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The translation of humor in video games: a case study

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Declaration of originality

I, Ornella Lepre, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

Over the last thirty years, the practice of game localization has become more and more widespread and has started to attract a growing academic interest. However, the translation of humor in games has received little scholarly attention, despite the fact that humor is a fundamental component of games and can be a difficult area to translate. In this view, the thesis is aimed at identifying and classifying the main types of humor in games and the way in which their translation from English into Italian has been tackled, highlighting how the interactive nature of games may affect translation. As the audiovisual features of games are incredibly varied and cannot always be assimilated to the established categories of audiovisual translation, the thesis also discusses how the various audiovisual modalities of games can have an impact on localization. Then, it examines three popular games that are particularly suitable for this analysis, as they feature plenty of humorous dialogues and situations: *The Secret of Monkey Island* (1990), *Day of the Tentacle* (1993) and *Discworld* (1995).

The thesis pays particular attention to instances of humor based on cultural elements, as they are especially likely to cause disruptions in a translated text. The research looks at how often humor is intrinsically based on culture-specific references and analyses how translators deal with them. This issue appears particularly relevant in the case of games, as unfamiliar references can most easily damage the user's experience.

The final part of the thesis discusses the retranslation of games. By comparing the old and new translations of two games in the corpus, the thesis aims at seeing if and how translation choices have changed across time. As one of the retranslations was made by fans of the game, the thesis also aims at giving insight into the phenomenon of fan translation.

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Abbreviations

AVT	Audiovisual Translation
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
ECR	Extralinguistic Culture-Bound Reference
JRPG	Japanese Role Playing Game
MMORPG	Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game
NPC	Non-player Character
RPG	Role Playing Game
SDH	Subtitling for the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing
SL	Source Language
ST	Source Text
TL	Target Language
TT	Target Text
UI	User Interface
VA	Veterans Administration

Introduction

Video games have come a long way from the days of titles like *Pacman* and *Space Invaders*, with their simple mechanics and unimpressive graphics. Still, despite their pixelated appearance and limited gameplay, those early classics managed to capture the imagination of players, who determined their success as a medium and their growth into what they are today: one of the most popular forms of entertainment, enjoyed by a diverse audience across the globe. Today's video games feature sophisticated visuals and complex storylines, and the budget and production teams of AAA ('triple A') games approach those of movie blockbusters. The rise of games has been strong enough to spur talk of a 'game generation' (Beck and Wade, 2004), for which the experience of growing up gaming or surrounded by games has changed attitudes and expectations. People in their twenties have never known life without electronic entertainment; games become more pervasive every year, with mobile technologies creating new possibilities and providing access to games on mass market devices like mobile phones. According to the ESA (Entertainment Software Association), 59% of the United States population play games; both genders are well represented in the market, with 48% of female gamers (ESA, 2014). Moreover, the statistics show that video games today are not only favoured by young people, as 39% of people who play games are over 36 years (ibid.). Asia and Europe are also playing an increasingly important role in the growth of the video games market, especially in the mobile and online gaming sectors, where they are expected to represent about 80 percent of the total revenues by 2017 (Web 1). The widespread availability of fast internet connections contributed to enlarging the video games market; in 2013, nearly two thirds of their income came from the dematerialisation of distribution and online payment practices (Web 2), as users are able to download games on their devices without needing to have physical copies.

The expansion of the industry has brought it to the attention of academic disciplines such as Social Sciences and Humanities: games are now being studied both as a new type of narrative and as a vehicle for human expression and

interaction. Research has been conducted on the effects of gaming, both positive and negative. An emerging area of study, motivated by claims by the media that games with violent elements might cause aggression in players, deals with the possible effects of violent video games on youth (Griffiths, 1999; Colwell and Kato, 2003; Ferguson et al., 2008). On the other side, games are being researched for their potential as educational and pedagogical tools, on the basis that they are built around learning principles and can provide deeper learning experiences through interactive engagement (McClarty et al., 2012). As games stimulate mental development, specifically-designed games can also provide a safe environment to assist people with disabilities manage new routines and reconnect with real life. According to the Ablegamers Foundation, more than half of the 60 million people with disabilities in the United States use video games to improve the quality of their lives and make friends. New technologies are being developed to allow someone who is in a facility, a VA hospital or homebound and cannot go out to socialize to play in a MMP (massively multiplayer) environment (Leotta, 2012).

Finally, Economics also appears to be more and more interested in the gaming market, which is now a popular topic in academic research. In particular, the video game market has been defined as a two-sided market, in which 1) two sets of agents act through an intermediary or platform, and 2) the decision of each set of agents affect the other sets of agents (Rysman, 2009). In the case of video games, the agents are the consumers on one side and the game developers on the other; both act through an intermediary, e.g. a console producer like *Sony* or *Microsoft*. What distinguishes this type of market is that the intermediary's optimal strategy (for example, the optimal pricing strategy for *Sony*, who chooses at what price to sell their *Playstation* consoles) will depend on the 'externality' between the parties it serves – on the fact that the users care about how many developers are interested in the platform and the developers care about how many users the platform has. Rochet and Tirole (2010) argue that two-sided markets like the video game market are characterized by so-called 'network externalities', as the prices paid by the consumers for the final product and the price paid by the developers (such as the royalties that go to the platform holders per unit of sales) are usually interdependent. For this reason, intermediaries must 'get both sides of

the market on board' to maximize their profit. These peculiar features of the gaming market have given rise to a number of empirical Marketing and Industrial Organization studies (Venkatraman and Lee, 2004; Clements and Ohashi, 2005; Gretz, 2010) on their implications for firms and consumers, as the relevance of this market is increasingly recognized in the already established research on oligopolistic markets.

Network externalities also have another side. Users are not only interested in how many developers create games for a platform, but also in how many other users own the same platform and play the same games: if other users buy the same platform, they will be able to play online with others, trade games, or simply play the games that are popular with everyone. This contributes to making the video game market a worldwide market, as the demand for a video game platform depends not only on the number of users of that specific platform in the same country but also on the success of that platform abroad. For example, if more *Playstations* are sold in the US, more games will be developed for the US market. As a consequence, more players in Spain will also buy a *Playstation*, because they expect more titles to be developed in the future and be distributed in their country. This will in turn increase the profitability of translating games for Spanish-speaking players, as the potential audience has become larger. In this context, games localization – a term that is commonly used to indicate the linguistic and cultural adaptation of games and computer software for different target markets, or 'locales' – plays an ever-growing role, which is at odds with the relative lack of attention it has received in Translation Studies until recently.

Although the first localized games date back to the early 1980s (Bernal-Merino, 2011a) it was only after 2000 that translation scholars started to show a growing interest in the practice (see chapter 1). One of the less explored aspects, which seems worthy of investigation due to the relevant consequence it can have on the game experience, is the translation of humor. Possibly for its being something that distinguishes men from animals, humor has always fascinated researchers from a wide range of disciplines, ranging from psychology to translation. Many have studied it and, depending on the stance adopted, views on the subject differed greatly. One of the earliest philosophers, Plato, expressed his contempt for

laughter in his work *The Republic*. This condemnation, together with an aversion for laughter that is also present in both the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers, was to influence centuries of Western philosophy. It took a rather long time for the anathema to be left behind, in a gradual but steady process that culminated in the 17th century, when humor appeared to have been rehabilitated. It was not until 1677 that Spinoza (2002/1677: 344) could defend laughter in the fourth book of his *Ethics*, by stating that:

> Laughter, and likewise merriment, are pure pleasure, and so they are good in themselves, provided they are not excessive. There's nothing against our having pleasure, except grim and gloomy superstition. Why should it be more proper to relieve our hunger and thirst than it is to rid ourselves of gloom?

Exactly a hundred years later, in 1777, Davies wrote that 'Commerce, and her companion Freedom, ushered into the world their genuine offspring, True Humor. To these she owed her birth; and when they expire, it will require no great sagacity to prophesy that she will follow her parents to the same grave'. At the end of the Eighteenth century, Britain was enjoying great economic prosperity; a spirit of national independence and individual freedom was felt across the nation. Davies, like many of his contemporaries, saw humor as an expression of free men: it was 'the offspring of freedom' (Morris, 1947/1744), and an achievement in itself.

Since then, countless writings have been devoted to humor, trying to explain what humor is and why people laugh (see section 1.3). While many authors have dealt with humor in literature and in film studies, the topic of humor in video games is not as popular. In fact, humor is rarely considered a fundamental component of games, despite the fact that they are undoubtedly a most fertile ground for 'incongruity', one of the pillars of humor production (see section 1.3.2). In simple words, the incongruity theory claims that humor is generated when there is discordance between what we expect and what actually happens. In this respect, Super Mario, one of the most iconic video game characters ever created, could be considered an emblem of incongruity: a moustached Italian plumber who spends his life trying to save a princess from an evil fire-breathing turtle, fighting terrible foes like flying turtles and frowning mushrooms by jumping on their heads. As

shown in Dormann and Boutet's (2013) analysis of comical video game characters, many game characters are designed to be humorous. In general, games are far from humorless and the surveys conducted by authors like Grönroos (2013) and Dormann and Biddle (2007) on the role of humor in games demonstrate that games offer a huge potential for creating humor, and have many different ways to exploit it. The topic, however, is still somewhat unexplored. Even less developed – apart from a small number of studies carried out by Mangiron (2010) and Fernández Costales (2011; 2014) – is the research on how video game humor is translated. Therefore, subscribing to the theoretical framework provided by Descriptive Translation Studies, which see translation as a process governed by 'norms' that reflect a set of constantly evolving socio-cultural constraints (Hermans, 1991; Toury, 2012/1995), this thesis will investigate how translators deal with the transfer of humor in video games, from English into Italian.

For scholars who set about to study a relatively new discipline, the prospect is both daunting and exciting. Daunting, because of the lack of a long-established literature and of the guidance it provides, but also exciting, because in the vastness of the subject they will look for especially distinctive traits and, in the case of this thesis, of something that uniquely distinguishes the translation of humor in games and that may not be found anywhere else. As interactivity is arguably the most defining characteristic of games, I will try to see how interactivity affects humor and its translation.

It is thanks to interactivity that the 'reader' of the videoludic text – i.e. the player – is not a passive user but rather becomes a participant to the creation of content in many ways, some of which will be explored in the pages of this thesis. This, in turn, determines that a translation which misdirects the player can have bigger consequences than in any other media, as it can interfere with gameplay by creating obstacles for the players (or by making the game easier, as discussed in section 5.4.3). A situation which perfectly illustrates this problem can be found in *Monkey Island 2: Le Chuck's Revenge* (1991), a game where the player must solve puzzles using the tools and information gathered from the environment in order to

advance in the story.[1] At one point, the only way to progress in the game is to stop a waterfall so that the main character can access a cave that is hidden behind it. The waterfall can be stopped by activating a pump, but none of the tools available to the player is an obvious choice for this task. The only way to close it is to use a live monkey called Jojo that the player's character can pick up from a different area. If the player inputs the command 'Use Jojo with pump', the character uses the monkey as a tool and the waterfall stops flowing. The solution of this puzzle is based on the fact that the 'monkey wrench' is, in English, a type of adjustable wrench. If guessing the solution might be hard for English speaking players, it will be even harder for players of localized versions, as the expression does not exist in other languages. In fact, the link between the word 'monkey' and the tool called 'monkey wrench' is lost in the French, German, Italian and Spanish translations of the game and players are left clueless about what the monkey could be used for, and therefore unable to solve the waterfall puzzle. In any media, it is not uncommon to find examples of wordplay and puns that are particularly challenging to translate. In audiovisual translation (AVT), the challenges grow, as audiovisual constraints pose further limitations to the possible solutions available to the translators. As a genre within the wider field of AVT, many of these limitations also characterize game localization, which sees translators having to deal with additional constraints due to the specific features of the medium (the main contributions to the existing literature dealing with these issues are discussed in 1.1, while chapter 3 describes further audiovisual features of games that might affect localization). However, the consequences of being faced with a translation that is unclear or that does not replicate the function of the original text (in the previous example, conveying a hint to the player) can be especially severe in a game. In the example from *Monkey Island 2*, if players cannot guess the solution to the puzzle, they cannot advance in the game – in other words, they are denied access to further content and their engagement may come to an abrupt and frustrating end. This would not happen in such a detrimental manner if they were watching a movie and, as this specific puzzle has no relevance for the rest of the story, missing the wordplay would only hinder their understanding of a single scene.

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[1] Games like this, called 'graphic adventures', will be discussed in Chapter 4, as the games in the corpus here discussed belong to this genre.

Even outside such extreme scenarios, a ‘break’ in the translation, a ‘culture bump’ – an expression used by Leppihalme (1997) for cases where a TT reader has a problem understanding an allusion based on the source culture – can be more disruptive in games than in any other media. For example, one of the puzzles in the 1993 game *Day of the Tentacle* requires the player to chop down a kumquat tree. According to one of his biographers, George Washington, who appears as a character in the game, chopped down a cherry tree in his youth. To move the story forward, the player is supposed to paint the kumquats red and then mockingly challenge Washington to chop it down. The translators kept the references to his ‘famous’ skills in chopping cherry trees, but the humorous effect of challenging the future President to chop down a fake cherry tree was somewhat diluted by the fact that Italian players would likely have never heard of the story. Still, the translators had little choice: they could not eliminate the joke, as it was necessary to proceed in the game. Removing names and facts pertaining to the source language (SL) culture that are hardly familiar to the target audience could directly affect gameplay and jeopardize the whole experience.

As cultural specificity is especially likely to cause disruptions in a translated text, I intend to pay particular attention to instances of humor based on cultural elements. If humor is known for being difficult to translate (Chiaro, 1992), humor based on culture poses to translators the additional challenge of having to deal with cultural items that might not be equally well known to source language and target language speakers. Therefore, special attention will be paid to analyzing humor that is intrinsically based on culture-specific references and to how translators deal with them: do they adopt a foreignizing approach (Venuti, 1995), keeping possibly unfamiliar names – hoping that the context will be enough for the audience to ‘guess’ the meaning of the joke – or do they opt for domestication (ibid.), substituting the obscure references and trying to achieve a similar humorous effect with other, more familiar and transparent references? I would like to argue that this issue is particularly relevant in the case of games, as culture bumps can most easily damage the user’s experience.

The technique of breaking the fourth wall, in which characters in a work of fiction acknowledge or address the audience (see section 2.3), finds a natural home in games, being inherently linked to their interactive nature, and is often used for humorous purposes. One way of breaking the fourth wall is through the use of *meta-references* (Scholes, 1970), a type of self-reference where fictional elements (usually the characters) directly or indirectly point at the fact that they belong to a fictional world. I would like to contend that a large part of the humorous occurrences in games are instances of meta-referential humor. The reason is simple: while not being unique to this medium, meta-referential humor in games builds on the peculiar relationship between the player and the world in which the characters act, which enhances the comic potential of this kind of humor. In this view, I will illustrate several ways in which meta-reference is used in games to break the fourth wall for comic effect – for example, by having a character addressing the player or acknowledging the game universe. Puns and jokes based on pop culture references that clearly do not belong to the fictional world of the game can also be considered meta-references; if a character from a game set in a fantasy world refers to another game or to a movie, the fourth wall is then broken. As these references are often culture-specific, translating a game that heavily features this type of humor can be particularly complex and challenging.

The games that are part of this research contain a substantial number of humorous elements based on culture-specific items. In fact, they contain many types of humor, which permeates the majority of these games' dialogue exchanges and situations. The corpus is made up of three popular games from the 1990s: *The Secret of Monkey Island* (1990, released as a remake in 2009 with an updated translation), *Day of the Tentacle* (1993) and *Discworld* (1995, re-translated unofficially in 2009). The games were originally released in English and I will study their Italian translations, as, according to Newzoo (2013), Italy is one of the main video games markets in Europe, with an estimated gamer population of 21 million in 2013 and 56.3% of them spending money on their games.

The analysis focuses on the translation of on-screen text in general, as the audio for the Italian versions of the games keep the original English voices, where present.

The retranslation of the games will be useful to analyze possible changes that may have taken place in translation policies over the years. As Hermans (1996: 40) points out, translations are normally produced:

> with reference to pre-existing texts and discourses. The normal mode of existence of a translation is not as ‘a translation’ or ‘a translated text’ per se, but as a translated legal document, a translated philosophical treatise, a translated work of literature. [...] In catering for the needs of the system recipient, translation cannot but defer to the prevailing discourses of that system.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the possibility of referring to pre-existing translated games in Italy was considerably more limited than it is nowadays. Hence, a diachronic approach will be also adopted in this thesis to see if and how translation choices have changed across time by comparing the original translations of *The Secret of Monkey Island* and *Discworld*, made in 1990 and in 1995 respectively, when game localization was still taking its first steps in Italy, with their new translations made in 2009, when localizing games for the Italian market was already an established and prolific practice.

In examining whether any changes have taken place in recent years, I also aim to test the validity of the retranslation hypothesis (Berman, 1990), a theory emerged in Literary Translation Studies which claims that newer translations are more source-text oriented than previous ones.

The first three chapters of the thesis provide the theoretical background for the research, while the other three are devoted to a case study which illustrates some fundamental aspects of the translation of humor in video games. In particular, the thesis is structured as follows.

Chapter 1 presents a review of the literature to date on topics related to the translation of humor in games and is organized into three sections. The first part illustrates the research in game localization, focusing on those studies which deal with its cultural aspects. The second part covers humor studies, with special attention to the linguistic theories of humor. The third part discusses studies on the

translation of humor, and in particular on the translation of humor in audiovisual media such as film and comics, which share many common traits with games in the way humor is presented to the audience.

Chapter 2 discusses the relevant aspects of humor in video games, using examples from popular titles in an attempt to demonstrate that humor is heavily present in games. It also illustrates how the peculiar nature of games – in particular, their interactivity – can have an impact on humor, as understanding humor can sometimes be essential to move forward in the game. Interactivity also allows for a 'customized' level of humor, which can in turn affect the users' experience through different storylines.

Chapter 3 addresses the audiovisual features of games, which are incredibly varied and cannot always be assimilated to the established categories of audiovisual translation. By analyzing how content is presented to the user, the chapter discusses how the various audiovisual modalities of games can affect translation.

Chapter 4 introduces the games that have been used in the corpus and the methodology followed in the analysis. After briefly illustrating the history of the genre of graphic adventures, the main characteristics of the specific games chosen are described. The analysis covers the types of humor employed in the games and their audiovisual features; an overview of the data collection process is also given, in view of the complexities that gathering text data from video games often entails.

Chapter 5 is devoted to the actual text analysis. The chapter investigates which approaches are preferred in the translation into Italian of humorous elements and takes a closer look at which translation strategies are prevalent in the treatment of humor based on culture-specific references. For this, the classification of translation procedures proposed by Pedersen (2005) is particularly useful, as he focuses on audiovisual translation and gives special attention to extralinguistic culture-bound references (ECRs), which are especially frequent in these games.

The methods for the translation of puns discussed by Delabastita (1996) are also considered, as much of the humor in the corpus relies on puns.

Chapter 6 discusses the retranslation of the games, comparing the first and the newer Italian translations in order to identify potential discrepancies and similitudes. The chapter also gives insight into the phenomenon of fan translation, as the retranslation of *Discworld* analyzed is an amateur translation, made by fans of the game almost twenty years after its first release.

Chapter 7 presents the conclusions and implications of the research, and provides recommendations for further work.

The appendix contains a sample of humorous elements taken from the corpus, classified by types of humor, with their Italian translation. A reference list concludes the thesis, listing all the sources cited in this work, followed by a gameography and a filmography.

Chapter 1

Literature review

1.1 Introduction

A study of the translation of humor in video games necessarily touches various areas of research. Translation and humor studies have both dealt with topics that are relevant to the issue. The first chapter of this dissertation surveys some of the main academic contributions in these areas.

Section 1.2 contains an overview of the existing research on localization, intended as the process of adapting computer software and, in particular, video games for foreign countries.

Section 1.3 explores the literature on humor. Bearing in mind that the topic has generated countless discussions among scholars and across the centuries, the survey aims at presenting both the old theories that are still deemed relevant today and the new theories that have emerged in relation to the linguistic aspects of humor.

Section 1.4 examines the contribution of Translation Studies to humor research, with special regard to verbally expressed humor (VEH) and the translation of puns and wordplay. Finally, the attention shifts to the translation of humor in audiovisual media, with a focus on film and comics, which share many common traits with games in the way humor is presented to the audience.

1.2 Localization of video games

Localization, defined by the Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA, 2007: online) as 'the process of modifying products or services to account for differences in distinct markets', plays an increasingly important role in the growth of the video games industry;[2] nevertheless, so far games have been the object of relatively little academic interest from a Translation Studies point of view.

1.2.1 The peculiarity of video game texts and its implications for localization

The current research into the technical side of video games localization is in part motivated by the complexity of video games as texts. As in other multimedia products, translatable assets take several forms. The dialogue can have voiceover or just subtitles, and it must be pointed out that the terms 'voiceover' and 'subtitles' do not have the same meaning when referred to games as as they have in other areas of AVT, as further explained in chapter 3. In games, the term 'voiceover' is used to indicate a technique that is similar to dubbing, although it has a number of peculiar features. Similarly, games use various types of 'subtitles', some of which deviate from traditional subtitles in several ways, including the fact that in many cases they do not accompany verbal messages transmitted through the audio channel. In addition, the interface through which the player interacts with the game world usually contains both graphical and textual elements (sometimes, verbal items are inserted as graphical elements); paratext abounds in the form of manuals, packaging and promotional material, which often includes an official website. Bernal-Merino (2008) lists a variety of textual types present in video games, describing their main features, specific skills that can be especially valuable in the translation of each type and some of the constraints they

[2] The boundaries between 'translation' and 'localization' are far from being well defined and there is no consensus in translation studies on whether the term 'localization' is needed to describe this phenomenon. Subscribing to the view expressed by O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013), I will use the term 'localization', as it is an established industry practice, but I will also refer to the 'translation' of games, viewing translation as a concept that can include cultural and technical aspects of rendering a message into a different language and not merely a linguistic process.

impose on translators. O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013) expand on this point, presenting a taxonomy of narrative-oriented game text and associating text types with translation strategies and priorities.

Localization does not always cover all these elements and the level of localization must be chosen with careful consideration of the trade-off between the uncertain additional sales that localized versions can generate and the additional costs and risks associated with a more complex process (Chandler and O'Malley Deming, 2012: 8). For low budget titles, the optimal choice can be no localization at all, as the predicted increase in sales might not be large enough to justify the extra investment. For games that are expected to sell only a few thousand copies in foreign markets, it is customary to translate only manual, packaging and other supporting documentation (the so-called 'box and docs' localization). Where a bigger budget is available, the game itself is localized; even so, voiceover – when present – is not always translated, as this requires considerably more time and money. Bartelt-Krantz (2011) stresses the importance of calculating the ROI (Return on Investment) for game localization projects, highlighting the considerable costs that would be incurred by localizing a triple-A product such as *Dragon Age: Origins* (2009), with its over 1 million words of text.

In evaluating the opportunity of fully localizing a game, the time factor also has substantial relevance. The costs of missing a release date are obvious: as in the movie industry, releasing a game at a particular time of the year will have repercussions on the revenue (for example, the period preceding Christmas usually sees a peak in sales).

Sometimes, however, such deadlines are hard to meet, as translating a game can be complex and time-consuming. Bernal-Merino (2007) identifies in text fragmentation and in the presence of variables two of the most challenging features of game translation. Text fragmentation is a product of the interactive nature of games. As players are able to influence the pace and flow of the game, their actions also affect what textual content is displayed and when: the order of certain events can be changed, lines of dialogue may or may not be heard, instructions from the game may or may not be triggered by the player, and so on.

As a consequence, a game script can be made up of a series of 'fragments' which do not necessarily have a clear meaning outside the context of the game. Since translators are not always able to see the game before its release, text fragmentation can be a problem, especially if they are not provided with enough contextual information (see also Dietz, 2006, for a discussion of the issues related to what he calls 'blind localization').

The insertion of variables in the text can also create obstacles during the localization process. Sometimes, players are required to enter their name, a name they want to use for their character, or personal information such as their age or sex; the game will store this information and use it for various purposes (e.g. to address the player). In the game code, this data is represented with variables – strings of text accompanied by a symbol that helps distinguish them from the rest of the code and from translatable items. For example, if the game is supposed to notify players each time a new high score has been set, the code might contain a sentence like '<playername> is now leading the board!'; when the message is displayed on screen, the variable <playername> will be replaced by the name of the player. It is also common to have the same scenarios repeated in slightly different circumstances (e.g. a war between two nations, a football match between different teams, or similar shops that sell different equipment depending on the location). Here, too, variables can be used to repeat the same lines of text with small variations: when the text is displayed on screen, the variable name is replaced by content that depends on the specific circumstances, possibly taking into account information provided by the player.

This complexity affects the relationship between developers and translators. Inadvertently modifying even a single character of the game code is likely to prevent the software from working: if the code contains a mistake, the game can 'crash' when that specific line of code is reached, or it might not even start running. For this reason, translators do not, as a rule, have access to the code: in many cases, developers extract all the translatable items from the code and provide the translators with files containing the text alone. This way, the translators do not have to identify the translatable parts by themselves, which

takes time and sometimes requires familiarity with a programming language to avoid accidentally disrupting the code.

1.2.2 Fan translation: a different perspective

While professional video game translators are not normally required to extract the translatable text themselves, amateur translations of video games are often made by fans of a game who have the necessary skills to extract the text from the code and modify it. The proliferation of fan translations was aided by the birth, in the 1990s, of console emulators, a type of software that allows PC users to play on their machines titles that were originally developed for other systems. Muñoz-Sánchez (2009) describes in detail the process, known as ROM hacking,[3] employed by some users to translate existing console games, and highlights its potential as a training tool for aspiring translators. One of the most common reasons behind amateur translations is the desire to make certain games available in countries where official versions have never been released; for many Japanese games, fan translations are the only existing translations in English. However, fan translations are also frequent for games that already have an official translation in that language. They are often motivated by a belief that the previous translations were lacking in some respects, because of mistranslations or because, in the eyes of the fans, the old versions were not faithful enough to the originals.[4] Indeed, the knowledge fans have of a specific game can compensate, to a certain degree, for their lack of professional skills (Muñoz-Sánchez, ibid.; Díaz Montón, 2011). The in-house localization model, where translators work in the premises of the

[3] It is worth pointing out that ROM hacking (or 'romhacking') does not always involve translation: the term simply refers to a method for editing a game that can be used to modify any of its elements, be it graphics, music or text, by modifying its ROM (Read Only Memory) image. Also, although translation hacking is sometimes considered a type of romhacking, modifying the text of a game does not always involve ROM hacking. The term is usually correct when it refers to fan translation of console games, which therefore requires high technical competence. However, modifying PC games can be much easier, as acknowledged by O'Hagan (2009b), as the only thing required can be modifying one or more files in the directory of the game after its installation. When the text is contained in .txt files which can be modified with a simple text editor, translating a PC game is not truly ROM hacking and can be a relatively easy task from a technical point of view, as illustrated in section 6.1.

[4] See chapter 6 for a more thorough discussion of retranslation.

developers and have access to the original game, is mostly popular with Japenese developers; in other countries, developers often choose to outsource the localization process to translation companies. As a consequence, professional translators are not always given the chance to play the game they are localizing, much less play it thoroughly, and this can have serious repercussions on the quality of the final product (Mangiron and O'Hagan, 2006; Bernal-Merino, 2007). In addition, the fans' unofficial position gives them freedom from the censorship rules that often cause official translations to display significant changes from the original text (Di Marco, 2007; Zhang, 2012).

1.2.3 The localization of culture: a battle between constraints and creativity

Different countries have different rules regarding what content is acceptable in a game and the policies employed to enforce these rules range from actual censorship to dedicated committees in charge of assigning an age rating to entertainment software before it is released. Although standards of what is acceptable are not always codified and spelt out, publishers may require changes during localization due to the issues that are considered especially sensitive in certain countries, such as politics, sex, or religion. Zhang (2012) argues that in China, due to the complexity of a reviewing process which involves more than one censoring authority and to a lack of clear guidelines on the suitability of game content, modifications to games made by localizers through self-censorship can end up being more stringent than those the authorities would require.

Edwards (2011) points out how localization should always take into account the context of the market to which a game is targeted. She stresses the importance of culturalization, focusing religious, geopolitical and historical forces as the factors that are more liable to generate cultural backlash. As her aim is to provide advice for a successful localization, she suggests the notion of contextual proximity (Edwards, 2012) as a guiding principle: the closer a piece of content is to the local context in time, place or form, the highest is its potential sensitivity. In a realistic 'shooter' game, fictional geography is not likely to prove controversial if the

game is set in a distant foreign country; the same game, however, might not be well received in the country where the action takes place.

Furthermore, the representation of historical events always deserves special attention, even when such events happened well in the past, as their current relevance might still be felt very strongly in certain locales. Edwards (2011) provides examples of games which provoked negative reactions due to their treatment of culturally-sensitive issues. At times, such reactions were strong enough to prevent the game from being released in certain countries and, in some other cases, the publishers preventively modified the games in order to avoid losing foreign markets. For this reason, while the power of localization lies in ensuring that gamers feel more engaged when playing, Edwards (ibid.: 21) argues that 'culturalization ensures that gamers will not be *disengaged* from the game by a piece of content that is considered incongruent or even offensive'. Although this statement appears to view the adaptation of cultural items for foreign audiences almost as a necessary evil, the author concludes her analysis by pointing out that culturalization should not be seen as an obstacle to 'the creative forces behind game development' (ibid.: 28), but rather as something that can help these creative forces to find expression in as many cultures as possible.

For this to happen, a certain degree of creativity may be required from the translators. Mangiron and O'Hagan (2006) use the term 'transcreation' to denote the level of freedom enjoyed by video game translators. Advocating a view of localization that is in line with Vermeer's (1989) *skopos* theory, the authors argue that game translation should be guided by its purpose (skopos), which is not loyalty to the original text, but to the overall game experience (2006 and 2013). This idea of games translation as a process which should revolve around their ludic component reflects the ludological views that have lately emerged in game studies (Frasca, 1999): while a narratological approach considers games simply as a new form of narrative, the ludological approach sees them as a new formal system, for which the specific rules are defined by the dimension of play. As a consequence, notwithstanding the severe space and time limitations as well as the other technical constraints which characterize the localization of a game (see chapter 3), creativity plays a very important role in the process. In fact, in the case

of Japanese games adapted for Western markets, the said space limitations might in part explain why creative solutions are necessary to recreate the feel of the original. Mangiron and O'Hagan (2006) provide an example which clearly illustrates this point. In the original Japanese version of the game *Final Fantasy X*, the names used for the weapons have often an evocative meaning. One of these names is 風林火山 (*fūrinkazan)*; the four Chinese characters represent 'wind, forest, fire and mountain' and the expression, when used in Japanese, could be translated as 'as fast as the wind, as quiet as the forest, as daring as fire, and immovable as the mountain'. Given that, for technical reasons, the names of the weapons had a spatial limitation of approximately 15 characters, a literal translation was not a viable option; therefore, the translators aimed at retaining the evocative feel of the original by renaming the blade 'Conqueror'. Other examples show how contextualization is used to further engage the player, with the use of regional expressions and cultural references that are assumed to be familiar to the target audience. Humor can be contextualized as well, and humorous elements can be intensified or even added to bring the game closer to the local players.[5]

Di Marco (2007) also focuses on Japanese games, arguing that the cultural distance that has to be covered in their translation for European markets is especially large and thus potentially problematic. Showing how Japanese characters were adjusted for Western audiences, she demonstrates how the modifications made during localization can involve visual as well as textual elements. In one of her examples, shown in Figure 1, the female protagonist of a Japanese game changes from a seventeen-year-old girl to a woman in her early twenties; the school uniform she wears in the original game is replaced by regular clothes and she acquires lighter hair and Western features.

[5] This topic is reprised and studied in more depth in Mangiron (2010), see section 1.3.2.

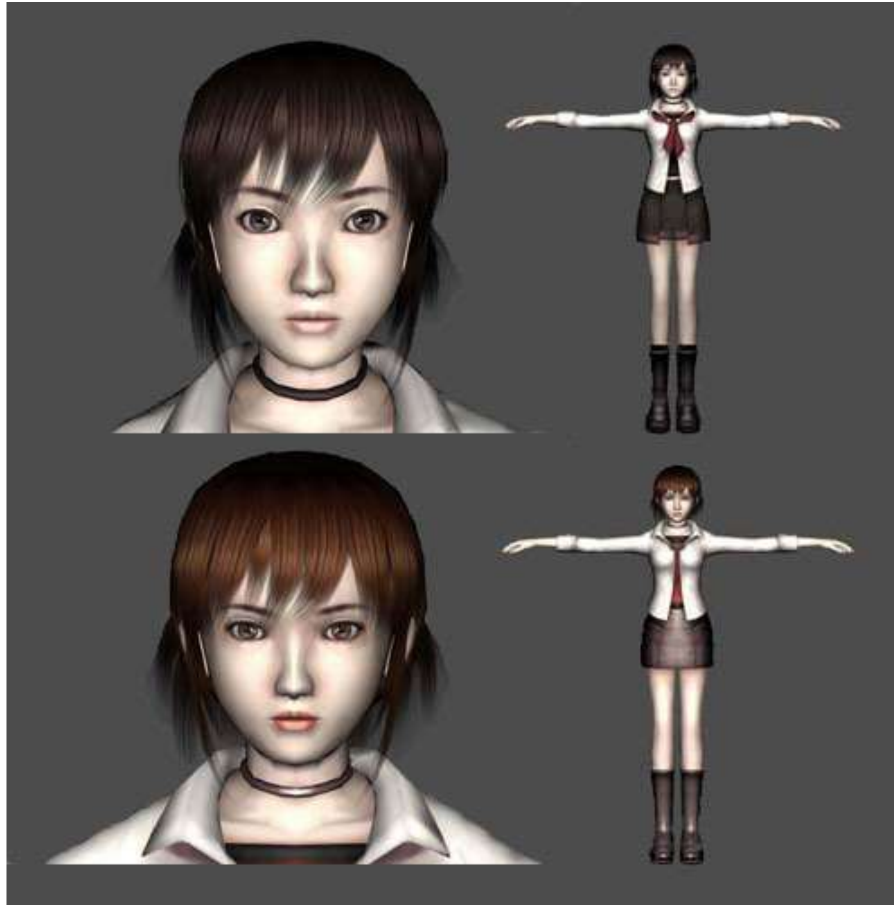


Figure 1. A screenshot used by Di Marco (2007) to illustrate the localization of a character from *Fatal Frame* (copyright 2001 Tecmo)

The motivation behind these changes was not some codified standard of what is acceptable in certain communities, but the belief that Western audiences prefer more adult-looking characters than their Japanese counterparts. As Di Marco (ibid.) points out, changing visuals is more costly and time-consuming than translating text, hence the need of correctly evaluating the profitability of different degrees of localization.

Economic considerations also play a role in the changes made to keep a low age rating in foreign countries, as losing players under a certain age means losing potential revenue. In the European version of *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga* (2003), a game which in the original Japanese version was rated suitable for players over 3 years old, an alcoholic cocktail was replaced by a blend of fictional ingredients; in the Italian localization of *Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door* (2004), a title with the same age rating as *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga*, a

cartoonish-looking witch who was transgender in the original version became a man who had magically 'turned himself into a woman'. As these examples show, translators often try to maintain the flavor of the original. 'Cultural localization', according to Di Marco (ibid.), is therefore a matter of adaptation and transparency, of loss and compensation: a process of hybridization where translation, marketing and the polysemiotic nature of the medium all contribute to giving games new, 'placeless' identities.

For Mandiberg (2009), the loss of identity due to cultural localization can outweigh its potential benefits. With a thesis that echoes the ideological turn in Translation Studies posited by Hermans (1985) and Lefevere (1992), he argues that localization impoverishes certain games by losing the linguistic variety of the Japanese originals and, partly (and as a consequence), their allegorical meaning. Hence, for games that can be seen not only as entertainment but as political texts, he wishes for 'localization' to be replaced by 'translation', which in his view would help preserve their aspects of transnationalism and difference. However, as argued by O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013), culture-specific factors do not need to be the vehicle for ideologies or allegorical meanings to be a valuable element of a game. The game *Ōkami* (2006), set in ancient Japan, contained several references to Japanese culture which were mostly kept in the US version and likely played an important role in its success in Western markets – an example that shows how keeping foreign cultural elements can be the best strategy when they contribute to the 'exotic' feel of a foreign-made game.

Most of the works discussed in this section adopt a descriptive approach, analyzing existing translations to study the current practices and, in some cases, providing indications for localizers. O'Hagan (2009a) shifts the focus to the reception aspect, with a pilot study conducted using the localized version of the Japanese game *Ico* (2001). In the experiment, game sessions were recorded and retrospective interviews were carried out in order to register the player's in-game behavior and his views on specific elements, such as gameplay, controls, story and language. The player was also requested to fill in a 'log', registering his impressions and feelings at specific moments in the game. The evidence collected suggests that the same game design might elicit different emotional responses

from players depending on their culture of origin; in particular, developers should take into account that different narrative strategies might appeal to audiences in different regions. On the other hand, the results highlight the importance of nonverbal communication as a universal vehicle that can be used in games to overcome cultural barriers.

1.2.4 Software localization, game localization: common challenges

It has already been stressed out how the technical issues that arise in the localization of games also characterize software localization. Similarly, it is worth mentioning those works that deal with the cultural implications of software localization, as many of the points they raise can be applied to video games. Krishna et al. (2004) discuss the challenges created by cross-border software outsourcing, in which software suppliers outsource the development to teams operating in countries different than those of the final clients. If the development of end-user products is outsourced, cultural differences can be a problem if the software is not designed to suit the target culture, in a culturally-neutral way or internationalized, i.e. taking into consideration that it may be localized; the same issues can arise when players have to engage with a game interface that has not been properly localized. Furthermore, the localization of a video game is sometimes carried out by several teams located in the respective target countries; with this system, cultural issues can emerge in managing the cross-border relationships between developer and localizers, as described by Krishna et al. (ibid.) for the case of software suppliers.

In general, studies on the cultural aspects involved in software localization can provide a number of useful tools to both game localizers and researchers. Šiaučiūnė and Liubinienė (2011) apply to video games the localization pyramid first developed by Chroust (2007) in his analysis of the globalized software market. Chroust's model sees localization as composed of seven layers, involving, in increasing order of complexity, technological infrastructure, grammar, semantics, graphic and iconic representation, business conventions and practices, social and communicative aspects and, finally, culture. Even though the 'cultural

layer' is given autonomous identity, Chroust (ibid.) stresses how the last three layers are all intimately associated with cultural aspects. For example, the way of addressing and greeting the user, which he places among the social and communicative aspects, is highly dependent on culture, with regard to both linguistic register and acceptable gestures.[6] Addressing the user in a familiar way, for example, can be perfectly acceptable in the United States, but impolite in Germany. A similar reasoning must be applied when translating games, although the communication style should be tuned to take into account the different type of content, as the ludic nature itself might allow a more colloquial communication style in both countries.

The cultural layer presupposes all the other layers and requires an additional level of competence on the part of the localizer in order to avoid misinterpretation of messages. As a case in point, Chroust (ibid.) points out how certain types of cultural items, e.g. jargon or sport metaphors, should ideally be avoided when designing software, as foreign users are unlikely to understand them. In particular, he argues that 'humor very rarely carries over to another culture' (ibid.: 10).

The challenges of rendering humorous elements into a different language are widely acknowledged, as testified by the many contributions the topic has generated across a variety of research fields. Some of these studies, deemed particularly relevant to the topic of this dissertation, are discussed in section 1.4. First, however, section 1.3 provides a brief overview of the state of research on humor.

1.3 Humor: an overview

This section presents the most widely accepted theories of humor; in particular, it gives a brief account of the superiority, incongruity and relief theories. Then,

[6] In discussing the relationship between user and machine, Chroust (2007) subscribes to Miller's position according to which the more complex computer interfaces become, the more users tend to ascribe human qualities to them, thus expecting computers to be polite and helpful and to observe etiquette. To use Miller's (2004) effective image, humans expect from a realistic interface 'the sensitivity of an intuitive, courteous butler'.

section 1.3.4 focuses on verbal theories of humor, as they have frequently been applied to the study of humor in translation.

1.3.1 The superiority theory

As something that permeates human life, humor can provide an extremely rich ground for research; indeed, the vastness of the topic has attracted scholars from the most disparate disciplines to investigate the subject. Although the second half of the 20th century has seen a proliferation of academic studies on humor and laughter, the interest in these topics is much older. In his tractatus *De Oratore* (55 1870/55 BCE: 114), Cicero acknowledged the nature and source of laughter as matters worthy of investigation, together with 'the various classes of the ludicrous'. The year was 55 BC, and history has since then produced countless reflections on all aspects of humor.

One of the most famous theories of humor, formulated in the 17th century, is the *superiority theory*, commonly attributed to the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes (2001/1651: 41) defined 'sudden glory' as 'the passion which maketh those grimaces called LAUGHTER'. This emotion, he wrote, 'is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves' (ibid.).

Some, like Heyd (1982), have found this analysis of laughter to be in line with Hobbes's concept of man's nature, with his struggle for self-preservation and competition for power; others, like Ewin (2001), argued that it would be unfair to ascribe Hobbes's definition of laughter to his supposed egoistic view of humanity in general, since he also admits that there are occasions where a company laughs together 'at absurdities and infirmities abstracted from persons' (Hobbes, 1812/1650: 66). In addition, the fact that he sees in laughter an expression of self satisfaction does not imply that all instances of laughter must originate from the same emotion. Be that as it may, the definition of laughter quoted above and a few

mentions in *Leviathan* and *Human Nature* were enough to forever associate the superiority theory of humor with the English philosopher.

Hobbes (2001/1651: 41), however, was not the first to see laughter as caused by 'the apprehension of some deformed thing in another'. Some 2,000 years earlier, Plato (360-347 BC) argued that ignorance is often deemed funny; and, in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle (2010/350 BC) highlighted how comedies revolve around characters that are of lesser virtue than, or inferior to, the audience.

1.3.2 Humor and incongruity

Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, dated from around the 4th century BC, also contains the first embryonic version of what is probably the most widely accepted theory of humor, namely the *incongruity theory*. He points out (Aristotle, 2010/350: 139) that jokes often change the letters of a word as a device to surprise the audience; this way, 'the word that comes is not what the hearer imagined', which produces a comic effect when a logic is suddenly and unexpectedly found in the apparently contradicting items.

In modern times, many have subscribed to the incongruity theory, of which the first thorough formulation was given in 1764 by the Scottish poet and philosopher James Beattie in his essay *On Laughter and Ludicrous*. As the title suggests, Beattie (1809/1764) was interested in the study of laughter rather than humor, and he acknowledged that, despite the connection between the two, humor does not always raise laughter. However, the concept of incongruity has later been viewed as one of humor's main characteristics. According to Beattie (ibid.: 155),

> Laughter arises from the view of two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage, or as acquiring a sort of mutual relation from the peculiar manner in which the mind takes notice of them.

What matters, then, is not only the incongruity between the two parts, but also its 'resolution', the mutual relation that the two elements acquire in the mind of the

subject. For this reason, the incongruity theory is also called incongruity-resolution theory (Ritchie, 1999).

In general, Beattie (ibid.: 156) adds, 'the greater the number of incongruities that are blended in the same assemblage, the more ludicrous it will probably be'. Then, in a statement that echoes Aristotle's considerations on the role of surprise in jokes, he goes on to note that laughter often arises:

> from the discovery of unexpected *likeness* between objects apparently *dissimilar*: and the greater the apparent dissimilitude, and new-discovered resemblance, the greater will be the surprise attending the discovery, the more striking the opposition of contrariety and relation, and the more lively the risible emotion. (ibid.: 178)

The concepts of surprise and absurdity as two factors that cause laughter also feature in Kant's (2008/1790: 117) reflections on the subject: 'Something absurd [...] must be present in whatever is to raise a hearty convulsive laugh. Laughter is an all action arising from a strained expectation being suddenly reduced to nothing'. Similar views can be found in Schopenauer's book *The World as Will and Representation*, written in 1818. In his version of the theory, the comic effect is produced by the incongruity between a real object and a concept: 'Laughter itself is simply the expression of this incongruity' (1969/1818: 59). Again, the effect is amplified by 'surprise', being greater the more unexpected this incongruity is.

In more recent days, a number of scholars have tried to find empirical evidence of the role of incongruity in determining funniness. Although testing a theory of humor requires working with variables that are not easy to define, let alone capture numerically, the elusive nature of the task has not discouraged researchers.

In order to carry out empirical studies, appropriate measures for both 'incongruity' and 'funniness' are needed. Many of the existing analyses rely for their dependent variable on the subjects' perception – for example, people may be asked to rate the funniness of a joke on a scale –, while independent variables –

i.e. the degree of incongruity or surprise – are measured with a variety of techniques. Mull (1949), for instance, uses a collection of musical pieces, each with a different degree of contrast in elements such as rhythm, timbre or intensity, to test which ones listeners find more humorous. Kenny (1955) studies the responses gathered after exposing individuals to jokes where the endings have been manipulated to represent different levels of expectedness. Nerhardt (1970) performs an experiment in which people are asked to lift suitcases varying in weight and judge their heaviness. His hypothesis is that there should be a positive correlation between the frequency of smiles and laughter from the subjects and the divergence of the actual weights from what they expect based, for example, on the size of the suitcases. Although his first results do not confirm the existence of such a correlation, the outcome of the experiment is consistent with the predictions of the theoretical model when performed in a laboratory setting, where subjects are tested individually, and therefore are not influenced by social factors.

Whether these experiments are capable or not of proving the validity of the incongruity theory, they certainly prove that it never went out of fashion, despite not being immune to criticism. One of the theory's biggest critics is Latta (1999), who goes to great lengths to disprove it. If two incongruous things can be perceived to go together, he argues, they are not truly incongruous: 'To make sense of an incongruity is to see that there was no incongruity in the first place' (ibid.: 150). What is more, there are humorous instances where a 'true' incongruity is involved, but no resolution takes place. As an example, he mentions the incongruity, highlighted by Paulos (1980) in a discussion on nonverbal humor, between the dignified movements of Charlie Chaplin's character and his appearance as a powerless little man with 'tattered clothes, slight physique, childlike expression' (Latta, 1999: 152). In this case, Latta argues, there is an incongruity, but this incongruity is not 'resolved' in any way.

1.3.3 The mechanics of humor: Freud and the relief theories

Latta (ibid.) proposes an alternative theory which sees humor as a process through which an individual goes from an initial stage of 'unrelaxtion' to a state of relax –

a theory that can be classified among the so-called ‘relief theories’ emerged in the 19th century.

