust to the ever evolving environment of game localization.

Finally, the last contribution in the volume, by Kate Edwards, with the title of *Beyond Localization: An Overview of Game Culturalization*, highlights the importance of the process of cultural adaptation or culturalization in game localization in order to avoid any negative backlash for game developers and publishers and to produce games with more locally-relevant content. After discussing the key role culture plays in game design, Edwards presents the different levels of game culturalization that can be applied in game localization and describes the different types of culturalization chal-

lenges, namely history, religion, ethnicity, and geopolitics. She concludes stating that culturalization should be an integral part of game localization, as it can ensure that the work and the creative vision of game developers can be enjoyed by as many cultures as possible.

The different contributions in this pioneering volume address the emerging fields of Game Accessibility and Game Localization from different angles, providing insightful information about these relatively unexplored academic areas with such close ties to the industry. However, many other aspects remain yet to be explored. Further research in Game Accessibility and Game Localisation can be beneficial for all, as it can help increase the potential market size for developers and publishers. Improving access to games can also foster the inclusion of different type of users, from language learners to the aged, including those with sensorial, motor or mental diversity and those who do not speak the original language of the game. The industry and academia should work hand in hand to keep advancing towards a society where video games and the interactive entertainment they provide are available to all, regardless of their abilities and the language they speak. A world where video games can truly provide fun for all.

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Conventions used in this book

When a videogame is mentioned, the year of its first release is included in brackets. In the case of game franchises, a hyphen is used after the year to indicate that the series is ongoing.