The first attempt at a relief theory of humor is usually attributed to the English philosopher Herbert Spencer. Spencer (1865) investigated the physiological aspects of laughter. He observed that, while joy produces laughter, sardonic and hysterical laughter can be caused by mental distress, and even acute pain can sometimes make a person laugh. Its general cause is, therefore, ‘strong feeling, mental or physical’, which results in ‘an uncontrolled discharge of energy’ (ibid.: 200).

It is clear that Spencer did not aim at providing an alternative to the incongruity theory of humor; rather than trying to define what humor is, he was more preoccupied with understanding and describing the ‘mechanical’ process involved in the response to humor. To him, laughter was simply a vehicle through which the human body discharges energy. Nevertheless, Spencer’s formulation of the relief theory is hardly able to explain all instances of laughter, which often occurs too quickly to plausibly involve a build up and subsequent release of energy.

The relief theory of humor is most often associated with Sigmund Freud. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, from 1905, Freud illustrates the main joke techniques through a series of examples and compares them to the patterns that are most frequent in dreams. The diversion of the train of thought from one topic to another (what he calls *displacement*) and the use of absurdity and nonsense, both recurring devices in jokes, are among the main elements that characterize our dream life. Indirect representation – the replacement of a thought with an allusion or symbolism, also common in jokes – is ‘precisely what distinguishes the mode of expression of dreams from that of our waking life’ (1960/1905: 89). Such a similarity between how dreams and jokes work, he argues, cannot be the product of chance.

Freud divides jokes in innocent, which do not serve any particular aim, and tendentious, the aim of which is usually of a malicious nature, likely to provoke aversion or offend certain listeners. The latter can in turn be divided in hostile

jokes and obscene jokes (to which he later adds the categories of cynical and sceptical jokes). Hostile jokes serve the purpose of aggressiveness or satire; obscene jokes that of sexual exposure.

Innocent jokes, Freud (ibid.) argues, can provide us with an insight on the nature of jokes at their purest, as their only purpose and effect is to elicit a feeling of pleasure in the hearer. Tendentious jokes, however, are much more likely to provoke a sudden burst of laughter; therefore, they must have access to an additional 'source' of pleasure that innocent jokes lack. Focusing on obscene tendentious jokes, he identifies the source of pleasure of this type of jokes in that they allow us to retrieve the instinctive enjoyment of undisguised obscenity usually impeded by repression. Although civilization imposes us to repress this kind of primary enjoyment, repression is difficult for the human psyche, which relishes the possibility of relief provided by obscene jokes. Hostile jokes work in the same way. Society teaches us that hostile urges, just like sexual urges, must be repressed: it is not acceptable to express hostility, be it verbal or physical, against our fellow men. Jokes are a way to disguise our hostility; they allow us to evade restrictions by exploiting something ridiculous in our enemy which we would not be allowed to expose otherwise. Again, they liberate impulses that are constantly kept in check by external rules, thus representing a relief valve. If maintaining an inhibition requires a certain amount of physical expenditure, abandoning it produces an amount of pleasure that corresponds to the 'physical expenditure' that is saved.

Despite being centered around physical relief, Freud's theory of humor seems more tightly connected with the mechanisms of the mind than those of the body – the economy in physical expenditure is a direct consequence of the loosening of internal 'ties'. In this respect, Freud distances himself from Spencer, whose relief theory was rooted in the mechanical aspects of the energy release.

When the focus of Freud's analysis shifts from tendentious to innocent jokes, his theory becomes less clear, and the way in which 'economies in physical expenditure' should explain the other types of humor appears rather forced. According to Freud (ibid.), when jokes do not have any other purpose than

causing pleasure to the listeners, the source of such pleasure is to be researched in the joke techniques themselves, and many of these techniques are based on saving physical expenditure. As an example, he considers play on words, seeing in their technique of associating words that are similar in sound rather than in meaning a 'shortcut' that allows us to save physical work. The more alien are the circles to which the words belong, the bigger is the pleasure derived from the joke, and this, in his view, is due to the fact that we are saving a bigger amount of energy by shortening our train of thought. Other widespread joke techniques, e.g. allusions or the repeated use of the same word, have in common the rediscovery of something familiar, when we were expecting something new; this rediscovery, too, determines an economy in physical work.

Finally, he discusses jokes that use techniques such as nonsense, absurdity or representation by the opposite, observing that they liberate us from the constraints of logic, if only for a moment. From our infancy, we are taught not to say anything absurd; for this reason, we derive pleasure from 'liberated nonsense' (ibid.: 134). Diverging from a line of thought is much easier than keeping to it: the savings in energy expenditure associated with these jokes are, he argues, especially obvious. Nevertheless, what is to be intended by 'physical expenditure' is not always clear. Furthermore, even if we are willing to accept that some jokes allow us relief from the effort required to conform to the rules imposed by our intellectual upbringing, it is hard to apply the same mechanism to all joke techniques.

Although it is difficult to find a build-up of unreleased energy that precedes every instance of humor or laughter, Dormann and Biddle (2009) note how relief theories can be useful in explaining one of the main functions of humor in video games. Games often involve creating a state of tension in the player, and humor can help discharging that tension, making the game experience more relaxed and enjoyable.

Indeed, identifying the functions of humor is what many theorists have tried to do. Although superiority, incongruity and relief theories are usually presented as three opposing views of humor, it is easy to see how they are not really at odds with one

another, as the questions they try to answer are different. In this light, Lyttle (2001) suggests that humor theories should be grouped into three categories. The first group would include those, like the relief theory, which investigate the possible functions of humor. Incongruity and all the theories that analyze the *stimuli* for humor would form the second group. The third group would gather the response theories, which aim at explaining under what circumstances people will actually be amused by something that can be considered funny; superiority theories would belong to this group. Such a clean-cut separation, though, rarely occurs, as most theories of humor aim at answering multiple questions, even when they focus attention on one particular aspect. With this in mind, Attardo (1994) presents a classification which groups theories depending on the type of approach they use, as illustrated in Table 1:

Cognitive	**Social**	**Psychoanalytical**	**Physiological**
Incongruity	Hostility	Release	Neurological
Contrast	Aggression	Sublimation	Muscular
	Superiority	Liberation	
	Triumph	Economy	
	Derision		
	Disparagement		

Table 1. Attardo's (1994) classification of humor theories

To a lesser degree, this classification can be subject to the same criticism – there is no reason why a theory of humor could not use more than one of these approaches, as many do.

1.3.4 Verbal humor and the script-based theories

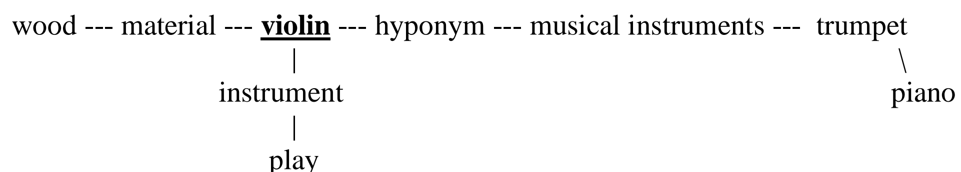
Attardo is well known for his General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), developed together with Raskin as an extension of Raskin's Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH), in the 1980s.

Verbal humor is an area of humor research which has received particular attention from scholars over the past thirty years. As verbal humor calls for considerable translation effort, it is also especially relevant for the purposes of this dissertation. One of the most well-known works in this field is Raskin's (1985) *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*, which contains his Semantic Script Theory of Humor. Raskin (ibid.) defines a script as a large chunk of semantic information surrounding a word or evoked by it. [7] The following scheme exemplifies information contained in the script 'home' proposed by Raskin (1979):

```
HOME
Subject: [+Human]
Activity: To live in:  / To have family there
                       | To take meals there
              IN:     <  To sleep there
                       | To receive guests
                       \ To stay in when nothing to do
              OUT:       To go out when something to do
Object: Artifact, Space inside
Place: Settlement
Time: Long
Condition: Own
```

Figure 2. Example of a 'script', from Raskin (1979: 331).

Scripts are not isolated entities and they are interconnected by links of various semantic natures (e.g. synonymy or antonymy). All the information possessed by an individual constitutes a 'semantic network', made of all the scripts (lexical and non-lexical) s/he knows and all the links between them. The following group of interconnected nodes represents a very small fraction of a semantic network:



[7] Attardo (1997: 402) later defines scripts as 'collections of semantic information pertaining to a given subject [embodying] the sum total of the cultural knowledge of a society, which can be represented as a set of expectations and/or weighted choices'.

In a script-based theory, the lexicon associated with an item includes all the lexical entries invoked by it. Although Raskin (1979) insists that the meaning of a script only contains lexical items, he also points out that a considerable amount of non-linguistic information (what he calls 'encyclopedic knowledge') must be admitted into the lexicon, as this information is usually needed for the processing of sentences.

In order to correctly interpret a sentence, an individual must use certain 'combinatorial rules' to calculate all the combinations of the scripts that are compatible with the lexical items forming the sentence. If this process yields at least one meaningful combination, this coherent reading will be chosen as the correct interpretation of the text.

The analytical process which leads us to the interpretation of a text through the combination of different scripts is what allows the creation and reception of humor. In the SSTH, Raskin gives the following definition of a joke:

> 107) A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both the conditions in 108) are satisfied:
>
> 108) i) the text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts
> ii) the two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite [...]. The two scripts with which the text is compatible are said to overlap fully or in part on this text.
>
> (Raskin, 1985: 99)

Both conditions are necessary and, together, they are sufficient conditions for funniness.

The first point states that the text must be related to two or more scripts that overlap. Saying that someone is 'playing' evokes different sets of scripts, related, for example, to 'playing a musical instrument' or 'playing a game'.

The second point stresses the importance of opposition in the construction of jokes. Raskin (1985) defines three main classes of opposition: actual/non-actual, normal/abnormal and possible/impossible; jokes contain lower lever instantiations

of these universal oppositions (e.g. good/bad or sex/no sex). To clarify how the process works, he uses the following joke:

> 'Is the doctor at home?' the patient asked in his bronchial whisper.
> 'No,' the doctor's young and pretty wife whispered in reply. 'Come on right in'
> (ibid.: 100)

In this example, the hearer is first lead to believe that a patient is looking for a doctor to be treated for an illness. The script 'doctor' is activated, until the second line of the joke questions what seemed to be a reasonable interpretation of the text. If the doctor is not at home, there must be another reason why his young wife is inviting the man to their home. At this point, the hearer will look for an alternative interpretation and realize that the man and the doctor's wife must be lovers. The script 'lover', then, is also compatible with the story (the overlapping requirement is satisfied). As the two scripts, 'doctor' and 'lover', are opposites according to the sex/no sex opposition, the second requirement is also satisfied and the text can be considered funny.

Although the SSTH aims at universality, it is confined to the limited area of jokes, as the presence of overlapping and opposing scripts cannot be accepted as a valid explanation for all forms of verbal humor. However, Raskin's theory is arguably the most influential among the modern contributions to the incongruity theory of humor. After researchers attempted to expand its scope and address some of the issues it raises (Raskin, 1985; Chlopicki, 1987; Zhao, 1987), in 1991 Attardo and Raskin presented a revised version of the theory in the article *Script theory revis(it)ed: joke similarity and joke representation model*. The new formal system proposed by these scholars, named General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), has two main purposes. Like the SSTH, it first aims at identifying the elements of a humorous text, something that would provide us with the necessary tools both to generate a humorous text and to recognize one when it is presented to us. Secondly, it discusses the concept of 'joke similarity' and looks at how to measure the semantic distance between jokes.

To do this, the script opposition introduced in the SSTH is integrated with five additional 'knowledge resources' (KRs) that play a fundamental role in the creation of a humorous text. The resulting six KRs are:

1. Script Opposition (SO), the KR 'inherited' by the SSTH and also, as the authors point out, the most abstract one.

2. Logical Mechanism (LM) is the way the two opposing scripts are brought together. The authors do not enumerate all existing LMs, as it would not be possible to compile an exhaustive list. Juxtaposition (two scripts are shown together), exaggeration (one element is exaggerated for humorous purposes), exchange of roles (the roles of two characters are switched from what would be normal) are all examples of feasible LMs. Of the knowledge resources, the LM is the most controversial and its lack of clarity has been pointed out in Ruch et al. (1993). Attardo (1997) argues that the LM embodies the resolution phase present in the incongruity-resolution models of humor. As resolution is not always necessary (there is no resolution, for example, in nonsense humor), Attardo himself observes that the LM resource can be considered optional.

3. Situation (SI) includes the context of the joke: where it is set, the participants, what they are doing and all the other elements that constitute the 'props' of the joke – elements that are usually provided by the scripts activated in the text. Some jokes rely heavily on situations; others leave it in the background.

4. Target (TA) is the object, the 'butt' of the joke; in the original classification, the target is always a person or a group of people. Although there are jokes that have no specific 'victim', some groups have become recurrent targets in certain cultures. The authors quote as examples the many different jokes circulating in the USA about the stupidity of Polish people; in Italy, there is a similar class of jokes about the Carabinieri (a military police) and, more recently, the footballer Francesco Totti has become a popular target.

5. Narrative strategy (NS) is the form in which the joke is told: as a pseudo-riddle, a dialogue, or a simple narrative.

6. Language (LA) includes every characteristic of a joke that is not determined by the other KRs, i.e. 'all the choices at the phonetic, phonologic, morphophonemic, morphologic, lexic, syntactic, and pragmatic levels of language structure that the speaker is still free to make, given that everything else in the joke is already given and cannot be tinkered with' (Attardo and Raskin, 1991: 298). Therefore, two jokes distinguished only by their exact wording would differ only in the language parameter. With the exception of puns, where the choice of words is more limited, any sentence of a joke can be paraphrased in many ways; the final position of the punchline, however, is of utmost importance.

The authors arrange the six KRs in the following sequence, in decreasing order of relevance:

SO → LM → SI → TA → NS → LA

According to the GTVH, this hierarchy allows us to order jokes on the basis of their degree of similarity. Two jokes that differ in one of the most important parameters (keeping the others fixed), for example SO or LM, should be perceived as being less similar than two jokes that differ only in language or narrative strategy.[8]

Besides providing a useful framework for any analysis of jokes, the notion of KRs has proved popular in the field of Translation Studies. As the next section shows, the role of KRs in explaining funniness helped some researchers to develop a linguistic theory of humor translation.

[8] Ruch et al. (1993) test this hypothesis by asking 534 subjects to compare different versions of a joke which vary only in one KR. The outcome of the experiment shows that most of the predicted relationships are confirmed by empirical observation; only SI and LM are not in the correct order, and several explanations are suggested for this result, including the vague nature of the LM resource.

1.4 The translation of humor

This section aims at illustrating some of the main contributions to the study of humor in translation. As this dissertation focuses on video games, particular attention is given to the translation of humor in audiovisual media. Studies on the translation of humor in video games are noticeably scarce; the final part of the section covers the few that deal specifically with the game medium.

1.4.1 Overview

With its linguistic focus, the GTVH provides an ideal theoretical basis for the study of humor in translation; it also lays the foundation for analysing humor in AVT, as funniness has a strong linguistic component in many audiovisual products as well. Most attempts to translate a humorous text must tap into the Language KR. The reason why LA is at the bottom of the KR ladder is that many jokes can be paraphrased in a number of different ways without changing their semantic content. Not all jokes, however, can be easily rephrased using different words: while the process usually poses no difficulty for the so-called 'referential jokes', changing the language without altering the meaning is more complex for verbal jokes. Distinguishing between these two classes of jokes is not always immediate, but, as Attardo (1994: 28) points out, Cicero (1870/55 BCE) provides in his *De Oratore* 'a surprisingly modern empirical test for the verbal/referential opposition':

> What, said in whatever words, is nevertheless funny, it is contained in the thing, what loses its saltiness if the words are changed, has all the funniness in the words. [...] because after changing the words they cannot retain the same funniness, should be considered to rely not in the thing but in the words.

In this view, if a text cannot be translated without losing its funniness, then we must be dealing with a verbal joke. The opposite is not always true – verbal jokes can often be translated into an unrelated language – but the translation will probably have to be a functional one, as puns rely on the relation between signified and signifier, which is different for every language.

Attardo (1992) acknowledges that the translation of verbal jokes, known familiarly as puns, deserves special attention. For most nonverbal jokes, the ideal translation shares the same script opposition, logical mechanism and narrative strategy as the original, while a greater degree of freedom is allowed to Language, the 'lowest' of KRs. In puns, the Logical Mechanism dictates the specific form of the text (e.g. calling for the use of paronyms, antonyms, etc.), thus determining the actual size of the Language resource available for the translation.

This simple switch in the hierarchy of resources reflects the importance of the Language KR in certain humorous texts and this, Attardo (2002) argues, is the reason why humorous translation cannot always be guaranteed. In order to claim the existence of a humorous effability principle – the certainty that an arbitrary humorous text is translatable in an arbitrarily different target language –, one should be able to state the possibility of absolute translation, defined by the author as a 'perfect' translation that corresponds in all connotative and denotative aspects to the text in the source language (ibid.: 191). Absolute translation, however, is impossible: even the literal translation of a joke where all the terms are denotatively identical in the two languages and all the associations between them are identical in the two cultures will differ from the original in one feature, that of being in the target language. As we cannot be sure that the connotations in which source language (SL) and target language (TL) differ are not exactly those called upon by the Logical Mechanism, we cannot be sure that any humorous text can be translated in all existing languages.

Nevertheless, despite advocating the impossibility of guaranteeing, in principle, the translatability of humor, Attardo (2002) discusses several strategies to apply the GTVH to the translation of both verbal and nonverbal jokes. In particular, what a translator can derive from the GTVH is the metrics for determining the degree of similarity between jokes. As remarked above, the distance between two jokes that only differ in Script Opposition is perceived as bigger than the distance between two jokes that only differ, for example, in Narrative Strategy or Target; as a general rule, two jokes with different Script Opposition are likely to be perceived as different jokes. This is why, if preserving all the similarities between

an original joke and its translated version is not possible, a translator should at least try to maintain the Script Opposition on which the original humorous mechanism is based. The SO should be changed only when a specific script does not exist in the TL or it is not acceptable to use it for humor. By providing an order of priorities, then, the GTVH can be a useful guideline for translators, helping them to choose the most appropriate strategies to make a joke in the target language as similar as possible to the original.

The translation of puns has always proved a delicate issue. Before analyzing the relationship between puns and language, Delabastita (1996: 128) proposes the following working definition of wordplay:

> Wordplay is the general name for the various textual phenomena in which structural features of the language(s) used are exploited in order to bring about a communicatively significant confrontation of two (or more) linguistic structures with more or less similar forms and more or less different meanings.

He then lists several methods a translator can use to render a pun into a different language (ibid.: 134):

PUN → PUN: the original pun is substituted by a pun in the target language, which may or may not be different in formal structure, semantic structure or textual function;

PUN → NON-PUN: the pun is replaced with a non-punning phrase which may retain one or both senses of the original expression, but may also lose both;

PUN → RELATED RHETORICAL DEVICE: the pun is substituted with a similar device, e.g. repetition, alliteration, rhyme or paradox, so as to maintain, if not the structure, at least the same rhetorical effect of the original text;

PUN → ZERO: the pun is omitted;

> **PUN ST (Source Text) = PUN TT (Target Text)**: the pun in the original language is transferred into the target text exactly as it is without actually being translated into the target language.

These solutions are complemented by two others which may see a new pun introduced in the target text where there was none in the original:

> **NON-PUN → PUN**: a pun is placed in a position where the original text had no wordplay; often, this technique is used to compensate omissions occurred in other parts of the text;

> **ZERO → PUN**: the translator introduces new textual material in order to add a pun that was not present in the original; as in the previous case, this technique can be used as a compensating device.

The techniques just described can also be combined and, for instance, a pun can be omitted and another one added in a different place to compensate for the omission. Should they not suffice, the translator has another resource available:

> **EDITORIAL TECHNIQUES**: translation choices can be explained in glosses, footnotes, endnotes, translator's forewords, etc.

In discussing the supposed untranslatability of wordplay, Delabastita (1996) notes that many of these techniques are considered unacceptable by some source-oriented translators, as such devices do not realize their desired standard of equivalence between the texts. Paradoxically, though, the technique that most accurately mirrors the content of the original text (PUN → PUN) often requires changes to both vocabulary and structure. As creating a pun can be difficult, the choice of procedure is often left to practical considerations, and time constraints when delivering the final product may lead translators to play the puns down or choose the easiest alternative.

One type of wordplay that has received particular attention in the literature is allusive wordplay, in which proper names or existing linguistic material are used

to convey implicit meaning. Leppihalme (1997) performs a thorough examination of allusions in translated texts, where they can cause 'culture bumps', an expression used by Archer (1986) in the context of intercultural communication and borrowed by Leppihalme to indicate a situation where the receiver of a target text has a problem understanding a source culture allusion.

Leppihalme (1996) highlights how writers often modify preformed phrases (idioms, catchphrases or allusions to different texts) that they assume to be familiar to their audience and use them in a text with the purpose of involving the readers, for instance by causing shock or amusement. Referring to such preformed phrases as 'frames', she uses several examples of modified frames to illustrate different types of allusive wordplay. The modifications applied can be linguistic, syntactic, or a mix of both. The phrase 'Tender is the knight' (Moody, 1985: 66) brings to mind the title of the novel *Tender is the Night* by F. Scott Fitzgerald; this is an example of lexical substitution, where a key word in the frame, 'night', is substituted by a homophone (a word with identical sound). In a similar fashion, a word can be replaced by an antonym (a word with opposite meaning) or a paronym (a word with similar sound). Other possible linguistic modifications include addition, where a context-related word is unexpectedly added to the frame, or reduction, where the frame itself is reduced to a smaller key phrase.

Leppihalme (1997) aims at identifying the problems that arise from trying to transfer this type of wordplay into a different language. To do this, she adopts an experimental approach, asking a group of Finnish students of English to spot and translate frame-type allusions in texts taken from fiction, journalism, headlines and subtitles. While the choice of students as subjects might raise concerns regarding their competence in recognizing and translating the allusions (only one professional translator is included in the sample), the experiment highlights a number of potential issues. First, the results indicate that allusions are not always recognized. On the contrary, only a few cases were immediately spotted by the majority of respondents, who often failed to even suspect the presence of an allusion, let alone correctly establish its source. Before approaching the problem of translating a joke that relies on a culture-specific allusion, it goes without saying that a translator should be able to identify it. The experiment, however,

shows this is not something that can be taken for granted. Even when the wordplay was spotted and noticeable effort was put into its translation, the TL text contained several misreadings and mistranslations, which compromised the coherence of the passage. Still, spotting a frame-type allusion and linking it to the correct source is only the first issue a translator must solve. Once this preliminary stage is over, finding an appropriate translation strategy can prove challenging, especially when the allusion is inserted with a humorous purpose. As Leppihalme (ibid.) points out, differences in the source and target cultures can represent the biggest obstacle, making the translation of certain culture-specific puns particularly difficult. One of the main problems, she argues, lies in the different attitudes that different cultures have towards punning. Punning headlines, for example, are commonplace in English, but occur rarely in the Swedish quality press; in English, references often have literary sources, while Swedish puns mostly draw from popular culture. In addition, the source and target audiences are usually familiar with different pools of referents: the translators should ideally have a clear idea of the knowledge and expectations of the receivers, as referencing an unfamiliar source is more likely to leave them puzzled than amused, thus creating a culture bump.

As noted by Leppihalme (ibid.), the text evoked by an allusion is not necessarily a written text. The concept of 'allusion' is closely linked to that of 'intertextuality'[9] and it goes well beyond the simple act of borrowing words from earlier works: evoking familiar texts can absolve a number of different functions, not least of which is humor. As section 2.3 illustrates, video games often resort to allusions with the purpose of achieving a humorous effect.

1.4.2 The translation of humor in audiovisual texts

Audiovisual translation is often seen as particularly challenging due to its polysemiotic nature (Gottlieb, 1997; Chiaro, 2009). The plurality of codes used by

[9] In the definition of intertextuality proposed by Attardo (2001: 71), 'a text (T_i) will be said to have an intertextual relation to another text (T_j) when the processing of T_i would be incomplete without a reference to T_j.'

audiovisual texts implies that a 'reader' receives information through a number of different channels, which can create additional constraints. To take into account the peculiar features of audiovisual media, some academics have adapted and expanded the dominant theories of humor.

Zabalbeascoa's (1996) analysis of the translation of humor for the small screen is one of the first studies that deal with jokes in AVT. Tackling the issue with both a descriptive and a normative approach, he examines British TV comedies such as *Yes, Minister* (1986-88) and *Fawlty Towers* (1975-79) and observes the effects on humor of the dubbing into Spanish and Catalan. In particular, he focuses on humorous elements that display some cultural connotation and are therefore liable to be more difficult to translate. Quoting examples from *Yes, Minister*, Zabalbeascoa (ibid.) shows how certain cultural items that are known to British audiences were maintained in the Catalan version of the show, despite the fact that a Catalan audience might not know their meaning. In the original version, the characters refer to the British tabloid Daily Mirror and to Number Ten, the official residence of the Prime Minister in 10 Downing Street; the Catalan version keeps the name of the newspaper and translates Number 10 literally with *número deu*, without using any technique that might help viewers understand the reference. This makes some of the jokes present in the original script much harder or, in some cases, impossible to grasp for the foreign audience.

While Zabalbeascoa (ibid.) suggests alternative translations for these specific examples, he does not claim that translators should always try to adapt the cultural jokes for the target country. What he proposes is a model of translation based on 'priorities and restrictions' (ibid.: 243), in which the specific approach that should be adopted depends on a number of factors, not least of which the type of text that is being translated. For each specific translation task, the priorities should be arranged on a vertical scale of importance. This would provide a way to evaluate how good a translation is based on whether it satisfies the top priorities before attempting to satisfy the lower ones; in other words, each priority would also be a restriction for all the priorities that lie below it.

With regards to the translation of humor, then, the choice of translation solutions would be a matter of establishing where the priority humorous effect lies on this scale. Looking at the importance conventionally attributed to humor in different genres, Zabalbeascoa (ibid.: 244) suggests that its role might be seen as follows:

> Top: for example in TV comedy, joke-stories, one-liners
> Middle: happy ending love or adventure stories, TV quiz shows
> Marginal: as pedagogical device in school, humor in Shakespeare's tragedies
> Prohibited: moments of high drama, for example in a tragedy or a horror text.

To further clarify this point, he considers a politician who has to give the same speech in different countries. If the speech is of a serious nature, humor should not be considered a top priority at the global level; however, if it is decided that the jokes should be kept in the translated speeches, they would have to work, as jokes, in different countries: locally – in specific parts of the text – humor would indeed be a priority.

Asimakoulas (2004) takes as a reference point Attardo and Raskin's (1991) GTVH to devise a model for verbal humor on screen. In his model, humor is defined by two principal elements, which he broadly defines as 'norm acceptance' and 'norm opposition'. Norm acceptance means adhering to a set of conventions that can be humorous *per se*, without necessarily involving any kind of opposition/incongruity, e.g. national stereotypes. Norm opposition, on the other hand, is the 'social' version of script opposition; for example, it may involve playing with taboo issues in a situation where doing it is deemed to be especially inappropriate. As these norms are established at a collective level and are inherently linked to a precise moment and place, they characterize humor as a social phenomenon.

Asimakoulas (ibid.) theorizes that, in film, humor is structured on a circular level, where the internal elements (the knowledge resources borrowed from the GTVH) interact through language with the external ones (e.g. linguistic, visual and cultural constraints, intertextual references or the encyclopaedic knowledge people possess). In this sense, language is the element through which the norm acceptance/opposition paradigm is realized. When a humorous segment is

repeated – an example of intertextuality – the norm acceptance lies in the use of a familiar piece of information, while the opposition is in the fact that the repeated text clashes with the original by being used in different circumstances.

Applying this model to two US movies subtitled into Greek, *Airplane!* (1980) and *The Naked Gun: From the Files of the Police Squad* (1988), Asimakoulas (ibid.: 825) highlights the meta-referential aspects of humor in movies, as norm acceptance and opposition are seen as 'a means that establishes humorous communication between the director/screenplay writer and the viewers'. In particular, 'the character's semblance of seriousness increases the funniness of what is said and renders characters absurd caricatures (targets) who unconsciously fail to follow the rules of social propriety and politeness as well as natural and coherent turn-taking' (ibid.: 825).

Drawing from the selected movies, the author illustrates examples of wordplay, metaphors, disparagement and other devices employed to achieve humorous effect, and shows how the translators played with language and register to render them into Greek. Not all translations, it emerges, were equally effective: satisfactory solutions were often found for register-based humor and wordplay, but the translation of other types of humor, such as parody or disparagement, was not always as successful. Bearing in mind that these results depend on the choice of movies that are analyzed, the author discusses several situations where changing the structure of the joke was enough to recreate a funny outcome in the target language.

In general, when humor relies heavily on dialects, sociolects or other types of language differentiation, its translation can be especially difficult, and the features of audiovisual translation, e.g. the time and space constraints in subtitles, only exacerbate the problem. Delabastita (2010) examines how translated versions of the British TV series *'Allo 'Allo* (1982-1992) deal with comedy techniques that build on the contact between different spoken languages. In the series, set in France at the time of the Second World War, the main characters have four different nationalities – British, French, Italian and German – and they are supposed to speak four different languages, each with different registers. In the

original version, the languages other than English are rendered by making the characters speak accented English (e.g. a Frenchman, when supposed to speak French, will speak English with a French accent);[10] this leads to incongruous situations, in which characters who 'in real life' would speak different languages and not understand each other are actually all speaking English. These situations are frequently exploited for humorous effect, relying on the fact that the audience is able to understand both sides and appreciate the incongruity (superiority is also a factor here, as viewers are aware that they know more than the characters). However, they also make translation considerably harder. Among the many foreign versions of the series, Delabastita (ibid.) focuses on the Dutch subtitles and on the French dubbed version. In the Dutch subtitles, the most striking feature is a heavy stylistic reduction as a neutral, accent-free written Dutch is used in the majority of cases. While this is an understandable choice, as trying to preserve the accents in the text would have compromised legibility, the subtitles lose one of the main components on which the series bases its humor, i.e. its linguistic complexity.

The French dubbed version solves one of the 'problems' of the original, as French characters can now speak the language they are supposed to speak. On the other hand, the French-accented English spoken in the original version contributes to making the characters sound silly to the English viewers, just as the German and Italian accents do for the other nationalities, an element that is lost in the French dubbing. Furthermore, as remarked above, the incongruity created by the plethora of language variations was itself an instrument of humor, to the point that the dialogue exchanges sometimes contained metalinguistic jokes. On the whole, then, the analysis seems to point towards a loss of humorous content in the translated versions, which might in part explain why many successful comedies 'flop' when exported abroad.

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[10] In the article, the term 'accent' is used in a loose manner to indicate a range of linguistic interferences that go beyond pronunciation-related phenomena, including features that also cover vocabulary, word order and grammar. For example, characters speaking 'English with a French accent' overuse the article 'the', address other characters with *Monsieur* or *Madame* and, in general, display a preference for French words (both commonly and rarely used in English).

Still, as Chiaro (2006) points out, how a translated comedy movie fares in a foreign country does not necessarily reflect the quality of its translation, as its success also depends on many other elements, e.g. the actors involved, the setting of the story or advertising campaigns. Even when a movie's funniness is indeed the main factor behind its success in both the country of origin and the destination country, there is no guarantee that the new audience is laughing in the same places as the native audience and for the same reasons; thus the need, stressed by Chiaro (ibid.), for further research on the subject.

Aiming to address this issue, and taking into consideration the results of a pilot study conducted by Antonini et al. (2003) on Italian viewers, Antonini (2005) analyzes audiences' perception of humor in English to Italian subtitled products. Using as a case study an episode of the British comedy *Father Ted* (1995-98), she observes that Italian viewers who watched the subtitled version rated the material less funny, because they missed many humorous elements of the English original. Fuentes Luque (2003) had already reached similar conclusions in his study of translated humor in the Marx Brothers' movie *Duck Soup* (1933), which indicated that several puns were lost in the translation. As a result, many Spanish viewers judged the dubbed version of the movie, where translators had taken more liberties with the text, funnier than the subtitled version, where literal translations were more frequent.

As humor often relies on cultural knowledge, the articles discussed so far mention differences in cultural background as one of the reasons behind the varying levels of humor appreciation. Rossato and Chiaro (2010) focus on this particular aspect, choosing for their analysis *Good Bye Lenin!* (1978), a German movie where culture-specific elements play a very important role, and evaluate the response to humor from a sample of German and Italian viewers. The plot of the movie revolves around a boy whose mother falls into a coma shortly before the fall of the German wall in 1989 and wakes up after the re-unification of the country. To prevent her from having a heart attack after waking up and finding that the world she knew does not exist anymore, the son tries to recreate the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in her flat, which gives rise to many humorous situations.

After collecting the data through a questionnaire and through observing whether the respondents laughed or smiled at specific elements, Rossato and Chiaro (ibid.) conclude that culture is a powerful factor in humor appreciation, as negative humor response from Italian viewers is often caused by a lack of knowledge of the German Democratic Republic and its history. Dividing the German viewers in two sub-samples – those who had lived in East Germany before 1989 and those who had not – they also find that the reactions of the two native groups are considerably different. In fact, the responses of German viewers who are less familiar with the old East Germany (possibly because they were too young when it still existed) are sometimes closer to the responses of Italian viewers than to those of German viewers who know more about the society depicted in the movie.

The importance of cultural elements surfaces as a recurring theme in the literature on humor in audiovisual translation. For our purposes, before moving on to the specific field of video games translation, it is worth returning to Zabalbeascoa's (1996) analysis, as it raises several points which appear equally relevant for the video game medium.

While Zabalbeascoa (ibid.) develops his model of priorities for the translation of humor in TV comedies, his considerations can be easily extrapolated to video games. Although there is no agreement in the literature on the importance of humor in games (González, 2004; Dormann and Biddle, 2007 and 2009), chapter 2 argues that humor can be a local priority even in games that do not have funniness as their main goal. When this happens, humor becomes a local priority of a very high order, and its translation should not be sacrificed for the sake of simplicity.

Zabalbeascoa (1996) also points out that the concept of 'equivalence' itself should be considered variable: while for some texts it is a priority to be equivalent to the original in a certain respect, at times it might even be a priority for a text not to be equivalent. As an example, he cites the technique of dubbing politicians or other famous people to make them say something that is manifestly different from what they were actually saying, e.g. for advertising or satirical purposes.

In dubbing comedy, ‘intended’ comic effect should be regarded as a top priority and treated as such: restrictions such as lip synchronization, isochrony, or accuracy of textual information could be disregarded to pursue a funny effect. Equivalence would then lie ideally in ‘an intention to be funny, regardless of the final outcome’ and the translation of a TV comedy should be judged on the basis of how funny it is, rather than how faithful it is to the original: ‘there is little point in comparing source and target texts in terms of the exact amount and type of humor they contain; if anything, it would be desirable for the translation to be even funnier than the source text’ (ibid.: 247).

Mangiron (2010) subscribes to this view and takes it a step further. In the first study entirely devoted to the translation of humor in video games, she draws on the concept of ‘transcreation’, proposed in the seminal work by Mangiron and O’Hagan (2006), and applies it to the area of video game humor. Following Dormann and Biddle (2006) and González (2004), Mangiron (2010) argues that humor in games has several functions. Besides using it for characterization purposes, developers can increase the engagement value of a game by inserting humorous elements in dialogues and in other verbal and nonverbal components. Humor can also have a social value as references to culture-specific items reinforce the players’ sense of belonging to a particular social group, making them feel more involved in the game. Finally, it can provide relief to the player.

In fact, as anticipated in subsection 1.3.3, games are one of the best testimonies to the relief function of humor. Balancing the difficulty of a game to meet the tastes of a variegated audience is a very difficult task, both because some players are more experienced than others and because different players enjoy different levels of challenge. In certain games, having to repeat a particularly difficult sequence several times is almost inevitable, and this can make players feel frustrated; to prevent this potential setback, humorous elements are often inserted to enhance gameplay. In addition, many games try to build up tension, but too much tension can easily hinder the enjoyment of playing, and humor helps ‘discharge’ such tension. Therefore, humor can play an important role in the success of a game and this, in Mangiron’s (2010) view, is reflected in the freedom translators are allowed when rendering it into a language different than the original.

According to Mangiron (ibid.), the strategies for dealing with video game humor parallel those used in the translation of other audiovisual texts, as listed by Chiaro (2004). In particular, when faced with VEH in the source language, the translator can replace it with another VEH element that preserves, at least partially, the original form and/or meaning, replace it with an idiomatic expression in the TL or eliminate the VEH element and compensate the loss by adding a different one in another part of the game. Despite these similarities, though, Mangiron (2010) highlights how intensification procedures appear to be particularly frequent. Focusing on the English and Spanish translations of the well-known Japanese series *Final Fantasy* (1987-present), she shows how more idioms, puns and play-on-words are inserted in the target texts than would be needed to compensate for the loss of VEH in the target language. Both the English and the Spanish versions of the games contain several examples of functional translations, where dialects and references to the culture of the target countries are inserted with humorous purposes. She also points out how the English version, targeted to the North-American market, is more humor-oriented than the Japanese original and how it includes additional references to popular culture that go beyond the discourse of the game. For example, a Japanese play on words was translated using the idiomatic expression 'peeping tom', which is also the name of an American pop band and of a British movie; this way, the allusion would work on multiple levels depending on the players' background knowledge. By mirroring differences between the Japanese and North-American societies, these elements help players in the target country feel that the game was designed for them.

In Mangiron's opinion, the reason why games translators enjoy an especially high level of freedom when dealing with humor is the function of games translation: more than being faithful to the original text, the translator should be faithful to the original game experience, even if the only way of achieving this goal is to drastically change the cultural references contained in a game or even to increase (or decrease) its amount of humorous content. In this light, while Zabalbeascoa (1996) argued that translated comedies could aim at being funnier than the originals as a way to be faithful to the humorous intent of the authors, Mangiron (2010) seems to suggest that, in extreme cases, a video game might even

'become' a comedy in the translated version, should humor be a more effective way of engaging players in the target country.

While the analysis carried out by Mangiron raises several interesting points that deserve further investigation, it is also limited by the particular characteristics of the corpus, as pointed out by the author herself. In the localization of the *Final Fantasy* games studied in the article, the translators worked in close contact with the developers, which allowed the latter to make the changes they deemed necessary to recreate the original game experience. As noted in section 1.1, this type of synergy does not always occur. Although the ideal business model is one where the creative and localization departments work almost simultaneously, the 'shared authorship' model suggested by Bernal-Merino (2006), such a model is very rarely implemented. The reason why translators often have little wiggle room lies in the nature of games itself, a point that is illustrated and expanded in the next chapters.

Chapter 2

Humor in Games

2.1 Introduction

Humor has received attention from a number of disciplines, ranging from psychology to sociology, through anthropology and linguistics. As discussed in chapter 1, many scholars have been preoccupied with defining what humor is, identifying its nature and what is considered funny. However, despite the increasing popularity of the video game medium, the relationship between humor and games remains largely unexplored.

Dormann and Biddle (2007: 248) suggest that there is little humor in video games, despite the importance of humor in human interaction and its role in augmenting player engagement. Game designers have claimed that it is often hard to create humorous situations, with the difficulty ascribed to the inner repetitiveness of video games or to their design constraints (González, 2004). Still, from an external point of view, games would seem to provide fertile ground for humor. As pointed out by Raskin (1985: 134), humorous stimuli usually contain several incongruities, some acting as secondary incongruities, that form a background to the main ones that define a compound joke. An empirical study by Samson and Hempelmann (2011) suggests that background incongruities can enhance funniness; the same jokes, when presented with the background incongruities removed, tend to be perceived as less funny and to provoke more aversion than the originals. As examples of background incongruities, Samson and Hempelmann (ibid.: 167) list ‘animals that talk, space aliens, an Italian, an American, and a Russian sharing a language’. Although the authors do not mention video games, it is easy to see how their considerations may be applied to

electronic entertainment, where fantasy characters and settings are a common feature. Even the most realistic virtual worlds are usually governed by rules (e.g. the availability of multiple ‘lives’ for the player, the simplified skill development systems and the limited artificial intelligence of computer-controlled characters) that, although generally accepted, require intense suspension of disbelief, which potentially enhances humor appreciation.

In a research on humor reception among players, Dormann and Biddle (2009) observe that the classical superiority, incongruity and relief theories can be applied to many instances of video game humor. By conducting interviews on a sample of players, they conclude that humor can greatly improve the gaming experience: it can relieve tension, make characters easier to relate to and, in general, make games more memorable. But different players have different reactions to humor. As personal factors are always of utmost importance in humor appreciation, cultural differences are especially relevant in a market in which products are increasingly designed for a global audience. In her analysis of the translation of humor in the Final Fantasy series (see 1.4.2), Mangiron (2010) shows that: 1) the translated version of a game can feature a different type of humor than that in the original, and 2) the game itself can be more or less serious depending on the target market, featuring characters and dialogues that are more humor-oriented when game designers believe such choices may better meet local players’ expectations. It is clear, then, that localizing a complex game requires time and resources, and a heavy presence of humor makes the task even more challenging.

The same *Final Fantasy* series is an example of how, in some respects, certain games are getting closer to movies. In recent years, technological advances have allowed for marked improvements in graphics and sound, and the *Final Fantasy* games are renowned for their spectacular *cutscenes* – cinematic sequences used to advance the plot. Although these sequences often contain humorous elements, users have no control over them; to fully appreciate the peculiarities of humor in games, it is necessary to understand the role of the player.

2.2 The role of the player

Newman (2002) identifies two fundamental states of player engagement. The *On-Line* state describes all instances where the user is actively playing the game; it constitutes a state of 'ergodic participation' in which the player can determine the flow of the game. The opposite state, *Off-Line* engagement, includes the moments when the player's involvement is limited to watching what is happening on the screen. This latter state is well represented, for example, by cutscenes.

There are, however, certain situations which require a level of engagement that is in between these two extremes. It is the case, for example, of *Quick Time Events* – non-interactive sequences interspersed with moments where the player is asked to quickly input specific commands (if the actions are not performed as soon as they are prompted, the whole sequence must be repeated). Therefore, Newman (ibid.: online) argues, On-Line and Off-Line engagement should be considered as 'polar extremes of an experiential or ergodic continuum'.

Typically, different forms of player engagement coexist in the same game. Moreover, the general level of engagement required is closely linked to the degree and type of interactivity that characterize a specific title and to the unique nature of narration in games. According to Ryan (2001), the main difference between the narrativity of games and that of drama or movies is the fusion between actor and spectator: players contribute through their actions to the enacting of a plot and, at the same time, observe the story they helped create. In order to analyze how the user relates to the narrative in games, Ryan adapts categories first introduced by Aarseth (1997) in a study on cybertexts. Ryan's categories define two pairs of opposing attributes (internal/external and ontological/exploratory) that can be combined to qualify four different types of interactivity. In the internal type, the user engages with the fictional world either by identifying with a character (an *avatar*) or by observing the world from a first-person point of view. In the external mode, the user stays outside the virtual world, but still has a means to control it or 'navigate' through it through different gameplay mechanisms. The difference between exploratory and ontological interactivity stems from the way

the user is able to affect the virtual environment: exploratory interactivity only allows the user to move around the fictional world, without modifying its features, while the ontological mode allows him to make decisions that shape that world, influencing the direction in which it evolves.

Although it is obvious that different game configurations model different degrees of interactivity, they all describe a type of link between user and text that is usually absent from literature or drama. This relationship between the player and the fictional world provides a possible reason for the seeming lack of comedy in games. Whether the player is allowed to act from a first-person perspective or through an avatar, much of the pleasure derived from video games comes from the chance to virtually 'live' the game's experiences in a deeper way than when watching a movie or reading a book. Even someone who enjoys Woody Allen comedies more than *Indiana Jones* movies, if given the chance to experience those stories as the main character in a game, might prefer to 'be' the adventuring archaeologist rather than the neurotic New Yorker. Nevertheless, *YouTube* is full of player-made comedy videos. Some show the player performing funny actions in a game or highlighting game actions that result in a funny outcome; some players record and share on-line funny game sequences, such as from *The Sims* (2000), a game where the characters interact among themselves engaging in a wide range of occupations and aiming to simulate the behavior of real individuals. *Red vs. Blue*, the most well known example of *machinima*,[11] is a comedy series based on the action game *Halo* (2001). Such examples suggest that many players,

[11] *Machinima* [machine cinema] can be broadly defined as "filmmaking within a real-time, 3D virtual environment, often using 3D video-game technologies" (Marino, 2005: online). Sometimes, users have access to tools that can be used to modify a game, for example creating new levels and characters; using these tools (often provided by the game developers), they can create computer-animated movies. Machinima can also be the result of a collective effort, as explained by Marino (ibid.), founder of the Academy of Machinima Arts & Sciences: 'if you've ever played a computer game on a network (LAN) at work or seen others play it, each person in the game is using their computer to log into the server computer. Each computer represents one character in the game, usually running around shooting at each other. Everyone playing can see each other's character in real time in the game world, from their character's viewpoint on their monitor. In machinima, the roles shift: the characters, instead of shooting each other, are actors in the scene, and the server doubles as the camera, recording everything that happens in the virtual world'. For a history of machinima and game-based moviemaking, see Lowood (2006 and 2008).

if provided with the necessary tools, would enjoy the opportunity to be virtual comedians.

On the other hand, the active role of the player makes comedy a particularly difficult genre to realize in video games. One considerable obstacle is that the authors cannot have complete control over timing, one of the most important factors in successful comedy. Therefore, humorous moments are often relegated to non-interactive cutscenes, which offer plenty of opportunities for both verbal and visual humor, but which are not conceptually different from a funny scene in a movie. Such cutscene humor provides little information about the distinctive traits of humor in games. Furthermore, 'Game over' screens are becoming a rare occurrence, and many games involve some form of trial and error progression, requiring players to repeat particular sequences that they failed the first time. In such games, a difficult mission can take several attempts to complete; for example, a particularly tough fight may be repeated many times before figuring out the enemy's weak spots. Similarly, when a puzzle requires the use of a specific object to overcome an obstacle, if the solution is not immediate, the player might have to try many different ways to proceed until he finds out a solution that the game recognizes as correct. As surprise is one of the key elements of humor, even the funniest lines lose their appeal when heard repeatedly. According to Tim Schafer, one of the main designers behind widely acclaimed funny games like *Day of the Tentacle* (1993) or *The Secret of Monkey Island* (1990), game makers should try to minimize such occurrences. He states that 'Characters need to change up what they say, not just to keep the humor fresh, but to make the character seem more real. [In addition, if] the player chooses to ask the same question of a character over and over, eventually, that guy's gotta say, "What, are you deaf?"' (González, 2004: online).

Schafer's game *Day of the Tentacle* (DOTT) provides an interesting ground for analyzing video game humor.[12] The game can be classified as a graphic adventure, a genre that was very popular at its release in 1993. During the course

[12] The game is described in more detail in Chapter 4, which contains a thorough analysis of the translation strategies used in *Day of the Tentacle* and other popular graphic adventures. The chapter also includes a brief history of the genre (see section 4.2).

of the game's story, the player controls three different characters. In order to overcome various obstacles, he can have the characters perform a number of actions, interacting with the game environment. To do so, the player inputs commands by combining verbs displayed on a grid with the items seen on the screen. For example, if the player wants to get out of a locked room and a key is hanging from a wall nearby, the player can order the character to 'pick up key' (at which point, if the action is allowed, the key will enter the character's 'inventory') and then to 'use key on door'. Figure 3 represents a typical moment of gameplay. It is also possible to speak to non-player characters (NPCs) controlled by the computer; and although there are a few scripted scenes that are triggered by specific events, most of the dialogue is guided by the player, who can select among multiple questions and answers.

Figure 3. *Day of the Tentacle* (copyright 1993 LucasArts Entertainment Company)

In Figure 3, the player controls Bernard, the character to the left. The available actions are displayed in the bottom left area of the screen, while the inventory occupies the bottom right area. At any moment, the inventory content is determined by the player's previous actions. As humor is possibly the main focus of the game, everything, from the drawing style to the sound effects, including the voices provided for the characters, is aimed at creating comedy. Visual elements, such as the fonts used for the writings, the exaggerated animations or the incongruity between the rough appearance of the sleeping man and the feminine decor of his room, harmonize to give the scene a distinctive 'funny' feel. Verbal

humor is presented through puns and wordplay; for example, if the player commands Bernard to 'look at the sleeping conventioneer', he will say 'Now, that's a heavy sleeper'. Table 2 presents some of the actions available to the player:

	Action	**Object in Bernard's inventory**		**Element of the scene**	**Character's response**
1	Push/Pull			sleeping conventioneer	'I can't move him an inch.'
2	Use	textbook [on thermodynamics]	on	sleeping conventioneer	Bernard starts reading to him, with no effect, and then comments: 'Well, it gets ME up in the morning.'
3	Use	funnel	on	sleeping conventioneer	'I'm not sure I like that idea.'
4	Use	scalpel	on	sleeping conventioneer	'It WOULD look like an accident... maybe later.'
5	Use	chattering teeth	with	sleeping conventioneer	'That's a stupid thing to do with a perfectly good set of chattering teeth.'
6	Use	red paint	with	Sweater	'No, I like the way it is.'
7	Pull			Sweater	'It won't budge.'
8	Use	fork	with	sleeping conventioneer	'I'd rather not.'
9	Pick up			Sweater	'I can't pick it up. That guy is lying on it.'
10	Close			Door	Bernard closes the door
11	Talk to			sleeping conventioneer	Opens the following dialogue options to choose from: 'Late night?' 'Do you ever inhale flies when you snore like that?' 'Are you interested in particle physics?' 'Oh, never mind.' Whatever option is chosen, the man does not wake up.

Table 2. Examples of player actions and game responses from *Day of the Tentacle*

Bernard's response in example 2 plays with his characterization as a stereotypical 'nerd', whose slight, bespectacled figure and harmless appearance also makes it incongruously funny when he appears to actually consider the player's idea of using a scalpel on the sleeping man (example 4). A similar type of understatement is used as a humorous device in examples 8 and 3. Humor also relies on incongruity in example 11, where the player is presented with a whole set of options to broach a conversation with the conventioneer, who is obviously

sleeping heavily and will not answer. The character's response in example 5 aims at achieving a humorous effect by surprising the player, who would probably expect him, when asked to 'use chattering teeth with sleeping conventioneer' to worry about the safety of the sleeping man, and not that of 'a perfectly good set of chattering teeth'.

When asked about the challenges of presenting comedy in video games, Schafer (González, 2004: online) states that designers should channel players 'down funny corridors', giving them the tools to be funny:

> We give players disappearing ink they can squirt on anyone they want [...]. It's mostly useful in this one puzzle, but still you can go all over the game squirting people with it and watching their reaction. So you're not really limiting the player there. You're just putting the elements of comedy in their hands and making it easy for them to be the comedian.

Although the player can ask the avatar to perform a wide range of actions, not all of these actions are permitted. A command such as 'pick up house' is unlikely to have any effect, but the mere fact that the player is allowed to input it implies that the game should react in some appropriate way. As many of the possible combinations are potentially funny or absurd, the responses should be funny or absurd as well. However, the more freedom is given to the player, the more difficult it is to anticipate his moves and design an appropriate response for each of his actions. In Table 1, for example, three of the character's responses (number 5, 6 and 8) also appear as responses to other actions in different sequences of the game. Since writing different responses for all possible actions is often neither technically nor economically convenient, it is easy to see how frequent repetition can stand in the way of good comedy.

While verbal and visual humor are not peculiar to video games, it is clear that much of the humor in *Day of the Tentacle* is – or appears to be – in the hands of the player, as many of the humorous situations are determined by his actions. Furthermore, there are times when the player must have a sense of humor that is similar to that of the creators of the game, or at least be able to understand their

jokes, in order to advance in the story – something that is not necessary to get to the end of a movie or a novel, but that is common to many adventure games.

Table 2 also displays another interesting pattern. Most of the game's responses appear to be direct replies to the player's requests. The game never explicitly acknowledges the existence of an outside world, but it constantly exploits the relationship between player and character to build a sort of permanent dialogue between the two. This type of interaction, which draws attention to the fictional nature of the game world as opposed to the outside world of the player, is frequently used in games for comedic purposes, and will be discussed, in its different forms, in the next section.

2.3 *Meta-references* and the *fourth wall*

According to Scholes (1970), meta-reference is a particular device where fictional elements – usually the characters – directly or indirectly indicate that they belong to a fictional world. Often employed as a way to break the fourth wall, it has only recently become the object of media studies (Auter and Davis, 1991; Larsen, 1994; Kirchmann, 2007).

Although meta-referencing is widespread in games, there are few academic works that investigate the self-referential aspects of the medium. Santaella (2007) identifies seven types of self-reference in games, listing various ways in which the game (usually through its characters) points directly to itself. Asserting its importance to the understanding of the semiotic processes involved in playing, Santaella defines games as 'the epitome of self-reference' (ibid.: 207); even the commands that players input, she argues, are self-referential, as the orders are given by the players to themselves. Rapp (2007) describes four cases of self-referencing in games and, in discussing its possible functions, suggests an inherent comic potential that arises from being closely associated with paradox.

Historically, many authors have employed the technique of breaking the fourth wall for comedic purposes. Laurence Sterne (1759), who used it extensively in *Tristram Shandy*, and P.G. Wodehouse, who often had Bertie Wooster address his readers directly, are two notable examples. Fourth wall-breaking devices have been used with a variety of aims. In his plays, Berthold Brecht frequently required the actors to address the audience; this was meant to create a *Verfremdungseffect*, a distance between audience and characters that would help prevent a spectator from losing himself completely in the story, thus encouraging him to be 'a consciously critical observer' (Willett, 1964: 91). In cinema, authors such as Jean-Luc Godard, Reiner Werner Fassbinder and, more recently, Lars von Trier, adopt various techniques to obtain the same distancing effect. In this respect, games are no exception. In the *Metal Gear* saga (1987-2014), Hideo Kojima created one of the most meta-referential works in any media. The saga's meta-referentiality reaches its fullest expression in *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (2001), where

> Kojima plays with the ambiguity in the role of the user, who is at the same time spectator and actor of the stories being told, to explore themes that are dear to him. [...] The practice of consulting him becomes so pervasive that it disrupts the identification between the user and [the character]
>
> (Fraschini, 2003: 114-115).

Although the technique is also used in the series as a humorous device, Kojima often uses meta-referencing as a vehicle for the messages he wants to convey — a Brechtian appeal to the player not to passively lose himself in the game. Western game designers, too, have adopted the technique of breaking the fourth wall for purposes other than humor. *Eternal Darkness* (2002), written by Denis Dyack and Ken McCulloch, employs several strategies to play with the user's perception in order to create a feeling of horror in the player, for example by simulating errors of the TV or console, lowering the volume (which is accompanied by a fake television volume indicator on the screen) or using a skewed camera angle.

Still, although not all meta-references are humorous, a lot of the humor in games is meta-referential. Dormann and Biddle (2007) conducted a series of interviews in which they asked players to describe examples of humorous occurrences that they enjoyed. The importance of meta-reference was one of the main patterns that

emerged from their study: many players reported finding it funny when characters referred to other games or to their own fictional nature. The following examples illustrate different ways in which video games break the fourth wall for humorous purposes.

2.3.1 Characters addressing the player

In the previous section, we saw how the way players control their avatars in adventure games, such as *Day of the Tentacle*, provides many opportunities to break the fourth wall. *Simon the Sorcerer* (1993), another classic adventure game, is even more direct in the way it addresses the player, as it has many moments in which any semblance of fourth wall is lost. For example, early in the game, upon hearing a tree stump talk, Simon turns to the camera and says 'There has to be some sort of logical explanation for this', to which the tree retorts 'You can at least look at me when you're talking to me!'. At this point, the player can choose among four replies; the first one reads: 'I was talking to the player, not you!'. Since this reply is also the 'correct' choice, the one that allows the conversation to move in the direction required by the story, the player is forced to acknowledge his own role in the game in order to proceed. Such occurrences, however, are not a prerogative of adventure games. In the action game *Max Payne* (2001), the main character can be in an elevator where annoying music is coming from a speaker. If the player shoots the speaker, the music stops and Max says: 'Thank you.'

Even strategy games are known for using this kind of humorous remark. Returning to Ryan's (2001) categories, strategy games traditionally feature an external mode of interactivity. Instead of observing the fictional world from a first-person point of view or controlling a single character, the player organizes and maneuvers armies and structures to destroy the opponents' assets or conquer particular areas controlled by the enemy. To do so, he must click on units under his control to select them and order them to perform the desired actions (e.g., move to another position or attack a specific enemy). In *Starcraft* (1998), clicking repeatedly on one of the ogre soldiers will cause it to protest and tell the player to stop clicking because 'it tickles'; in *Warcraft – Orcs & Humans* (1994), if the

player clicks on certain units, they will complain by responding with lines such as 'Stop poking me!' or 'Why don't you lead an army instead of touching me?'. Dormann and Biddle (2007) reported a similar example as something players found very funny. This is not surprising as, despite having a more external role, the player is still what moves the game forward, and a character, by talking to the player, builds on this strong link.

2.3.2 Referencing the game universe

The fourth wall can be broken simply by acknowledging its existence. A character addressing the player can be considered as a special type of meta-reference in which the suspension of disbelief is lost when the game includes jokes on the idiosyncrasies of gaming itself. One way this effect is achieved is by playing with the rules and conventions of games. Upon entering the game universe, the player subjects himself to a precise set of rules that define its mechanics. Each game has different rules, and the player does not normally question them. For example, in *Uncharted*, when the character controlled by the player is shot, his health automatically replenishes if the player can avoid taking additional damage for a short time. In the real world, since the character is supposed to be a regular human with no special abilities, one would marvel at his miraculous regenerating powers; however, in the game, this is purely a design choice – we are willing to accept it, and it does not strike us as odd, unless the game itself breaks the illusion by pointing at the oddity.

A typical example of a convention that many games follow is allowing the player to carry an unlimited number of items; usually, the items can be accessed and used through an inventory menu. In the game *Discworld* – and in the novels it is based on – the main character is accompanied by the 'Luggage', a magical walking trunk that follows him everywhere. One of its functions in the game is to serve as a bottomless inventory. If the player orders the main character to examine the Luggage, his response is 'Why can't I have an inventory window like everybody else?', thus breaking the fourth wall by pointing at the interface used by the player to interact with the game.

Games also like to poke fun at the presence of recurring items and gameplay devices. An element that is familiar to players of a certain game (or a certain genre) can easily be transformed into an inside joke. In the *Metal Gear* games, which focus on stealth action, it is possible to hide under cardboard boxes to avoid being seen by enemy guards. While the effectiveness of such a disguise in real life is at least doubtful, the games make wide use of this device, and it has become a trademark of the series. In *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* (2004), if Snake, the player, hides inside a box and contacts by radio a fellow agent, Sigint, the following scripted conversation is triggered:

> *Sigint: Uh, Snake... what are you doing?*
> *Snake: I'm in a box.*
> *Sigint: A cardboard box? Why are you...?*
> *Snake: I dunno. I was just looking at it, and suddenly I got this irresistible urge to get inside.*
> *No... not just an urge – more than that.*
> *It was my destiny to be here; in the box.*
> *Sigint: Destiny...?*
> *Snake: Yeah. And then, when I put it on, I suddenly got this feeling of inner peace.*
> *I can't put it into words. I feel... safe.*
> *Like this is where I was meant to be. Like I'd found the key to true happiness.*
> *Sigint: Uh-uh.*
> *Snake: Does any of that make sense?*
> *Sigint: Not even a little.*
> *Snake: You should come inside the box. Then you'll know what I mean.*
> *Sigint: Man, I don't wanna know what you mean!*

The joke is on the game itself and, through the clueless character, on the player; by highlighting the incongruity of its rules, the game highlights the fact that the player is willing to follow them. Here, the two characters are not aware of their fictional status, thus the nod to the player comes directly from the game's authors. Sometimes, though, the characters explicitly allude to the fact that they are in a game. In *Disgaea 2* (2006), one of the characters complains about being less powerful than in the original, *Disgaea* (2003), while in *Ratchet & Clank: Future* (2007) an NPC greets the two heroes with a surprised 'Sorry, I didn't recognize you in high-def'.

The ‘tutorial’ sections of video games, in which players are instructed on how to interact with the game, also offer many opportunities to break the fourth wall. Such opportunities are frequently exploited in *Super Paper Mario* (2007). At the beginning of the game, the character Bestovius teaches Mario – and the player – how to switch between two and three dimension views by pressing ‘A’ on the controller; since Mario appears puzzled, Bestovius adds: ‘What is this ‘A’ I speak of? I assure you that if we are being watched from another dimension... Those beings will understand’. However, as the following excerpt from *Day of the Tentacle* shows, not all references to the player are equally kind:

> *Bernard:* *Sometimes I do stupid stuff, and I don’t even know why... as if my body were being controlled*
> *by some demented, sadistic puppet-master.*
> *Ed:* *Well, we all feel that way sometimes.*

2.3.3 Intertextual references

In a work of fiction, intertextual references tend to break the fourth wall and are, in this sense, meta-references. Often inserted for humorous purposes, references to other texts (e.g. movies, songs, books or other games) are especially common in games. The *Warcraft* series displays numerous examples of this characteristic type of meta-reference. In that series, if the player clicks on a ‘sorceress’ in his army, the sorceress might respond by saying ‘Click me baby, one more time’. This is not only a reference to the player’s action of ‘clicking’, but also to the song *Hit Me Baby, One More Time* by Britney Spears. At times, intertextuality can be more veiled. Reading the inscription on a gravestone in *Fable III* (2010) – a game that contains many pop culture references – the player finds a man in a grave who ‘tried to hold his breath for ten minutes’; this is likely a reference to Guybrush Threepwood, the main character in the *Monkey Island* series, although that game series and the character are not explicitly mentioned. Similarly, foes that say ‘It’s just a flesh wound!’ upon being hit may, to someone familiar with the movie, bring to mind *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975).

Intertextual references are one of the earliest forms of meta-reference. In 1600, Cervantes' Don Quixote owned a copy of one of the author's previous novels, *Galatea*. Similarly, in the 1994 game *World of Warcraft*, one of the enemies can be heard saying 'Wings, horns, hooves, what are we saying!? Is this *Diablo*!?', openly referring to *Diablo* (1996), another game by the same developer. In opera, Gilbert and Sullivan often relied on such references for comic effect. In one of the most well known tunes from the *Pirates of Penzance*, the Major General mockingly mentions *HMS Pinafore*, one of the composers' earlier works. In the 2010 hit video game *Mass Effect 2*, a character from an alien race sings a version of the Major General's song, in a chain of transmedial cross-references spanning more than a hundred years.

Humor based on intertextual references can always create issues for the translators, as the culture-specific items might not be familiar to both the source and target audiences. This can be especially true in audiovisual translation, when visual cues can make certain solutions (e.g. omitting the references or replacing them with others that are more familiar to the target audience) unavailable. In games, however, the problem can be worsened by the tight connection between gameplay and the humorous elements. Section 2.6 deals with this issue, discussing how the interactive nature of games can make the translation of humor particularly significant and, at the same time, add further constraints to a successful localization.

The categories described above are not aimed at forming a rigorous scheme for the classification of all the devices games use to break the fourth wall for humorous purposes. The following scene from *Discworld II: Missing Presumed...!?* (1996) is a good example of how, in practice, these categories overlap heavily. During the adventure, the main character from the series, Rincewind, goes through a magic circle and ends up in the first *Discworld* game, where he meets his old self. The setting of the scene – character, background and sound effects – is taken from the first game, while the future Rincewind displays the more detailed graphics of the sequel from where he comes:

Future Rincewind:	*Hey, I remember this. Haha, things have changed, haven't they?*
Past Rincewind:	*Who are you?*
Future Rincewind:	*I'm you, just better drawn and animated.* *Just look at those jagged pixels. Not to mention that mono voice.*
Past Rincewind:	*Please, tell me what's going on.*
Future Rincewind:	*I'm from the sequel. And there's been a few changes, I can tell you.* *Higher resolution – a wizard must look the goods, you know.* *Better sound – after all my voice isn't supplied by just anybody, you know.* *Longer rest periods between quests. Less walking. That sort of things.* [He turns to the screen] *For the life of me, I just don't see why they don't just have lots of film clips,* *I could sleep through the whole game then.*
Past Rincewind:	*Well, if you're from the sequel, then perhaps you could help me?* *I've been wandering around here for days like a puppet on a string.* *The person playing this game has no idea!* *Could you please explain to me that thing about butterflies and lamp posts?*
Future Rincewind:	*Are you kidding? That's not going to help you.* [He turns to the screen again] *Honestly! Some people...*

With such a short scripted dialogue, the game manages to break the fourth wall in a number of ways, the first and more obvious of which is having the old and new versions of the same character meet. Both appear to be aware of their nature of fictional characters; the new Rincewind refers to 'the sequel' and to the technological improvements that have occurred since the first game, openly acknowledging both the game and the real universe. He then turns to the screen and addresses the player.

The old character brings 'his' fictitious player into the discussion ('The person playing this game has no idea!'), with a mocking reference to the rules of the game genre, which often lead players to try the most absurd actions in order to solve particularly complex puzzles ('Could you please explain to me that thing about butterflies and lamp posts?').

When the future Rincewind speaks to the screen for the second time ('Honestly! Some people...'), it is ambiguous whether he is talking to the actual player, to the fictitious person who is supposedly playing the first game, or to both – and if he also played the first *Discworld* game, the player will feel doubly called upon. Whichever the case, self-referential humor rarely gets much more 'meta' than this.

As the examples show, not all references are equally overt: a character openly mentioning an earlier game or his 'inventory window' will obviously be more noticeable than a quick look to the camera or a passing quotation from an obscure movie. Thus, the fourth wall can be lightly scratched or completely torn down. How to use this wide range of possibilities is up to the game's authors, who have to tread carefully if they do not want to disrupt the user's immersion in the game itself. The delicate equilibrium between fiction temporarily perceived as reality and fiction perceived as fiction, when existing at all, can be easily upset by the use of external references; this is true for any media, but especially for video games.

Watching an episode of the popular TV series *House M.D.*, we see that one of the characters, Dr Wilson, has posters of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* in his office. This element adds to his characterization; we may infer that Dr Wilson likes cinema – in particular, classic films – and we can guess that these are two of his favorite movies. Therefore, the reference adds depth to the character. At the same time, though, it works in the opposite direction, reminding us that we are watching a work of fiction. It can be amusing to notice that Dr House's address is 221B Baker Street, a reference to the London home of Sherlock Holmes, a character the authors drew inspiration from when creating the character of Gregory House. However, as soon as we recognize the reference, our attention is drawn to the fact that House, too, is a fictional character.

In games, the effect of this kind of meta-reference can be even more startling. In *Fable III*, a fantasy game set in a medieval-period inspired world, a peasant woman asks our character whether the previous night he has seen 'the last episode of *EastEnders*', a long-running British soap opera set in London. Here, the humor is effective for at least three reasons.

The first reason relies on the incongruity arising from the fact that the inhabitants of *Fable*'s fantasy world are not supposed to know what television is, let alone about the existence of *EastEnders*. For this reason, we are startled to hear the woman mention it. This is not something that is specific to video games: for example, in the movie *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, the same effect is achieved when the Knights of the Round Table sing a line about 'impersonating Clark Gable'. Second, the incongruous effect is amplified by the fact that not only is the villager woman a peasant from the Middle Ages – she is even 'less real' than a movie character: her cartoonish look does not aim at photorealism and, although she may have a virtual house, a virtual job and maybe even a virtual family, this is the extent of her reality. As mentioned earlier, a bigger number of background incongruities imply that games often require more suspension of disbelief on the part of the player than other art forms do. We are willing to suspend our disbelief and accept the rules and constraints that even the most realistic-looking games necessarily impose on us, but the tiniest reminder of the outside world can break the spell. This is why the peasant who is a fan of *EastEnders* immediately strikes us as incongruous and thus, if we accept the classical theory, funny. The third reason why meta-references work particularly well in games is connected to the relationship between the player and the character, or, in general, between the player and the game world.

Whenever the recipient of any type of text encounters and recognizes a meta-reference, a special link is created between the two sides of what is called the fourth wall. How this link is perceived may vary depending on the specific circumstances; for example, the reader can feel a sense of amusement and complicity or a sense of discomfort – or both at the same time.

Oliver Hardy was one of the pioneers of the camera look, a technique he made frequent and effective use of in many of the *Laurel and Hardy* comedies. Reflecting on Ollie's famous camera look, Larsen (1994) mentions the strange, fleeting relationship that it suddenly establishes between Hardy and the spectator, causing the spectator to feel a sort of 'indefinite euphoria', but also both 'uncertainty' and 'dejection'. When entering the cinema, Larsen (ibid.) argues, the

spectator also enters a contract which dictates that the people on the screen behave as if no one else is aware of them, while the spectator must pretend to believe them. However, this contractual illusion falls apart when Ollie looks to the camera:

> It is *as if* [the spectator] has a partner, a fellow conspirator within the story, someone who knows that there is another person standing behind the window pane, and this someone within the story is now playing with him, counting on his presence, showing off, showing that he is there within the story *for him.* [...] And the spectator is moved, *touched* by this unexpected, surprising, frank interpellation, but is also sad because he knows that it is only 'as if': this moving interpellation is a fiction, a childish dream.
>
> (Larsen, ibid.)

In the 2001 game *Jak and Daxter*, a priestess reproaches the two protagonists for their irresponsible attitude with the words 'This is not a game!'. Showing a high level of awareness, Jak and Dexter turn to us and look straight to the camera for a long moment. This look and the priestess' words remind us that this is, indeed, a game. While the scene makes us smile, it also breaks the contractual illusion that was entered at the start of play, just as done by Oliver Hardy's look at the camera. Nevertheless, something is profoundly different. The spectator, Larsen (ibid.) continues,

> knows that Mr. Hardy's look comes from far away, from a naive, childish universe which he, the spectator, may very well look at from without, regard as a fiction, but of which he can never be part: The window pane is there all the same. He is standing at the outside, powerless. He, the spectator, may very well be the highest instance of the narrative, but nevertheless the story *moves on.*

In video games, the story does *not* move on without the help of the player. It is not 'as if' someone within the story is 'counting on his presence': the story will only move on following his actions, and without such actions it would not have arrived at that point in the game. The look into the camera lasts only a second, but the link remains; the player is not rejected again, relegated to looking into the window pane from the outside, because he was never fully outside and never completely cut off.

In the Sega game *Sonic the Hedgehog 2* (1992), if left idle for a while, Sonic taps his foot and stares impatiently at the 'camera'. While Ollie could not expect a

response from the spectator, Sonic can and does. In the sequel, *Sonic CD* (1993), if the player does not input any command for too long, Sonic says 'I'm outta here' and leaves, ending the game. When the titular character in *Max Payne* thanks the player for shutting down the elevator music, it is the player himself who triggered the scene, even though it was not written specifically for him, but for a generic user. The player's actions determined when and if the character would talk to him; another player might have moved past the elevator and finished the game without ever hearing that line.

This particular configuration of the fourth wall in games – the fact that, for most of the time, the player is able to control what happens on the other side – is possibly the main reason why a great number of humorous occurrences in games are instances of meta-referential humor. This section lists several ways in which a character can react to the player's inputs, acknowledging an outside presence and therefore breaking the fourth wall. But it is a very thin wall from the start, as it is the player who triggers the device: the character is not talking to a generic player — he is talking to him, as a direct consequence of his actions.

The line between what is inside and outside the wall is often so blurred that it seems legitimate to wonder if there is such a barrier in video games. Conway (2010) suggests that the classic concept of a fourth wall is not applicable in this medium. In Conway's view, a reference to the outside world does not necessarily break the illusion; on the contrary, it draws the player further in, enhancing his experience. Regardless, both views acknowledge the deep connection between the player and the fictional world, a connection that augments the effectiveness of meta-references. Whether the player considers them a welcome addition to the game or a grating intrusion will depend on the type of game, on the ability and intentions of the game designers and, ultimately, on the sensibility of each player. In the case of humorous references, it is not easy to anticipate how a player will react to a 'wink' from the authors in a context where he is supposed to feel deeply immersed in the virtual world: will he find the wink amusing or jarring? This leads us to another fundamental feature of humor in games: hidden humor.

2.4 Hidden humor: it's always Easter in games

A discussion of hidden humor has a necessary premise: any occurrence of humor is, to some degree, concealed. Spotting humor is the first step in the process of humor appreciation. Studies on the cognitive nature of humor recognition (Schulz, 1974 and 1976) investigate the temporal relationship between the processing of the incongruity and of the resolution information, in both verbal and visual humor; neuroscience provides evidence of humor detection happening in a separate part of the brain than humor appreciation (Moran et al., 2004). Here, though, the label of 'hidden' can indicate a form of presentation that places humorous elements in the background.

This way of presenting humor is common to other visual arts. Film and comics often place visual humor in the background. The following examples from *The Simpsons* clearly illustrate the technique:

Figure 4. Example of humor in the background from *The Simpsons*.
(Copyright 2010 20th Century Fox Film Corp)

Figure 5. Example of humor in the background from *The Simpsons*.
(Copyright 2010 20th Century Fox Film Corp)

In Figure 4, the humor plays on the incongruity of seeing a zombie engaged in the mundane activity of microwaving his lunch (a brain that can be seen through the oven door), in an office kitchen where the microwave sits beside a more uncommon appliance like the alembic on the right. Behind him, the poster on the wall is a reference to the TV show *The Office*. Figure 5 is a frame taken from the title sequence, where humorous details like the magazine ‘Anxious Mother’, a generic parody of women’s magazines, only appear on the background for less than two seconds. In both cases, the attention is focused on the characters in the foreground.

In these images (Figures 4 and 5), viewing the whole picture is the only effort necessary to spot the humorous elements in the background. Compared to someone who watches a movie or reads a comic, a game player has greater freedom, implying that his active role in discovering hidden humor can take different forms. As seen in the previous section, in order to discover humorous elements, the player may have to examine a particular object, visit a particular area or, in general, perform specific actions that are not strictly required for progressing through the game. Games provide a set of possible actions to the players, allowing them to choose whether to do only what is strictly necessary to get to the end of the game or to explore other possibilities made available by the special kind of interaction that characterizes the gaming experience. Other entertainment media must choose what content to present to the audience and how

prominent each element should be. In Figures 4 and 5, all viewers see the same images and the space assigned to the different elements in an image is the same for everyone, therefore humorous elements in the background would look out of place if *The Simpsons* was not a comedy. In games, the term 'background' is not always to be interpreted literally, but rather as a layer of content that, in order to be accessed, requires some degree of effort on the part of the user. As a consequence, humor can be inserted in a less intrusive way, and hidden humorous elements are often found even in games where comedy is not part of the main gameplay.

Adding hidden content to a game is a widespread practice. Hidden elements, the so-called *Easter Eggs*, are of many types and perform different functions. Sometimes, players can discover hidden rooms or whole hidden levels of a game, or they may gain access to new items and playable characters. Focusing on hidden features that provide an advantage to gameplay, Hirumi and Hall (2010: 59) argue that they serve two main purposes: '(1) to enhance replay value, and (2) to encourage the player to explore the game world'. The classic strategy game *Age of Empires* (1997) has several hidden features that help players who cheat, but are also designed to elicit a humorous response. For example, typing the codes PEPPERONI PIZZA and BIGDADDY during gameplay provides the player with, respectively, a huge amount of food for his troops and a black car with a rocket launcher; the latter being an unusual item for a game with a historical setting that spans from the Stone Age to the Iron Age.

Many of the examples of humorous occurrences illustrated in section 2.3 can also be classified as Easter Eggs, as they can be difficult to find. For example, the conversation between the character Rincewind and his time-travelling alter ego in *Discworld II* can only be seen if the player performs a series of very specific actions, which include going in and out of a magic passage several times in a row, without any indication from the game that the actions might produce any effect. At times, finding an Easter Egg is in itself the reward for spending time looking for it, something that is effectively parodied in the *Grand Theft Auto* (*GTA*) series (1997-2014). All the games in the series make heavy use of the Easter Egg device, but the game *GTA: Vice City* (2002) has, hidden in a secret room, an actual

chocolate egg inscribed with the words ‘Happy Easter’, while in *GTA: San Andreas* (2004), if the player climbs to the top of a certain bridge, his reward is a rather anticlimactic sign that reads ‘There are no Easter Eggs here. Go away’.

2.5 Video games: towards a customized level of humor?

The preference for hidden humor is closely related to another distinctive trait of humor in games: although few games can be classified as comedies, humorous side elements are present in all genres. In their empirical analysis of the perception of humor by players, Dormann and Biddle (2007: 250) found that many enjoy humor that is embedded in games ‘not as a primary focus, but as part of the texture of the gameplay’. The fact that humor appears on the side and ‘not as a primary focus’ (ibid.) might indicate that humor is considered an element of little importance, but this conclusion is far from clear. As remarked above, this feature stems from the nature of the medium: a video game can be designed to have several layers of content, not all of which are immediately visible. Humorous content can be and is inserted in all kinds of games, even those with a ‘serious’ focus, since access to such content can be excluded from the mandatory path of the game, if that course of action is deemed more appropriate. Some Easter Eggs are likely to be found only by players who already know how to find them, information that can be obtained through websites and guides. The popularity of Easter Eggs indicates that players enjoy looking for them, and developers often take the opportunity to include in-jokes and funny references in their games.

The freedom players are allowed in choosing their preferred course of action has many faces; one of them is whether to strictly adhere to the main path of a game or to explore other possible paths. In video games, due to their adaptive nature, content creation does not end with the developers, but continues with the player, who ultimately decides the final shape of the product according to his taste – games allow a high level of content customization that other media lack. With regard to humor, this has a relevant implication in a feature that is peculiar and possibly exclusive to games: customization of the level of humor.

That certain games provide users with the tools to create humorous dialogues and situations has been discussed in section 2.1. To build a player-driven story, many games use multiple-choice dialogues; that is, they give players a selection of responses and their choice will influence the dialogue of the other characters that are part of the conversation. The dialogues often contain humorous lines – players can choose whether they want to be nice, funny, aggressive, and so on. Still, two main questions are answered by the game's authors: How humorous a text should be created? Is comedy the main focus of the narrative line? The following examples clarify how the decisions in turn affect the choice given to the players.

In *Day of the Tentacle*, the developers unquestionably created a comedy game, as humor permeates all dialogues and situations. The story involves time travel and part of it is set in the United States at the time of the Declaration of Independence. Several historical personalities appear as characters in the story, and the player interacts with NPCs through multiple-choice dialogues. In a sequence set in the eighteenth century, the player can talk to a maid who is using a sewing machine to produce a prototype of the US stars and stripes flag, following instructions she received from the US Founding Fathers. The maid, hoping that the player has not come to bring her another design change for the flag, asks about 'the current brainstorm from our fickle founding fathers'; the player, a character who is the stereotype of a heavy metal music fan, is presented with the following answer choices:

Could it have a chrome-plated bald eagle robot on it?
How about a skull with, like, scorpions in its mouth?
It should have a hologram on it somewhere.
We need a babe in a leather bikini, swinging a broadaxe.

Table 3. Humorous answer choices in *Day of the Tentacle* (example 1)

Later in the adventure, meeting the evil Purple Tentacle, who comes from the future, the player can choose what to say to that character from among several options:

Could you give us some stock tips?
Do the Sharks ever have a winning season?

Do we manage to defeat you and save the world?
Can you remember stuff that hasn't happened yet?
Are you MORE or LESS intelligent than the Purple Tentacle from our time?
How is it that you can grow hair without follicles?
I think we'd best be off now.

Table 4. Humorous answer choices in *Day of the Tentacle* (example 2)

In both cases, the player is provided with a set of answers among which there is no serious option. The player can choose a preferred response, but the authors' initial choices move him along a humorous path.

Let us now consider a game that is completely different from *Day of the Tentacle* in both genre and atmosphere: *Dragon Age: Origins,* a role playing game set in a fantasy world.[13] Through the choices made, the player can heavily affect the course of the story. Table 3 presents selected dialogue excerpts from that game:

Lines said by non-player-characters	**Replies available to the player**
Alistair: You know, I've been thinking...	I was about to ask if you were feeling sick.
	Such rare event is worth informing me of, sure.
	What have you been thinking about?
	This isn't a good time to chat.
Morrigan: 'Tis a curious feeling. I don't know how else to describe it.	What? Is something wrong?
	You look confused.
	Oh? Did you have your first feeling?
Alistair (in response to the player's suggestion that he would be a great king): Really? Whatever would give you that idea?	You have a kind heart and a strong sense of justice.
	Theirin blood will tell. You'll rise to the occasion.
	You'd look snappy with a crown?
	Power makes men incredibly attractive.
Leliana: The stars are out.	Uh, that's great?
	There is still beauty to be found in this world.
	For once, a clear night.
	So? Go help Alistair make supper.

Table 5. Examples of multiple-choice dialogues from *Dragon Age: Origins*

[13] While this dissertation deals with video games from a general perspective, further research is needed to investigate the peculiarities of humor in different genres. By focusing on the historical aspects of the issue, it should be possible to see whether the birth of new game genres and the evolution of the existing ones have entailed a corresponding change in the style of humor they feature.

Unlike *Day of the Tentacle*, *Dragon Age* cannot be classified as a comedy, and this is reflected in the dialogue options available. Still, when choosing the lines the character will actually say among those that are 'potentially' spoken, the player chooses whether or not to use the humorous replies, thus determining how humorous the actual script of the game is. Even though funny or sarcastic answers are not the only options provided by the developers, the player can choose, for example, to be sarcastic throughout the whole story. Therefore, the prominence of humor in the actual experience of the game can differ among users and it can even vary for a single person who chose to play the same game more than once, each time making different choices.

Dragon Age II (2011), the sequel to *Dragon Age: Origins*, has a slightly different dialogue system. The conversation options are presented on a wheel that displays a short paraphrase of what the character will say if that option is chosen;[14] each paraphrase is accompanied by a small icon that specifies the tone in which that response is intended. For example, a smiling mask indicates that the character will be, in the words of the game's instructions manual, 'wry, humorous, or witty'. Moreover, in cutscenes, where the player has no control, the main character will say things that reflect past dialogue choices: if humorous responses were often chosen, the lines in the scripted cutscenes will adhere to this type of player behavior. This is further indication of how humor in video games acquires new and unique features from player-driven storytelling, even in elements, such as cutscenes, that at a first glance might appear to show very little difference from their movie counterparts.

Determining the amount of humor through the player's dialogue choices is, of course, only possible in games that use multiple-choice dialogues (typically, these are games where the story plays an important role). In general, the decision is up to the authors, who cannot be certain that humorous items will be appreciated in a game where humor is not the main focus. Section 2.4 describes how the possibility of inserting funny elements as an aside can help overcome this issue.

[14] Section 3.6 addresses the possible reasons for implementing this type of 'condensed' dialogues.

Nevertheless, although many meta-references and Easter Eggs, which were intended to be funny, may or may not be seen during a game, finding them is not always the result of a conscious choice: a player might encounter them while pursuing another objective; even when looking for hidden content, the player might not know exactly what the hidden content is and whether it has a humorous connotation.

An interesting solution is provided by the game *Fallout: New Vegas* (2010). The *Fallout* series, set in a grim post-apocalyptic future, is known for its widespread use of pop culture references, ranging from *Blade Runner* and *Monty Python* through to *Star Trek* and *The Simpsons*, including numerous songs, movies, TV series and novels. While many fans of the series enjoy these references, others see them as unnecessary breaks of the fourth wall that ruin the atmosphere of the game. Hence, for the latest title in the series, *Fallout: New Vegas*, the developers envisioned a system that would allow players to choose whether they want to experience the game's 'silly' content. At the start of the game, players can activate an option called 'Wild Wasteland'. The in-game description of that option reads: 'Wild Wasteland unleashes the most bizarre and silly elements of post-apocalyptic America. Not for the faint of heart or the serious of temperament.' The option adds humorous encounters that are not in the standard version of the game. For example, the player might run into a destroyed refrigerator containing a skeleton and a fedora. This is a reference to *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, where Indiana Jones survives a nuclear explosion by hiding in a lead-lined fridge which is then hurled miles away by the blast – a scene that received much criticism and is often mocked for being too unrealistic even for a movie that is supposed to challenge the spectator's suspension of disbelief. When the Wild Wasteland option is activated, the humorous elements replace equivalent elements that can be found in the normal game. For example, in place of a group of mercenaries from which a special rifle can be obtained, a player who chooses the 'wacky' option will find a UFO with three aliens, from which he can obtain a special alien weapon. Similarly, two 'mini-nukes' that are available during the standard game are substituted by 'holy hand grenades', inspired from the 'Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch' appearing in the movie *Monty Python and the Holy*

Grail.[15] Therefore, someone who chooses the 'wacky' path will play a game that differs in the pervasiveness of humor from that seen by other 'serious' players.

2.6 Humor and gameplay

Section 2.5 showed how, in *Dragon Age: Origins*, the player can choose humorous replies in dialogues among a variety of lines. In that game, the player's choice of dialogue tone is not devoid of consequences: the companions who may join the player during the adventure have a well defined personality, which emerges both in their dialogues with the main character (i.e. the player) and in other circumstances, as they will often banter spontaneously or intervene during dialogues between the main character and other NPCs. Some companions are more serious than others and do not appreciate or understand humor: joking on a serious matter with them is likely to result in a decrease in their 'approval' of the player, which in turn has repercussions on the story (e.g. a companion might leave the player's group if the divergence becomes too big). On the other hand, a companion with a more humorous personality will probably approve of a player who manages to get the party out of dangerous situations by using wits instead of force. Moreover, gaining a companion's friendship will also affect the development of the plot, for example by opening up new possible quests. All this has relevant consequences for the translation, as it becomes important that each dialogue option maintains the same tone (e.g. humorous or not) as in the original. It may not be possible, for example, to eliminate a joke and compensate for the loss by adding humor in a different point of the conversation, unless the reactions of the other characters to the specific lines are modified as well. Again, as described for adventure games, humor can be an important element of gameplay. There, it worked as a tool to solve specific puzzles and therefore unlock

[15] In an interview given before the release of the game, Josh Sawyer, lead designer of *Fallout: New Vegas*, discussed his dislike for the use of humorous pop culture references: 'it just kind of pulls me out of the world. And a lot of times it just seems kind of cheesy and goofy. [...] In any case, a lot of our designers wanted to put that stuff in there and I'd be saying 'no, no, no, don't do it.' Eventually we thought, you know, there's probably an easy way to do this, which is a perk that basically says 'I wanna see all the goofy shit.' So we have 'Wild Wasteland'. You opt into it at the beginning and then you get to see all the goofy crap."

subsequent parts of the game; here, it can play an instrumental role in moving the plot along different paths.

Fernández Costales (2014) points out that, in *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (2009), puns based on English names were lost in the Spanish version of the game, making it difficult for players to complete certain parts of the story. This issue is not limited to puns based on proper names and it is common to other languages. In the game, one of Batman's enemies, the Riddler, presents Batman (and the player) with puzzles, often in the form of wordplay. To solve these riddles, the player must follow clues contained in the wordplay and look for specific items or places in the game. One such riddle, which can be found in a cell block, reads: 'All alone in your cell? Why don't you break the ice with the most dangerous prisoners?'. Solving that puzzle requires the player to find a cell with the door blocked by ice, break the ice and enter the cell. In the Italian version of the game, the translators were able to render the wordplay literally as 'Tutto solo nella tua cella? Perché non provi a rompere il ghiaccio con gli altri prigionieri?' [All alone in your cell? Why don't you try to break the ice with the other prisoners?], since 'rompere il ghiaccio' [breaking the ice] has the same literal and figurative meaning in Italian as in English. Other riddle translations were less successful. Later in the game, the player is presented with the following riddle: 'Tweedledum and Tweedledee SAW it, can you SEE it too?', with the words 'saw' and 'see' capitalized in the original text. Tweedledum and Tweedledee are two longstanding villains of the Batman universe, inspired by the homonymous characters from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*. To solve the riddle, the player must find a seesaw in the garden, as hinted quite clearly by the highlighted English words. The Italian translation reads: 'Tweedledum and Tweedledee lo hanno visto, tu ci riesci?' [Tweedledum and Tweedledee saw it, can you?]. Here, the wordplay is omitted, perhaps because the translators could not find a way of making a similar pun when using the Italian term 'altalena' for 'seesaw'. The player is left with a different type of clue, a visual one in which two characteristic hats worn by the characters Tweedledum and Tweedledee are on a seesaw.

All these examples show that, even when we look at the specific aspect of humor, interactivity – broadly intended as the possibility for the user to actively engage

with the content – is what characterizes the video game medium. From that perspective, this chapter has discussed how humor in games is affected by the special relationship that exists between the game and the player. Humor can be instrumental in the development of the plot through gameplay and dialogue choices. Sometimes, understanding humor can even be a requirement to progress within the story – a feature that distinguishes games from other narrative forms.

The examples provided also suggest that the apparent lack of humor in many titles is often a consequence of the particular structure of a game: content can be presented to the player in a multilayered format in which the side elements are as important in defining each user's experience as those along the mandatory path. Design choices can provide audiences with the chance to customize both the type and the amount of humor contained in a game; such potential for customization often results in a notably different perception and experience of humor for different users of the same game.

Chapter 3

Features of audiovisual content in games

3.1 Introduction

Although video game localization is attracting a growing academic interest, comprehensive examinations of audiovisual content in games and of the differences between the main modes of audiovisual translation (such as dubbing and subtitling) and their video game counterparts are still scarce. Mangiron (2012) gives an overview of subtitling practices in video games, advocating the adoption of guidelines that would be useful both to enhance player's experience and to improve accessibility. This chapter follows a similar approach, but it extends the analysis beyond subtitling, also focusing on the issue of synchronization and trying to shed light on the reasons behind certain peculiarities of audiovisual communication in games, as the challenges presented by their translation will have an impact on the translation of humorous content.

As video games are much more varied than other media, this lack of a systematic approach could be due, in part, to the plurality of communication channels they use. Just like other audiovisual media, games commonly feature off-screen narrators, dialogues and inserts such as signs, newspapers or letters. However, in addition to these standard verbal items – whose peculiar nature in games is discussed in this chapter – games almost invariably include messages that are addressed to the player and text that is part of the game 'interface' (two categories which often overlap).

The User Interface (UI) 'translates the player's input – the button-presses (or other actions) in the real world – into actions in the game world [...], and it presents the internal data that the player needs in each situation in visible and audible forms'

(Adams, 2010: 200). Menus, dialogue boxes, buttons and icons are some of the elements UIs typically include.

As noted by Bernal-Merino (2007), translating text in the UI can be problematic, because most UIs present spatial constraints: when the text is enclosed in windows or captions, their size poses a limit to the number of characters translators can use. These spatial constraints also characterize the localization of software; in games, though, they are one of the reasons that may lead translators to adopt creative solutions (Mangiron and O'Hagan, 2006).

Interfaces are an example of the huge variety of layouts games display from a formal point of view. The spectrum of possible combinations of textual and graphical elements in UIs, which range from completely text-free to text-only, gives us an idea of the challenges that any attempt at an exhaustive classification encounters.

One extreme of this spectrum can be represented by the 1980 game *Zork I: The Great Underground Empire*. *Zork I* has no graphics or sound. The player reads lines of text describing the environment and the actions that take place in it, and interacts with the game by typing commands such as 'go North', 'look at the house', etc.[16] As soon as we move away from this extreme and start looking at other games, we see that most of the times text and graphics are blended in an inseparable mix. One of *Zork*'s sequels, *Return to Zork* (1993), can be used to illustrate this point. In *Return to Zork*, the player sees the adventure from a first person point of view; the game environment is made of a series of locations where characters, animals, etc. act on a static background. Every time the player enters a different location, a label appears on the lower part of the screen, indicating the name of that location, as shown in Figure 6, where the player has just entered the 'mountain pass'. This label disappears after a few seconds.

[16] Despite selling more than 400,000 copies, the game was never localized into other languages; even if it had been, it would matter very little for our discussion, as the process of localizing it could hardly be considered 'audiovisual translation'.

Figure 6. Example of text superimposed on the background in *Return to Zork* (copyright 1993 Activision)

If an element of the environment can be interacted with, its name appears in a small blue font whenever the player hovers the mouse pointer above it. Clicking on the said element, a collection of icons representing the possible actions is displayed near the pointer. In Figure 7, four icons on the bottom left-hand side of the screen represent the actions that can be performed on a small rock:

Figure 7. Interface with text and graphics in *Return to Zork* (copyright 1993 Activison)

Again, hovering the mouse on the icons will animate them and some text will be displayed, in a grey font, to illustrate the actual actions that can be performed on the object; in this example, a hand that puts something in a pocket is 'subtitled' as 'put the rock in your inventory', a foot kicking the rock is 'kick the rock', a hand that picks it up from the ground is described with 'pick up the rock'. If the player picks up the rock, a message appears over the area where the rock was, saying

‘you are now carrying the rock’. If the player clicks on the vulture on the right while carrying the rock, a new icon menu appears, from which the player can select ‘throw the rock at the vulture’; performing the action results in the vulture flying away and a message appears where the bird was, saying ‘nice throw, the vulture flies away’. Classifying all these bits of text as belonging to the interface or to the game itself would be quite a difficult (and arguably pointless) exercise. However, there are many verbal elements that appear inside the game world. Going back to our example, the vulture is standing on a sign that reads ‘Valley of the vultures’; the player also carries with him a journal where all the important events are automatically noted down for his reference, the content of which can be accessed at any moment. Finally, dialogue exchanges are presented in a way that is specific to this particular game. While the characters encountered during the game are fully voiced (although there are no subtitles in the original language), the player’s character is not. The player can only choose a conversation topic or a reaction to what his interlocutor is saying. Again, this is done through a graphic menu: selecting an icon representing a face with an interested expression, labelled with the word ‘fascinated’, will probably make you gain favour with the other person; choosing the icon of an envelope means ‘ask about the letter’, and so on.

Return to Zork, although by no means representative of a standard way of presenting verbal content in games, is a good example of the many forms of verbal communication they employ. From a formal point of view, fonts of different colour and size are used for messages with different functions; the positioning of the lines of text varies depending on the object they refer to; many times, the players themselves determine, with their actions, when elements of text should appear and how long they should stay on the screen.

Unlike the first *Zork* game, *Return to Zork* was localized into various languages. Looking at the Italian version of the game, we see that all the voices were dubbed and all the verbal elements that appear over the background images (e.g. the ‘Mountain Pass’ label) and in the player’s journal were translated into Italian. However, no interlingual subtitles were provided (the Italian edition of the game was only dubbed) and the verbal elements that are part of the backgrounds and are not just superimposed on them (e.g. the ‘Valley of the vultures’ sign) were neither

translated nor ‘subtitled’ in any way. Although the dubbing of the full game shows that considerable resources were invested in the localization process, the end result can be said to show some inconsistencies and shortcomings, as several textual elements are left in the source language, with the risk of puzzling the Italian player.

If the type of audiovisual content varies from game to game, the same can be said of the material that is translated and how. *The Legend of Kyrandia* (1992), a game for the same system (PC) and from the same year (1993) as *Return to Zork*, was released in Italy with the original English voices translated with Italian subtitles, and with all the text on-screen translated as well. These choices are the result of a number of factors, which include, but are not limited to, financial considerations and technical constraints.

With this premise in mind, we can move on to analyze in more detail the technical, linguistic and aesthetic features of verbal communication in video games, to see if and how traditional categories should be adapted, when discussing games, to account for differences with other audiovisual media. Let us consider, first, subtitling, an area which has received considerable attention in Audiovisual Translation Studies.

3.2 Dialogue and subtitles: general considerations

A definition of subtitling often referred to in the context of translation is the one proposed by Gottlieb (2004). Subtitling, he writes, ‘consists in the rendering in a different language of verbal messages in filmic media, in the shape of one or more lines of written text presented on the screen in sync with the original verbal message’ (ibid.: 135). Similarly, Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007: 8) define interlingual subtitles as ‘a written text, generally on the lower part of the screen, that endeavours to recount the original dialogue of the speakers, as well as the discursive elements that appear in the image (letters, inserts, graffiti, inscriptions, placards, and the like), and the information that is contained on the soundtrack

(songs, voices off).' Pedersen (2011: 4) takes up these definitions and, when discussing the differences between dubbing, voice-over and subtitling, he points out how 'subtitling keeps the original soundtrack, and superimposes a translation on the visual image of the film or TV programme'.

It appears, then, that one of the defining features of subtitles is that they display the translation of an original soundtrack. Although all the authors specify that the verbal messages include not only speech but also other textual elements (e.g. songs, signs or newspaper headlines), their main function is to show in a different language what is said in the source language 'in sync with the original verbal message' (Gottlieb, 2001: 87). While the definition works well for filmic media,[17] the possibility of extending it to video games without further elaboration should not be taken for granted, as in many games the soundtrack does not contain spoken dialogue *stricto sensu*. In video games, a subtitle is any textual element added over background images with the purpose of explaining or complementing the audiovisual content, both in the original product and in the localized version, and whether or not the verbal message is also coming through the audio channel.

Initially, games were not voiced. *Berzerk* (1980), the first game to include an impressive, for the time, 30 words of spoken dialogue, remained an exception for years after its release. The speech was computer-synthesized, which means that the voices were artificially produced,[18] as gaming systems' sound chips could not achieve the necessary sound quality to play actual recorded dialogue. Even if they had been capable to reproduce voice tracks, it would not have been possible to store them on the game cartridges, due to their memory limitations. This is why the first fully voiced games did not appear until the 1990s, taking advantage of the higher-capacity CD-ROM format.

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[17] Gottlieb (2004) considers 'filmic media' cinema, video, television, laserdisc and DVD. As the definition was proposed in 2001, it is reasonable to assume that an updated version would include newer technologies with similar audiovisual features, such as the Blu-ray disc.

[18] Speech synthesis was extremely expensive at the time; Tony Miller, chief engineer at the game's developer and publisher *Stern Electronics*, remembers it costing around of $1000 per word (Web 3). Despite this, the game was localized into certain languages, such as Spanish.

At a first glance, this evolution might resemble that of movies: a silent era, after which characters 'learned to talk'. But there are two main reasons why the comparison does not hold.

First, the two ages of movie sound are clearly marked by the respective techniques of verbal communication: during the silent era, although various means were used to display written elements (Marie, 1977), speech was mainly conveyed through intertitles, whilst 'talkies' saw the introduction of voices and subtitles as we know them. The same cannot be said of video games: unlike silent movies, games that are not voiced – or that are only partially voiced – employ a variety of methods to represent the verbal elements of the soundtrack (many of which will be discussed in section 3.3). The fact that we need to distinguish between 'partially' and 'fully' voiced games already speaks volumes about the feasibility of an exact parallel between the ludic and filmic media in this respect.

The second fundamental difference is that a diachronic approach only helps the researcher defining a clear evolutionary trend in the case of movies, but not so much when discussing video games. Taking into account the period of transition that followed the introduction of speech, silent movies and talkies can roughly fit into ideal categories of 'old' and 'new' movies. Making a silent movie today is a perfectly acceptable stylistic choice, but feature length silent movies are very few and rarely enjoy commercial success (a notable exception being the 2011 Oscar-winning French movie *The Artist*). In the case of video games, the distinction between games that are voiced and games that are not is not purely chronological: many games created today are not voiced, so much so that 'text-only dialogue can be considered one of the characteristic elements of game media' (O'Hagan and Mangiron, 2013: 161). There is no reason to assume that things are going to change in the near future. First, because the technical limitations mentioned above, despite being distant memories for current generation PCs and consoles, still hold for some gaming systems. Mobile gaming is growing at an impressive speed, but games for small devices such as PDAs and mobile phones only hold a small amount of data, compared to games published on DVD ROM discs, the dominant support format for home gaming systems. New distribution methods, such as the 'digital delivery', allow developers to sell games online on virtual

marketplaces, without having to produce physical copies, which helps small independent studios to create and distribute simple games that rarely include voice acting, a feature that is still complex and expensive to implement. Furthermore, the choice of having spoken dialogue in a game is not only dictated by financial or technical constraints; other factors enter the decision, e.g. the genre of the game, its mechanics and the role played by the story.

For these reasons, even current games present a variety of audiovisual modes that do not always include spoken dialogue for verbal communication. As a result, the traditional definition of 'subtitling' presented above does not seem to be appropriate for the video game medium. The huge formal variety which characterizes games implies that we still speak of 'subtitling' in translation if the source language version only has written text, while the characters simply move their lips without producing any sound, or if the game has no lip-sync and the written dialogue is displayed above the character who is speaking, in a fashion that resembles comics.

The next section tries to identify the distinguishing traits of audiovisual communication in video games. In order to do this, it leaves aside interface text or other pieces of verbal information not strictly related to the narrative, as they unequivocally mark the video game medium. Instead, the discussion focuses on on-screen text used to represent dialogue, narration and, in general, on the elements that are closer to those found in filmic media, for which terms such as 'subtitles' and 'voiceover' are often borrowed regardless of the different features they present in games. As identifying corresponding categories of AVT for video games is one of the purposes of this section, no assumptions will be made at this stage about the specific features of subtitles, e.g. their appearance, positioning, synchrony with the soundtrack or reduction levels, as these features will be analyzed throughout the chapter.

3.3 Subtitles – Aesthetic features

In defining subtitles in filmic media, Gottlieb (2005: 15) specifies that they 'need not be "sub"', as some countries accept them in the upper part of the screen when the lower fifth of the picture contains important information. Still, placing them in the lower part of the picture is the standard practice in most countries.

For dialogue exchanges, the prefix 'sub' is often appropriate in games. In recent productions, especially when games contain cinematic scenes, there is a growing tendency to adopt the conventions of film subtitles, including their positioning in the lower part of the screen. However, this is not a universal practice, since at least as many games display lines of dialogue in different positions, e.g. in the upper part of the screen or above (or close to) the character who speaks them.

Not only different games adopt different practices: often, the same game uses different techniques for different types of text; for example, the narrator's lines can be placed in the centre lower part of the screen, while the characters' lines are shown directly above their heads.[19] In many cases, functional reasons are behind these choices. We already pointed out how, when games are not voiced, subtitles are the only channel used to convey dialogue, which makes them indispensable in the original language. When this is the case, i.e. when the original version only has written text, the localized text is usually displayed in the same position as the original, if only for practical reasons: during the translation process, the source text is simply replaced in the software code with the target language text.

In the absence of spoken dialogue, placing the text near the character is much more than a stylistic choice, as it helps the viewer to identify which character is speaking, in a similar way to what is done in the subtitling for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing (SDH). This can be particularly useful when the characters' faces are not detailed or cannot be seen well. In these situations, as noted by O'Hagan

[19] While the positioning of text close to the character who is speaking is also a standard technique in comics, these normally use speech balloons. In games, speech balloons are much less common, which comes as an advantage to the translators, by giving them one less spatial constraint to worry about.

and Mangiron (2004), the name of the character who is speaking can be added at the beginning of each sentence; other common techniques are to accompany the written lines with gestures or simple facial animations, to use different colours for different characters (as also done in SDH) or to display a small picture of the character's face each time they speak.

In the case of games that feature spoken dialogue, a plurality of techniques to convey this dialogue can be found. *Dragon Age: Origins* (2009) is a game with voice acting and advanced graphics. During 'regular' dialogue exchanges, both intralingual and interlingual subtitles (subtitles in the original English or in the translated languages, e.g. Italian) are displayed at the top of the screen. However, the main character travels with a group of companions, whose speech is controlled by the computer, and who often start bantering among them in situations where the game camera does not allow the player to see their faces well. Although all these dialogue exchanges are voiced in the original language and accompanied by lip movements, the player has the option of toggling subtitles (intralingual or interlingual), which will be displayed above the character who is speaking, helping to identify who is saying what.

In *Day of the Tentacle* (1993) only some of the dialogues are voiced. Also, the cartoonish-looking characters move their lips and bodies when they speak, but do not display sophisticated lip-sync or detailed animations. Therefore, when characters speak, the text appears above their heads and is displayed in a specific, identifying colour that marks all their utterances: in Figures 8 and 9, a yellow font is used for the blonde girl's lines, while the purple tentacle's dialogue is displayed in purple. The lower part of the screen (appearing in black in the pictures) is occupied by an interface for most of the game, hence it would not be possible to use it to display the speech.

Figure 8. Dialogues with multicoloured text in DOTT (Copyright 1993 LucasArts Entertainment Company)

Figure 9. Dialogues with multicoloured text in DOTT (Copyright 1993 LucasArts Entertainment Company)

Some of these techniques are used in the much more standardized filmic media, as for instance in SDH (Neves, 2005). Analyzing captioning for SDH, Gottlieb (2005: 14) points out that 'it is possible to move them left and right when it is necessary to identify speakers or to make clear where the sound is coming from'.

Díaz-Cintas (2009: 5) also notes that 'they generally change colour on television depending on the person who is talking or the emphasis given to certain words in the same subtitle'.[20] The BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), a network which subtitles 100% of programmes on its main channels, added in 2010 multi-coloured subtitles to its broadcast online application *iPlayer*, to aid deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers (Web 4).

While in mainstream audiovisual programmes these conventions have not spread, as of today, to subtitling for the hearing, in games they survived the advent of voice-acting, lip-synching and detailed graphics, and are now commonly used in both technologically advanced games and in less advanced titles, where their functional role can be realized at its fullest.

Several factors can explain why the use of different colours in subtitles has found a place in video game subtitling and not in film. First, the sheer amount of information some games have to display (dialogue, signs, interface text, comments to player actions, etc.) calls for multiple ways to represent it. Also, although games are increasingly being recognized as a form of entertainment suitable for everyone, and not only for children or younger audiences, the playful nature of gaming might still place them on a less serious level than movies. Under this prism, using multi-coloured subtitles in a movie could be considered less acceptable if cinema is perceived as a more adult, 'respectable' medium. In this view, it would be interesting to check whether multi-coloured subtitles are more prevalent in games targeted at a younger audience. However, examples of serious-themed games which use coloured text are easy to find. In the shooter *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* (2011), set in realistic war environments, the name of the character speaking is displayed in green at the beginning of every line, while

[20] It is interesting to note that some similar conventions are also common in 'fansubs' (Ferrer Simó, 2005; Díaz-Cintas, 2009). Díaz-Cintas and Muñoz-Sánchez (2006) highlight the fact that fansubbers employ techniques used in both subtitling for the hearing and for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing, as well as in video games. In the case of fansubs, the use of such techniques often appears to be more an artistic choice than a functional necessity. Nevertheless, given the recent origins of the fansubbing phenomenon and the young age of the average fansubber (Bayar, 2012), it would not be surprising if it was video games that first exposed them to these techniques, thus contributing to making fansubs a hybrid, creative form of translation.

the rest of the subtitle uses a white font. Here, the different colour has a functional role, and the colour chosen, green, is in line with the military theme of the game.

The popularity of this device in games could also be due to the different process used to subtitle them. In games, colours can be easily added in the game code, something that is not always possible in cinema subtitling, particularly in the case of laser subtitling.[21] With the advent of digital TV, things might change, but only time will tell if these features will get a foothold in the general audiovisual market.

3.4 Subtitles – other formal characteristics

As pointed out by Mangiron (2013), game subtitles do not seem to follow precise guidelines. In listing several of their peculiar features, she highlights how they are usually much longer than their filmic counterparts and often do not preserve sense and grammatical blocks; moreover, besides using different colours and positioning on the screen, they can use different fonts and vary in size and number of lines.

Before moving on to the issues related to synchronization, it will be useful to discuss one of the more technical aspects of subtitles in games, namely the possibility for the player to turn them on or off. Often, the choice of activating subtitles, both inter- and intralingual, is left to the user, who can switch between having subtitles and not having them before or during the game by accessing an option menu.[22] The process is similar to what happens in programmes distributed on DVDs and Blu-rays, with a slight difference: while these formats allow

[21] For a survey of the processes used through history to add subtitles in film, see Ivarsson (2004).

[22] Here, the term ‘subtitles’ only refers to text that accompanies voiced speech, and not to the cases where text is the only mode of verbal communication. This clarification may seem unnecessary: choosing to toggle off written text when it is the only form used to present dialogues can appear rather pointless, as the player would be left with no clue as to what is being said. However, subsection 3.5.2 illustrates several of the devices that players have in order to govern the pace of verbal elements on screen, by allowing them to accelerate the dialogues or skip them altogether.

viewers to access the option at any moment – sometimes without even needing to pause the movie – games are not always as flexible in this respect, as it may not be possible to access menus or even pause the game during certain sequences (e.g. during cutscenes or while in combat).

Furthermore, the established distinction of 'open' versus 'closed' subtitles (Díaz-Cintas and Remael, 2007: 21) should be adapted to include a third category for 'mixed' subtitles, as the choice of activating them might be limited to certain moments of the game. Frequently, subtitles in cutscenes are open: they are an integral part of the video and cannot be toggled off. At times, however, players are only allowed to toggle subtitles on during the actual gameplay and not during cutscenes, something that can hinder their comprehension of large chunks of the plot. Both situations can arise because cutscenes are often added to specific points in the story as separate clips and cannot be modified in the same way as the rest of the game.

On the other hand, some games provide the player with separate options for subtitles during cutscenes and during gameplay. As cutscenes are movie-like sequences usually reserved for important events in the plot, someone who is playing in a language that is not his own might be especially keen to have subtitles during these scenes, so as not to miss crucial parts of the story. On the other side, cutscenes are not interactive (or allow for very limited interaction), which means that missing some words of a scripted dialogue might create fewer problems than missing a question during an in-game dialogue in which the player is expected to actively participate.

However, as will be discussed in subsection 3.5.1, spoken content in games comes in many different forms. With a choice of words whose meaning is not immediately clear, even for someone who is familiar with the game, *Skyrim* (2011) provides an option for activating 'dialogue subtitles' and one for 'general subtitles'. As it turns out, the game considers 'dialogue subtitles' those which appear when the player engages in an actual conversation with another character. 'General subtitles' accompany utterances that are not part of any of these self-contained dialogues, e.g. something said to by a guard or a vendor to the player

while he is passing by, words an NPC is muttering to himself or conversations between two NPCs happening in the player's vicinity. Again, there can be different reasons to want either type of subtitles: while it might be more important to understand the former type of dialogues, if only to be able to choose appropriate responses, general subtitles could be useful when the NPC who is speaking is farther from us and might not even be in view, as his voice will reach us in a lower volume. Despite the fact that most games have interlingual or intralingual subtitles, very few have subtitles for sound effects. While this can obviously hinder the game experience for hard of hearing players just as it would hinder their enjoyment of a movie, it can have bigger consequences for them when sounds are supposed to facilitate gameplay, as remarked by Mangiron (2012), who cites the example of two horror games, *Silent Hill Homecoming* (2008) and *Penumbra* (2007) where sounds alert players of the presence of nearby enemies.

Users may have also another reason for toggling subtitles on even if they are playing in their own language and have no hearing impairment, and that is to play without sound. While it is difficult to imagine why anyone would watch a movie with the sound removed, in video games this is a possibility. A game like *Fallout 3* (2008), with its approximate 9,000,000 words, is among the most text-heavy games published in the last decade. Still, it often involves hours of relative silence, in which players wander through deserted wastelands on their own or explore ruined buildings where they are equally likely to find someone they can talk to as a horde of monsters with no interest in polite conversation. Japanese Role Playing Games (JRPGs), despite being another genre where story and characterization are of the utmost importance, also include long sections of repetitive fights where players hear the same musical theme and the same catchphrases from the characters over and over again. During these sections, someone might want to go on playing even in circumstances where they have to do it with the sound off, knowing that they will not lose much in terms of verbal communication. Still, subtitles can help them avoid missing any verbal utterances.

Shortly after the release of *Star Wars: The Old Republic* (*SWTOR*) in 2011, a user posted the following comment on the web (Web 5) regarding the possibility provided to the players of turning subtitles on in the game:

> Though the voice acting in *SWTOR* is one of its highlights, I often have to play the game with the sound off when other family members are in the room. But I don't want to miss the dialogue from the mission giving NPCs. Good news: you can turn on subtitles for all spoken dialogue in the game including your own [*He then describes the procedure to activate subtitles during conversations from the option menu*]. Of course you're missing out on the snarky tone of your dark side answers or the varied accents from the game's mission givers, but if you're in a situation where you need to play with the sound off, this helps immensely.

to which this is how another player replied:

> This is extremely helpful for those of us with normal everyday life :) aka, family, friends, etc. (ibid.).

To understand this type of comments, it helps knowing that SWTOR is a MMORPG (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game), a popular type of RPG played exclusively online, where thousands of players around the world can be 'logged in' at the same time, inhabiting its virtual universe and 'meeting' in the game to complete quests together or simply talk or explore the fictional world. In general, online gaming makes video games a collective experience and this explains why, instead of waiting to be alone in the room before continuing their game session, the authors of the comments above might prefer to go on playing with no sound.

Portable game consoles are also an established reality and the number of people who play games on increasingly advanced mobile phones is constantly growing: in a situation where the sound would disturb others (e.g. while travelling on public transport or in a hospital), players might choose to use subtitles so as not to miss the dialogues.

In this scenario, interlingual subtitles cease to be a 'vulnerable' form of translation (Díaz-Cintas and Remael, 2007: 55), or at least their vulnerability is limited to the visual constraints, as the reader is not able to compare the translation with the

original soundtrack. This seems unlikely to be the standard way of playing any title, and it is not easy to gather evidence on how common this practice might be; however, it is worth mentioning if we intend to perform a complete analysis of 'subtitles' in video games without making any assumptions based on our knowledge of their nature and functions in other media.

The apparent lack of established conventions and the formal variety of the medium are among the main factors that allowed so many different techniques to catch on in video games at the same time. Several issues that emerged from the analysis of aesthetic features of subtitles also play a crucial role in understanding the importance that synchronization and condensation have in video games, in ways that might appear peculiar to someone familiar with dubbing and subtitling in other audiovisual media.

3.5 Synchronization

In all forms of audiovisual translation, timing-related issues occupy a place of paramount importance. In filmic media, they are likely to get the spotlight only when the content has to be transferred into a different language: although there are exceptions (e.g. animated movies, commentaries on DVDs or Blu-rays, post-synchronization of content, subtitles for the deaf and hard-of-hearing and for polyglot movies), dialogues are normally recorded during filming. In games, unless they employ the technique of motion capture (which tracks the movements of real actors and applies them to their polygonal models) or include whole videos featuring real actors (as in the *Command and Conquer* series, 1995-2012), the speech is usually recorded separately and needs to be added to the soundtrack at a later stage, in addition to textual elements, which can create synchronization problems. In this view, this section discusses the timing of spoken and written content in games.

3.5.1 Spoken content

Upon introducing the topic of subtitling, I pointed out that, unless otherwise specified, I would use the term ‘subtitles’ to indicate all textual elements superimposed over the game to explain or complement audiovisual content. At this point, a similar premise must be made regarding the use of the term ‘synchronization’ in the following discussion. The term is frequently used as a synonym of ‘dubbing’ (Delabastita, 1989: 203), which in turn is commonly referred to as ‘voiceover’ in games (O’Hagan and Mangiron, 2013). I will refer to synchronization in a broader way, in relation to all occurrences where synchrony between different channels (e.g. audio or visual) is an issue.

Creating a game, one of the objectives is often to reach synchrony between the characters’ animations and their speech; when the game is translated and dubbed into other languages, the synchrony will be researched between the characters’ movements and the target language speech. If only interlingual subtitles are added, the desired synchrony will be between subtitles and the original dialogue, just as it would be when translating a movie. If the game contains dialogue that is not voiced, some form of synchrony is likely to be implemented between character movements and written text, and so on. Analyzing actual practices will help understand how these synchronization constraints affect video games and to what extent their importance is acknowledged in the medium.

Sioli et al. (2007) list four types of speech recording for multimedia products (wild, time-constrained, sound-synch and lip-synch recording), which can be chosen depending on whether any speaking characters are visible and whether the duration of the audio must be synchronized with events on screen. Still, even when the characters who are speaking appear on screen, synchronization in games can take multiple forms. Bearing in mind that, in games, the problem of synchronizing speech with visual/textual elements is present in both the original and the target languages, the definition of synchronization suggested by Chaume (2004: 43) can constitute a good starting point for analysing games that feature voice acting. In Chaume’s words,

> Synchronization is one of the features of translation for dubbing, which consists of matching the target language translation and the articulatory and body movements of the screen actors and actresses, as well as matching the utterances and pauses in the translation and those of the source text.

The definition covers three fundamental types of synchronization which have been addressed as relevant in the literature: phonetic or lip synchrony, kinetic or body movement synchrony, and isochrony, or synchrony between utterances and pauses. With reference to these types of synchronization, the following three categories illustrate how the specific ways games are voiced in the original language vary greatly, with a variety of techniques that parallels what I observed when discussing subtitles in section 3.2:

1) Spoken dialogue, no lip-sync

When dialogues are voiced, lip-syncing in the source language may or may not be present, depending on stylistic choices, technical constraints or financial concerns. *Metal Gear Solid* (1998) well represents this category. In the game, the use of 3D polygonal graphics allowed for a cinematic direction that contributed to its success, gaining it praise for how it 'truly felt like a movie' (IGN, 2005). And, indeed, compared to that of its contemporaries, the game's 3D was spectacular. However, the hardware of the Sony Playstation system, for which the game was initially developed, could only handle a limited number of 3D objects at the same time. As a result, while 2D graphics would have allowed for facial animations, the characters' 3D polygonal models were still quite rudimentary, with faces 'pasted' over their heads: the game featured quality voice acting, but the characters' lips and eyes did not move, something that was clearly visible in close-ups and detracted from the game's overall appearance.

Twelve years later, in 2010, another game in the series, *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker* was published for the PSP, a portable Playstation system produced by Sony that was more powerful than the old Playstation. However, the game still did not feature lip-sync during spoken dialogues: while most playable parts of the game displayed 3D graphics, the cutscenes were realized in the form of animated comics, where kinetic synchrony without lip-synching appeared less incongruous.

2) Spoken dialogue, partial sync

Another popular option is to have the characters move their mouths while they speak, without an exact correspondence between the lip movements and the sounds they are supposed to be producing. In this case, isochrony becomes the most relevant aspect of synchronization, as the character's animation should start and end in order to match the speech. This way of representing speech (seen, for example in *The Whispered World*, 2009) has lower technical requirements than full lip-sync; therefore, it can be used in games that run on less advanced systems or that do not employ advanced graphics. It is also less time-consuming to implement and, even if the game is later dubbed, it does not impose heavy constraints on its localization, as the translation does not have to deal with phonetic synchrony to reflect the different lip movements in the different languages.[23]

3) Spoken dialogue, full lip-sync

With full lip-sync, the characters' facial animations aim at a concordance between lip movements and sounds. Of course, different games can pursue this objective more or less actively and can be more or less successful in reaching it; hence, the boundaries between the second and third categories are often blurred.

These three categories do not exhaust all possibilities, as the same game can contain a mix of different techniques. *Virtue's Last Reward* (2012), a game developed for both *Nintendo 3DS* and *PS Vita*, has voiceover for the *Vita* version and not on the *3DS*. Moreover, partial lip-sync is only present during certain dialogues, while in other dialogues characters only move their bodies. Finally, NPCs are voiced but not the main character; this makes it difficult for players who do not want to read the subtitles to do so, as they still need to look at the bottom of the screen each time their character speaks.

[23] If the game also has interlingual or intralingual subtitles, cases (1) and (2) still require that subtitles be synchronized with audio and visuals. The issue is further discussed in subsection 3.5.2.

Leaving aside the ever important technical and financial constraints, games that aim at realistic looking speech are usually those where story and characterization play a bigger role. Several games feature excellent lip-sync: *Mass Effect 3* (2012), *Final Fantasy XIII* (2009), *Red Dead Redemption* (2010), *L.A. Noire* (2011) are all titles that do not shy away from close-ups of the characters during dialogues, as the quality of their lip-sync is good enough not to hinder the realism of the graphics and the resulting player involvement.

Here, too, the central role of the player has relevant implications. Although technological advances can make video games look increasingly similar to movies, the aesthetic similarity does not always mean that the issues arising from the translation of the two media are becoming closer.

L.A. Noire, for example, was developed with an innovative technology that allowed to capture and reproduce the facial expressions of the actors in an especially realistic way. The lifelike animations are the basis for one of the key features of the game: the player, who takes on the role of a police detective, has to interrogate several crime suspects and be able to tell if someone is lying or telling the truth. As the localized versions of the game keep the original soundtrack and add subtitles in the target languages, detecting lies can be harder in the translated versions. While Bannon (2009: 67) points out how ideally, in a movie, 'If the character is lying well, the subtitle must give nothing away', the opposite is also true: if certain details in what the character says and how he says it point to him being a liar, this should be reflected in the translation. However, conveying this in a subtitle can be difficult. In addition, if the clues are in the images (e.g. in the facial animations), the subtitles distract from the scene. Although the same problems could arise when translating a movie, the inability to find an acceptable solution in the game might result in the player being denied access to the rest of the content. Therefore, on one hand, increasingly realistic lip-sync and animation bring some games closer to movies; on the other hand, when this provides the basis for gameplay elements, it can create problems during the translation.

Naturally, as lip-sync gets more detailed and realistic, its constraints on localization get more stringent and increasingly similar to those that characterize film dubbing. When a game is re-voiced into a different language, having to deal with locked movements of the lips may result in the voice actors making awkward pauses or having to unnaturally accelerate the pace of their speech. While in film this problem is mostly dealt with by translators and script adapters, who take into account the original lip movements when rendering the dialogues in the target language, sometimes in video games the visuals are remade during the translation process and animations are modified in order to fit the lip-syncing and avoid these issues. *Tales of Vesperia* (2008) and *Final Fantasy XIII*, for example, underwent this treatment when they were localized from Japanese into English for the American market. Furthermore, the fact that lip-synching can be automated can have even more notable consequences for the translation process. In *Half-Life 2* (2004), the developers included a phoneme editor which infers the phonetic structure of the spoken lines using the script and the recorded sound and automatically produces facial animations.[24]

However, not all methods employed to reproduce facial animations allow to shift from a language to another as easily or as cheaply. When a game uses three-dimensional characters made of polygonal models (capable of more or less detailed animations depending on the number of polygons used), a common technique for replicating human movements is motion-capture. With this method, adding lip-sync to the game separately for different languages would require shooting many sequences from scratch; still, it is feasible, and a lot of effort was put into this process for the game *Devil May Cry 4* (2008).

Although all these techniques bear consequences for the translation process, there are situations where synchronization of speech and facial movements can be a

[24] The game engine, called *Source Engine*, was made available for the public together with the game. This practice is not uncommon for PC games: users can build their own 'modules', additional game content that can be played with and distributed to others, something that can give rise to huge communities of 'modders'. With the Source Engine, users have access to the in-built phoneme editor, which allows them to realize facial animations for their own expansions of the game using a feature called *Faceposer*. This way, anyone can create extra spoken content for the game with good lip-sync, in any language based on the Latin alphabet.

very loose constraint, both in the original and in the target language. Delabastita (1989: 203) points out how even in film dubbing the stringency of this type of synchronization constraint is sometimes exaggerated, as its actual strength depends on the type of film and on 'the angle and distance of the camera and the general visibility conditions in each individual scene to be translated'; a statement that can be said to be true also for the video game medium.

In addition, since many titles are only partially voiced, these issues can be limited to very specific sections of a game. Movies are either silent or voiced and, if a movie resorts to both features, the device itself is usually a plot element or has some other kind of narrative or artistic significance. It is the case, for instance, of the 2011 movie *The Artist*: as it tells the story of a movie star from the 1920s whose career is threatened by the advent of the talkies, it is shot in the style of old silent movies, with intertitles to accompany the 'silent' dialogue, and it only contains a few lines of spoken dialogue at the end.

In games, combining speech and other forms of verbal communication (e.g. intralingual 'subtitles') is still more common than having voices for all the dialogue. In fact, if we look at some of the most popular games of the last decade, we immediately notice that this is still another area characterized by considerable variety.

While some games (e.g. *Kingdom Hearts*, 2002) only feature speech in cutscenes, others, such as the *Professor Layton* series (2007-2014) have voices both in the cutscenes and in other dialogues that are deemed particularly relevant for the plot. At times, voices are only provided for the main characters; a town vendor, whose only role is to trade with the player, might be voiceless or might only be allowed a quick 'Hello' (as is the case in *Xenoblade Chronicles*, 2010). In other games, most characters speak - sometimes even of their own accord. Visiting a town square in *Fable 2* (2008), the player might hear little kids playing, stalls vendors advertising their merchandise, a man talking to himself while going about his business, and so on. While this should make the scene more realistic, it may also generate confusion if several NPCs decide to voice their thoughts at the same time while the player is talking to a different character. In this respect, it is striking how in

Fable 2 all the characters are voiced except for the one controlled by the player. As voices contribute strongly to characterization, this feature finds both a narrative and ludic *raison d'etre* when it is used in games (usually RPGs) such as *Fallout 3* and *Dragon Age: Origins*, where each player can create their own main character by choosing a number of characteristics, which include physical traits, abilities and skills. As these games put a lot of emphasis on customization, forcing the main character to speak in a specific voice would lessen the illusion for the player of freely choosing the 'role' to play. On a related note, another distinctive trait of video games is that sometimes player customization extends to characters' voices. Although *Dragon Age*'s main character is not voiced in dialogues, he or she has a limited set of phrases that are spoken during battles. When creating their character, players can choose a type of voice among several options (e.g. 'wise' or 'violent'); also, as they can create either a male or a female character, two versions are available for each voice. This type of choice, which shows how customization can affect both the audiovisual content of a video game and the effort that must be put into its localization, is not exclusive to recent games. Already in 1993, when speech in games was much rarer, *Rebel Assault* (1993) gave players the possibility to choose their character's sex and included two sets of dialogues, recorded by a male and a female voice actor.

Voices can also be limited to certain occurrences. Famous video game characters' voices have become well-known to players everywhere thanks to just a few spoken words or exclamations, like Super Mario's iconic *mamma mia!* In *Soul Calibur* (1998), a so called *beat*'*em*'*up* where the purpose of the game is to defeat a series of opponents in one-on-one matches, characters have catchphrases that they pronounce whenever the player performs a specific action. In this context, voicing them has multiple functions. First, the type of voice chosen for the character helps characterizing him or her, in a genre where dialogues do not usually have a lot of space. Moreover, it facilitates gameplay, as it helps the player figure out whether his move hit the opponent or not, even in especially chaotic moments, without having to read written messages or look at different

parts of the screen (to check, for example, if the 'health meter' of his opponent has gone down).[25]

Characterization can even be achieved through 'gibberish speech'. In fact, that a certain video game character has a voice does not necessarily imply that what he or she says has any meaning. In an article called 'Stop making sense! A tribute to video game gibberish', Holmes (2009: online) argues that not every game in every genre would be better with human voices, and points out how:

> video games shouldn't always talk. [...] Videogame characters are most often made out of hand-drawn sprites and/or polygons. Where do they get off trying to talk like people? Do they really think they're going to convince me that they are 'real boys' (and girls)? More so, do they really think that's what I want them to be?

Even if we focus on games featuring gibberish speech, we find a rather heterogeneous mix of techniques. While some games, such as *Gobliiins 3* (1991), have characters that talk 'pure' gibberish (e.g. for humorous purposes), in other titles speech displayed as written text in a real language is only voiced as gibberish. It is the case, presented in Figure 10, of *Starfox* (1993); in the image, representative of how characters speak in the game, the line 'Hey!! Don't be so g-g-greedy!!' spoken by Slippy, an anthropomorphic frog, is voiced with a sort of croaking gibberish.

Figure 10. Text voiced as gibberish in *Starfox* (copyright 1993 Nintendo of America Inc.)

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[25] These issues, arising from the semiotic nature of video games, are further explored in section 3.6.

The different techniques have different implications for localization. When what is said makes absolutely no sense and is not subtitled, these dialogues can remain untouched during the translation process. At times, however, the random, nonexistent words and sounds are interspersed with real words, or words that sound very similar to existing ones, which can make translation problematic.

Figure 11. English text voiced as 'Ubbi Dubbi' in *Rayman Origins* (copyright 2011 Ubisoft Entertainment)

In *Rayman Origins* (2011), the characters speak a mix of English and various word games. The 'Bubble Dreamer' – the levitating, bearded creature appearing in Figure 11 – speaks *Ubbi Dubbi*, a language game played in the US that consists in adding -*ub*- [/ˈʌb/] before each vowel sound in every word. Hence, in the original English game, the sentence 'Sorry, that's all I can remember!' is read as 'Suborruby, thubat's uball ubi cuban rubemubembuber!' Figure 12 provides a different example from the same game. The nymph who says 'That was a nightmare... Thanks!' speaks *Pig Latin*, which means that she actually says 'Atthay asay away ightmarenay... Anksthay!'. Other characters use variations of English that do not necessarily follow such precise rules.

Someone playing the original version might easily recognize the word games, or at least spot the similarities between the characters' words and the English written

text. However, as only the written elements have been translated in the localized FIGS versions, the text in the target languages does not help players to notice the similarities between the fake spoken language and the original English. Depending on their familiarity with the English language, foreign players might think that the characters speak English or simply gibberish; they might even identify the speech patterns, but these will still be lost in the target language subtitles.

Figure 12. English text voiced as 'Pig Latin' in *Rayman Origins* (copyright 2011 Ubisoft Entertainment)

Finally, an invented language can be spoken. Sometimes, this invented language has no meaning, its only purpose being to provide a unique flavour to the game, as in *LocoRoco* (2006), for which more than 50 songs were written in the fictional language spoken by the characters. Other times, though, the device has a precise gameplay-related function. O'Hagan (2009a) notices how in the game *Ico* (2001) an invented language is used to represent the fact that the main character cannot communicate with his companion through words, as the two speak different (invented) languages. For this reason, the main character's speech is subtitled in Japanese – replaced by English in the English version –, while his companion's is subtitled with strange symbols. It is interesting to note that, if the player completes the game and then starts again from the beginning of the story, both characters' speech is subtitled in English, as if they now had a deeper connection,

even though at the start of the new game they are not supposed to know each other yet.

From the sample of cases just analyzed, which stakes no claim to be an exhaustive survey of all the forms that spoken content can take in video games, it should be clear that rendering a game that contains spoken text into a different language cannot be but a multifaceted task. If it is true that when talking about film translation the term 'synchronization' should not be used as a synonym for dubbing, because considering the two processes as essentially the same thing would be an oversimplification, the same caveat is valid, and all the more so, for video games. Even the terms 'dubbing' and 'voiceover' should not be automatically intended with the same connotations as in filmic media. For a start, the choice of translation strategies can be influenced by the fact that re-voicing a game often means dubbing the parts of a game that are voiced. In such cases, when rendering an element for dubbing or subtitling, translators should take into account that the same element might appear both as a spoken element and as a written element in different parts of the game. If, for example, the name of a fictional place appears as written text in English, its translation will have to adhere to constraints such as limitations on the number of characters. However, if the same name also features in a spoken dialogue in close-up, translators should be made aware of this, as the translated name might also have to take into account lip-synching constraints.

This vast array of approaches gives rise to a number of issues in the synchronization between spoken text and visuals, both in the case of the original game and in the case of the actual translation. Moreover, in the majority of cases, voiced dialogues are also accompanied by some form of written text in the original, which adds another dimension to an already complex landscape.

3.5.2 Written content

As is to be expected, the complex and multiform relationship between all channels used for verbal communication also affects the modes of synchronization between

the written medium and the visual and audio channels. In filmic media, spotting – determining the exact moment when a subtitle should appear on the screen and the moment it should disappear – is one of the main tasks that must be performed in the subtitling process. Ideally, it should be carried out by an experienced translator (Díaz-Cintas and Remael, 2007), as it can easily affect the quality of the final product. A subtitle should not appear before the character starts to speak and it should not remain on the screen for too long after the character has ceased to speak, as this would unnecessarily draw the attention of the viewers on the lower part of the screen and will jeopardise synchrony between soundtrack and written text. A good subtitle should remain on the screen for the time necessary to be read by the audience, which ideally would cover the duration of the lines spoken. This is, of course, a utopian scenario, as the acting speed rarely matches the viewers' reading speed, which in turn is determined by a number of factors that depend on the specific viewer, on the content that is subtitled and on the subtitle itself (Díaz-Cintas and Remael, ibid.; Carroll, 2004).

In certain cases, however, the heavy influence players have on video game content can make subtitling them easier. While movie viewers 'are not in charge of their pace of reading' (Gottlieb, 2001: 47), a video game audience often is. As pointed out by Darolle (2004), players can sometimes affect the pace at which lines of text follow one another, as one will remain on screen until they choose to move the scene – and the text – forward. Mangiron and O'Hagan (2006) highlight the fact that players are often given the chance to pause and restart game and subtitles during play.

Players also have other ways to influence the subtitle speed, for example by accelerating them or skipping them altogether (Mangiron, 2012). In many games, subtitles appear gradually, following the speech of the characters – a practice other media usually reserve for special types of subtitles, e.g. for karaoke; when this is the case, players are usually able to make them appear instantly and, as soon as they are on screen, move on to the following line.

While in games without detailed animations or spoken dialogue it seems natural for the pace of on-screen text to follow a player's reading speed, the persistence of

text on screen can often be controlled even in games where this means abruptly cutting speech, animations and lip-synching. It happens, for example, in *Xenoblade Chronicles* (2010): during some of the dialogues, a small icon representing the controller's 'A' button appears beside the subtitle, to indicate that the next line will appear when the player presses 'A'. *Xenoblade Chronicles* contains dialogues that are voiced (both in the original Japanese and in the dubbed English version), others that are only lip-synched and others that are simply accompanied by generic animations; while some display subtitles in the lower part of the screen, some of the non-voiced conversations use speech balloons in the style of comics. All these types of subtitles can be accelerated in the way just described, even when this abruptly interrupts voiced lines. This will usually render the characters' animation slightly out of sync, as they will keep on moving the lips for about a second after their speech is cut.

By moving forward from one line to another as soon as each of them appears, whole dialogues can be skipped. Just like playing a game with the sound off can be easier to justify than watching a movie with the sound off, the possibility of skipping dialogue is linked to the nature of video games. While the importance of dialogues depends, to a certain extent, on the type of game and on choices made by the developers, players subjectively attach different importance to different elements of a game according to their taste. This is another manifestation of the adaptive nature of games: a player who is more interested in the story will choose to talk to as many characters as possible and will listen attentively to all the dialogues; someone who has a preference for action sequences will be free to skip them. Depending on the specific title, not listening to a dialogue might have more or less severe consequences on the ability to progress in a game.

The ability to skip or accelerate the dialogues and other elements of text has another justification in the 'replayability' of games. Games offer several reasons to start again from the beginning after seeing the main story (for example, to complete the game by exploring 100% of the locations, collecting all the weapons or defeating all the enemies, or in general doing all that was not necessary to get to the end). It is common to play a game (or part of it) more than once and, after the first 'playthrough', players might want to skip scripted dialogues, cutscenes or

tutorials they have already seen. The story can also branch in different directions depending on players' choices; therefore, when replaying a game, it is possible to encounter a mix of new and old scenes, the latter of which can be skipped. Finally, as pointed out in section 2.2, players often need to repeat particular sequences before they are able to get past them; if these sequences include textual elements, they might want to skip some or all of the familiar text.

3.6 The features of text reduction and condensation in video games

Another aspect in which games differ from other audiovisual media is the relationship between what is said and what the user reads on the screen. While subtitles in filmic media are usually a shorter version of what is said through the audio channel, this is not always the case in games. Furthermore, rules for 'subtitles' in games are not as widely followed as those for subtitles in film. This section investigates these issues, focusing on the peculiar types of text reduction and condensation to be found in games.

3.6.1 Reduction in games: general considerations

In her study of subtitling in games, Mangiron (2012) highlights the fact that certain game developers, like Sony and Microsoft, request intralingual subtitles to reproduce everything that is said and, even when this is not the case, subtitles are usually only a little shorter than a verbatim transcription. However, she also notes how interactivity can mitigate the negative consequences of having subtitles that would normally be too fast to read. In fact, far from being simply a formal difference, the possibility of influencing when lines of text appear and how long they stay on the screen affects several of the space and time constraints that characterize subtitling in other audiovisual media. Conventions such as the 'six-second rule' or the maximum number of characters per line, which are most relevant in TV, DVD and cinema subtitles (Díaz-Cintas and Remael, 2007) lose

some of their importance in a game where dialogues are not voiced and the player can decide when to move on to the next line: if a subtitle disappears only when the player chooses to move on with the text, the limitations to the amount of text each subtitle can contain will be less strict than they would be in a movie. Similarly, if subtitling reading speeds can be considered higher in DVDs than, for example, traditional TV, as a DVD can be paused and rewound (ibid.: 96), the same considerations apply, and to a greater extent, to a video game where players are entirely in charge of the dialogue pace.

Furthermore, giving rise to a situation where the term 'subtitle' is used in an even looser sense, subtitles in games can come before the line is spoken, throwing in disarray the concept of accurate synchronization when spotting. This is not a rare occurrence, being the standard case in multiple choice dialogues, as already illustrated in several examples.

This feature can have, on the relationship between subtitles and speech, peculiar consequences that are not always desirable. In an audiovisual medium, it is reasonable to view speech as the main channel for verbal communication, with subtitles playing a secondary role, providing aid when voices and sounds alone cannot fully realize their function: it is the case of subtitles for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, of interlingual subtitles or, in games, of 'subtitles' for dialogues that are not voiced. Having the written text appear before the speech is uttered reverses, in a way, this order of importance, as the player reads the line before hearing it. This can be especially harmful for lines that are intended to be funny, as timing and delivery are two fundamental factors in achieving a humorous effect: even if the characters are voiced by talented comedy actors, making players laugh will be harder if they already know what is coming.

One possible solution is to have voices for all the characters except for the one controlled by the player – an approach adopted by several RPGs, as we saw in section 3.5. But different games have different ways of dealing with these situations. While in some of them (e.g. *Day of the Tentacle*, 1993, or *The Curse of Monkey Island*, 1997) the lines players choose are read exactly as they appear in the text, there are cases where some form of reduction takes place. The

conversation options might be condensed into just a few words or names, each representing a possible topic. In *Broken Sword* (1996), the conversation topics are represented by a series of icons: the player chooses one and then listens to the actual sentence spoken by his character.

At this point, it is important to specify that in this discussion I will be using the term ‘reduction’ in a broad sense, indicating both a phenomenon that characterizes all forms of subtitling and other types of reduction that occur in video games.

As one of the most common features of subtitling, text reduction has received considerable attention in the literature. Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007: 146) list three main reasons why reduction is often necessary: ‘1) viewers/listeners can absorb speech more quickly than they can read [...], 2) viewers must also watch the action on screen and listen to the soundtrack, [and] 3) subtitles are limited to a maximum of two lines’. Then, they identify two types of reduction, which are often combined: total reduction, achieved through omission of lexical items, and partial reduction, achieved through condensing and making the TT more concise. Translators have many different ways to do this rewriting, e.g. by turning compound sentences into simple sentences and compound tenses into simple tenses, by merging phrases and sentences or by omitting terms.

It is clear, then, that the reduction described above in reference to conversation choices in games, where the spoken line follows the condensed version presented to the player, can only be regarded as the same phenomenon if we give the term a much broader meaning. In order to classify under the same label the case of *Broken Sword*, where the only hint to what line will be spoken is an icon, we need to consider it a very extreme case, where dialogue is ‘condensed’ into a graphical element. Nevertheless, although there are different forms or text reduction, which serve various purposes, it can be argued that they all have a unifying trait in the concept of ‘relevance’ as a guiding criterion for their application.

The *relevance theory* was first devised by Sperber and Wilson (1986) as an attempt to outline an inferential model of communication, in which a rational hearer can formulate expectations of relevance regarding any utterance made by a

speaker; if the speaker is also rational, the receiver's expectations will prove correct, which will allow him or her to infer the meaning of the utterance. In Sperber and Wilson's theory, an input is relevant if it produces a worthwhile difference to the individual's representation of the world – for example, a contextual implication, i.e. 'a conclusion deducible from the input and the context together, but from neither input nor context alone' (Wilson and Sperber, 2002: 251). Gutt (1991) applied the theory to translation, arguing that translators aim at conveying in the target language a message that produces a contextual implication for the hearer that is as similar as possible to the original; this only happens if a translation follows the principle of relevance. For the purposes of this discussion, Kovačič's (1994) application of the theory to subtitles can provide us with a more precise idea of what relevance implies for audiovisual translation and, in particular, for text reduction. By analysing a sample of English-Slovene subtitles, she finds confirmation of the relevance principle as defined by Sperber and Wilson, in that the translations usually try to balance the importance any information contained in a subtitle has for understanding the whole film (the 'context') and the effort necessary to process it (ibid.).

In light of these considerations, when a game provides the player with 'condensed' dialogue options, each of them should be the outcome of a delicate balancing act performed by the writers (in the SL) or the translators (in the TL) in order to maximize the relevant information in the text and minimize the player's effort. However, taking this trade-off into account is not always easy, so that an obvious drawback of this technique is that, at times, the choice becomes almost blind: if the balance is not met, the player might have no clue as to what the exact sentence will be or how the character will phrase it. The solution adopted in *Dragon Age II* and described in section 2.5, where an icon is used to suggest the tone of each option, is a way of addressing this problem.

On the other hand, the choice of the amount of text players have to read may reflect the developers' intention of targeting a game at a particular audience: players who are interested in the narrative aspect of a game may prefer being able to choose the exact sentence they want to say, even if they have to listen to it again when it is subsequently spoken by their character.

Whatever the reason to choose a particular approach, each of them can create specific issues during the localization process. The two dialogue exchanges presented in Table 4, taken from the 2007 game *Mass Effect*, illustrate how this type of reduction in video games may differ from the case of traditional subtitling. The first column displays a sentence spoken by a non-player-character during a conversation; the second column contains the possible replies players can choose from, while the third column shows the actual line that is spoken by the player's character when each option is selected.

Line spoken by NPC	**Condensed replies available to the player**	**Actual line spoken by the player's character**
Ripped through his shields. Never had a chance.	He deserves a burial.	We'll see that he receives a proper service once the mission is complete. But I need you to stay focused.
	We can't help him now.	Sometimes marines die. The rest of us just have to carry on. We still have to find that beacon.
	Forget about him.	Leave him. We need to finish the mission.
Nihlus will scout out ahead. He'll feed you status reports throughout the mission; otherwise, I want radio silence.	He can count on us.	We've got his back, Captain.
	Understood, Captain.	Ready and able, sir.
	Can we trust him?	I don't like putting my life in the hands of a turian, sir.

Table 6. Examples of condensation in *Mass Effect* (2007)

In these examples, minimizing the processing effort appears to have been a major concern for the writers; also, most lines were subject to heavy rewriting. Both choices were probably made in order to avoid unnecessary repetitions, as the player will listen to the extended sentence after having read the condensed version. In cases such as this, though, the consequences of an extreme condensation, either in the original language or in the translation (or in both), are immediately visible: the player chooses a dialogue option, but the extended version spoken by the character might not correspond exactly to what the player wanted to say and this may steer the plot in a different direction than the one intended by the player. For example, since the main character is human and the

turians are an alien race, if the player chooses the last option in the second excerpt ('Can we trust him?'), the actual line will contain a racist undertone that was not clear from the selected condensed version. This shows how text reduction in video games can be an especially delicate issue.

As observed above, this kind of 'reduction' is of a different type and has a different function than the text reduction normally performed in audiovisual subtitling; still, when games get closer to movies, e.g. when they are voiced and subtitled either in the SL or TL, reduction in a more canonical sense is not uncommon. However, besides being dictated by different space and time constraints (as mentioned at the beginning of this section), it also acquires peculiar features due to the nature of the medium.

Delabastita (1989: 201) points out how:

> A film is an organized whole or 'text', the various component signs of which enter into complex sets of relations. By the same token, any translation that is performed on a single source film sequence affects the whole of the text structure, and imposes a set of constraints on the translator where other sequences have to be translated.

As an example, he observes how a scene that has been cut in the translated version of a movie may force the translator to compensate for lost dialogues by inserting additional information in other scenes or to apply further reductions to avoid confusing the viewer. However, the translator can also cut information that is repeated in several dialogues if such repetitions do not have a specific function in the text and if these reductions can free space for other relevant information.

In games, translators have to be particularly careful if they want to make similar reductions. As many dialogues and scripted sequences are event-based – the player triggers them by performing a particular action, e.g. entering a location or choosing to speak to a NPC – the actual 'text' among several possible realizations will depend on the choices made by the player, who gets to see only a fraction of all the text contained in the game.

In addition, missing a bit of dialogue can have severe consequences on the players, who later in the game might be required to use the information it contained. This is the reason why, in many games, relevant information gathered through dialogues automatically ends up in a journal or diary that players can consult at any moment. Ideally, the translators should always be given the means to identify these important bits, especially when, as it is often the case, they cannot play the game and only receive disconnected segments of text, known as strings, to translate.

Again, and not surprisingly, differences with other media stem from the interactive nature of video games. The following section further expands on this point, discussing how the central role of the player combines with the multimodal nature of games.

3.6.2 Reduction and the multimodal nature of games

In discussing cinema subtitling, Bogucki (2004: 31) stresses how 'the textual notion of coherence does not apply to subtitles unless they are seen in combination with the other semiotic channels'. The same can be said for voiceover in games: what is said should be considered in conjunction with the information that comes from the non-verbal audio channel (music and sound effects) and the visual channels, both verbal (e.g. written signs) and nonverbal (images). In video games, textual coherence often requires consideration of an additional element: the player's actions. The in-game text may contain a line such as 'it does not seem to open', which only makes sense when seen in combination with the action that triggers it – for example, the player is trying to open a locked door. This is why the lack of sufficient context can be particularly problematic for video game translators. When translating a line for a movie, seeing the whole scene or reading the previous lines of dialogue helps to interpret it correctly. If the same line appears in a game, it may be triggered every time the player performs a specific action throughout the game (e.g. every time the player tries to open something that is locked), in which case there might not be a single translation that works every time. Therefore, if players' actions contribute to the narrative,

seeing a dialogue in context might not be enough to be able to translate it correctly, as it might also be necessary to know what 'triggers' it.

Nevertheless, when lack of context is not an issue, the multimodal nature of video games can widen the choice of available reduction strategies. As multimodal texts use various semiotic vehicles (e.g. images, sound, language) to create a message, translators might be able to assign a different importance to each of them in the target language, if they believe this can help to better convey the original meaning.

Adapting a methodological approach applied by Thibault (2000) to the analysis of a television advertisement, Taylor (2003) stresses the potentiality of multimodal transcription for audiovisual translation. In particular, he argues that it can be used to identify how different semiotic modalities combine to create a certain message, thus helping translators to devise appropriate strategies to convey the meaning in the translated text.

In discussing film subtitling, Chuang (2006: 85) argues that a movie translator

> can distribute meanings to all the semiotic modes. [...] when the translator chooses not to render some meanings of the dialogues in the subtitles, he/she may distribute certain meanings in the visual modes (such as the moving images), or in the audio modes (music or sound effects), if the translator perceives the representation of a subtitled film as an integrated entity.

In this view, 'the equivalence relation between ST and TT is very complex because it does not deal with one-to-one modal translation, i.e. from dialogues into subtitles, but with multi-modal translation from all the involved modes to all the involved modes in the TT' (ibid.).

While such redistribution of meaning in the subtitling of a movie is an interesting theoretical possibility, translators can, as a norm, only modify the dialogue; hence, their wiggle room in this respect is very limited, as they can only affect the relative importance of the other modes by operating on the verbal channel.

However, these considerations are valid for other media, such as comics and, to an even greater extent, video games, where the visuals are sometimes altered in the transition from source to target language (O'Hagan, 2005; Di Marco, 2007).

Kaindl (2004) draws attention to the multimodal features of humor in comics and on their consequences for translation, showing how verbal humor in the original is sometimes rendered with plays on signs that depend on multimodal combination. In games, multimodality can acquire further layers: in addition to the canonical codes of audiovisual programs – images and sound – games can use the controller devices to transmit physical stimuli to the player; in particular, modern controllers feature a feedback mechanism which causes the controller to vibrate in response to certain events that happen on screen. Using this mechanism, the controller can vibrate with varying intensity if, for example, the player hits an obstacle while driving a car, if there is an explosion, or in any other instances where this might enhance the player's immersion in the game. While the history of cinema provides a few examples of attempts at adding communication channels other than sound and images, none of these attempts has ever been successful.[26] In games, on the contrary, haptic feedback, and vibration feedback in particular, have become a regular feature since the release of the Nintendo *Rumble Pak* in 1997.

It is easy to think of instances where the presence of an additional channel could prove a valuable resource for translators. In a space fight, the player's vehicle taking a hit could be represented through visual cues (e.g. the image shaking briefly), sounds (e.g. sound effects or a character saying 'We have been hit!') or a sudden vibration of the controller. If the scene contains a large amount of speech to be translated and subtitled, the translator might choose to omit the voiced comment in the subtitles, relying on the fact that 'in a polysemiotic context, semantic voids are often intersemiotically filled' (Gottlieb, 2005: 21).

[26] One of them is the *Smell-O-Vision* mentioned by Delabastita (1989: 196), a system used in 1960 in the movie *Scent of Mistery* which allowed cinema audiences to experience different smells in connection to particular scenes or characters of the movie. The system did not prove popular and was not used again, although it gained enough notoriety to place in the 2000 *Time* reader survey of 'Top 100 Worst Ideas of All Time'.

On the other hand, the polysemiotic quality of video games can also limit the pool of feasible reduction strategies. Mangiron (2012) notes how interactivity should be taken into account when creating a subtitled game, as some information provided through subtitles is likely to be missed when the player is engaged in another task – e.g. fighting, as in *Assassin's Creed* (2007) a game she mentions in which the main character is required to fight and listen to explanations on the background story at the same time. In action-packed moments, the sizeable amount of material coming through the non-verbal visual channel will further lower the reading speed, as noted by Pedersen (2011: 20) for television. This is especially true when the player does not only watch such action-packed scenes, but takes active part in them: his attention will be focused both on the picture and on which commands to input, a decision that often must be taken in a very short lapse of time.

An example will help clarify this issue. In many games, characters have a set of sentences they pronounce during combat sequences depending on how the fight is going, in order to inform players and help them take the necessary actions promptly. In *Xenoblade Chronicles* (2010), as in many Japanese RPGs, the player controls a party of three characters. Battles against several enemies take place in real time, and players have to constantly keep an eye on lots of different elements, checking the progress of the battle, ordering each character to attack, heal or defend their companions, etc.

Figure 12, taken from the German localized version of the game, captures one of these especially intense moments during a fight:

Figure 13. An especially intense moment of gameplay from *Xenoblade Chronicles* (copyright 2011 Nintendo)

A considerable amount of information is displayed on the screen. The icons in the lower section, for example, represent possible actions that the player can choose at that specific moment; each of them can be highlighted so that a line of text will appear in the space below to explain its effect. The 'status' of the characters controlled by the player – their health, experience level and other characteristics – is shown in the left part of the screen. Each character's health meter is also displayed above his or her head. An icon representing a button ('b') on the game controller indicates that pressing that button will 'warn Sharla' ('Sharla warnen' in the German text) against an imminent danger she is facing and allow her to react. On top of everything else, numbers indicating the damage dealt to the enemy (the number '2810' displayed in grey) or the health gained by a certain character (the '93' displayed in green') appear briefly to show the results of the player's actions.

When a character's life meter drops below a certain level, he or she will say 'I'm not doing too well' or make similar comments; in the situation depicted in Figure 13, it will probably be the character Sharla, whose life points (960/3840) are dangerously low. If the player had not realized that one of his characters needed healing, because his attention was focused on something else, these utterances will make him aware of that.

In this situation, subtitling the character's comment in German would add still another element for the player to keep an eye on. Hence, these comments are omitted in subtitles, even though German subtitles are provided for all other spoken dialogue: while the purpose of the comment is to help players to keep everything under control, adding further lines of text would arguably have the opposite effect. Still, omission such as this one would make the game more difficult for hard of hearing players, as highlighted in 3.4 for certain types of subtitles for sound effects.

As many of the peculiar features mentioned up to this point originate from, or are affected, to some degree, by the interactive nature of games, Newman's (2002) distinction between Off-Line and On-Line engagement constitutes a useful reference point for our discussion. When dealing with reduction issues, translators should take into account the level of participation that is required from the player; furthermore, as pointed out in section 2.2, Off-Line and On-Line engagement are only the extremes of a continuum of cases, and different sequences of the same game will normally require different levels of engagement. Therefore, while the guidelines for translating subtitles for a cutscene might not be very different from those that should be followed when translating a movie scene, an increase in the level of participation from the player might indeed require different rules: a cutscene interspersed with Quick Time Events, for example, would call for higher reduction levels and a longer persistence of subtitles on the screen.

Video games are characterized by an uncommon variety in form and content that sets them apart from other audiovisual media. As this chapter showed, such variety is reflected in a plethora of different ways in which content is presented to the users. Interactivity can have relevant consequences on how verbal elements make up the video game text, whose non-linearity is only one of the distinguishing traits. Even the techniques used in non-interactive cutscenes are 'similar, but not identical, to those used in AVT' (O'Hagan and Mangiron, 2013: 59). As a consequence, terms like 'dubbing', 'voiceover' or 'subtitling' cannot always be applied to video games, and any discussion which employed the established AVT terminology in reference to games should take into account if and how the type of audiovisual communication in a specific game differs from

the traditional categories. As the games I chose for my empirical analysis are graphic adventures, the next chapter further discusses the characteristic features of the genre and of each specific game in the corpus.

Chapter 4

The corpus

4.1 Introduction

A consequence of the great variety which characterizes the medium is that any textual analysis performed on video games is likely to be limited in both object and aims to a particular genre. Chapter 3 showed how the interactive nature of games is often what determines the peculiarity of both the textual elements and the forms of audiovisual communication they employ. While this is indeed a trait that is common throughout the medium, the way it manifests itself depends on the type of game and the specific title. For this reason, the analysis presented in Chapter 5 does not aim to draw universal conclusions on the translation of humor in video games as these could only be the outcome of more extensive research in the field – research that, as discussed in chapter 1, is currently almost non-existent. Given this necessary premise, and before presenting the games that make up the corpus, I will describe in section 4.2 the main characteristics of graphic adventure games, the genre being analysed in this study.

4.2 Adventure games

An adventure game can be defined as a game in which the player assumes the role of protagonist in an interactive story driven by exploration and puzzle-solving instead of physical challenge (Rollings and Adams, 2006). Three factors, then, concur to identify the genre:

(1) the player is the protagonist of an interactive story;
(2) exploration and puzzle solving are the main gameplay elements;
(3) combat is not the primary focus.

While (1) is maybe the most important of the three, there are other types of games in which the player is the protagonist of an interactive story. Similarly, there are other genres where combat is not the focus of gameplay; hence, rather than being an exclusive trait of adventures games, (3) helps defining the boundaries between these games and action-adventures. The expression 'puzzle-solving', on the other hand, has come to indicate certain recurring types of challenges that characterize the genre. In particular, players will be required to use items gathered throughout the game to decode messages, unlock doors and reach new areas to explore and, in general, advance the plot. In doing this, they will often (but not necessarily) interact with NPCs, generally through dialogue.

The 1976 game *Colossal Cave Adventure*, also known simply as *Adventure*, gave the genre its name. Initially developed for the PDP-10 computer, it was a 'text adventure': the story was presented in textual form to the player, who was able to interact with the environment by inputting one-word or two-word commands. In the words of Sharma (2008: 8), 'The history of *Colossal Cave Adventure* is important not only because it was one of the first games and the first of its kind but because of its significance to Gaming culture as we know it today'. In particular, Sharma (ibid.) points out that the game was shared for free and open to modification, a way of sharing their creations that many developers would subscribe to years later, during the internet age; moreover, he highlights the addictive nature of the game, as it spread rapidly through college campuses (university laboratories with computer infrastructures) and workplaces and people were hooked to their computers.

Text adventures proved popular in the early years of home computers. *Zork* (1980), mentioned in chapter 3 as an example of a game with a text-only interface, is one of the best-known, and spawned a number of sequels across different platforms. Fencott et al. (2012: 55), however, argue that *Zork*'s legacy went well beyond its sequels, as

> the *text adventure* game may have disappeared but the *adventure* genre continues to this day in a variety of modes, yet it is still basically the same genre as it was

> all those years ago. You can see its influence on console *action adventure* games such as The Legend of Zelda and in later day 3D games such as Thief and the whole range of *stealth* games in general.

As soon as home systems became capable of displaying rudimentary images, the first graphic adventures started to appear. Graphic adventures added visuals to the 'text parser',[27] the environment players used in text adventures to input commands and, in general, to interact with the games. As pointed out by Blackman (2013: 4),

> the graphical format spelled the end of players typing in their instructions or questions, relying instead on a short predefined list of verbs and mouse picks [...]. Gone was a large part of the charm of the early text adventures where one could type in just about anything to see if the authors had allowed for it, no matter how ridiculous or risqué.

Sierra On-line (originally *On-Line Systems*) soon established itself as one of the most successful and prolific developers in the genre. With *King's Quest: Quest for the Crown* (1984), Sierra started a series that would go on for almost 20 years; despite still featuring a text parser as its inputting device, the game also introduced innovations such as an animated avatar for the player.

In Japan, early examples of graphic adventures such as *The Portopia Serial Murder Case* (1983) paved the way for visual novels, a type of interactive fiction with static graphics and an emphasis on dialogue choices. For years, only few Japanese visual novels were localized officially into other languages. Recently, this trend has reversed and following the popularity of *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* (2001), which was localized into English and other languages, other Japanese visual novels have been commercially translated. Visual novels such as the *Ace Attorney* and *Professor Layton* series have gained an extensive following, thanks also to the success of the *Nintendo DS* console, for which most of these titles are developed. In particular, with its 15 million copies sold worldwide as of August 2013, the *Professor Layton* series is undoubtedly the biggest selling series of adventure games of the last decade.

[27] The text parser, used in text adventures, is a program which converts text inputted by a user into meaningful units that can be processed by the computer.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the popularity of visual novels was very limited outside Japan. In the Western market, graphic adventures were revolutionized by the introduction of point-and-click interfaces, which allowed the player to interact with elements on the screen using a moving cursor. The Apple Macintosh computer, with its graphical interface navigated by a mouse, provided an ideal ground for this type of interface, which ICOM Simulations used in the *MacVenture* series, a series of four games released between 1985 and 1988, namely *Déjà Vu: A Nightmare Comes True* (1985), *Uninvited* (1986), *Shadowgate* (1987) and *Déjà Vu II: Lost in Las Vegas* (1988). Figure 14 presents a moment of gameplay from *Shadowgate*:

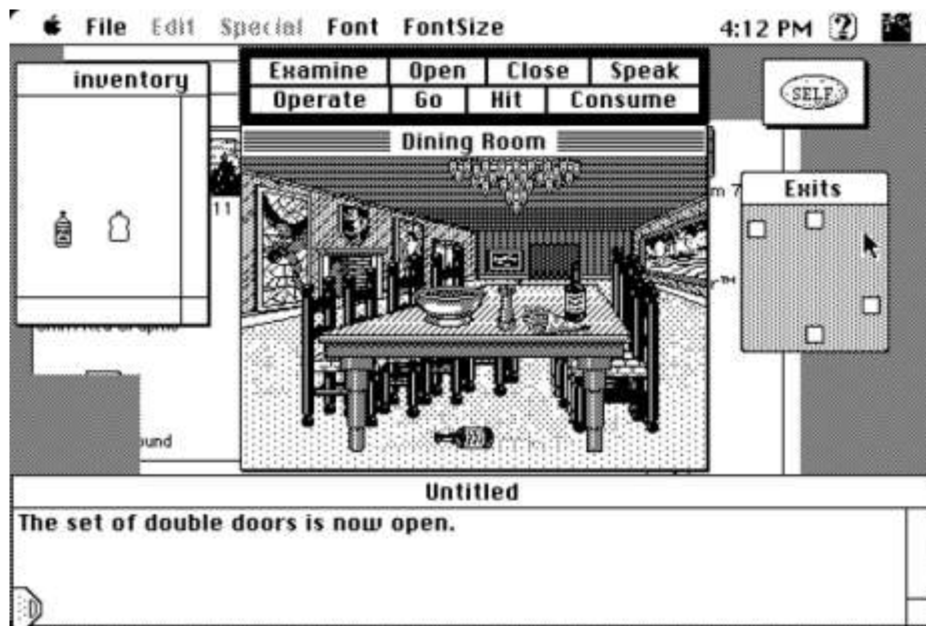

Figure 14. Screenshot from *Shadowgate* (copyright 1987 ICOM Simulations Inc.)

The action takes place in the central window, with no text parser: the player can use objects by clicking on them or dragging them, and many actions are context-sensitive, meaning that their outcome depends on the specific objects on which they are performed. For example, dragging a bottle of wine from the table to the ground will drop it there, while dragging it onto a glass will have the effect of pouring the wine into the glass. A set of commands listed in a separate window (e.g. Examine, Operate, Consume) can be used to perform other actions.

Point-and-click interfaces quickly became a standard feature in many adventure games, so much so that they defined the entire sub-genre of 'point-and-click adventures'. *Sierra On-Line* adopted this type of interface in the fifth episode of their already successful series *King's Quest*. The MacVenture interface inspired *Lucasfilm*'s SCUMM (Script Creation Utility for *Maniac Mansion*) system, first used by the company in *Maniac Mansion* (1987) and later in several other games, including some of the best loved graphic adventures of all time.

The late 1980s and early 1990s can be considered a golden age for graphic adventures (Holmes, 2012). *LucasArts* and *Sierra* battled for supremacy with a number of successful titles, but many other developers entered the field of what had arguably become one of the main game genres. Adventures like *Myst* (1993), in which players explore an almost deserted world from a first person perspective, with little or no interaction with other characters, were rare; most gave a high importance to dialogue, which contained clues, plot details and, often, humorous exchanges, as in *Broken Sword* (1996), *Simon the Sorcerer* (1993) or *Beneath a Steel Sky* (1994).

With the advent of advanced 3D graphics and online gaming, other genres (e.g. *first person shooters* and games with online multiplayer features) surpassed graphic adventures in popularity (Holmes, 2012). Titles such as *The Longest Journey* (1999) and *Grim Fandango* (1998), despite being critically acclaimed and very well received by players, were not enough to keep the interest of the public alive.

As mentioned above, the genre experienced a rebirth in the 2000s, thanks in part to the portable *Nintendo DS* console. Just like the PC mouse – an ideal device for point-and-click interfaces – contributed to the proliferation of graphic adventures during the previous two decades, the DS touchscreen played a similar role for the hugely popular Nintendo console, giving players a simple way to interact with elements on the screen by touching them with the stylus pen provided. New titles, however, were not limited to the DS. *Machinarium* (2009), originally released on PC to much critical acclaim, was later ported to OS X, Playstation 3 and PDAs. *Telltale Games* adopted a new 'episodic' format for their adventure games, which

include successful sequels of classic *LucasArts* adventures such as *Sam & Max Hit the Road* (1993) and the *Monkey Island* series. *Tales of Monkey Island* (2009), released both on PC and on a number of consoles, was a commercial success, and the episodic nature proved a good fit for the new digital markets, where players can download copies of the games onto their home systems. The first two games in the original series, *The Secret of Monkey Island* (1990) and *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge* (1991), regarded by many as masterpieces of the genre, underwent a restyling and were re-released on PC and most current gaming platforms as 'Special Editions', in 2009 and 2010 respectively. Furthermore, big budget 3D titles such as *Heavy Rain* (2010) and *L.A. Noire* (2011), the latter heralded by many as the pinnacle of facial animation in games, could be considered as an evolution of point-and-click adventures, since looking for clues and talking to NPCs to advance the story is a fundamental part of gameplay.

In March 2012, Tim Schafer, well-known to fans of the genre as the lead designer of some of the most popular *LucasArts* adventures, launched a project on Kickstarter, a crowd-funding platform, hoping to reach the goal of $400,000 to fund the development of a point-and-click adventure. It was, by his own admission, an ambitious goal; no one knew much about the game, except that it would be designed by Schafer together with Ron Gilbert, another former *LucasArts* employee and the creative mind behind the first two *Monkey Island* games. Despite this, the project raised 1 million dollars in the first 24 hours, with the campaign closing at 3.3 millions.[28] Such a record sum would not easily be matched by other developers, but the episode shows that there is a substantial demand for this type of games, also proving how Kickstarter can be a boon for small independent studios, which today develop most graphic adventures.

[28] Despite raising a sum equal to almost ten times the initial goal, a year later Schafer announced that the development of the game was going to need more money, as the game had become 'too big'. As going back to Kickstarter to ask for an additional investment did not seem fair, the studio chose to sell the first half of the game online, to fund the remaining part of the development; the second half of the game would come later as a free update, while the initial backers would receive both parts without any additional payment, as promised. In January 2014, the first 'act' of the game, called *Broken Age*, was finally released. Although the announcement that the development would require more money was initially criticized, *Broken Age – Act 1* received, on average, very favorable reviews. In March 2015, it was announced that *Broken Age – Act 2* will be released at the end of April 2015.

Although *LucasArts* entered the field of graphic adventures when *Sierra On-Line* already had an established fanbase and a solid reputation in the Western market as the main developer of the genre, *LucasArts* games quickly gained a large following, possibly even larger than *Sierra*'s. Many of their titles appear to have stood the test of time and anyone who wanted to get to know the genre would likely start from the *LucasArts* library. A chart published in 2011 by the online video game magazine *NowGamer* chose not to include any of them, justifying the choice by saying that:

> As much as we love the graphic adventures of *LucasArts*, every single one of them, from *Maniac Mansion* to *Escape From Monkey Island*, is of such high quality that they would dominate any adventure list to the point where they exclude so many other games that are worth playing.
>
> (Day, 2011)

This is one of the reasons why two of the three games which constitute my corpus, *The Secret of Monkey Island* (1990) and *Day of the Tentacle* (1993), are *LucasArts* games. The third one, *Discworld* (1995), was developed by *Teeny Weeny Games* and *Perfect 10 Productions*, and published by *Psygnosis*. The following section describes the three games, which belong to the above mentioned 'golden age' of graphic adventures, and explains why I have selected them for this analysis.

4.3 *The Secret of Monkey Island*

The Secret of Monkey Island (TSOMI), developed and published by *Lucasfilm Games* (nowadays *LucasArts*), was initially released on floppy disk in October 1990 for the PC, Atari ST and Macintosh systems; the Amiga version, also on floppy, followed in January 1991.

The Secret of Monkey Island was distributed in Italy by *C.T.O*. Following a policy adopted by this distributor for most *LucasArts* adventures in Italy, the game was first released in a preliminary version in the original language, before the

localization was completed. In this version, box and manuals were translated, but the software was in English. The box contained a form for requesting the Italian version for free after its release.

The game would have several sequels: *Monkey Island 2* (1991), *The Curse of Monkey Island* (1997) and *Escape from Monkey Island* (2000), all developed by *Lucasfilm*/*LucasArts*, and the episodic *Tales of Monkey Island* (2009), developed by *Telltale Games* and *LucasArts*, made up of five episodes released separately over six months.

In the first game, set in a fictional archipelago in the Caribbean Sea, we are introduced to the main character of the series (and avatar of the player), Guybrush Threepwood, a young man who aspires to be a pirate. While accompanying him on his 'quest', we meet many other characters, ranging from improbable pirates to health-conscious cannibals. Several of them appear throughout the series, including Elaine Marley, Guybrush's love interest and governor of Mêlée Island, and the ghost pirate LeChuck, who will become its recurring villain.

4.3.1 TSOMI – User interface

The game is a traditional point-and-click adventure, where the player must interact with the environment by ordering the main character to perform specific actions and solve puzzles using objects gathered by exploring various locations. Multiple choice dialogues are a relevant part of gameplay; while some contain clues useful to progress in the story, many of them are only inserted to help characterization, often through humorous exchanges. A trademark feature of the game, also used in the sequels, is 'insult swordfighting', explained in section 5.3.5.

At the time TSOMI was released, *Lucasfilm* had made a name for themselves as *Sierra*'s rival in the field of graphic adventures. The two developers had completely different ways of approaching the genre; in particular, they appeared

to have different ideas regarding how hard the games should be and what this difficulty should entail. *Sierra* games were often unforgiving to the player. 'Dying' was extremely easy; entering the wrong door could result in a sudden death, which meant having to go back and repeat a section of the game. Moreover, it was possible to get stuck at a particular point in the game as a consequence of choosing the wrong action.

LucasArts's policy in this respect was much kinder to players. *LucasArts* adventures did not usually have these 'points of no return', and dying was only possible in few of their titles, like the pioneering *Maniac Mansion* (1987) and *Zak McKracken* (1988), and *Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis* (1992), a graphic adventure which featured action elements.[29]

Figure 15 below shows how the screen is structured in the Amiga floppy disk version of TSOMI:

Figure 15. Screenshot from the floppy disk version of *The Secret of Monkey Island* (copyright 1990 LucasArts Entertainment Company)

The action takes place in the upper part, while the lower part lists, on the left, the actions that can be performed and, on the right, the object in the player's inventory at any moment. In this first version of the game, the player can use 12

[29] In *TSOMI*, it is actually possible to kill Guybrush, but it takes quite a lot of patience on the part of the player, who would have to wait more than ten minutes after he is thrown in the water by an NPC, without performing any action.

verbs to interact with the environment, in green – open, close, push, pull, walk to, pick up, talk to, give, use, look at, turn on and turn off –, whereas the line directly below the image, in blue, is used to input commands. Unless the player specifies a different command, the verb ‘walk to’ is automatically selected and, if the player clicks on a point on the screen that can be reached, the character walks to that point.

If the player hovers the cursor on an element of the screen that can be interacted with, its name appears in the command line (e.g. by pointing to a door, the line becomes ‘walk to door’). To open the door, the player has to click on the appropriate verb (i.e. ‘open’), and then on the door. This type of interface, despite its functionality, could create issues during localization. As highlighted by Díaz Montón (2007), the concatenation of a series of text strings in a game script can generate lines of text that are grammatically correct in the original language but not necessarily in the TL, if the strings are translated separately and then assembled automatically by the software. This can happen because the word order is not the same in the SL and TL, or because the concordance between names and adjectives is not reproduced (in translating from English to Italian, for example, adjectives match the names they describe in both number and genre, while in English they do not). The analysis in the following chapters looks at this issue if it turns out to have repercussions on the translation of humor.

In 1992, a CD-ROM version of TSOMI was released for PC. The new version was virtually identical to the original, except for updated audio and some slight changes to the graphical interface. For example, as Figure 16 shows, the written inventory was replaced by a graphical version, where each object was represented by a small icon:

Figure 16. Screenshot from the CD-ROM version of *The Secret of Monkey Island*, with a graphical inventory (copyright 1990 LucasArts Entertainment Company)

In the CD-ROM version, nine verbs were used instead of 12: 'walk to' was omitted, as the player could move the character to a precise spot simply by clicking on that spot, and two of the other verbs, rarely used in the game – 'turn on' and 'turn off' – were also eliminated. I will focus on the CD-ROM version with nine verbs, as the same verbs are used in the 2009 edition analyzed in chapter 6.

4.3.2 TSOMI – Types of text and audiovisual features

As remarked above, dialogues are very important in the game. When characters speak, their utterances appear above their head and they are for the most part split into one- or two-liners, but sometimes three or more lines are also used. Dialogues are not voiced. The characters' lines are accompanied by face and body movements, and a different colour is used for each character, with white being used for the protagonist. As remarked in section 3.3, this technique helps identifying who is speaking, in a similar way as is usually done in subtitling for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing (Neves, 2005).

Apart from the dialogues, which constitute the bulk of the in-game text, few lines of narrative text are used throughout the game and appear in the TL in the

localized version. Text is also used in images (see, for example, the signs in Figure 17); however, most is not translated, apart from a few instances in which it is not actually part of the background graphics but just superimposed on them (as in Figure 18). The instruction manual and the text on the box were completely localized into Italian.

Figure 17. Example of graphic text in *The Secret of Monkey Island* (copyright 1990 LucasArts Entertainment Company)

Figure 18. Regular text superimposed on the background in *The Secret of Monkey Island* (copyright 1990 LucasArts Entertainment Company)

4.3.3 TSOMI – Humor

In TSOMI, like in the other games that make up this corpus, there is a pervasive presence of humor. Kalata (2011: 245-246) observes how humor is not confined to specific dialogues or situations, but permeates all aspects of the game:

> At first glance, the world of *Monkey Island* appears to be relatively normal – at least, as normal as a computer game about pirates can be – but there are little bits of wackiness that come out of nowhere. It's all very self aware at how silly it is, too, and like the best farces, every weird little bit makes sense in its own strange little universe. […] This is the sort of game where you can find a red herring (an actual fish) which turns out to be entirely necessary to progress. One of the key items is a seemingly useless Rubber-Chicken-with-a-Pulley-in-the-Middle.

However, he notices (ibid.: 246) that dialogues are also an important vehicle for humor:

> The three dialogue choices when you first speak to the pirates [a trio of pirates encountered at the beginning of the adventure, described by the game as 'Important Looking Pirates'] set the tone for the rest of the game – you can go the straightforward route ('I want to be a pirate'), the crazy, brazen route ('I mean to kill you all!') or the silly non-sequitur ('I want to be a fireman.') […] There are straight replies in any situation, but it's more fun to pick the completely random ones ('Call me Squinky.') or the unnecessarily belligerent replies.

The game often breaks the fourth wall for humorous purposes. Guybrush may reply to players' requests by commenting on the required action, at times turning to face the 'camera'. In a dialogue exchange at the end of the game, while reflecting on what lesson can be learned from the adventure, the player can choose the line 'Never pay more than 20 bucks for a game'. In particular, intertextual references are frequent. When Guybrush looks at a chalice and says 'Now THIS is the cup of a carpenter!', this is a reference to the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. But TSOMI also references other games. For example, it pokes fun at the policy adopted by the rival *Sierra* regarding the possibility of dying in games: if Guybrush walks off a cliff on Monkey Island, a message appears in the style of *Sierra* adventures which reads 'Oh, no! You've really screwed up this time! Guess you'll have to start over! Hope you saved the game!', before Guybrush bounces back onto the cliff, exclaiming 'Rubber tree!'.

4.3.4 *The Secret of Monkey Island: Special Edition*

The 2009 *Special Edition* of TSOMI features a number of updates. It has improved graphics and sound and a different interface. The old interface with the 9 verbs is gone, the game environment now occupies the whole screen and players can interact with it simply by clicking on different items or characters with their controller. More importantly, the *Special Edition* was released in Italy with a new translation, which justifies its inclusion in the analysis.

According to the retranslation hypothesis (Berman, 1990; Gambier, 1994), retranslations always tend to be closer to the source text than the original translations; however, Paloposki and Koskinen (2004) challenge this view, arguing that the issue is much more complex, as many examples of retranslations do not conform to this hypothesis. Nonetheless, 'the comparative study of several translations of the same source text can provide an insight into the historical evolution of translation as a process' (Vanderschelden, 2000: 13) and, in this light, by looking at the changes occurred between the different translations of the game, it might be possible to see whether there is a recognizable trend in the localization process.

4.4 *Day of the Tentacle*

In 1993, *LucasArts* released *Day of the Tentacle*. Although it was presented as the sequel to *Maniac Mansion*, another *Lucasfilm* adventure from 1988, it only features a few of the characters from that game. Set in a large mansion in an unspecified place of the United States, DOTT has three main characters which can be controlled, in turn, by the player: Bernard, already mentioned in section 2.2, and his roommates, the med student Laverne and the roadie Hoagie. Together, with the help of the mad scientist Dr Fred Edison, they have to try and stop the

evil Purple Tentacle – a disembodied, sentient tentacle who became evil after drinking polluted water.

The task proves harder than they thought. Judging that the easiest way to save the world is to go back in time and prevent Purple Tentacle to drink the contaminated water, Dr Edison sends the three back using a machine of its invention, the Cron-O-John. Unfortunately, the machine does not work as expected, and each of them ends up in a different time. Laverne ends up two hundred years in the future, in a world dominated by tentacles, where humans are kept as pets; Bernard remains stuck in the present day, while Hoagie arrives two hundred years in the past, on the day the Declaration of Independence is about to be signed.

While TSOMI provides players with different parallel tasks, so that they do not get stuck for too long trying to surpass the same obstacle, DOTT exploits the time travel device to create puzzles that span over several centuries. By ‘flushing’ items through the Cron-o-Johns, it is possible to exchange them between the various characters; apparently useless objects gathered in the past can be used to remove obstacles in the future, which in turn can provide items that are necessary to solve puzzles in the present era, and so forth. In the tradition of *LucasArts* games, the characters cannot die and it is not possible for the player to get stuck at a particular point in the game with no way of progressing.

Like *The Secret of Monkey Island*, *Day of the Tentacle* was distributed in Italy by C.T.O. However, unlike TSOMI and other *LucasArts* adventures which had a preliminary version with translated box and manuals and English software, it was published in its final version, with box, manuals and game in the TL. One of the most widespread Italian video games magazines of the time, *K*, praised C.T.O. for the prompt release of the Italian localized version, acknowledging the challenges of translating graphic adventures:

> The translation of graphic adventures is a commendable but extremely difficult practice, which often causes more issues than the porting of software to other platforms. Experience teaches that it is not enough to give the text to the hands of a professional to translate it blindly. They need to have the adventure to hand, verify the situations in order to avoid often major mistakes, testing every possible player action. Basically, a second beta-testing of the game. If we consider that in

> dialogues it is usually possible to choose among at least four options, we can have an idea of the amount of work that is necessary. For titles such as *Day of the Tentacle* or *Monkey Island 2* the translation is especially challenging due to the frequent plays on words in the original English which rarely have an Italian equivalent.
>
> (Cattelan, 1995, my translation)

The unusual amount of resources invested into the release of the Italian version of *Day of the Tentacle* can probably be explained with the success of the previous *LucasArts* adventures in Italy, which in turn was partly due to the effort put into their Italian localization.

4.4.1 *Day of the Tentacle* – User interface

The interface, described in section 2.2, is very similar to the one used in TSOMI. In fact, it is common to many *Lucasfilm* games that were developed using the same scripting language, named SCUMM – Script Creation Utility for *Maniac Mansion* – after the first game where it was used. The name SCUMM is often used to identify these games, which are sometimes referred to as 'SCUMM games'.

4.4.2 *Day of the Tentacle* – Types of text and audiovisual features

The original game was released both on CD-ROM and floppy disk. The CD-ROM edition features voice acting for many of the dialogues. However, the intralingual 'subtitles' present in the two versions are the same and identical to the utterances; therefore, no reduction is observed from the speech to the written text. The localized version into Italian used interlingual subtitles in all versions, with the CR-ROM version also keeping the English voiceover.

Spoken lines are accompanied by face and body movements. While the graphics are not detailed enough to make lip-sync a priority, kinetic synchrony is usually present in the original English. As illustrated in section 3.3, *Day of the Tentacle* also displays features that are used in SDH: 'subtitles' are positioned above the

character who is speaking, and each character is distinguished by a different font colour. Again, multiple-choice dialogues are the norm, but cutscenes with scripted dialogue exchanges are used in specific points of the game to advance the plot.

Like in TSOMI, there are only a few lines of narrative text, used in cutscenes. In the Italian version, some of the text used in images during the game, like newspaper titles, appear in Italian. The instruction manual and the text on the box were also translated.

4.4.3 *Day of the Tentacle* – Humor

In discussing the peculiar features of humor in games and how it is affected by their interactive nature, section 2.2 described some of the features of humor in DOTT. One particular element that is relevant for this analysis is the heavy presence of culture-specific items. We saw how TSOMI contains pop culture references and, in general, culture-specific references. In DOTT, heavily US-oriented, the number of jokes based on cultural knowledge is even higher. This is not surprising, considering that part of the game is set in the United States at the time of the Declaration of Independence and several historical personalities appear as characters in the story. As a consequence, the game can be profitably used to study the different policies that translators adopt when humor is heavily based on culture specific knowledge.

When Benjamin Franklin says, while flying a kite, ‘Off we go, into the wild blue yonder!’, this is a reference to the US Air Force song. In Italian, the line becomes *E via, nel blu dipinto di blu* [And go, in the blue, painted in blue], which keeps the general meaning of the sentence by referring to the famous Italian song, *Volare*. Sometimes, the references are simply omitted. In the original text, a character says that he needs a bat for his band, as they could ‘bite his head off or whatever’. The translated version reads *potremmo decapitarlo o qualcos’altro* [we could decapitate it or something else], losing the reference to the infamous moment where the rock star Ozzy Osbourne bit the head off a bat during a concert.

However, the translation does keep other references. The player can choose to ask a character from the future whether 'the Sharks ever have a winning season'. The Italian line is unchanged; if players do not know about the hockey team, they can easily guess that the joke is based on a sports reference, even though the line is arguably less funny. Chapter 5 discusses the available translation procedures in detail.

4.5 *Discworld*

The last point-and-click adventure analyzed in this dissertation is *Discworld*, released in 1995 by *Psygnosis*. The Discworld is the setting for a very successful series of novels by British author Terry Pratchett, from which the game draws inspiration. The plot of the game is adapted from one of the novels, *Guards! Guards!*; however, apart from the initial setup, only a few situations follow the book closely.

Many characters from the books appear in the game, including its protagonist, Rincewind. The player controls him throughout the adventure, which sees the largely inept wizard charged with the task of saving the city of Ankh-Morpork from a large dragon, summoned by a secret order of cloaked men who plan to use it to gain power. Although the game is full of elements taken from the novels, being familiar with the setting is not necessary to enjoy the game. In some cases where an additional explanation is useful but difficult to fit in the gameplay, a narrator appears over the background, complete with blackboard, to illustrate a specific element of the lore. Figure 19 shows the narrator explaining the nature and functions of the Luggage, the living trunk, familiar to readers of the novels, that follows Rincewind around (and that, as described in 2.3.2, works as his 'living inventory'):

Figure 19. An animated illustration of the Luggage's features in *Discworld* (copyright 1995 Teeny Weeny Games)

This clever integration of an element of the books (the Luggage) as a gameplay feature (the main character's inventory) is an example of how the game always tries to stay faithful to the spirit of the books. Being inspired by a series of comic novels, it seems appropriate that the game never punishes the player for wrong choices. Like in *LucasArts* games, there are no dead-end paths, and although Death (a recurring character in the series, who speaks in capital letters and can only be seen by certain individuals) often appears to Rincewind, it is not possible to die in the game. That is not to say that *Discworld* is especially kind to the players. In fact, the extreme difficulty of some of the game's passages could be considered its biggest flaw. At the time of its release, *Discworld* was lauded for its humorous script, for its graphics and voice acting, and for how it managed to recreate the feel of the novels, but was also criticized for the lack of logic of many puzzles, which often lead players to perform random actions using the objects in their inventories, hoping to find the solution this way.

The inclusion of *Discworld* in the corpus also allows us to look at fan translations: in 2009, almost fifteen years after the game's original 1995 release, a new unofficial Italian translation was made by fans of the game. In addition, together with the analysis of the updated TSOMI translation, studying the more recent translation of *Discworld* can provide further indications on how the phenomenon of retranslation presents itself in video games.

4.5.1 *Discworld* – User interface

In *Discworld*, the image occupies the whole screen. Unlike TSOMI and DOTT, there are no verbs to choose from when selecting an action: a double click of the mouse works as a context-sensitive command, ordering Rincewind to ‘interact’. A single click of the left mouse button tells him to walk to a specific point, while a click of the right mouse button is used to examine items. If the player double-clicks on Rincewind himself, the inventory window appears; the number of objects the wizard can carry on himself is limited but, as already mentioned, the Luggage allows him to carry additional weight.

In conversations, players can choose from a set of icons for different type of lines: a jack-in-the-box represents a sarcastic comment, a grey cloud indicates a more aggressive attitude and so on, as shown in Figure 20:

Figure 20. Icons representing dialogue choices in *Discworld* (copyright 1995 Teeny Weeny Games)

However, most of the options that are not classified as ‘jokes’ (e.g. those represented by a question mark, useful to obtain specific information) are also intended to be humorous.

4.5.2 *Discworld* – Types of text and audiovisual features

Like DOTT, *Discworld* was released both on CD-ROM and floppy disk, with the CD-ROM version featuring voice acting. Among those who provided the voices for the game are famous British actors such as Monty Python star Eric Idle, Tony Robinson, best known for his role as Baldrick in the TV series *Blackadder*, and Ron Pertwee, who played Doctor Who in the long running BBC TV series.

Like in DOTT, the text appears above the head of the character who is speaking, and the same lines of text are used in all versions of the game, both with and without voices. Again, intralingual 'subtitles' are not to be intended in the traditional sense, as they are never a reduced version of what is said, but rather the verbatim transcription of the actual lines read by the actors. Still, the game itself uses the term 'subtitles', giving players an option for toggling subtitles on or off, and one for subtitle speed, as shown in Figure 21:

Figure 21. Subtitle options in *Discworld* (copyright 1995 Teeny Weeny Games)

The option for changing the subtitle speed is actually misnamed, as it works in the opposite way to what it seems to indicate: sliding the marker to the right lowers the subtitle speed, increasing their persistence on screen. Strikingly, it is not only the subtitle speed that changes: the lines of dialogue are also sped up or slowed down according to how the player adjusts this setting, as illustrated by the following example. The subtitle 'Listen – one thing I've always meant to ask...' is

the exact transposition of the line spoken by the voice actor (since, as specified above, the text is the same for both the floppy disk and CD-ROM versions of the game, with voice acting only featuring in the latter). If the player sets the highest possible speed, the subtitle stays on the screen for 2.854 seconds, disappearing as soon as the actor finishes uttering it (with an average of 16.1 characters per second). With the lowest possible speed, it stays on for 9.015 seconds (with an average of 5.1 characters per second). In addition, it is always possible to accelerate lines of dialogue by clicking the left mouse button: this way, the player can interrupt the speech and move on to the next line. With the slowest subtitle speed, however, the speech lasts 3.735 seconds, almost one second more than with the fastest setting. The game achieves it both by slowing down or accelerating, very slightly, the spoken line and by shortening or lengthening all the natural pauses in the speech (e.g. the pause after 'Listen' in the example).

Just like in TSOMI, the in-game text is made up by dialogues, a small number of lines of narrative text and text in images (see Figure 22), which is only localized when it is not integrated in the graphics.

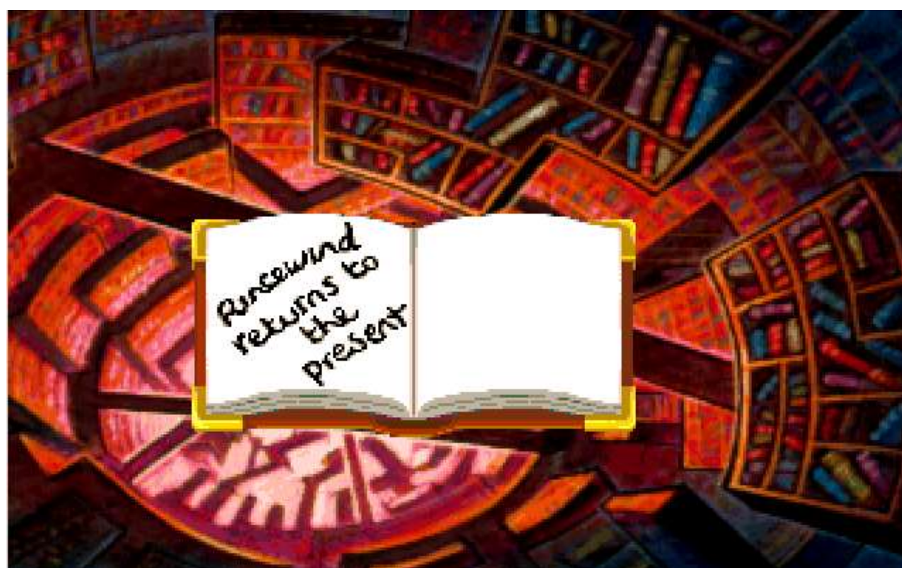

Figure 22. Text in graphics in *Discworld* (copyright 1995 Teeny Weeny Games)

Although this analysis focuses on the Italian version of the games in the corpus, the Japanese edition of *Discworld* is worth mentioning, as the game released in

Japan had a different cover art from the editions published in other countries.[30] The graphic style of *Discworld*'s cover was completely different in Japan. For the US and European (PAL) versions, the cover (Figure 23) was designed by Josh Kirby, well known for having created the cover art for Terry Pratchett's books. The cover of the Japanese game (Figure 24), released on the *Sega Saturn* and *Sony Playstation* consoles, has a drawing of Ankh-Morpork, the city where the game is set, as it might appear in a comic. On the back, some of the characters from the game (Rincewind, his Luggage, Death and a dragon) are represented in a manga-like style. In particular, they are drawn with a *chibi* style, a term that has become widespread in manga and anime fandom to indicate a style where characters are represented in an exaggerated way, usually small and with oversized heads and eyes, to resemble small children. This graphic style was probably believed to be more appealing to the Japanese public.

Figure 23. Front (right) and back (left) cover of the European version of *Discworld* (copyright 1995 Teeny Weeny Games)

[30] A localized version of *The Secret of Monkey Island* was also released in Japan, but the cover art was the same as in Western countries, only with translated text.

Figure 24. Front (left) and back (right) cover of the Japanese version of *Discworld* (copyright 1995 Teeny Weeny Games)

4.5.3 *Discworld* – Humor

In the *Discworld* novels, Pratchett parodies both traditional fantasy and general literary tropes and conventions, while at the same time using them for a satire of real world figures and current social and political issues. The same themes are present in the game, but *Discworld* also jokes on the conventions of video games and of graphic adventures in particular (see section 4.7.2). Furthermore, there is a high prevalence in the game of puns and play on words, just like in the books it is based on.

4.5.4 *Discworld*: a transmedia franchise

Given the popularity of the *Discworld* novels, Terry Pratchett's books have received a number of adaptations into different media, including film, theatre and radio. According to O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013), transmedia franchises, which more and more frequently include video games, are liable to limit the freedom that could otherwise be given to game translators; this can happen because players already have expectations regarding a canon they are familiar with. On the other side, such franchises give game companies the chance of rewriting familiar stories across different media. Fernández Costales (2014) points out how adapting

superhero games can be especially challenging due to the fact that translators must also be faithful to the original source. He shows how, in the game *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, the constraint of having to follow the official terminology of the comics made certain riddles extremely difficult to translate, thus creating additional obstacles for the TL players.

In the case of the *Discworld* game analyzed in this thesis, the translator did not always follow the existing translation of the books. Certain names kept the same translation as in the books. For example, the main character Rincewind and his 'Luggage' became *Scuotivento* and *Bagaglio* [Luggage] in both the Italian game and books. Other names, however, did not maintain the same translations – e.g. the Unseen University, which is *Università Invisibile* [Invisible University] in the books and *Università Occulta* [Occult University] in the game. As will be illustrated in section 6.3.7, the retranslation made by fans switched back to the translations used in the books on several occasions.

4.6 The data

Most of the translatable text in the games selected for the corpus is contained in the dialogues and in the descriptions of the items and the environment. Following the classification adopted by O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013: 154), it can be assimilated to unvoiced dialogue scripts and non lip-sync voiceover (although the lip-sync could be better described as a 'face-synch', as the characters' lip movements are not especially detailed, due to the cartoonish graphic style). Non-diegetic assets are present in the form of in-game User Interfaces, as described above, and printed materials in manuals and box art.

The process of collecting and arranging in-game text data from a video game can be complex. Many times, dialogues and text assets are embedded within the code and the text is rarely arranged in the order in which it is seen in the game – often because, as discussed in subsection 1.2.1, the order in which lines appear in the game can depend on the player's actions.

Obtaining the data for *The Secret of Monkey Island* was simple. A fan of the *LucasArts* games developed a free utility, called *scummtr*, that allows the extraction of all in-game text (slightly more than 30,000 words), which is then saved as a text file. The program works with several well-known adventures, including *The Secret of Monkey Island*. I used *scummtr* to extract the text from the English and Italian versions of the game; the strings of text contained in the resulting text files follow the same order, so it was possible to create an Excel file with the two versions in adjacent columns for an easy comparison.[31]

For *Day of the Tentacle*, I used the CD-ROM version to collect the data; the in-game text (approximately 30,000 words) for both the original English and the Italian translation could be extracted with the same utility used for *The Secret of Monkey Island*, *scummtr*.

Finally, for *Discworld*, the SL text (approximately 41,000 words) was conveniently located on the CD-ROM in a file named English.txt; the file Italian.txt contained the localized version. The text strings had to be divided manually, but they were easily identifiable thanks to the separators used in the file. They also appeared in the two files in the same order, and a worksheet could be prepared where English version and Italian translation could be compared side by side.

4.7 Types of humor in the games

As highlighted when describing the games, each of them provides a different perspective on the challenges presented by the translation of humor. The graph in Figure 25 illustrates the proportion of humorous elements identified in the games, classified by type of humor. The classification does not originate from any

[31] Only a few adjustments were necessary to obtain the correspondent strings of text in the same rows, mostly for strings of text that were not present in the source text – e.g. additional credits for the Italian version.

previous work, but has been rather devised taking into account the peculiarities of video game humor as outlined in chapter 2.

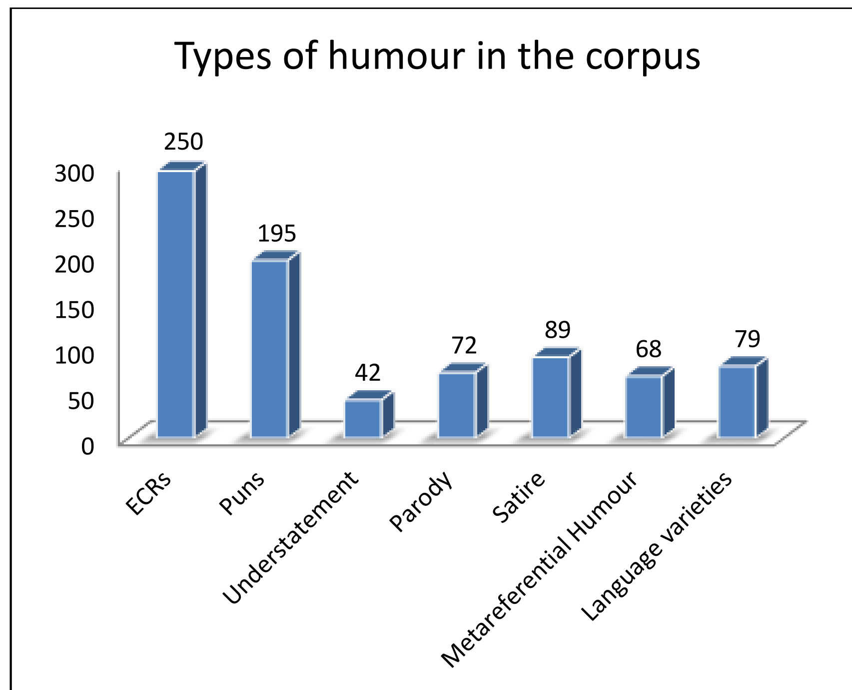

Figure 25. Total number of occurrences for each type of humorous element in the corpus

The graph shows that some types of humor have similar relevance in the corpus; it is the case, for example, of linguistic jokes based on language varieties ('dialect') and satirical elements. Other types of humor, like puns or humor based on extra-linguistic culture-bound references[32] (ECRs), are more prominent. In both cases, however, the relevance of each type of humorous element varies in each game. While *Day of the Tentacle*, for example, features half of all the ECRs in the corpus (150), puns, parody, and satire are prevalent in *Discworld* (with respectively 136, 62 and 63 occurrences identified). As anticipated in 4.4.3, *Day of the Tentacle* is heavily US-oriented and contains many jokes based on cultural references. Jokes based on culture-specific items feature heavily in TSOMI as well; whilst *Discworld*, the only game set in a fantasy world, displays a smaller proportion of humorous items based purely on cultural references. However, other

[32] An ECR is defined by Pedersen (1995: 2) as a reference that is attempted by means of any culture-bound linguistic expression, which refers to an extralinguistic entity or process, and which is assumed to have a discourse referent that is identifiable to a relevant audience as this referent is within the encyclopedic knowledge of this audience.

types of humor that are also based on cultural knowledge, e.g. parody and satire, abound in the game inspired by Terry Pratchett's saga.

Sections 4.7.1 to 4.7.9 illustrate the different types of humor present in the games, providing examples for each category. ECRs, which represent a big share of all humorous elements, can be further divided into direct and indirect references; indirect references, of which the proportion is showed in Figure 26, are discussed in 4.7.4. Moreover, some of the cultural references featured in the games can be considered 'frames' (Leppihalme, 1996); section 4.7.5 is devoted to this specific sub-category, represented in Figure 27.

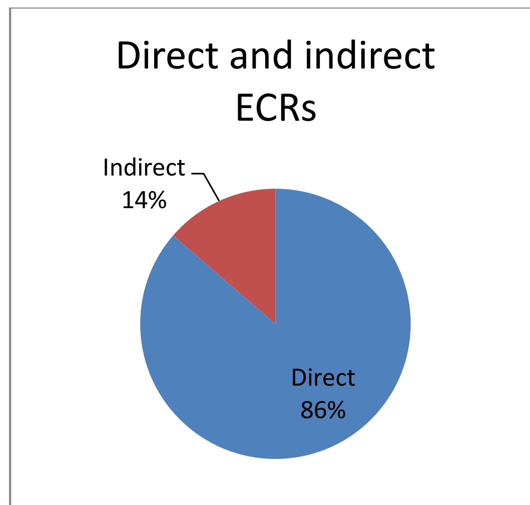

Figure 26. Proportion of indirect references over the total number of ECRs in the corpus

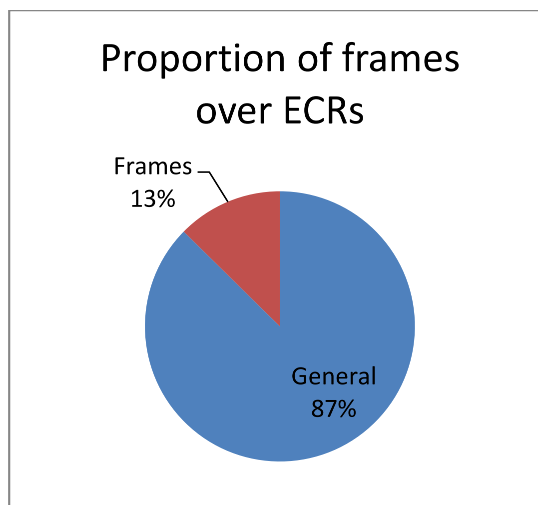

Figure 27. Proportion of frames over the total number of ECRs in the corpus

4.7.1 Puns

Puns are one of the most widespread forms of verbal humor and feature heavily in the selected games. This analysis adopts the working definition suggested by Delabastita (1996), which focuses on the confrontation between linguistic structures with similar forms and different meanings. Borrowing Delabastita's scheme (ibid.: 130), most puns in the corpus fit into the categories listed in Table 5, defined by the linguistic features they exploit.[33]

Phonological puns	Malapropism
	Proper names with semantic significance
Graphological puns	Homophones
	Acronyms
Morphological puns	Compound words
	Portmanteaux
	Homonyms
	Wordplay on idioms, proverbs, quotes, etc.

Table 7. Types of puns present in the corpus

The examples in the following paragraphs clarify how each type of pun is structured.

4.7.1.1 Phonological puns

Malapropism: where a word is replaced with a different one with a similar sound but an inappropriate meaning:

> '*Arms* for the poor, sir?', where 'arms' replaces 'alms'. (*Discworld)*

> 'I'm just a loveable street *urchin*, I am', where *urchin* is used instead of *orphan*. (*Discworld*)

[33] Please note that in the following pages a list of all the different types is offered. A discussion of the actual translation strategies employed takes place in Chapter Five.

Proper names with semantic significance:

> 'I'm the sheriff around here. Sheriff *Fester Shinetop*', Shinetop being a bald man. (TSOMI*)*

4.7.1.2 Graphological puns

Homophones: two words with the same pronunciation that differ both in meaning and in spelling:

> 'cereal killer', for 'serial killer' (*Discworld)*
>
> 'Abandon all hops, ye who enter here...', where 'hops' replaces 'hope' in the line from Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* (*Discworld*)

Sometimes, the pun can involve more than one word, as in the following case:

> 'Silly cone implants, I think they're called', playing with 'silly cone' and 'silicone'. (*Discworld)*

Acronym: a humorous abbreviation of a group of words, as in the following examples from *Discworld*:

> 'D.U.I.? Donkey under influence?'
>
> 'Impose a P.A.Y.E. tax or something (a tax that could be imposed on a dragon).
> P.A.Y.E.?
> Pay as you eat.'

In the first case, 'D.U.I' is Discworld's 'driving under influence', as the vehicle is a donkey cart. In the second example, the acronym 'P.A.Y.E', which stands for 'pay as you earn', is distorted into 'pay as you eat'.

4.7.1.3 Morphological puns

These puns rely on the morphemes which make up a word and can be further grouped into:

Compound words: where the humor often comes from the opposition between the meaning of a compound word and that of the morphemes which make it up, as in the following case from *Discworld* with the morphemes ‘trade’ and ‘man’ and the compound word ‘tradesman’:

> ‘Tradesman’s entrance, I presume. I wonder what we traded him for?’

Sometimes the wordplay uses a segment of a word which would be a separate morpheme on its own, but it is not actually a free morpheme of the word in question:

> ‘I don’t know who exactly. I think it was a conspiracy. And if there’s one type of piracy I don’t like, it’s CONS-piracy’. (TSOMI)

Here, the wordplay relies on the fact that the word ‘piracy’ has no actual relationship with ‘conspiracy’.

Portmanteaux is a new word obtained by combining two different words or morphemes:

> ‘psychiatrickerist’, which merges ‘psychiatrist’ and ‘trickster’. (*Discworld*)

4.7.1.4 Lexical puns

Homonyms: are puns based on words with the same pronunciation and spelling but a different meaning:

> ‘We’re *drafting* a constitution for the United States.
> D-don’t say *d-d-draft*, you’ll only make me c-c-colder.’
> (‘draft’ can mean both a preliminary version of a text and a current of air in an enclosed space; from DOTT).

Wordplay on idioms, proverbs, quotes, etc.: where the play on words relies on the difference between the historical meaning of the words contained in an idiom – its literal meaning – and their current meaning:

> 'You are ladies of the night, aren't you?
> Dunno. What time is it now?' (*Discworld*)

4.7.2 Meta-referential humor

With meta-references, as described in section 2.3, the characters (or other elements of the game) highlight the fact that they belong to a fictional world. Given the close link between the game characters and the player, who determines their actions, this is often done by having characters respond to players' input. An example can be observed in *Discworld*, where, should the player click repeatedly on Rincewind, he would respond by saying 'Get off my pixels!' Other indirect nods to the player can feature in dialogue exchanges between characters, as in 'Do you ever wonder if we're all just characters in a novel?', which is what Guybrush asks the lookout on Mêlée Island during their first encounter in TSOMI.

Sometimes, meta-reference is not the main humor device, but an instrument used to achieve a different purpose (e.g. parody), and the boundaries between the two categories cannot always be precisely defined. In *Day of the Tentacle*, when prompted to perform one particular action that the game does not allow, Hoagie declares that an object is 'really stuck. Like adventure-game stuck', thus breaking the fourth wall with his explicit mention of adventure games whilst at the same time parodying the genre. The rules and conventions of video games are easy to make fun of through humorous meta-references. As one of the most common actions while playing an adventure game is to 'look at' elements on the screen, to find out whether they can be useful to progress in the story, *Discworld* references this feature by acknowledging it in Rincewind's responses to the player. Thus, when issued a command to look at a door, he might reply 'Here – this door just seems to be painted on!' or add, when asked to look at a lamp, 'Thank heavens I took that course in object recognition!'.

Furthermore, as observed in section 2.3, many references to elements outside the game universe can be considered, to a degree, 'meta', as they break the fourth wall and draw the player's attention to the fictional nature of the game. However, I have not classified these as instances of meta-referential humor, preferring to include them in the 'cultural' groups described in the next subsection.

4.7.3 Direct culture-bound references

The treatment of culture-specific items in translation is the object of several studies (Gottlieb, 1994; Leppihalme, 1997; Espindola and Vasconcellos, 2006) that provide a theoretical basis for the classification presented in this section. In particular, the culture-specific items identified in this analysis can be considered Extralinguistic Culture-bound References (ECRs). In Pedersen's definition (2005: 2), an ECR is 'any culture-bound linguistic expression which refers to an extralinguistic entity or process, and which is assumed to have a discourse referent that is identifiable to a relevant audience as this referent is within the encyclopedic knowledge of this audience'. In today's globalized world, an increasing number of ECRs are not bound to the source culture, as they belong to the encyclopedic knowledge of audiences from different countries; Pedersen (ibid.) considers these references 'transcultural'. A transcultural ECR, which does not pose a challenge to the translators, can be originally from one of the two cultures, but may have entered the encyclopedic knowledge of both audiences (e.g. *Woodstock*, the 1969 music festival, mentioned in *Day of the Tentacle*). Transcultural ECRs can also belong to a third culture (e.g. the Norse god *Thor*, referenced in the same game). An ECR is instead defined as 'monocultural' if the referent is not as easy to identify for the TT audience as it is for the ST audience (ibid.) (e.g. *vindaloo*, an Indian curry dish mentioned in *Discworld* which is better known to a British than to an Italian audience). Pedersen (ibid.) also includes in his model 'microcultural' ECRs. References in this category are bound to the source culture, but it cannot be assumed that the majority of the ST audience would be able to identify them, as they are highly specific.

The analysis in Chapter 5 and 6 uses the expression ‘cultural substitition (monocultural)’ to indicate all occurrences of cultural substitution where the ECR was replaced with a different one that is only familiar to the TL audience and not to the SL audience, and ‘cultural substitution (transcultural)’ for those where the TT ECR belongs to both the source and target culture. Hence, the monocultural type can be considered more TL-oriented than the transcultural type.

As there is no reason to assume that all types of ECRs are treated similarly in translation, it is useful to define further subcategories, similar to those used by Espindola and Vasconcellos (2006); again, real examples from the games will help clarify the classification followed.

Food and drink: this category includes the names of foods, recipes, dishes and drinks that can be considered culture-bound, but also names of restaurants and other items related to the food area:

> ‘This thing smells of *butterscotch*!’[34] (*Discworld*)
> ‘I’ll wager Madison’s with that woman who bakes the *cupcakes*[35] again.’ (*Day of the Tentacle*)

Toponyms: proper names of places and, in general, geographical references:

> His bus broke down in *Pittsburgh*, so he’s stuck there. (*Day of the Tentacle*)
> My crew stole it and sailed to *Ipanema* in search of a tan. (TSOMI)

Persons: personal names, nicknames, and references to famous people:

> My wife says I look like *Charles Laughton*. (DOTT)
> Have you read *Camus*? (DOTT)

Measuring system: units of measurement used for length, weight, speed, etc. As two of the games in the corpus (*The Secret of Monkey Island* and *Day of the Tentacle*) are American and one (*Discworld*) is British, none of them uses the

[34] A type of British confectionery made primarily from butter and sugar.
[35] A small cake designed to serve one person, frequently baked in a small thin paper or aluminium cup (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cupcake).

measuring system adopted in the target country chosen for the analysis (Italy), i.e. the metric system.

> 'I can't move him an *inch*!' (*Day of the Tentacle*)
> '*2 pts* monkey blood, *3 oz* brimstone…' (TSOMI)

Fictional: includes references to characters, places, objects or other items belonging to a work of fiction:

> 'Has anyone ever told you you look like *Don Corleone*?' (*Day of the Tentacle*, referring to a character from the 1972 movie *The Godfather* and its 1974 sequel *The Godfather II*).
> 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be' (TSOMI; the line is spoken by Polonius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*).

Sports/Entertainment: these cover sport terminology and culture-specific items that refer to any form of entertainment, intended as 'an event, performance, or activity designed to entertain others' (Oxford Dictionary), e.g. cinema, music and video games:

> 'Didn't you see "The Fly"?!?' (DOTT, referring to the 1986 movie).
> 'How do you suppose *the Dodgers* are doing?' (DOTT; the Dodgers are a professional baseball team based in Los Angeles).

Institutions: any reference to government institutions and posts; in general, all institutional terms, both modern and historical, including those concerning education, religion, the economy, etc.

> 'Those IRS guys will never know the difference' (DOTT; IRS stands for Internal Revenue Service, the US government agency responsible for tax collection and tax law enforcement).
> 'Here lies treasure of such unimaginable wealth… well, you'll just have to dig it up to believe it. (Paid for by the Mêlée Island *Chamber of Commerce*)'. (TSOMI)
> 'It's too late for *christening*.' (DOTT)

Social: includes cultural items related to work, leisure and other aspects of the social life of a particular group of language users.

> 'What a pretty little sheep. And she sure looks like championship material in that blue ribbon.' (*Discworld*)

> ‘I hope it’s not like at a cake bake-off or something.’ (DOTT)
> ‘Followers of Offler sacrificial lamb competition, yes that was the one.’ (*Discworld*)
> ‘Alchemists Anonymous – get rid of that banging habit.’ (*Discworld*)
> ‘Some weather we’re having then?’ (*Discworld*)

While animal competitions are not uncommon in certain parts of the US and in the UK, being a traditional feature of state or county fairs, they might not sound equally familiar to an Italian audience. And the same can be said for ‘bake offs’ in the second example. In addition, a ‘blue ribbon’, which in the English-speaking world represents something of a high quality, might not have the same meaning – or might have no meaning at all – in different countries. The phrase ‘Alchemist anonymous’ would not be recognized in a country where excessive drinking is not a problem, if the audience has not been exposed to the concept of ‘alcoholics anonymous’ through other means, e.g. movies or other works of fiction. The last example involves weather-talk; while a conversation about the weather might not seem very culture-specific, it is indeed a typical topic of conversation in the UK, where ‘English weather-speak is a form of code, evolved to help us overcome our natural reserve and actually talk to each other’ (Fox, 2004: 26).

4.7.4 Indirect culture-bound references

An important distinction must be made between ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ cultural references. In the previous examples, the culture-bound item was explicitly mentioned. It is possible, however, to refer to a cultural item just by alluding to it. In *Discworld*, when a character says: ‘Hats and whips! And gold! Inside temples’, he is alluding to the *Indiana Jones* movies and to their main character’s iconic fedora and whip. Similarly, the line ‘I accuse Colonel Horseradish in the Library with the lead pipe…’ from the same game refers to the well-known board game *Cluedo* (*Clue* in North America), in which players must guess the culprit of a murder (one of the suspects is ‘Colonel Mustard’), the murder weapon they used (the lead pipe is one of the possible weapons) and the room where the murder has taken place (the library is one of the rooms in the mansion where the game is set). These references can create issues during translation that are slightly different

from those associated with 'direct' references. In her study of allusions, Leppihalme (1997: 23) explores some of these issues, in particular, she points out how:

> The translator, in his/her role as cultural mediator, needs the necessary degree of biculturalism to recognize such meanings, and the awareness to see with which allusions and in which contexts the choice of translation strategy will need special attention, either because of the importance of the allusion in the context, or because of the difference in cognitive environments.

With the term 'allusions', Leppihalme (ibid.: 3) indicates both 'direct' and 'indirect' references, which she calls, respectively, 'proper-name allusions' and 'key-phrase allusions'. These considerations hold for both, as direct references can also have an implicit meaning. For example, the phrase 'Isn't that Benedict Arnold?' in DOTT contains a direct reference, but the reader (and the translator) must possess a specific background knowledge to know that Benedict Arnold was a US general during the American Revolutionary War who defected to the British Army.

However, when the name does not appear in the text, recognizing the allusion becomes more difficult for the translator, which can distort the choice of translation strategy. References may be signaled 'by deviations in spelling, lexis, grammar or style […]. Additionally, at times, there may be an introductory phrase, quotation marks or some other such "extra-allusive" device' (ibid.: 63). Some indication is often provided by the context in which the sentence is inserted: the more extraneous a line is to its context, the more likely it is that we are dealing with a cultural reference. In TSOMI, the main character describes a chalice with the words 'Now, THIS is the cup of a carpenter'. He has no context-related reason to say that; the phrase is simply a reference to the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, in which Indiana Jones has to identify the Holy Grail among a collection of cups. At times, the translator might have no way of being sure that a particular sentence is indeed a reference to something. In *Day of the Tentacle*, for example, the three main characters plead to Dr Fred: 'Help us Dr Fred, you're our only hope'. This is, in all likelihood, a reference to a line said by princess Leia in *Star Wars* ('Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi, you're my only hope') but, apart from the

similar phrasing, the only indications to this effect are that both the game and the movie are produced by George Lucas, and that the *Star Wars* saga is referenced, more explicitly, in other parts of the game.

4.7.5 Frames

We saw that a humorous element can use several types of humor to achieve funniness and, often, there is no clear-cut distinction between the categories listed in this classification. Similarly, culture-bound references come in many different forms. ‘Frames’ are one category that overlaps with several of those presented above. A frame can be defined as ‘a combination of words that is more or less fixed conventionally in the mind of a group of language users’ (Leppihalme, 1996: 200). In this sense, some of the indirect cultural references illustrated in subsection 4.7.4 are also examples of frames used for playful effect. To be considered culture-specific, though, it is not necessary that the frames refer to another object; sometimes, the culture-bound item is the frame itself, due to its familiarity to a certain audience. In DOTT, for instance, a tentacle asks ‘Why did the human cross the road?’, a riddle which users might recognize as a modified version of ‘Why did the chicken cross the road?’, which in turn is a joke known in several languages (see section 5.2). In the same game, the main characters ask their enemy, who is boasting about his evil masterplan, ‘You and what army?’, a phrase which is a common trope in many works of fiction.

Proverbs can also be modified for humorous purposes. In *Discworld*, the well-known phrase ‘curiosity killed the cat’ is used to describe ‘the Shades’ the most dangerous area of the city: ‘That’s a place where curiosity not only kills the cat, but also weights it down and throws it in the river’. Lexical puns that are based on idioms and proverbs can be considered a type of modified frame. However, not all modified frames involve a contrast between linguistic structures with similar forms and different meanings, which is what characterizes a pun.

4.7.6 Language varieties

Several types of verbal humor (e.g. puns or modified frames) use language as their main instrument to achieve the desired funny effect. Language varieties can appear in conjunction with most other forms of humor, with intensification purposes, but they can also feature on their own. A formal or anachronistic speech style can produce incongruity when used in trivial circumstances or for commonplace objects, as in the expression 'Ye Olde Outhouses' used in *Day of the Tentacle*. A particular way of speaking can also signal social roles ('ahoy there!' is a pirate's greeting in TSOMI) or help characterization through the use of foreign accents; it is the case of the movie director in *Discworld*, who is given a German-sounding accent (for example, one of his lines appears on screen as 'Zzzzo mister V'izard! Tell me v'at you think this first picture represents').

In addition, variations in language and register can be employed to represent different social classes, as in the following line from *Discworld* where the character Fleabart replies to Rincewind, who has asked him how he would like to be greeted, saying 'Well, shovin' a pint in me hand would be nice!'

4.7.7 Understatement

Understatement, a form of irony, is another type of humor frequently employed in the three games. Although it is used in many languages, understatement is a very British type of humor. In the words of Fox (2004: 66-67),

> The understatement rule means that a debilitating and painful chronic illness must be described as 'a bit of a nuisance'; a truly horrific experience is 'well, not exactly what I would have chosen'; a sight of breathtaking beauty is 'quite pretty'; an outstanding performance or achievement is 'not bad'; an act of abominable cruelty is 'not very friendly', and an unforgivably stupid misjudgement is 'not very clever'; the Anctartic is 'rather cold' and the Sahara is 'a bit too hot for my taste'; and any exceptionally delightful object, person or event, which in other cultures would warrant streams of superlatives, is pretty much covered by 'nice', or, if we wish to express more ardent approval, 'very nice'.

As *Discworld* is the only British game of the corpus, it is reasonable to expect it to feature understatement more heavily than the other two. Therefore, it is not surprising that if, having asked Rincewind to investigate a dark corner of a building full of 'dangerous' and 'malicious' shadows, he refuses, defining the place as 'just a wee bit on the scary side for my tastes'.

4.7.8 Parody

Defined by Rose (1979: 35) as 'the critical refunctioning of *preformed literary material* with comic effect', parody has a relevant place in the games that make up the corpus. However, the expression 'literary material' must be intended with an especially broad meaning: although all three games affectionately mock certain literary conventions, parody is often directed against the conventions and narrative devices of video games (in particular, adventure games), cinema and comics.

In *Day of the Tentacle*, trying to vindicate himself from the imputation of having created, with the poisonous waste from his laboratory, the power-mad tentacle who is now bent on world domination, Dr Fred says: 'You can't have a high-tech laboratory like this and not spew poisonous filth… all the other mad scientists would laugh.'

Discworld, on the other hand, is full of characters who reflect stereotypes of fantasy literature (some of which are well aware of it, bordering into meta-reference territory, as remarked in 4.7.2). The following examples illustrate how some of these stereotypes – the 'lovable street urchin' (as the NPC defines himself), the 'Bogeyman' and the 'hero' – are presented in the game:

Street urchin	I mean, it's not even as if I have a real social role!
	All I do is stand around providing background colour, getting me cheeks pinched

	and gathering all sorts of clandestine information.[36]

Table 8. Literary stereotypes in *Discworld*: the 'lovable street urchin'

Rincewind	What does a Bogeyman do, anyway?
Bogeyman	It's quite a hard job, being a traditional figure of terror.
Rincewind	Really?
Bogeyman	Well there's the good side, too.
	There's your place in folktale and legend, and you're your own boss.

Table 9. Literary stereotypes in *Discworld*: the 'Bogeyman'

Rincewind	Well, about these heroes?
Peasant	Always muscular types. Always got moustaches.
Rincewind	Moustaches, eh?
Peasant	Oh yes. But your real hero – your actual pre-destined hero, he's usually got the marks of some kind of destiny actually on him.
Rincewind	What – you mean he comes born with them or something?
Peasant	Well there's your birthmark – you know, marking him as hidden heir to the throne.
	Then there's the magical sword left in the step-father's keeping...
Rincewind	A magical sword, eh?
Peasant	Well you can always tell a real hero. They have a sword that goes 'ting'.
Rincewind	Ting?
	Yes. It's all part of the act.

Table 10. Literary stereotypes in Discworld: the 'hero'

Discworld also features numerous examples of visual parody. The main character, like the other wizards in the game, wears a long robe embroidered with stars and moons and a pointy hat – and he gets constantly mocked for how silly the outfit looks. A warrior woman, while always wielding a huge metal sword, only wears a bikini-like costume with boots and a very short leather skirt, a joke on how women in fantasy illustrations are often scantily clad, even when going to battle along their well-armoured male colleagues and when their costumes do not seem, as Rincewind puts it, 'climatically… appropriate'.

[36] The type of presentation adopted for the text on screen in the tables throughout the chapters aims at representing the way it is displayed in the games. In particular, each row contains a 'subtitle' (in the sense discussed in Chapter 3), while each line corresponds to a line on the screen.

4.7.9 Satire

Satire has been popular since the times of ancient Greece as a means to expose and criticize human vices and faults through humor, irony and sarcasm. Instances of satire abound in *Discworld*, but can also be found in the other two games. *Day of the Tentacle*, for example, pokes fun at politics by having George Washington ask the main character ‘Do you think I should be the “ecology president” or the “education president?”’. In the US, in modern day elections,

> the candidates all seek to be used as the bearers of projection for positive hopes of the nation. During each election loaded words with strong archetypal/affective connections (e.g. peace, prosperity, jobs and responsibility) are dragged out in hope that individual projections will find a hook in the actions or message of the candidate. Tags like ‘the Ecology President’ and ‘the Education President’ are aimed specifically at the capture of projections.
>
> (Gray, 1996: 171)

Washington’s line is clearly a humorous reference to this practice. Gamers can in turn choose a humorous reply by pointing out the incongruity of an ‘ecology president’ who is famous for having cut down cherry trees in his childhood, by choosing the reply ‘Depends on how many cherry trees you’ve chopped down’ (the other two options are ‘I’m a big fan of education’ and ‘I think ecology is very important’). Bureaucracy, personified in the same game by the black suited ‘IRS agents’, is also a typical target for satire:

> Say, what’s the filing date for a BFD-206/ZZ Insufficient Credit Applications Form?
>
> You have until midnight on the twelfth working day past the first full moon after the end of your fiscal year. However, you can extend the date by filing an RPM-78 Waning Interest Extension anytime before the close of business on the second Tuesday after the first Friday in March. And of course, if you’re married, you’d also have to file the K-7209 Statement of Joint Intentions and declare any mutual gift expenditures.

Parody and satire often feature at the same time; therefore, the distinction between the two can appear blurred. However, while parody makes fun of existing artistic material (literary or otherwise) by imitating it, distorting it or applying it ‘to

ludicrously inappropriate subjects' (Rose, 1993: 81-2), satire can use parody, irony or sarcasm as an instrument to target something external. It is often what happens in the *Discworld* novels, where the parody of fantasy literature and tropes gives the author a plethora of opportunities to satirize real world institutions, laws and customs. In this respect, the video game is very similar to the novels, as the following examples show:

Female NPC	Are you a member of the dragon protection society?
Rincewind	My dear woman, there's a dragon out there that is bent on burning this whole city to the ground!
Female NPC	It's usually the owner's fault, you know.

Table 11. Satire in *Discworld* – example 1

When Rincewind asks the Patrician, the 'benevolent tyrant' of the city of Ankh-Morpork, if he has any idea how to kill the dragon that is terrifying the city, the Patrician explains to him why the issue is not as simple as Rincewind may think:

Patrician	If I'm putting city funding into a phenomena removal programme, there has to be a way to
	show a turn-around in profit next fiscal year.
	The only alternative is to reassess our policy on mass eating, burnings and devourings.
	Convert it into a sort of city asset.
	No easy thing, I can tell you!
Rincewind	Er - yes...
Patrician	I mean, if only we could make a positive earning out of the thing.
	Impose a P.A.Y.E. tax or something.
Rincewind	P.A.Y.E.?
Patrician	Pay as you eat.

Table 12. Satire in *Discworld* – example 2

As Rincewind and his colleagues of the Unseen University play an important role in the game, the academic world is one of the most frequent objects of satire. This speech from the university's senior wizards is just one of the many examples of this:

Lecturer in Recent Runes	Cogitating, my lad, is that process by which the wise make space inside their minds for more ideas.
Rincewind	You make more space for ideas by sitting on your

	backsides sipping a cup of milky tea? […]
Lecturer in Recent Runes	My boy, ideas are normally sold by volume, not by weight. It's best to let them settle so you can find more room in the top.
Bursar	We have wisdom, and you do not.

Table 13. Satire in *Discworld* – example 3

4.8 Visual humor

The reason for giving visual humor separate consideration in the corpus is to highlight some of its features. Visual humor is not always, in this context, an additional type of humor, but a way in which humor can be presented. In fact, any of the categories listed above could also be used for humor that is only visual – for example, a woman holding an axe and dressed in very scanty leather bikini would still be a visual parody of fantasy stereotypes, even if no character mentioned her attire. Some cultural references only appear as elements of the background and are never referred to explicitly. In *Day of the Tentacle*, on a wall of the mansion where the story is set hangs a calendar with an image of Darth Vader, one of the main characters of the Star Wars movies, and a portrait of Max from *Sam & Max Hit the Road*, another *LucasArts* game.

However, the previous discussion has already provided examples of humorous lines that referred to elements on the screen, something that could be considered 'complex' humor, being based both on verbal and on visual elements (Zabalbeascoa, 1996). In TSOMI, when Guybrush says 'Now, THIS is the cup of a carpenter!', thereby referring to the Indiana Jones movies, the comment only makes sense in conjunction with the visual element, as Guybrush is looking at a collection of cups of different sizes and shapes, just as the character Indiana Jones did in the above mentioned scene. Every time the characters break the fourth wall by looking at the player, as a consequence of something that has been said, on-screen events or player actions, it can be considered an instance of visual humor. Also, just like in other media, visuals provide many occasions for jokes and puns. 'Must be what they call a tax squeeze', says *Discworld*'s Rincewind upon seeing a

tax collector in a pillory. And the following dialogue exchange between the wizard and the university's librarian, an orangutan, is arguably funnier when accompanied by the actions on the screen, in which Rincewind tries to guess what the librarian is telling him by interpreting its gestures:

Librarian	Oook ook
Rincewind	Excuse me?
Librarian	Ook ook ook eek!
Rincewind	I see – I need something in order to take out a book.
Librarian	Oook ook
Rincewind	Toothpaste?
	Fingers... gloves...
	Something in your hand?
Librarian	OOK!
Rincewind	A dentist? Halitosis? You want some mouthwash! That's it – you want some mouthwash!
	I'm sorry, but I'm already spoken for.
Librarian	OOOOOOK!
Rincewind	Oh, a library card!
	Oh, why didn't you say so in the first place?

Table 14. Example of dialogue where humor is enhanced by visuals clues

As it is not always feasible to change visual elements when localizing a game (Bernal-Merino, 2007), such elements tend to represent a constraint for the translators. Therefore, the following analysis also takes into account if the translatable text is linked to the visuals, in an attempt to study how this link may have affected translation choices.

As it is reasonable to expect, not all humorous occurrences in the corpus can fit in one or more of the categories just described, the main reason being that a large part of the three games' humor lies in the many incongruous characters and situations players have to face: in this study, I am not going to analyze all humor in the games, but only the translatable humor. A character with exaggerated features, for example, is supposed to look funny, but is not something I will look at, because it is not 'translated', at least not in these games. Similarly, a situation which requires the player to do something 'funny' in the game (e.g. using a banana peel to make a guard fall and get rid of him to access some place) will not be included in the discussion. In general, even such elements could present translation 'issues'. For example, they might be considered funny in a certain

culture but not in a different one, or they might be regarded as humorous in a certain era but not when the works are translated; in this case, however, source and target cultures are very similar and not much time has passed between the original and the translation. The purpose of the list, then, is to have some kind of rational classification to tackle the translation of humor, in order to analyze if and how the approach depends on its type. Chapter 5 illustrates the translation strategies adopted in the selected games.

Chapter 5

Text Analysis I – The translation of humorous elements

5.1 Introduction

Since Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995/1958) seminal work on comparative stylistic analysis of French and English, translation strategies have been the object of much interest in Translation Studies. Nevertheless, despite the abundance of research on the issue, the academia has not adopted, as yet, an unambiguous terminology: there is no universally accepted way of defining the mental processes that govern the translation activity, and terms such as 'strategy', 'procedure', 'method' or 'technique' are often used with different meanings, sometimes even by the same author (Hurtado Albir, 2001; Bardaji, 2009).

A thorough examination of the multiple nuances ascribed to these terms would require a lengthy discussion that would go beyond the purposes of this dissertation.[37] In the following discussion, the expression 'translation strategy' will indicate the processes employed by a translator, consciously or unconsciously, to solve a specific translation problem. Therefore, it will not indicate a general approach translators may have towards the whole text, although such a general approach might, of course, emerge from the use of certain strategies throughout a text.

Section 4.6 showed that the games in the corpus use many different devices to achieve a humorous effect; the analysis of how they are rendered into a target

[37] A review of various perspectives on this issue can be found in Gil Bardaji (2009).

language requires considering them separately, as the options available to the translators are specific to each type of device.

After a brief discussion in section 5.2 of the translation of frames, 5.3 introduces the issues arising from the translation of frames containing ECRs. The classification of translation strategies followed in this thesis for the analysis of ECRs is then presented in more detail in 5.3.1, while 5.3.2 illustrates the findings of its application to the sample. Section 5.4 deals with the translation of puns, describing the solutions adopted in the corpus for their translation and their popularity in the three games in relation to the different pun types. The remaining sections are devoted, respectively, to metahumor (5.5), understatement (5.6), satire (5.7), parody (5.8) and language varieties (5.9).

5.2 The translation of frames

In the case of many culture-bound items, a specific term can be singled out and replaced with one that is more familiar to the target audience without completely altering the meaning of the whole expression. With frames, such an operation is rarely feasible as frames are, by nature, expressions whose meaning is determined by the sum of all their components.

As discussed in 4.6.4 and 4.6.5, the elements I indicate with the term ‘frames’ are very similar to what Leppihalme (1997) defines as ‘key-phrase allusions’ (allusions which do not contain proper names). Leppihalme lists a variety of feasible strategies for the translation of this type of cultural items. However, some of these strategies are never found in the games I analyze; they are extra-allusive guidance added in the text; explicit explanations such as footnotes, endnotes and translator’s prefaces; simulated familiarity, i.e. marked wording of syntax that signals the presence of borrowed words. This is not surprising, as Leppihalme’s analysis focuses on written texts (e.g. articles and novels), where techniques such as footnotes or typographical means used to signal out of context words are much more common than they are in AVT.

The following are, instead, the strategies that I deemed relevant for my corpus:

a) Literal translation (in Leppihalme's taxonomy, minimum change), 'where the translator simply translates the linguistic component without regard to connotative and contextual meaning' (Leppihalme, 1997: 89);
b) standard translation, i.e. the use of a frame known in the TL with or without the same denotative meaning but with the same connotations. In the special case of frames that are quotations from literary or audiovisual works, the standard translation is the pre-existing translation of the frame; this strategy is similar to the 'official equivalent', one of the strategies suggested by Pedersen (2005) for the translation of ECRs described in 5.3;
c) replacement with a TL frame that is not the standard translation of the preformed SL expression;
d) paraphrase, which replaces the frame with a phrase which conveys the same meaning;
e) omission.

As pointed out by Leppihalme (1997: 96), 'a literal/minimum change translation can of course on occasion be a standard translation'. When the source and target cultures are close to each other, as is the case with the US and Italy, there can be 'transcultural' frames – proverbs, idiomatic expressions or phrases – that have the same meaning in both cultures. In those cases, translating word per word keeps the connotative meaning. For example, the phrase 'crocodile tears' is used both in English and in Italian (*lacrime di coccordillo*) to indicate a display of fake regret or sorrow. Therefore, in *Discworld*, the sentence 'I wonder if I can muster some crocodile tears' is translated literally as *Chissà se riesco a piangere qualche lacrima di coccodrillo?* [Who knows if I can manage to cry some crocodile

tears?]. This procedure also works when the familiar expression is only referred to with a paraphrase, like in the following examples from the same game:[38]

	Original English	Italian translation
1	IT HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH BUTTERFLIES FLAPPING THEIR WINGS.	HA QUALCOSA A CHE FARE CON FARFALLE CHE SBATTONO LE ALI.
2	You know I've always wondered, just why are you crossing the road?	Sai, mi sono sempre domandato perché stai attraversando la strada?

Table 15. Examples of transcultural frames

In example 1, a character refers to the 'butterfly effect', which in chaos theory indicates the fact that a slight change in the initial conditions can have a significant effect on future events; the origin of the name 'butterfly effect' goes back to a 1952 English language short novel by Ray Bradbury, but the expression is now well known in Italian. Example 2 refers to a joke first seen in print in 1847, in the US magazine *The Knickerbocker*. The most common version of the joke, which has spawned many variations, is 'Why did the chicken cross the road?', with the punchline: 'To get to the other side'.

In the game, the joke is inserted as a visual gag and if the player inputs the command to examine the chicken, the character says the line in the example, making this one of the many instances where a humorous item only features in the game if a player inputs a certain command at a specific moment, as discussed in chapter 2. The translation would have been more problematic had the joke not been known in the target culture. To take this into account, whatever the strategy chosen for any culture-specific reference, I checked whether the reference was still recognisable in the translation. While a literal translation may appear 'faithful' to the original text, this is not always the case for cultural specific elements which are not familiar to the target audience, as shown in the following example.

Let us consider a line from *Day of the Tentacle*, in which one of the characters describes a log in the fireplace with the comment 'It's big, it's heavy, it's wood'.

[38] Line breaks and capitalization reproduce the way the lines are presented on-screen. The text is in turn the exact transcription of the spoken dialogue, which is present in the CD-ROM version of the game (but not in the floppy disk version, as specified in 4.5.2).

This line is taken from the TV ad for a 'toy log' sold in the US at the beginning of the 1990s and when the game was released, in 1993, many players would have been familiar with the song. The toy log was never sold in Italy and it is highly unlikely that players would be familiar with it, yet the line has been translated literally as *È grande, è pesante, è legno*. Here, a literal translation makes the target text 'faithful' to the original only in appearance, as the original reference is lost.

As remarked when listing the different types of humorous elements in the games, sometimes the boundaries between two types are not precisely defined and, often, an element can be assigned to more than one category. The previous example can be regarded as a frame, but is also an indirect reference to an object belonging to a country's material culture (a toy with its TV commercial); hence, it is also an indirect ECR along the lines described in 4.6.4. I will briefly examine the translation of other references of this kind, before moving on in 5.3 to those that can be considered 'pure' ECRs.

Frames referencing literary or audiovisual works mainly include quotations from other works of fiction, such as movies or video games. When these works of fiction have already been translated into the target language, translators have available an 'official equivalent', consisting of using the TL translation of the phrase. With regards to transcultural key-phrase allusions, Leppihalme (1997: 95) notices that using a standard translation 'requires no new verbalisation from the translator and, being transcultural, helps to convey the full range of meaning, including connotations [and] can therefore be thought a sign of translatorial competence'. In the games, however, some references to movies were not translated with their official preformed version, which in turn made it unlikely that the TL audience would spot them.

For example, at one point in *Discworld*, the player can tell Rincewind to look at a pickpocket, and Rincewind will say: 'Handy if I need to pick a pocket or two'. The line is a reference to the musical *Oliver*, in which *You've Got to Pick a Pocket or Two* is one of the main musical numbers. The movie version of the musical was released in Italy with Italian dubbing; all the songs were translated, and *You've Got to Pick a Pocket or Two* became *Rubare in una tasca o due* [Stealing from a

pocket or two]. Despite having available this official version, the translators of the game rendered the line as *Torna utile se voglio prendere un paio di borse!* [It will be handy if I want to fetch a couple of bags], thus making the reference easy to miss.

Moreover, while it is true that translators cannot count on the TL audience to recognize all the references, sometimes the translators themselves might not spot them, and therefore not ask themselves how to best render them in the TL. When Rincewind finds himself in a dark room full of scary things, if the player asks him to look at objects such as the 'sinister water' or the 'eerie toadstools', the character's reply will be 'Perhaps it's time I sang about my favourite things?'. This is a reference to a song by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II from the musical *The Sound of Music*. In the 1965 movie version, the character Maria uses this song to teach the children she is looking after how to cheer up when times are difficult: during a thunderstorm, the scared children go to her for comfort, and through the song *My Favourite Things* she tells them that they will feel better if they think about their favourite things. The dubbed version of the movie was extremely successful in Italy, and the song, also translated and dubbed, became very well-known. It would have been easy to keep the reference by using the Italian title of the song, *Le cose che piacciono a me* [The things that I like]. However, in the first Italian version of *Discworld*, Rincewind says instead *Forse è il momento di cantare i miei pezzi preferiti*, which means 'Maybe it's time I sing my favourite songs': not only the reference is lost, but the original seems not to have been understood. Curiously, *Day of the Tentacle* contains a very similar reference. It is a song (*I Whistle a Happy Tune*) from a musical by the same authors (*The King and I*), which shares the same theme: a woman sings it to her son, encouraging him to 'whistle a happy tune' when he is feeling down. In DOTT, we can give that advice to a depressed conventioneer, by choosing to tell him 'Why don't you try whistling a happy tune?'. In this case, though, the songs in the Italian version of the movie were not dubbed: the only 'official' translation for the lyrics was provided by the subtitles made for the Italian DVD more than 30 years after the original release of the movie and is not well known by the general public. In the game, the Italian version became *Perché non provi a fischiettare una melodia?* [Why don't you try whistling a tune?], in which the

'happiness' of the tune has been lost, and with it the reference. On all these occasions, the official translations are either literal translations or paraphrases that preserve the original meaning, although this is not always the case, as the following example shows.

In *Discworld*, when Rincewind says 'And I'll be back', he is likely quoting a line said by Arnold Schwarzenneger in the movie *The Terminator*. The line has become Schwarzennegger's most famous catchphrase and he repeated it subsequently in several movies. In fact, the words 'I'll be back' are even inscribed next to his hand and foot prints on the famous Hollywood Walk of Fame. That Rincewind is quoting the movie is indicated by the fact that he adds 'Hmm, that wasn't a bad line'. In the Italian version of the movie *The Terminator*, however, the line was translated as *Aspetto fuori* [I'll wait outside]. While most of the times adopting the official translation can be regarded as a 'neutral' choice, in the sense that it is neither SL- nor TL-oriented, in this case such official translation represents quite a drastic change from the original text. In *Discworld*, the Italian translation of Rincewind's line is *E io tornerò… (mmh, non era una cattiva tattica...)*, which means 'And I'll be back... (hmm, that wasn't a bad tactic…)', showing a possible misinterpretation of the original line, which implies that translators might not have recognized the source of the quote. Interestingly, the fan translation of the game later corrected this oversight by having Rincewind say, instead, *E io tornerò... mmh, non male come battuta...* [And I'll be back... Hmm, not bad, this line...]. As we will see in chapter 6, the retranslation of the game made by amateur fan translators is in most occasions more faithful to the original text.

Overall, literal translation seems to be by far the most popular option for the translation of 36 frames analyzed in the corpus, as shown in Figure 28:

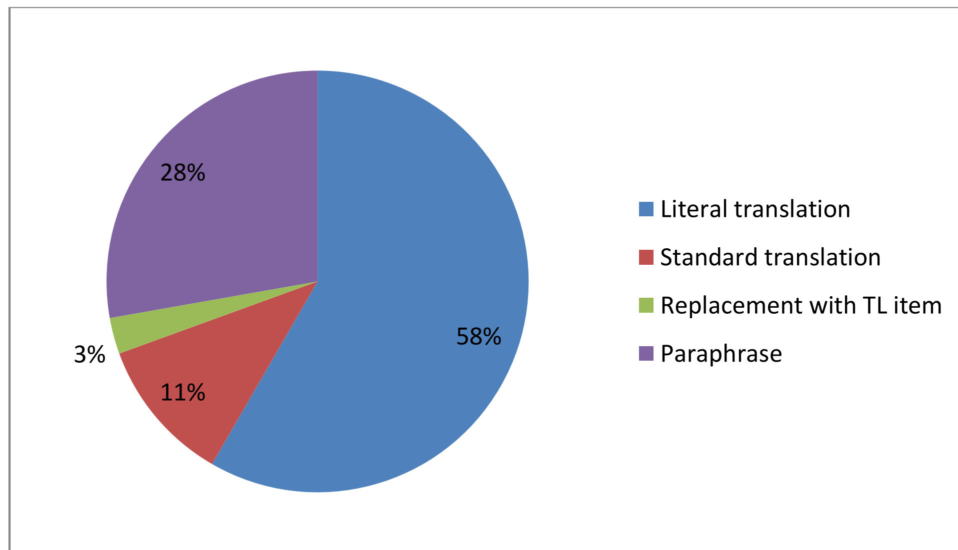

Figure 28. Strategies used for the translation of frames in the corpus

Often, however, translating a frame literally meant losing its connotative meaning, as the TL did not have an equivalent frame; for this reason, 6 of the 21 frames translated literally were 'lost' in the sense just described.

Furthermore, there were many occasions in which translators did not use the standard translation that was available: this happened for 3 of the 21 cases of literal translation, and for 9 of the 10 items which were paraphrased in the TT – quite a striking result, considering that it meant replacing a culture-specific item with something with no cultural connotation, when in 90% of the cases an easy translation was available that would have kept all the meanings in the TT.

5.3 The translation of 'pure' ECRs: relevant strategies

As this study adopts Pedersen's (2005) definition of Extralinguistic Culture-bound References (ECRs), the classification of the procedures used to translate them also follows, for the most part, the categories proposed by the same author. In his analysis of how culture is rendered in subtitles, Pedersen adopts a taxonomy which includes the following strategies:

- Official equivalent, which uses a pre-fabricated translation of the ECR that exists in the TL;
- Retention, where an element of the SL – in this context, an ECR – is kept in the TT;
- Specification, in which the ECR is left untranslated, but some information is added that makes it more specific than the original; this can be done through explicitation (e.g. spelling out an abbreviation or completing an official name) or addition (by adding information on the connotative meaning of a ST element);
- Direct translation, which can produce two outcomes:

  calque (a stringent literal translation), and

  shifted direct translation, in which slight changes are performed on the ST ECR to make it less exotic to the target audience;
- Generalization, where a reference to something specific is replaced by a reference to something more general;
- Substitution, which can be divided into:

  - cultural substitution, a strategy that is very similar to adaptation (as described by Vinay and Darbelnet, 1995) where an unfamiliar reference is replaced with an ECR – transcultural or monocultural – that is known to the TT audience, and
  - Paraphrase, which in turn can be divided into:

    - paraphrase with sense transfer, when the text used to replace an ECR in the TT keeps its sense and connotations, and
    - situational paraphrase, in which the sense of the ECR is removed;
- Omission.

For my analysis, I have used a classification similar to Pedersen's. However, my taxonomy does not include specification through addition and omission, as no occurrence has been found in the text, and direct translation is used without dividing into two further subcategories, as no 'shifts' were performed on the ST to make ECRs less exotic that were not classifiable as a cultural substitition.

Subsections 5.3.1-9 illustrate the categories I considered relevant using examples from the games; 5.3.10 presents the general findings in relation to their use throughout the corpus.

5.3.1 Official equivalent

At the time when the games were localized, many ECRs (mostly proper names of a fictional nature) already had a TL version, either because they were taken from works that had previously been translated into the TL, or because they were already part of the TL audience's cultural background. When this was the case, translators had the option to replace the ECRs in the SL with their official TL versions. In this line from *Day of the Tentacle*, the name 'Santa' has been replaced with *Babbo Natale*, the Italian name for Santa Claus:

ST: He looks a lot like Santa, but not as friendly.
TT: Assomiglia tanto a Babbo Natale, ma meno amichevole.
BT:[39] He looks a lot like Babbo Natale, but less friendly.

In my analysis, however, I include under the definition of 'official equivalent' not only proper names, but also items of a different nature for which an equivalent exists in the TL, such as measurement units. Replacing the SL unit with one from the measuring system used in the target country can be considered an official translation, even if the TL measure is not the exact conversion of the SL measure. In TSOMI, when Guybrush tells Carla, the 'Sword Master', that he is 'selling these fine leather jackets' (referencing the *Lucasarts* game Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade), she replies:

ST: Do you have one in size 3? Of course you don't! Because you're not really a jacket salesman!
TT: Ne hai una, taglia 48? Certo che no! Perché non sei un vero rappresentante di giacche!
BT: Do you have one in size 48? Of course you don't! Because you're not really a jacket salesman!

[39] Back-translation.

The two measures are not right the same, but shifting to the TL measuring system helps the audience understand the meaning of the lines. While using a different measurement unit could be labeled cultural substitution or adaptation, I chose to consider it 'official equivalent' as I believe that replacing a measure with the equivalent used in the target country does not necessarily denote a 'domesticating' approach, but is more often a vehicle for conveying practical information contained in the ST.

Other types of ECRs can also have an official equivalent in the TL. Let us look, for example, at the following line from *Discworld*:

ST: TIDDLYWINKS!?!
TT: AL GIOCO DELLA PULCE!?!
BT: AT TIDDLYWINKS?!? [literally, the 'Game of the flea']

Here, the *gioco della pulce* [game of the flea] is the name used in Italian for the game 'tiddlywinks'.

In some cases, using the official equivalent would signal the presence of an implicit ECR in the TL. The following line, also taken from *Discworld*, was mentioned in section 4.7.4 as an example of an indirect reference, where the cultural item, in this case the board game *Cluedo*, is only alluded to:

ST: Well... I accuse Colonel Horseradish in the Library with the lead pipe…
TT: Dunque... io accuso il Colonnello Barbaforte nella Biblioteca con il condotto principale...
BT: Well... I accuse Colonel Strongbeard in the Library with the main pipe...

The line could also be defined as a composite reference, as part of it has been modified in the text ('Colonel Mustard' from *Cluedo* becomes 'Colonel Horseradish') while other elements are kept with the same names as in the board game (the 'library' and the 'lead pipe'). Using in the TT the official translation of these items taken from the Italian version of *Cluedo* (*biblioteca* for 'library' and *tubo di piombo* for 'lead pipe') would have helped players recognize the reference in the TL. However, in this case the official translation did not reproduce the reference.

5.3.2 Retention

Retention is the most SL-oriented of all the procedures observed. In the corpus, it has often been used to account for proper names of people; and while some are of a fictional nature (e.g. 'Don Corleone', referenced in *Day of the Tentacle*), others are names of real persons, e.g. historical figures or well-known names from the entertainment world ('Charles DeGaulle' and 'Charlie Chaplin', also mentioned in DOTT). Other types of proper names received the same treatment and the line 'How do you suppose the Dodgers are doing?' from DOTT becomes *Come pensi che stiano andando i Dodgers?* [How do you think the Dodgers are doing?], retaining the name of the Los Angeles baseball team in the target language. One of the owners of a travelling circus in TSOMI is called 'Alfredo Fettuccini', a name that alludes to the well-known pasta dish 'fettuccine Alfredo'. The dish, a type of butter fettuccine, is of Italian origin; its name, however, while widely known in the US, is almost unknown in Italy. As the name was retained in the TL, the character still has a last name that sounds like a type of pasta, but the reference to the 'fettuccine Alfredo' is likely to be lost.

Retention has also been used sometimes to deal with common names, belonging to various cultural categories. For example, names of food items such as 'roast beef' or 'vindaloo' have been retained in *Discworld* (even though 'vindaloo', unlike 'roast beef', is a dish that not many Italian players would recognize). The approaches used to treat sports references in DOTT also include retention, as in the following line:

> I've noticed that they seem to do well with a man on first after *a fly ball* when the opposing pitcher is left-handed and wearing a green hat.

which has been rendered in the TT as:

> Ho notato che vanno abbastanza bene con un uomo in prima base dopo *una fly ball* quando il lanciatore è mancino ed indossa un cappello verde. [I've noticed that they do quite well with a man on first base after a fly ball when the pitcher is left-handed and wearing a green hat].

As pointed out by Pedersen (2005), retention is not an ideal procedure when ECRs are monocultural. In baseball, a ‘fly ball’ is a ball that is hit when it is still high in the air. Being specific to a sport which is not familiar to the Italian public, it can be considered a monocultural ECR, and it is likely that very few Italian players are able to recognize the meaning of the expression upon seeing it in the original English; this creates a culture bump and therefore dampens the humorous effect of the dialogue exchange.

Retention has also been used to deal with puns. As illustrated in 1.4.1, one of the strategies is to replace a SL pun with a pun in the TL. Sometimes, a SL pun ‘works’ in the TL with little or no modifications to its component and, on these lucky occasions, it can be simply transferred into the TT as it is. However, when the pun is based on culture-specific items, translators should take into account their degree of transculturality. In the following example from *Discworld*, retention has been used to transfer the name of the character ‘Redmond Herring’. The name is a play on the concept of *red herring*, an idiom used to indicate a literary device which distracts audiences from important clues or issues by directing their attention to an irrelevant detail. This is how the character introduces himself in the game:

ST: Redmond Herring, supplier of plot modifiers and moderators to the gentry, sir.
TT: Redmond Herring, fornitore di modificatori e di regolatori di trame per l’alta borghesia, signore.
BT: Redmond Herring, supplier of plot modifiers and moderators to the upper middle class, sir.

Recreating a pun similar to ‘Redmond Herring’ in the TT would have been difficult, as there is no equivalent idiom in Italian which could be used to maintain both the wordplay and its components. Yet again, the expression ‘red herring’ is not commonly known in Italian and the solution chosen means that the pun is likely to be lost on most of the TL players.

A puzzle involving ‘red herrings’ is also present in *The Secret of Monkey Island*. In the game, a troll guarding a bridge tells Guybrush that he must pay a toll in order to cross the bridge. As a toll, he requires ‘something that will attract

attention, but have no real importance'. He will also say that he wants 'something that will divert attention from things that are REALLY important', a perfect definition of 'red herring'. Therefore, if the player gives him an actual red herring that can be found in a different location, the troll will let him pass (after Guybrush has crossed the bridge, we can see that the troll is in fact a man in a troll costume when he removes his mask and eats the fish). The solution to the puzzle is not obvious to a SL player, as the item appears in the inventory under the label 'fish', but Guybrush says 'I think it's a herring' if the players examines it, thus providing an additional clue. Similarly to what happened in *Discworld*, the red herring pun will be lost on many TL players, as the expression is not well known in Italy. This time, however, the loss can make the game harder in the TL, as the trope is subverted in *Monkey Island*, where the red herring, contrary to its definition, plays a relevant role in the plot. Again, the connection of humor and gameplay proves essential, as it makes it especially important to carefully render the humor in the TT, but at the same time limits the options available to the translators, who can be faced with a very difficult task in having to translate humor that is culture-specific and is also linked to visual elements and players' actions.

5.3.3 Specification

Specification is intended here with a slightly different meaning than in Pedersen's (2005) study on ECRs. He defines this procedure as leaving the ECR untranslated, but adding information that makes it more specific, e.g. spelling out an abbreviation or adding a person's first name or qualification to a mention of his or her last name. In my analysis, I also intend specification as the process of adding information that is latent in the SL ECR; the original reference may or may not be translated.

The following is an example of specification used for an ECR belonging to the sports category. In the line:

> I've noticed that they seem to do well with a man on first,

the term ‘first’ is a sports reference that stands for ‘first base’ in baseball. As the Italian public is not as familiar as US audiences with this sport, the latent part of the expression has been added in the TT, which reads *Ho notato che vanno abbastanza bene con un uomo in prima base* [I’ve noticed that they seem to do rather well with a man on first base], in which *base* has been added to the translation in an attempt to make sure that players will understand the meaning and context of the ECR.

5.3.4 Calque

Calque is a literal translation where the semantic load of the ST ECR is not modified and ‘there is no effort made to transfer connotations or guide the TT audience in any way’ (Pedersen, 2005: 5). An example is provided by the translation of the expression ‘beauty queen’, an ECR belonging to the ‘social life’ category. In *Day of the Tentacle*, it has been rendered with the calque *regina di bellezza*; although nothing was modified, the literal translation maintained the exact meaning of the original, as the same expression is commonly used in the TL.

Not all ECRs, though, can be transferred so easily. In *Discworld*, ‘Thurmaturgy 101’ is one of the courses held at Unseen University, the place where wizards receive their higher education. While, in English speaking countries, ‘101’ indicates the basic level of a certain subject, the number is not used with this meaning in Italy, where equivalent expressions for this concept could be *Turmaturgia I* or *Fondamenti di Turmaturgia* [Fundamentals of Thurmaturgy]. The Italian translation of the game used instead *Turmaturgia 101*, resulting in an expression that would seem odd to the Italian players and not as funny.

5.3.5 Generalization

Generalization consists of replacing an ECR that is very specific with a more generic hypernym, that the translators deem more likely to be part of the TL

audience's background knowledge. This approach has not been used exclusively for microcultural ECRs, which are often, by definition, very specific. On the contrary, some examples of generalization observed in the corpus indicate a desire by the translators to avoid 'culture bumps' even with ECRs which are not bound only to the source culture. For example, 'calisthenics', a type of gymnastics, becomes, in *Day of the Tentacle*, *ginnastica* [gymnastics] and 'V-guitars' become the generic *chitarre* [guitars].

On other occasions, generalization has been used for ECRs which could be regarded as 'exotic' when the games were first released in Italy, but in later years started to be borrowed more and more frequently by the Italian language. 'Food and drink' is arguably one of the areas in which globalization has been especially quick in expanding the common ground between the SL and TL cultures. In 1993, translating 'that woman who bakes the cupcakes' with *quella donna che fa le torte* [that woman who bakes the cakes] meant replacing a culture-specific item, 'cupcakes', that very few would have easily recognized. If the translation was made today, and the term 'cupcakes' was retained in the TT, many more players would understand the English term.

A similar reasoning holds for another food-related item, the 'kebab' (or 'kabob' in the variant mentioned in *The Secret of Monkey Island*), a dish of meat cooked on a skewer which is now common in Italy, but would have sounded 'exotic' in 1991, when TSOMI was translated. This is also an example of an ECR which did not originate in the SL culture, as the type of kebab mentioned in the game, the shish kebab (a variety of kebab served on its skewer), is a Turkish specialty. The line containing the ECR reads:

> Soon you'll be wearing my sword like a shish-kabob!

The Italian translators judged that the reference was not familiar to the Italian public and decided to replace it with a generic *spiedino* [skewer].

However, another factor might have entered the decision – namely, the desire to insert a humorous element, maybe in an attempt to compensate for the loss of

some cultural references as well as puns and elements of language variety (as discussed in 5.4 and 5.9). The SL line is part of a certain mini-game introduced in TSOMI, ‘insult swordfighting’, which also made an appearance in some of its sequels. In insult swordfighting, the two parties must, while duelling with their swords, also fling insults at each other. Each insult has the appropriate counter-insult: if a pirate, upon being insulted, can produce the appropriate counter-insult, he wins a round, otherwise he loses. Winning or losing three consecutive rounds means winning or losing a match. The players, who can only learn new insults by duelling with other pirates, will inevitably lose the first matches, but these matches will allow them to gather a pool of insults large enough to beat their next opponents. In TSOMI, the following insult is the counter-insult to the line quoted above:

> First you’d better stop waving it around like a feather-duster.

In Italian, the translation of ‘feather-duster’ is *piumino*, which rhymes with *spiedino* [skewer]. Therefore, it is likely that this affected the translators’ choice in dealing with the shish kebab reference: by using generalization, they could insert an additional humorous element which was not present in the SL text, by rendering the two lines as:

> Adesso t’infilzerò con la mia spada come uno spiedino!
> Prima dovresti smettere di agitarla come un piumino.
> [I’m going to run you through with my sword as if it were a skewer!
> First you should stop waving it around as if it were a feather-duster]

This example reminds us that a number of factors affect the choice of translation procedures for ECRs. While the degree of transculturality of an ECR and the SL- or TL-oriented attitude of the translators are often the main elements on which the choice is based, they are not the only ones, and a meaningful analysis always requires taking into account specific circumstances which might have determined the solutions chosen. Moreover, the fact that many ECRs originally bound to the SL culture became in recent years transcultural suggests the opportunity of studying whether such change had any effect on translation choices and motivates the analysis of the retranslations of the games presented in chapter 6.

5.3.6 Cultural Substitution

As the name indicates, cultural substitution involves replacing the ST ECR with a different one. The new ECR in the TT can be transcultural, if it belongs to the background knowledge of both audiences, or monocultural, if it is specific of the target culture. In *Day of the Tentacle*, the ECR 'beef jerky' (a snack of dried meat popular in the US) was replaced with *ciccioli di carne* [pork scratchings], as jerky is not common in Italy. In the sample, such substitutions are frequent for ECRs in the 'food and drink' category, as many items which belong to the culinary tradition of a country do not have an equivalent in the target culture and language. At times, however, cultural substitution has been chosen even if the original ECR was transcultural. In the same game, for example, the line:

> It's too late for christening.

became

> È troppo tardi per la cresima.
> [It's too late for confirmation.]

Here, it is difficult to guess the motivation behind the substitution. Firstly, because both terms would be easily recognizable by an Italian audience. Second, the Italian word for 'christening', *battesimo*, would have required two more characters, but there were no spatial constraints to discourage the use of a slightly longer line. Finally, there are no visual references and there is no wordplay involved in either the SL or the TL.

When an ECR is inserted in a pun, this can affect translation choices, as in the following dialogue exchange from *Discworld*:

	ST	TT	BT
Windle Poons	Damn, I've lost it. What were we talking about again?	Diamine, l'ho scordato. Di che stavamo parlando?	Damn, I forgot. What were we talking about?
Rincewind	Um - pickles?	Uhm... marinai?	Um... mariners?

Windle Poons	What's pickled? What? Mm? What do you mean?	Chi ha marinato? Cosa? Che vuoi dire?	Who marinated? What? What do you mean?
Rincewind	Well the eels were pickled, weren't they?	Be', le anguille erano marinate, giusto?	Well, the eels were marinated, weren't they?
Windle Poons	What? Pickled elves? Damn their ears, I've told them to lock that liquor cupboard! Go on, boy, get after 'em!-	Cosa? Ancelle alcolizzate? Accidenti a loro, gliel'avevo detto di nascondere quella tazza di liquore! Va', a cercarle, ragazzo!	What? Drunk handmaids? Damn them, I told them to hide that liquor cup! Go look for them, boy!
Rincewind	No - no! Pickles! Not pickled!	No, no! Marinate! Non alcolizzate!	No, no! Marinated, not drunk!
Windle Poons	Pickles? Try the kitchen. Get out! Stop wasting my time!	Marinaie? Allora prova al porto. Vattene. Smettila di farmi perdere tempo!	Female mariners? Then try the harbour. Get out! Stop wasting my time!

Table 16. Example of ECR inserted in a pun

Here, the ‘pickled eels’ became *anguille marinate* [marinated eels] in the Italian translation. As pickled eels are unfamiliar to the Italian audience, while marinated eels are a typical Italian recipe, the substitution could reflect the desire to avoid ‘culture bumps’. However, the specific translation has an additional motivation: the word ‘marinated’ is used to create a pun with *marinaio* [mariner], thus replacing a ST pun in which Windle Poons, and old wizard who is quite hard of hearing, mistakes the word ‘eels’ for ‘elves’. Hence, the translators’ choice between keeping or modifying the reference has been likely affected both by the desire to recreate a pun and by the low degree of transculturality of the original ECR. As the presence of an ECR in a pun can easily affect the translation of both, these considerations were taken into account when analysing translation procedures.

In discussing cultural substitution, Pedersen (2005: 7) points out that it can be used in combination with other strategies, e.g. official equivalent. *Day of the Tentacle* provides an interesting example of cultural substitution used in conjunction with hyponymy, which works in the opposite way to generalization. In the game, a transcultural ECR from the ‘food and drink’ category, *spaghetti*, is used to replace the ST ‘noodles’. Despite having an Italian origin, the ECR *spaghetti* has become transcultural and just like *pizza* or *cappuccino* it is now commonly used in the source culture. The two terms have similar meaning, which

made the substitution possible despite the presence of a visual reference: the ‘wet soggy noodles’ – which were rendered, in the translation, as *spaghetti stracotti* [overcooked spaghetti] – are clearly visible on the screen. In fact, the visual reference narrows the choice of translations and while ‘noodles’ is a term used in English to indicate a variety of products, the image points towards the specific type of ‘noodle’ that is *spaghetti*. This way, while generalization aims at clarifying an obscure reference by replacing it with the bigger genus to which it belongs, the translation chosen in this example replaces a generic cultural item with a more specific ECR, a substitution made possible by the fact that the transcultural ECR used in the TT (*spaghetti*) is easier to recognize for the TL players than ‘noodles’.

Sometimes, the original ECR is replaced with a monocultural ECR that only belongs to the target culture. Pedersen (2005) notices how, in subtitling, this procedure is often chosen to deal with ECRs which refer to official institutions or titles. The link appears to be confirmed in the sample of video games selected for my analysis, as illustrated by the following example from *Day of the Tentacle*:

ST: Why bother? Everyone knows you can’t fight the I.R.S.
TT: Perché perdere tempo? Tutti lo sanno che non si può combattere la Finanza.
BT: Why waste time? Everyone knows you can’t fight the Finanza.

where the *Finanza* (short for *Guardia di Finanza*) is the Italian law enforcement agency responsible for dealing with financial crime. The agency, which is also in charge of fighting smuggling and the drugs trade, is part of the armed forces: it is essentially a police corp and could hardly be considered the Italian equivalent of the US Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

Substituting a SL ECR with a TL monocultural ECR is one of the most TL-oriented procedures that can be used when translating culture. In addition, an ECR which is specific to the target culture is sometimes used to replace a generic ECR or even added where the ST contained no ECR. Let us consider, for example, the following line from *The Secret of Monkey Island*:

To be honest, sir, I’m between jobs.

In the Italian version of the game, the line becomes:

TT: Per essere onesto, signore, sono in cassa integrazione.
BT: To be honest, sir, I’m in *cassa integrazione*,

which is a literal translation of the ST except for the expression *cassa integrazione*. While the original simply features an idiomatic expression for being unemployed (‘to be between jobs’), the TT replaces it with a strictly monocultural ECR. *Cassa integrazione* (short for *cassa integrazione guadagni*) is a special fund, financed by companies and the state, used to supplement the pay of workers who would otherwise lose part of their income due to being subject to lay-offs or short-time working. The scheme is uniquely specific to the Italian unemployment insurance system, and using it in the game points to a heavily TL-oriented approach. Pedersen (2005) argues that the TT audience is accustomed to this kind of cultural substitution and on many occasions may not even be aware that a target culture ECR has replaced a source culture original, as such target language ECRs often become ‘official equivalents’ due to the frequent use of this device. However, the fact that a substitution may not go unnoticed by the audience should only be considered a potential issue if absolute faithfulness to the original is what translators should aspire to achieve. Approaches may differ when the translation also has different purposes, like, for example, producing a humorous effect. When, on the fictional Caribbean island of Mêlée, our wannabe pirate Guybrush says that he is *in cassa integrazione*, the line is even more incongruous than his original reply of being ‘between jobs’, which breaks the suspension of disbelief and adds to the humorous impact of the dialogue exchange. As discussed at length in chapter 2, references to the real world can be especially effective in video games, as they exploit the relationship between the players and their avatar. When humor is involved, the increased incongruity can also enhance the funniness of a situation or dialogue. This effect is amplified when the monocultural ECR used in the TT is a proper name or, in general, something that cannot be mistaken for a SL ECR or for an official equivalent of a SL item, since it is unequivocally bound to the target culture. We observe this in *Day of the Tentacle*, where:

Maybe we could go on the talk show circuit.

is rendered as:

TT: Forse potremo apparire al Fabrizio Sostanzo.
BT: Maybe we could appear on the Fabrizio Sostanzo.

The name is a reference to Maurizio Costanzo, an Italian journalist and television host, whose eponymous talk show was a staple of Italian TV for almost 30 years, between 1982 and 2009. A similar example can be found in *The Secret of Monkey Island*: during the end credits, after suggesting that players now turn off their PC, the game lists a number of more productive things they can do with their time, like singing 'Welsh folk songs at the bank'; in the localized version, the line becomes 'canta le canzoni di Lucio Dalla in banca' [sings Lucio Dalla's songs at the bank], using the name of a popular Italian songwriter, Lucio Dalla. Seeing this scenes, Italian players will undoubtedly realize that the original dialogue has been modified.

Finally, cultural substitution is sometimes used when an ECR is part of a pun, as replacing the SL ECR with a TL ECR can help recreating a similar effect in the TT. As will be discussed in 5.4, one way of dealing with ST puns is trying to maintain a pun in the TT. In *Day of the Tentacle*, an ECR belonging to the 'entertainment' category is used to create a graphological pun based on the homophony between the adjective 'grimy' and the US music awards 'Grammys':

We have a chance to win a GRIMY award as the loudest new band.

Although the Grammy Awards could be considered a transcultural ECR, the wordplay with 'grimy' would not be easy to spot for an Italian audience. Therefore, the translators have replaced both components of the pun and the line has become:

TT: Abbiamo l'occasione di vincere il premio San Scemo per il complesso più forte.

BT: We have a chance to win the *San Scemo award* for the best band.

Scemo, a word that means idiot or fool, rhymes with Sanremo, the city where the popular *Festival di Sanremo* [Sanremo (Song) Festival] has been held annually since 1951. With this substitution, translators were able to create a TT pun that is similar to the original in both meaning and structure, although they had to employ a cultural reference that is immediately recognizable as being extraneous to the source culture and to the US setting of the story. However, as pointed out above, a higher degree of incongruity might be a good tactic when the text aims at creating a humorous effect.

5.3.7 Paraphrase with sense transfer

With this strategy, an ECR is replaced with a paraphrase that preserves its original meaning. When discussing, in section 4.7.3, the cultural category of ECRs related to social life, I mentioned an example from *Discworld* where the expression 'blue ribbon' has been used to indicate something of high quality – in that specific example, a sheep. As this expression does not have the same idiomatic meaning in Italian, translators have decided to express the same concept with a paraphrase whenever possible. For example, 'blue ribbon winning sheep' has been rendered as *splendida pecora* [splendid sheep] and, on a different occasion, a 'blue-ribbon custard' has become *la miglior crema che c'è sul mercato* [the best custard there is on the market].

Besides removing the original ECRs, these two solutions have also effectively removed the culture bumps that such ECRs might have created for the target audience. Still, translators have to be careful when adopting this procedure if they don't want to leave a 'shadow' of the former ECR, an outcome illustrated by the following example from *Day of the Tentacle*. There is a moment in the adventure where the characters are trying to find a way to raise money to buy a diamond. One of them has an idea:

Hey, I know! Let's put on a show in the old barn!

a line that has been translated as:

> TT: Ehi, trovato! Facciamo un concorso nella stalla!
> BT: Hey, I got it! Let's put on a competition in the stables!

In the original, the 'show in the old barn' is a reference to a US custom, originating from the 'barn dances' which were popular in the past in Ireland, England and other English speaking countries. In the US, the barn became a place where various types of festivals and shows were organised, such as country dances or musical revues. In the game there is no barn, and the reference is only a joke and not an actual suggestion as the TT implies.

Since this tradition does not belong to Italian culture, putting up 'a competition in the stables' does not ring any bell for the Italian players. However, the suggestion is odd enough that a player might wonder whether the line was in the original text and, if so, whether it was any more meaningful in the original language. Of course, this sort of translation, a hybrid between paraphrase and direct translation, may still produce a culture bump.

A similar problem arises when, in the same game, 'coleslaw' is rendered as *insalata americana* [American salad], and while the expression transfers the sense of the original, the name suggests that the original might have been different, as *insalata americana* is not the official name of any specific dish in the TL.

5.3.8 Situational paraphrase

This strategy sees the original ECR disappear completely as not even the sense is maintained in the TT. Pedersen (2005) observes that, in subtitles, this type of paraphrase is used frequently in the case of ECRs inserted in puns. While in my corpus there is no noticeable link between situational paraphrase and the presence of ECRs in puns, the procedure is used in a variety of cases. In *Discworld*, the line:

strutting about in there posing pouches...

has been translated as:

TT: a passeggiare impettiti con le mani in tasca...
BT: strutting about with their hands in their pockets...

Although the posing pouch is an item of clothing that is not unknown in the target culture, the translation has decided to omit it and replace the mention with new material.

The approach is also used for references from other fictional works. The line 'it's my precious' features in *Discworld* as a reference to J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937). It is one of the most well known quotes from that book and Tolkien's fantasy world is one of the most frequent objects of parody in Pratchett's *Discworld* novels, on which the video game is based. The Italian translators of the game changed it to 'it's a secret', thus omitting the reference and modifying the sense of the original.

5.3.9 The translation of 'pure' ECRs – Summation of results

Figure 29 shows the strategies used in the games for the translation of the 250 ECRs identified in the whole sample, while Figure 30 provides a comparison of the three games:

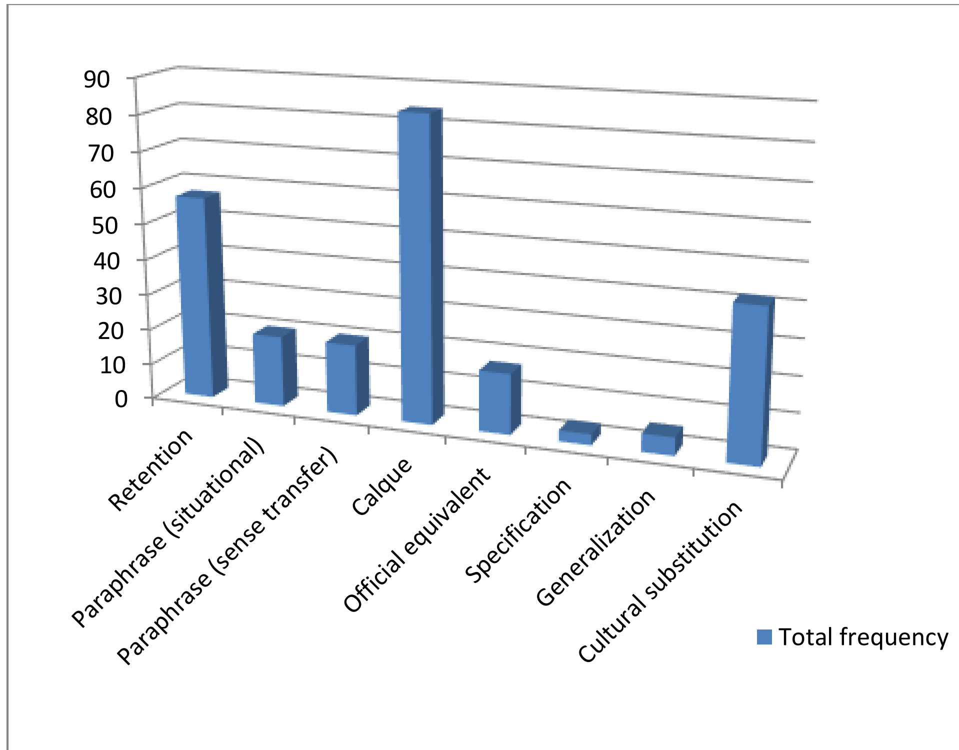

Figure 29. Translation procedures used for ECRs in the corpus

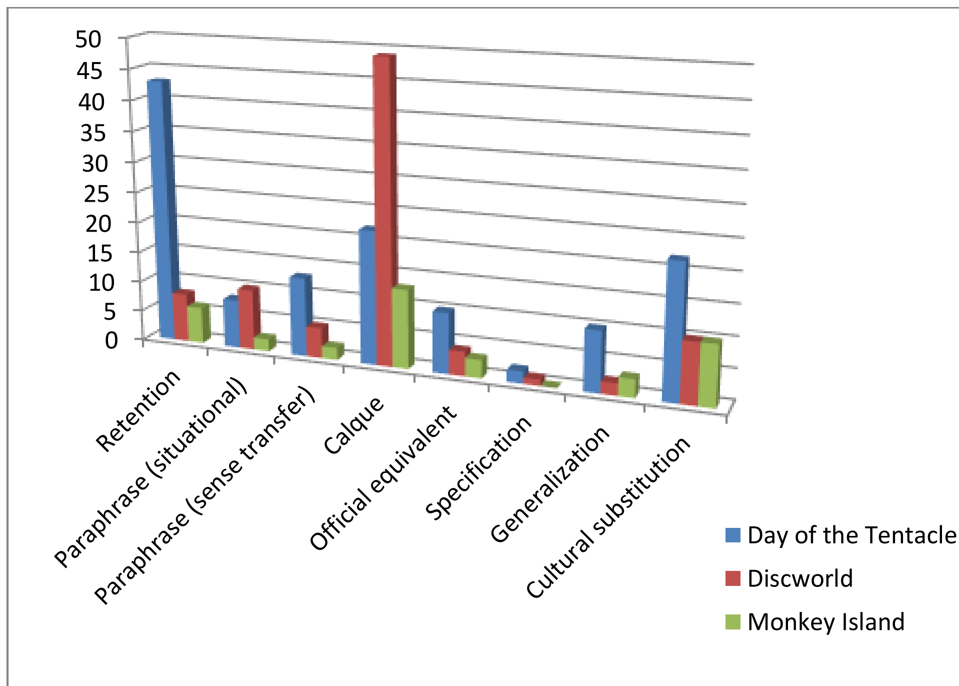

Figure 30. Translation procedures used for ECRs in each game of the corpus

According to Pedersen (2005: 4), retention is 'by far the most common strategy for rendering ECRs', despite the fact that other strategies might be more appropriate for references with a low degree of transculturality. His analysis,

however, focuses on subtitling, and chapter 3 pointed out that the rules and constraints of the translation of video games can be very different from those present in other forms of AVT. In my corpus, retention is the most common strategy only in *Day of the Tentacle*, where 33% of ECRs have been translated using this device, as shown in Figure 31:

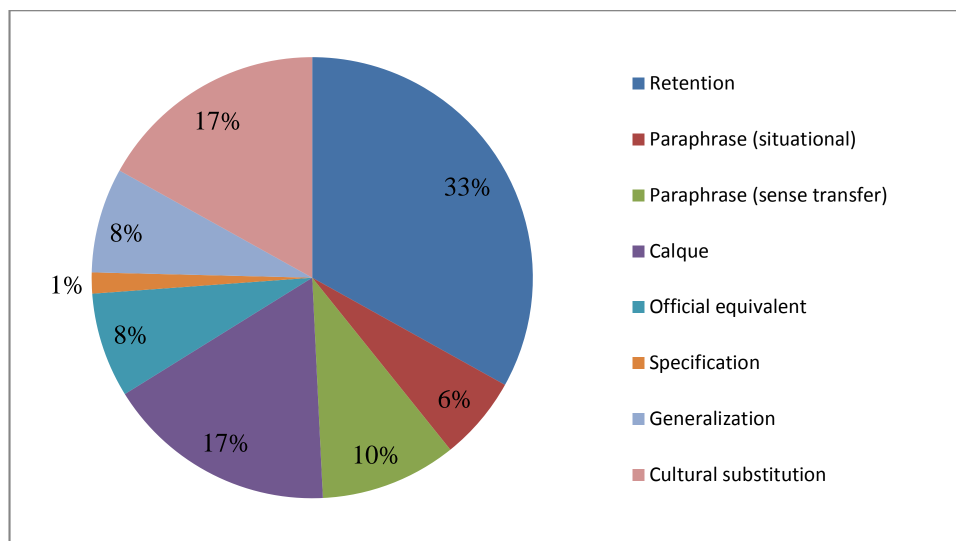

Figure 31. Translation procedures used in *Day of the Tentacle* for ECRs

After retention, the most frequently used strategies in the game are cultural substitution and calque, accounting, respectively, for 17% and 13% of all observations.

In *The Secret of Monkey Island*, retention has been used in 15% of cases, a proportion easily surpassed by both calque (33%) and cultural substitution (26%), a strongly TL-oriented strategy (see Figure 32):

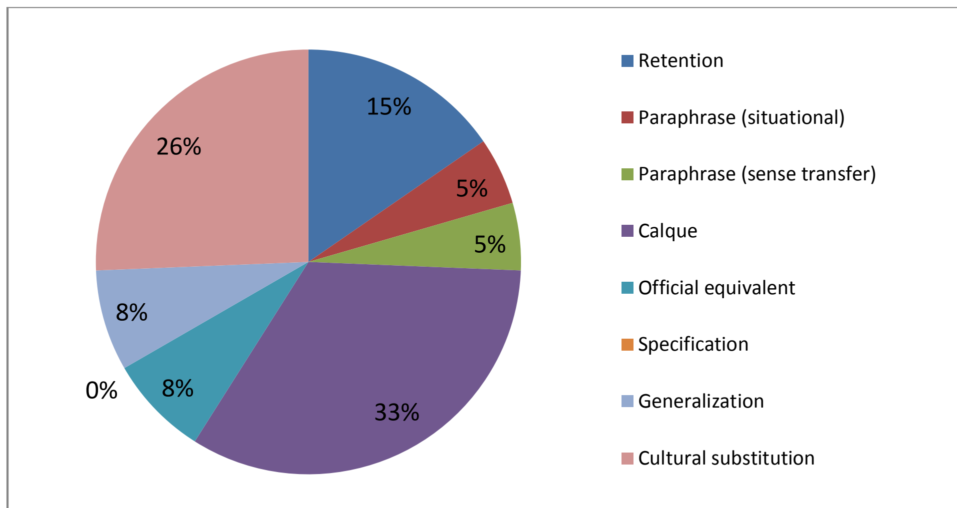

Figure 32. Translation procedures used in TSOMI for ECRs

Finally, in *Discworld*, where only 9% of ECRs have been translated using retention, the strategy is far from being the most popular one, with direct translation being used 55% of times (see Figure 33):

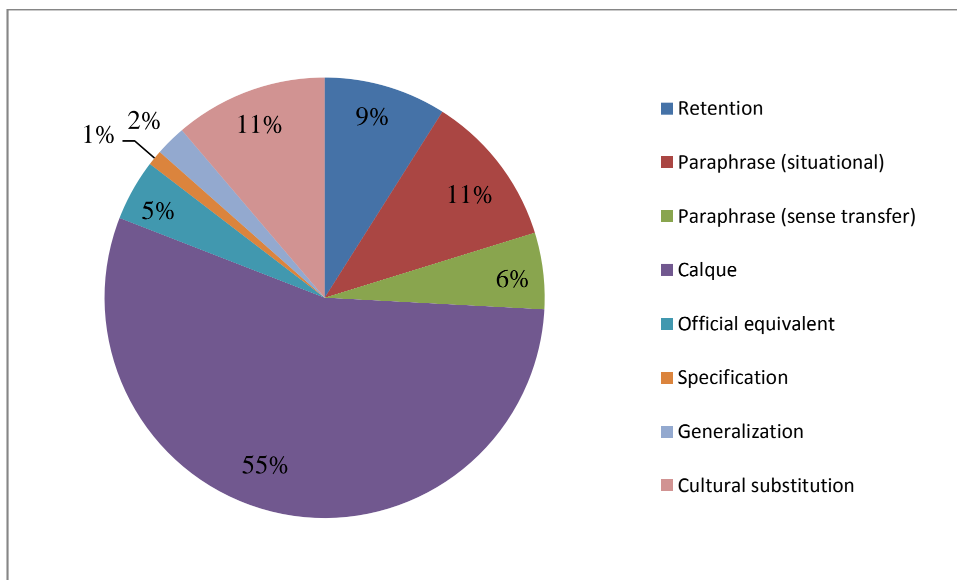

Figure 33. Translation procedures used in *Discworld* for ECRs

In chapter 3, we observed that video games can present translators with constraints that vary greatly across different games. Text reduction, for example, is almost absent from the games in the corpus, and the lack of severe constraints on the number of characters per line might have allowed translators to choose from various strategies other than retention for rendering ECRs. However, the substantial variation among the games in the corpus in the choice of strategies

suggests that there might be other factors at work. In particular, the choice might depend on the nature of the cultural references. In other words, these statistics do not take into account the type of ECRs that are being analysed: if specific strategies are commonly used for certain categories of ECRs, the different frequency with which they are used in each game might simply reflect differences in the text.

In fact, there seems to be a correlation between the cultural category to which each ECR belongs and the strategies chosen for it. For example, cultural substitution is used very often for institutions and, to a lesser degree, for food and drink; official equivalent is frequently used for fictional characters, entertainment and also, not surprisingly, for measures. Retention appears to be the strategy of choice for cultural categories such as fictional characters, people and geographical references in all three games; the fact that *Day of the Tentacle* contains many more of these ECRs than the other two games explains the very high frequency of ECRs retained in the localized version of that game.

The correlation between cultural categories and translation strategies implies that the frequency of certain translation strategies in a game is not necessarily evidence of a specific policy on the part of the translators, but the result of differences in the material that is translated. In this view, a different classification of the ECRs may provide interesting results. By dividing the sample in two groups, one containing proper name ECRs and another one containing common nouns, we observe that retention is used for most proper names in all three games, as shown in Figures 34-6:

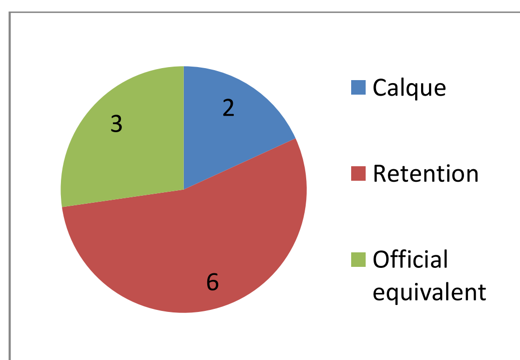

Figure 34. Procedures used for proper names in *Discworld*

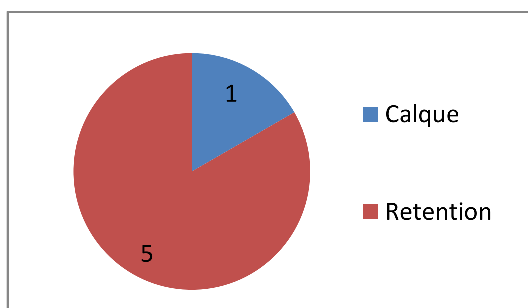

Figure 35. Procedures used for proper names in TSOMI

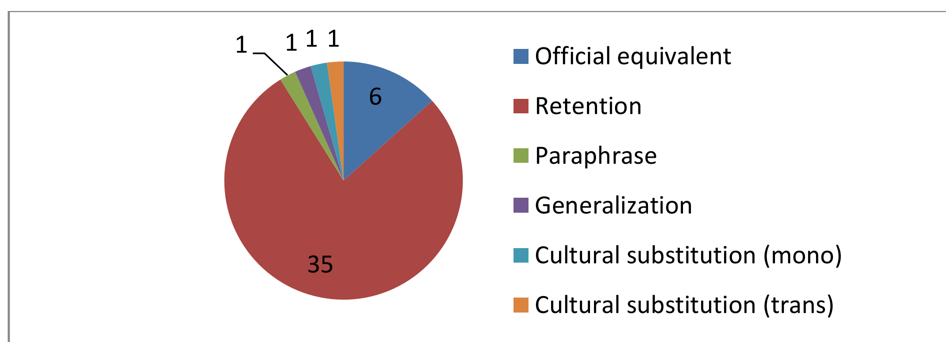

Figure 36. Procedures used for proper names in *Day of the Tentacle*

For common nouns, retention is only used a few times, often for food and drink ECRs such as *sushi*, *pub*, *roast beef*, that can now be considered transcultural (one of which, *cappuccino*, originates from the TL). As *Day of the Tentacle* features the largest number of proper name ECRs, it also makes the largest use of retention.

Figure 29 also shows that the percentage of ECRs translated with a calque is strikingly high; from Figure 30, it appears that *Discworld* is responsible for most of the occurrences of this strategy. While calque may seem to be a SL-oriented strategy when compared to others such as cultural substitution or paraphrase, the fact that a calque was used to translate a specific reference does not imply that the reference 'survived' the transfer into the TT. When applied 'blindly', as illustrated in 5.3.4 with the '101' ECR, a calque will simply generate a text that the TL audience does not understand. Therefore, it should not be assumed that a high frequency of calque produces a text which is especially faithful to the original. The percentage of calques which have caused the loss of an ECR differs

noticeably among the three games: in *Day of the Tentacle*, only 3% of the ECRs (4 occurrences over a total of 125) have been lost as a consequence of the transfer into the TT through a calque; in *The Secret of Monkey Island*, the proportion rises to 13%, while 16% are lost in the localized version of *Discworld*. In particular, the ECRs were lost in 12 of the 48 occurrences where calque was used in *Discworld*.

5.4 Puns

In the field of humor translation, the translation of puns has proved a popular topic, as highlighted in chapter 1. Before analyzing their frequency in the present corpus, I will illustrate the methods used for their translation with examples from the games following the classification proposed for puns by Delabastita (1996) and listed in 1.4.1. In principle, the classifications of translation strategies described in 5.2 and 5.3 could be borrowed to study the translation of puns based, respectively, on frames and on ECRs; however, the discussion will look at more general methods of dealing with puns and not at the specific strategies used in the cases where a pun in the ST was rendered with a pun in the TT. The reason for this approach lies in the fact that a thorough examination would require using a different set of strategies for different types of puns; as many types of puns are present in the corpus, and only a limited number of puns belong to each type, it would be difficult to get meaningful results from such a fragmented analysis.

5.4.1. Pun to pun

A common strategy for translating a ST pun consists in replacing it with a pun in the TT, as shown in this excerpt of dialogue from *Discworld*:

> Rincewind: You are ladies of the night, aren't you?
> Lady of the night: Dunno. What time is it now?

In this exchange, a lexical pun is obtained from the contrast between the literal meaning of the word 'night' and that of 'lady of the night', an idiomatic

expression used to indicate a prostitute. A literal translation would not recreate the pun in the TL. However, an idiomatic expression exists in Italian which is similar at a semantic level and has the same connotative meaning: *bella di notte*. Besides being the name of a plant with flowers that open in the evening, *bella di notte* is also, thanks to a 1952 movie by Rene Clair, *Les Belles-de-nuit*, an idiomatic expression used for a prostitute. Therefore, it has been used in the game to translate the ST pun as follows:

> Rincewind: Non siete le belle di notte? [Aren't you the *belle di notte*?]
> Lady of the night: Non so, che ore sono? [I don't know, what time is it?]

Of course, there are several ways of replacing a pun with a new one. For this analysis, however, it is not necessary to further narrow the strategy down, as each pun was always replaced with a pun of the same type.

5.4.2 Pun to non pun

It is clear from the above example that replacing ST puns with new TT puns is not always easy. Having no pun where a pun was present in the original text is not uncommon. Depending on the specific case, however, removing a pun from the ST can have different outcomes on the TT, some of which are illustrated by the following examples.

> ST: Sounds like the cat's caught a MOOSE up there.
> TT: Sembra che il gatto abbia catturato un ALCE lassù.
> BT: It seems like the cat has caught a moose up there.

This graphological pun from *Day of the Tentacle* is based on the homophony, in English, of the terms 'mouse' and 'moose'. Translators chose to render the phrase literally, also keeping the capital letters, which did not result in a pun in the TL, but still will probably produce a humorous effect, due to the incongruity of the evoked image.

An analogous procedure, applied to a similar pun, has lead to a different result in the following case, in *Discworld*:

> ST: Still - I suppose it's torture a lesson!
> TT: Eppure, suppongo che ti serva di lezione!
> BT: Still, I suppose that it'll serve you as a lesson!

In this case, the homophony is between 'taught you' and 'torture'. The specific words on which the humor is based give an additional layer to the pun, as the torture this NPC was subject to is exactly what is supposed to have taught him a lesson. Here, the literal translation removes the pun, and the resulting text in the localized version has no humorous connotation.

In the previous examples, removing the pun had no negative impact on the TT, where no sign remained that could indicate a missing element. At times, however, the choice of removing a ST pun using a literal translation can have undesirable consequences. Just like literal translations of frames and cultural references which are not transcultural may result in a text that sounds odd to the target audience's ear, the same can happen with puns. Let us look, for example, at a lexical pun from *Day of the Tentacle*. Upon being mistaken for a man who was supposed to deliver some marble blocks to a sculptor, Hoagie replies:

> I'm no marble deliveryman, but rock is my life. Heh heh.

Hoagie's main attribute is being a fan of music. In particular, he loves metal and rock; hence, the pun is a play on the multiple meanings of the word 'rock'. The localized version of the above line reads:

> TT: Non sono il marmista, ma le pietre sono la mia vita.
> BT: I'm not the marble-cutter, but rocks are my life.

Not only the pun is gone, it has also been replaced with a line that makes little sense in the TL.

5.4.3 Pun ST = pun TT

A conservative strategy consists in transferring the item which results in a pun in the ST into the TT without translating it. The pun mentioned in 4.7.1.1 is an example of such a strategy: the bald sheriff Fester 'Shinetop' retained his name in the TT, even though this implied losing the connection between his last name and his baldness, and therefore the pun. The same happened to the main character of the game, Guybrush Threepwood, who had his name mangled as 'Gibberish Driftwood' by a NPC in the ST, and the TT retained the mangled name without modifying it, although many TL-speakers would not be familiar with the English words 'gibberish' and 'driftwood'.

On both these occasions, modifying the pun would probably have required modifying the name of the two characters – an important decision, and one that we cannot assume translators had the authority or the will to make, as changing the name of the main character in order to keep a single pun in the TT could hardly be considered reasonable. However, the same strategy of retaining the punning name in the TT was also applied to names that were only featured once in the game. For example, a NPC advises Guybrush to change his name if he really wants to become a pirate, suggesting 'Dreadbeard' and 'Six-Fingered-Pete' as more suitable alternatives; these names are left untranslated in the TT. The strategy was also used for proper names of objects: for example, a brand of mints 'for the pirate who cares about first impressions' is called 'Breathmaster' in both the English and the Italian versions of the game.

Leaving a pun untranslated in the TT did not always make it more obscure. *The Secret of Monkey Island* contains an interesting example of a case where, on the contrary, the same strategy made the pun more obvious, with relevant consequences on gameplay. One of the puzzles in the game requires Guybrush to get past the 'deadly piranha poodles' who are guarding the governor's mansion. In order to do so, the player must pick up some yellow flowers in the forest, use them to garnish a piece of stewed meat, and then feed the meat to the dogs, who will instantly fall asleep. The game provides the player with a number of hints on how to overcome this obstacle. The pirates who give Guybrush the task add that

he 'might be able to drug them or something'. Also, in a seemingly unrelated conversation, another NPC who is locked in a cell in the town prison tells Guybrush that he was framed, as he 'didn't touch the stupid flowers'. If the player asks him what flowers he is referring to, he replies: 'The yellow Caniche Endormi flowers in the forest– It's against the law to pick them.' The player can also ask him to repeat the name of those flowers again. These are the same flowers that are needed to get past the dogs and the name of the species, 'Caniche Endormi', contains a clue to that puzzle, as it sounds similar to the Italian words for dogs, *cani*, and sleep, *dormire*. The name also resembles very closely the Italian idiomatic expression *non svegliare il can che dorme* [don't wake up the sleeping dog], which is similar to the English *let sleeping dogs lie* but has a more literal meaning, indicating that one should not provoke someone who might hurt them. Although the name of the flowers sounds almost identical to 'sleeping dogs' in Italian, similar words have the same meaning in other Romance languages, as *dorm-* and *can-* are the Latin roots for 'sleep' and 'dog' (hence English words like 'dormitory' or 'canine'). In French, the name was rendered with a slight modification as 'Caniches Endormis'; as 'endormi' is the French for *sleeping* and 'caniche' means *poodle*, the clue was especially transparent. In Italian, it was left untranslated as 'Caniche Endormi'. When *The Secret of Monkey Island* was released in Italy, the game was praised for being completely in Italian. *K*, one of the most popular video games magazine in the country, said in its review of the game that this was a very commendable feature, as 'much of the game is based on text (both for its jokes and for subtle hints or clues useful for solving the game)' (*K*, May 1991, my translation). The reviewer probably meant that such hints were not lost in the Italian version thanks to the fact that the game was translated. In this case, however, by keeping a source language expression in the TT, the translation actually made the game easier, which is arguably not what the authors had in mind when they 'hid' the clue in the original English version.

It is interesting to note that some English players complained about the puzzle being too difficult in the SL. In a discussion on the web, a user (*User A* in the following quote) asked if the game was supposed to be really cryptic or if the game contained any hint about the properties of the yellow flowers, as he was wondering if it 'was just trial and error of combining weird things' (Web 6).

When someone pointed out that the prisoner tells you the name of the flower, and that there is a connection between the name and the Italian word for 'dormire', the first user replied: 'But what if you don't know Italian... '. The rest of the conversation goes as follows (ibid.):

> *User C*: What if you don't know the cliché of files smuggled into prisons via cake? What if you don't know the meaning of the term 'red herring?' What if you don't know the chemical composition of gunpowder? What if you don't know that monkeys like to eat bananas?
> It's an adventure game. Some practical knowledge is necessary to complete the game.
> *User A*: Oh come on now. Knowing a foreign language is hardly 'practical knowledge.'
> *User C*: Knowing a bit of etymology principals is. For instance, the root 'dorm' is in the word, and there are enough English words with 'dorm' in them to figure out that a plant called 'endormi' has something to do with sleeping.
> *User D*: During the game you're told to drug the dogs and there are illegal yellow flowers with dorm in their name. Shouldn't be too difficult to think of trying to use the flower on the meat.
> *User E*: Rectification, FRENCH. Endormi mean asleep in French.
> *User F*: Better than that, 'Caniche Endormi' means Sleeping Poodle in French. Couldn't be more obvious. If you speak French that is...
> *User G*: Well, I must have been 10 when I played it the first time, and had no trouble. Of course it was through trial and error, but even if you don't know foreign languages, a smart person will realize that the dogs eat up normal meat with no effect, and therefore, logically one should add something to the meat. The flowers are probably the first thing most people would try, given the other inventory choices. [...]

This example illustrates how the translation of a pun can affect the difficulty level of a game in both directions; it also shows how it is not easy to judge such difficulty in the first place, as the same pun can be found very cryptic or very easy to decode by different players who speak the same language, depending on other factors like their background knowledge.

5.4.4 Other strategies

Delabastita (1996) lists two more options for dealing with puns in the ST: omitting them or replacing them with a related rhetorical device (e.g. alliteration, repetition or rhyme) to create a similar effect as the one created in the original; however, these do not appear relevant for the present analysis, as neither has been

found in the sample. Introducing a pun in the TT as new textual material when in the original there is no linguistic expression ('ZERO – PUN' in Delabastita's classification) has also never been done in the present corpus; nevertheless, textual material that did not feature a pun in the ST has sometimes been replaced with a pun in the TT ('NON PUN – PUN'). Use of this strategy is very infrequent and has only been used twice, in *Discworld*. On one occasion, the original text contained several lines in which the name of our character, Rincewind, was distorted by his superiors to 'Rincewater' or 'Breakwind'. The TT replaced two of these puns with similar TL puns, distorting the Italian name, *Scuotivento* [Rincewind], to *Riempimento* [filling] and *Sbattimento* [hassle], but also made up two additional names along the same lines – *Frangimento* [breaking] and *Scuotimento* [waggle] –, where the ST only repeated previous ones. The second time, the strategy was used in two dialogues between Rincewind and a fishmonger where the ST contained five lexical puns based on sea-related terminology or idioms (skating, row/roe, 'a ray of hope', 'shelling out', floundering for new lines):

Rincewind:	You're skating on thin ice!
Fishmonger:	Skates are over there sir, all in a roe.
Rincewind:	In a row?
Fishmonger:	No, all in a roe, as in 'fish eggs'.
[...]	
Rincewind:	Morning fishmonger! Busy day?
Fishmonger:	Fairly hectic sir.
	The ray over there keeps trying to escape.
Rincewind:	Escape?
Fishmonger:	Well it's a ray of hope, sir.
Rincewind:	I think you're eating too many fish eggs.
Fishmonger:	It's good for you!
Fishmonger:	That's quality seafood, sir!
Rincewind:	Isn't caviar expensive?
Fishmonger:	I don't mind shelling out the money.
Rincewind:	No more puns!
[...]	
Rincewind:	Stop it! You get me all tongue tied.
Fishmonger:	You're floundering for new lines, sir?
Rincewind:	Oh, be quiet!

Of these five puns, only three were replaced in the TT with TL puns. However, in the Italian versionm, the non-punning line 'You can keep up' has been translated

as *Può continuare a stare sulla cresta dell'onda!* [You can continue to be on the crest of the wave], creating a new sea-related pun.

Rincewind:	Cos'hai in testa, delle sardine? [What's in your brains, sardines?]
Fishmonger:	Le sardine sono laggiù, signore, tutte nell'uovo. [Sardines are over there, all in the egg.
Rincewind:	Nel luogo? [In the place?]
Fishmonger:	No, nell'uovo, cioè ognuna dentro il proprio. [No, in the egg, I mean each in its own.]
[...]	
Rincewind:	'Ngiorno pescivendolo! Si lavora, eh? ['Morning fishmonger! Working hard, eh?
Fishmonger:	Direi parecchio, signore. Quella razza là sta cercando di battersela. [Quite a lot, I'd say, sir. That ray there is trying to run off.]
Rincewind:	Battersela? [Run off?]
Fishmonger:	Be', è una razza d'idiota! [Well, it's a kind of idiot → Well, it's such an idiot!]
Rincewind:	Credo che tu abbia mangiato troppe uova di pesce. [I think you ate too many fish eggs.]
Fishmonger:	Signore, sono convinto che le piacerebbero! Sono degli ottimi frutti di mare! [Sir, I'm sure you'd like them! They're very good seafood!]
Rincewind:	Ma il caviale non è costoso? [But isn't caviar expensive?]
Fishmonger:	Non mi interessa quanto sguscio. [I don't care how much I shell out; *however, although its meaning here is clear, the expression 'to shell out' is not used in Italian with the same meaning as in English*]
Rincewind:	Basta con i giochi di parole! [Stop with the puns!]
[...]	
Fishmonger:	Oh, suvvia! Può continuare a stare sulla cresta dell'onda! [Oh, come on! You You can continue to be on the crest of the wave]
Rincewind:	Smettila! Non mi fai parlare. [Stop! You aren't letting me speak.]
Fishmonger:	Signore, sta forse cercando un nuovo modo di esprimersi? [Sir, are you looking for a new way to express yourself?
Rincewind:	Oh, sta' zitto! [Sh, shut up!]

As observed by Delabastita (1996), this strategy can be used as a compensating device: the choice of employing it, although only twice, suggests a desire to compensate for humor that has been cut in other parts of the text. In fact, of the

three games, *Discworld* is the one featuring both the highest numbers of puns and the highest percentage of puns that have been lost in the TT, which may be the reason why its translators took these opportunities to insert additional puns. Subsection 5.4.5 summarizes the frequency of each strategy in the corpus.

5.4.5 The translation of puns – Summation of results

Figures 37 to 39 represent the frequency of the four most popular ways to deal with the translation of puns in *Discworld*, TSOMI and DOTT:

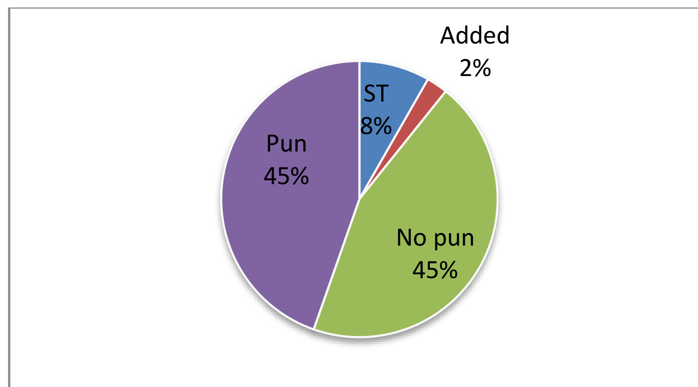

Figure 37. Strategies used for puns in *Discworld* (136 puns identified)

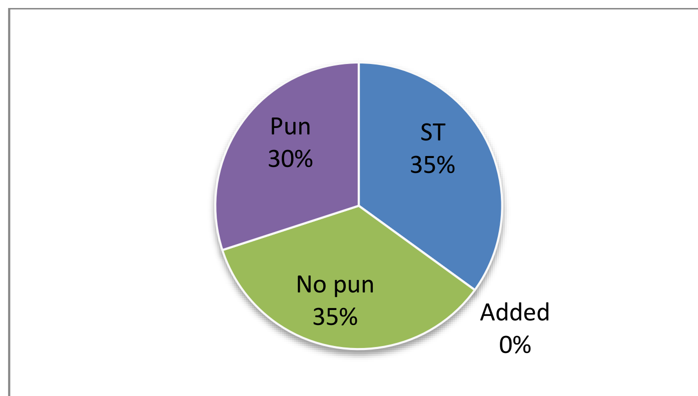

Figure 38. Strategies used for puns in TSOMI (30 puns identified)

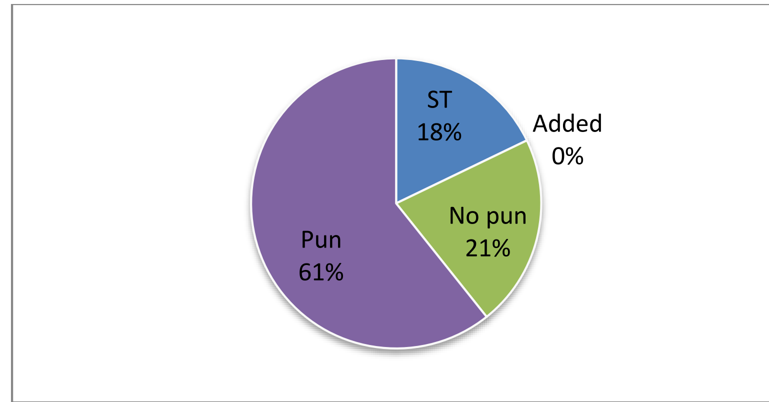

Figure 39. Strategies used for puns in *Day of the Tentacle* (36 puns identified)

In particular, the green section of each circle represents the percentage of cases in which a pun in the ST has been replaced with a non punning phrase in the TT; in other words, the puns have been lost in all these occurrences. While the translations of DOTT and TSOMI display this strategy on, respectively, one third and one fifth of all occasions, almost 50% of the puns received this treatment in *Discworld*.

The loss of humorous wordplay in the translation of *Discworld* is especially noticeable due to its heavy presence in the original text: wordplay features heavily in all the *Discworld* novels and the game stays faithful to the novels in many respects, including the type of humor employed. I have been able to identify 136 puns in this game, which amount to more than two thirds of the total number of puns found in the three games that make up the corpus. This higher proportion is not due to the presence of a specific type of pun in *Discworld*. The graph in Figure 40, which splits the sample into different subcategories for the different types of puns, shows that *Discworld* contains a higher number of puns in most categories, the only significant exception being ‘meaningful names’:

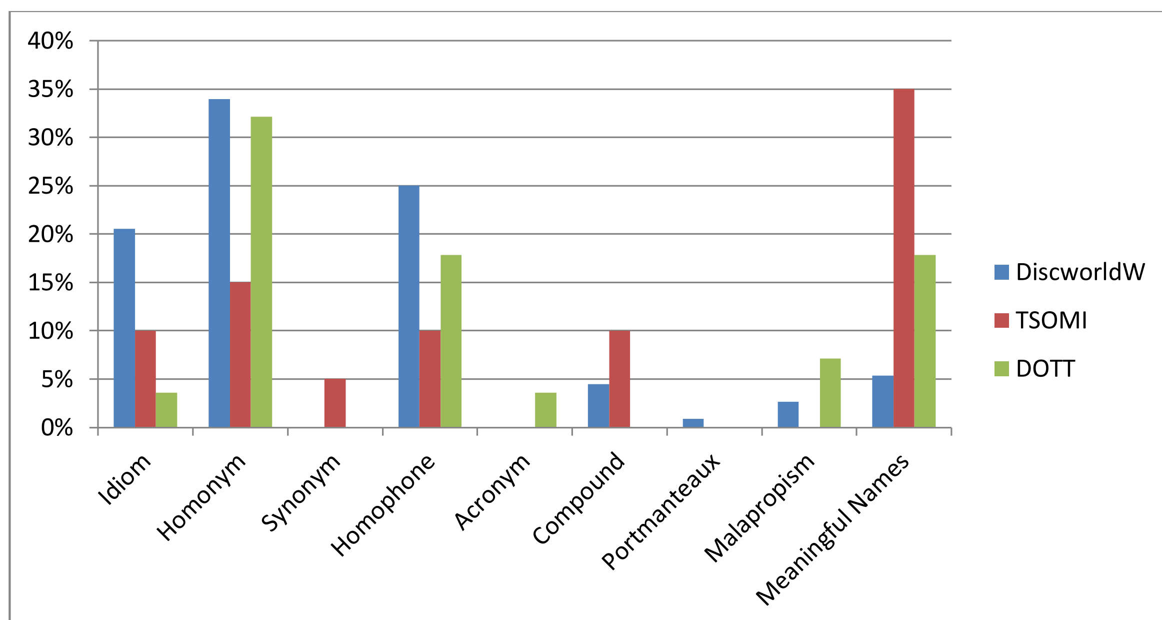

Figure 40. Percentage of puns in each game, classified by type

The fact that the importance given to wordplay in the original text is not fully reflected in the localized version might be one of the motivations behind the retranslation of the game (analyzed in chapter 6). As mentioned before, *Discworld* is also the only game in the sample where some puns have been added to the TT that were not present in the original, possibly to compensate for the losses in other parts of the text. Of all the types of puns, graphological puns based on homonymy and lexical puns based on idioms are more often lost.

5.5 Metahumor

The translation of meta-referential humor based on culture-specific references is discussed in 5.3. Most other occurrences of metahumor have been translated literally, preserving the humorous connotation and avoiding culture bumps, as this type of humor is commonly used and understood in Italian culture.

On a few occasions, a TL-oriented strategy has been chosen to translate metahumor. In keeping with the terminology used in 5.3, this can be considered a 'paraphrase with sense transfer' strategy, as it expresses the same concept as the ST, only with a different wording. The following example from *Discworld*

clarifies the method. Often, in adventure games, players must combine objects they find during the game to solve certain puzzles. Therefore, these games require players to spend a consistent amount of time examining objects, in order to identify their function and whether they can be picked up and used to progress in the story. At one point in the game, after being asked for the n-th time to look at an object in the background, Rincewind describes the object to us and then adds:

> Thank heavens I took that course in object recognition!

joking on the absurdity of his repetitive actions as a character in a game. The Italian version of this line is a paraphrase with sense transfer, where the metahumor is intact and it is conveyed through the same concept:

> Grazie al cielo ho fatto quel corso di riconoscimento di oggetti!

Over a total of 68 occurrences of metahumor in the whole corpus (14 in TSOMI, 35 in Discworld and 19 in DOTT), only two have been observed in which metahumor in the ST has been omitted or lessened in the TT. In *The Secret of Monkey Island*, Guybrush boasts that he can hold his breath for 10 minutes. The statement later proves to be true; however, if the player tries to keep him underwater for more than ten command options in the game interface (see 4.3.1) change to options such as 'float', 'bloat', 'rot' and 'order hint book', as shown in Figure 41:

Figure 41. Change in command options in TSOMI if Guybrush dies

This is a typical example of metahumor, as the game blatantly refers to the player's 'outside' world. In the translated game, 'order hint book' has become 'chiedere aiuto' [ask for help], thus the reference to the real world has been lost.

Similarly, in *Discworld*, when an NPC tells Rincewind:

> No time for idle chatter,

the wizard replies:

> As if I can help who supplies my voice.

This is a case of metahumor that stems from a pun, as 'Idle' is also the name of the actor who dubs Rincewind in the game (Eric Idle from *Monty Python*). In the first Italian translation, the pun has been lost, and so has the metahumor, as the line has been rendered as:

> TT: Come se servisse parlare.
> BT: As if talking would help.

It is worth noting that the metahumor (although not the pun) has been maintained in the retranslation of the game made by the fans, where the TT line is:

> TT: Come se fossi io a scegliere quando parlare.
> BT: As if it was me who chose when to speak.

which refers to the fact that it is the player who chooses when the character speaks. As discussed in chapter 6, this is not the only occasion where the retranslation is closer than the first translation to the original text.

5.6 Understatement

Understatement has been either kept in the TT, usually with a literal translation, or modified by expressing the original meaning without the humorous attenuation occurred in the SL. As usual, the approach can be better illustrated by examples from the games. In *Discworld*, a small dragon that cannot control his flames and explodes, leaving bits everywhere and innards stuck on the ceiling, is described as 'rather nasty, really'. The comment, quite obviously intended as understatement, is rendered in the TL as *è una cosa terribile* [it's a terrible thing]. Similarly, Rincewind's reaction to obtaining 'all the gold in the kingdom' is: 'I'm rich! I'm fabulously wealthy!', followed by 'Bwah ha ha ha ha – I'm comfortably well off!'. The incongruous effect of using the expression 'comfortably well off', which clashes with the huge amount of gold he now owns, disappears in the Italian translation *Buah ah ah ah ah, sono ricco sfondato!* [I'm filthy rich!].

As observed in 4.7.7, understatement is a typically British form of humor, and *Discworld*, the only British game in the sample, employs it more frequently than the other two. In particular, the number of occurrences registered was 32 for *Discworld*, 8 for *Day of the Tentacle* and only 2 for TSOMI. However, *Discworld* is also the game where understatement has been most frequently dropped in the translation. While, on most occasions, the Italian versions of *Day of the Tentacle* and *The Secret of Monkey Island* display literal translations that preserve understatement in the TL, only one third of the occurrences are kept in *Discworld* (see Figure 42):

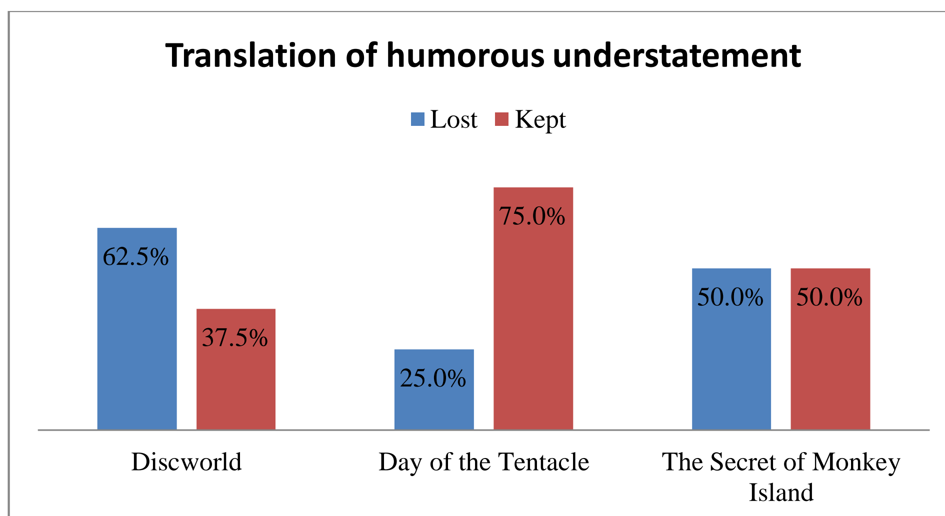

Figure 42. Translation of humorous understatement in the corpus

The fact that the Italian version of *Discworld* keeps much fewer occurrences of understatament is in line with the results obtained, so far, when analyzing the other forms of humor. Despite being typically British, understatement is also used and appreciated in Italy, and it's hard to imagine why translators would choose to omit it, unless there were other constraints to the translation, when rendering a humorous game into Italian.

5.7 Satire

In 4.7.9, it was pointed out that *Discworld* is, in the corpus, the game with the heaviest presence of satire, as this is a feature of the novels it is based on. The study by Broeder (2007) on the translation of humor in Pratchett's books contains one of the rare discussions of the translation of satire. In her analysis, she describes several strategies that can be used to render satire in a different language, ranging from direct translation, where the ST satire is translated literally, to paraphrase, including a variety of other methods such as substituting the SL object with a comparable TL object, or adding explanations in the TT. Broeder (ibid.) stresses how, given that satire is highly culture-specific, the main element determining the potential translation strategies is the distance between source and target cultures. In this view, she highlights the importance of ideology, as satire in the original text might be aimed at a subject which is sacred to the

target culture (a point first made in Raphaelson-West, 1989), and of the socio-cultural restrictions mentioned by Chiaro (1992). These restrictions can be geographical, historical or intellectual, representing the fact that people living in different countries or ages, or who have different levels of instruction, are bound to have different values; this, in turn, implies that satire aimed at a particular subject may not 'work' or may not be acceptable in a different culture.

The games in the corpus differ heavily in the importance they give to satire. While *Discworld* has 63 examples of satire, *The Secret of Monkey Island* follows with 22 and only 4 can be found in *Day of the Tentacle*.

In the Italian versions of the games, all of these have been translated literally, as shown in the following example from TSOMI:

ST: He's in a place beneath this island
somewhere in a huge system of catacombs
a hellish place filled with the wailing of tortured souls trapped forever in the rock
where the walls bleed and the air is thick with the rancid smell of pure evil.
Tourists used to line up for hours to see it.

TT: Si trova in un posto sotto quest'isola…
...da qualche parte in un labirinto di catacombe…
...un luogo infernale che trema con i lamenti delle anime torturate, intrappolate per sempre nella pietra…
...dove le pareti sanguinano e l'aria è colma del puzzo putrefatto del male.
I turisti facevano la fila per ore per vederlo.

In all the cases, the closeness between Anglo-American and Italian cultures ensured that a literal translation would serve the same satirical purpose as the original text.

5.8 Parody

In all media, the effectiveness of parody depends on the audience's familiarity with the parodied subject. Therefore, problems can arise during its translation when the source and target audiences are not familiar with the same references. As the Italian audience could be assumed to have knowledge of the material

parodied in the games, the translation is unlikely to have presented any major obstacle, as suggested by the solutions adopted. For example, when in DOTT one of the mutant tentacles asks ‘What brings a hot tentacle babe like you to a dump like this?’, his line parodies a cliché situation of certain American movies and novels, many of which belong to the noir genre. Italian audiences are familiar with their conventions, due to decades of importing Hollywood movies and an even longer history of translating literary works. As this familiarity can be said to have been mostly acquired through Italian translations of the originals, there is now an established jargon for many expressions that are common in these works. Thus, the Italian line for the previous English one reads *Cosa ci fa uno schianto tentacolare come te in un posto come questo?*, where the word *schianto* [knockout] could now almost be considered an ‘official equivalent’ for ‘babe’.

Given that they refer to elements in the audiences’ cultural backgrounds, parody and cultural references often go together. As pointed out on several occasions, the classification used in this discussion stems from practical concerns and not from the existence of precise boundaries between categories. ECRs can be used for parody. Language varieties can enhance the parodic effect of a scene or situation; for example, the ‘pirate language’ in TSOMI contributes to the parody of the pirate novels and movies, which is completed through the story, setting and dialogue exchanges of the game.

What is worth highlighting is that parody has been nearly always kept unchanged in the localized version of all three games. In *Discworld*, parody of the fantasy genre is one of the main components of humor, and the Italian version maintained it, as Italian players could be expected to be familiar with the genre. *Discworld* also likes to parody literary and gaming conventions and, when this happens, the text borders into metahumor, as exemplified by the character Redmond Herring, who supplies ‘plot modifiers’, intended as ‘all those things that make up the true essence of a story’ or, as Rincewind points out, things that complicate the plot ‘so that the poor stupid protagonist wastes all his time on false leads’. However, while the literal translation of this line preserves the parodic effect, the translation also keeps the name ‘Redmond Herring’, a punning ECR, in its original English, the meaning of which is likely to be lost in the TL.

5.9 Language varieties

Translating language varieties, e.g. dialects or sociolects, is never easy (Hervey and Higgins, 1992). In the case of subtitling, the task can get even harder, as pointed out by Asimakoulas (2004), Bartoll (2006) and Tortoriello (2013), as transcribing them may render subtitles difficult to read and to process, and therefore hinder humor appreciation. As reduction is commonly used in subtitling, the complexity of rendering language varieties in writing implies that they often end up being lost in the move from speech to written text, which can cause a text to lose important nuances.

As a consequence of the peculiar nature of 'subtitles' in games (discussed in chapter 3), the text on screen often transcribes everything that is said, without reduction of any kind, and the games in the corpus are no exception. However, several examples of language varieties have disappeared altogether in the target text. The slang term 'dude', frequently used by Hoagie in *Day of the Tentacle*, is sometimes translated as *amico* [friend] and often omitted. In the expression 'Ye illustrious tome of levitation', in *Discworld*, the mock-archaic article is simply dropped in the Italian version, which becomes 'Tomo illustrato della levitazione' [Illustrated tome of levitation].

In the games, the policy adopted for the translation of these items depends strictly on their type and function. For short terms such as 'dude' or 'guv', the TT uses a TL expression that could be considered equivalent in the target culture. For 'guv', in particular, the term used is *capo* [chief], which also has a geographical connotation, being a dialect term mostly used in Central and Southern regions of Italy. An extreme case of this technique can be found in *Discworld*, where the expression 's'alright' is translated with *vabbuono*, which has an even more precise regional origin as it is an expression used in the Naples dialect to say 'OK', thus adding a TL-specific geographical character.

However, the general tendency is towards the use of a more neutral language in the target text. In *Discworld*, a character's German accent can be heard in his speech but is also represented phonetically in the English subtitles, so that players who own the floppy disc version with no voices can recognize it. In the localized version, certain words that were borrowed from German in the ST (e.g. *ach* [oh], *ja* [yes], *nein* [no]) are retained, but the rest of his speech appears in standard Italian, without any other elements which would indicate a foreign-sounding pronunciation.

Sociolects, too, are usually lost. In *The Secret of Monkey Island*, some pirates speak a type of 'pirate English' – a language containing bits of dialect typical of the Caribbean and the Southern US and stereotypical expressions supposedly used by seafaring pirates, as represented in many fictional works. While sporadic elements are preserved in Italian (e.g. a pirate's onomatopoeic laugh is HAR HAR HAR in both the ST and TT, as per tradition), in most cases the TT loses any trace of these language varieties. For example, the sentence:

> What ya be wantin' ya scurvy lubber?

is translated, in Italian, as:

> TT: Cosa vuoi razza di zotico scorbutico?
> BT: What do you want, you cantankerous churl?

which displays no indication that a dialect was being used in the original. At times, in fact, characters shift from dialect in the SL to a complete mastery of the TL, as illustrated in the following example:

> ST: Sounds like this guy don't like rats!
> TT: Sembra che a questo tipo non piacciano i topi!
> BT: It seems that this guy doesn't like rats!
>
> ST: I sure hopes ya had sumpting more importan' ta stop me for?
> TT: Spero che tu mi abbia fermato per qualcosa di più importante?
> BT: I hope you stopped me for something more important?

Here, the incorrect use of 'don't' instead of 'doesn't' is replaced by two perfectly articulated Italian sentences, which display a correct use of syntax and grammar; in particular, the use of the subjunctive tense in *piacciano* and in the clause *che tu mi abbia fermato* is something that should be expected today from a person with an average level of education, but is at odds with the image of a rough, uneducated pirate, thus losing the effect of the original.

This loss of variety in the language is felt most heavily in *Discworld*, as the depiction of different social classes is a relevant feature of Terry Pratchett's world. Lines with sociolectal and dialectal elements are systematically rendered in a 'neutral' language, detracting from the richness of the characterization and removing an important device employed frequently by the author for humorous purposes.

5.10 Summary of findings

On the basis of the results discussed in this chapter, the types of humor present in the games can be roughly classified into two main groups. The first group includes elements that have not been substantially modified and have been rarely lost in the TT. Parody, satire and metahumor all belong to this group. For these categories, the original humor was preserved by simply translating them literally.

In the case of metahumor, rendering it into the TL did not pose a challenge to the translators because meta-referentiality is widely used in both the source and target cultures. With parody and satire, obstacles to their translation may generally come from the obscurity of what is parodied or satirized or from its unacceptability as a target of jokes in certain cultures. However, Anglo-American and Italian cultures are close enough so that an Italian audience could be assumed to understand most of the instances of parody and satire present in the texts and not be offended by them.

The second group includes the other types of humor considered in the classification: puns, understatement and humor based on ECRs and language varieties. In an attempt to deal with all these elements, the translators have made deeper changes to the target text, although different kinds of regularities emerge from the study of the different types of humor.

The analysis of ECRs has showed that translators tend to favour specific types of translation strategies for each type of reference. Various factors seem to guide the choice of translation strategies, e.g. the cultural category to which the ECRs belong, or their nature of proper or common names. Some of the causalities highlighted are particularly strong: for example, cultural substitution is usually employed for institutions, official equivalent is mostly used for fictional characters, and retention is often chosen for proper names across all categories.

Despite these regularities, however, different translators have different approaches for dealing with cultural references, so that even for the same type of ECR there is some variation in how they are rendered into the TL. For example, analysing each game separately has showed that *Day of the Tentacle* displays a higher proportion of SL-oriented strategies, while the translation of *Discworld* contains more TL-oriented strategies. *Day of the Tentacle* is a game heavy with culture-specific elements, but the fact that they were often kept in the TL version does not seem to have damaged the reception of the game in the target country. However, were the players not familiar with them in the least, they might have encountered some difficulties in reaching the end of the story. *K*, the same magazine which praised the Italian distributor of the game, said in its review that the game was 'not especially hard to solve'; on the contrary, players would be able to complete it relatively easily if they possessed 'a bit of luck, a bit of humor and some knowledge of American history'. The reviewer awarded the game a score of 941 (over 1000). In general, although a creative rendering was sometimes preferred to a more literal one (the cultural substitutions illustrated in 5.3.6 could be considered instances of 'transcreation'), such creative solutions were not often adopted. In some cases, the link between ECRs and gameplay implied that creative solutions were not always feasible or desirable (see, for example, the

puzzle involving George Washington and the cherry tree, described in the introduction of this thesis).

The analysis of puns shows that each time a pun has been used in the TT to replace a pun in the ST, the TT pun is of the same type as the original one. However, many puns have been lost in the TT, as they have been replaced with non punning text. Again, different translators display different propensities for this choice, which is especially frequent in *Discworld*. Just like in the case of ECRs, *Discworld* presents the observer with the least 'faithful' translation, as wordplay, an important component of the game's humor, is often lost. The loss is particularly serious because the humor in *Discworld,* as shown in 5.4.5, relies more on puns than the humor in the other two games.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from the study of humor based on understatement and language varieties: in *Discworld*, these elements often disappear, while the other two games, despite not always managing to keep them, present a TT that, on the whole, seems to be closer to the original ethos.

Therefore, the loss of humorous understatement suggests that not as much effort was put into the translation of *Discworld* as into the translation of the other two games chosen (possibly due to stricter deadlines or to financial constraints); overall, the analysis shows that in many cases humor was successfully rendered into Italian, and the substantial loss of humor in *Discworld* may be one of the reasons why fans of the game decided to make a new translation.

These results lay the foundations for the discussion of retranslation in chapter 6, which looks at the second Italian translations of *Discworld* and *The Secret of Monkey Island* and aims at identifying the main differences and common traits between the old and new versions.

Chapter 6

Text analysis II – Retranslation

6.1 Chapter overview

Chapter 6 focuses on the retranslation of two games in the corpus, *The Secret of Monkey Island* and *Discworld*. Section 6.2 introduces the topic of retranslation and illustrates the main characteristics of the two texts studied in this chapter, giving an overview of how and for what purposes they were made. Focusing on the humorous elements, section 6.3 presents the results of the text analysis, obtained by comparing old and new translations; the analysis aims at identifying possible regularities in the translation strategies used and highlighting differences and similarities between the two. Section 6.4 concludes the chapter and provides an overview of the main findings as regards retranslation.

6.2 Introduction

Gambier (1994) defines 'retranslation' as the translation of a source text that has already been translated into the same TL. To better delineate the boundaries of the concept, he distinguishes it from other types of 'second translations' like the translation of a translation (*traduction de traduction*), which indicates the process of translating into a third language a text that is itself a translation, or the back-translation (*rétrotraduction*), a more specific case in which a translated text is retranslated into its SL, usually in academic exchanges.

In his discussion of literary retranslation, Gambier subscribes to Berman's (1990) view according to which new translations get increasingly close to the original

text. While first translations tend to reduce alterity in the name of cultural and editorial imperatives, retranslations are ‘a *return* to the source text’ (Gambier, 1994: 414). This theory, come to be known as the *retranslation hypothesis*, has been challenged by other Translation Studies scholars. Paloposki and Koskinen (2003) show that there are many Finnish retranslations which do not conform to its fundamental claim. Furthermore, they argue that it is often the supplementarity of translations that creates the need for new translations; such supplementarity does not always express itself as a plurality of translations with varying degrees of assimilation to the target audience, as it can simply mean the targeting of different versions to different sections of readers. O’Driscoll (2009 and 2011) also contests the validity of the hypothesis. In a study of several English translations of Jules Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873), he shows that there is no linear progression from a first, TL-oriented, translation to newer translations that are increasingly SL-oriented. In particular, the most recent translation of the novel, made by Glencross in 2004, is not the most SL-oriented of all, being more distant from the original text than both the previous rendering by Butcher (1995) and much earlier translations, e.g. White (1885). In the field of video games localization, however, research in this area is still lacking to substantiate any of the claims. Therefore, the analysis in this chapter tries to shed light on this issue by observing the differences between the old and new translations of the two selected games, bearing in mind that the definition of ‘closeness’ used here is necessarily arbitrary and that closeness can take many forms.

The interval of time over which the two versions of TSOMI were produced is similar to the time between the old and new translations of *Discworld*: TSOMI was first released in 1990 and retranslated in 2009, while *Discworld* was released in 1995 and also retranslated in 2009. However, the two retranslations differ in the people involved in their making and in their prospective audiences. In addition to the professional (TSOMI) and amateur (*Discworld*) nature of the respective translators, the target audiences of the two retranslations were also different. While the remake of TSOMI was aimed at old and new audiences, the retranslation of *Discworld* was made for the old existing version of the game. Hence, when the translation was released in 2009, its target audience were mostly fans of old graphic adventures. This was a small niche of the public, older, in all

likelihood, than the average player, something that may have influenced how the text was translated.

The first impression to be noted is that while TSOMI appears to have been retranslated from scratch, this is not the case for *Discworld*. As the difference between translation and revision is not always clear-cut, a clarification of the two concepts is required. In the words of Vanderschelden (2000: 1), revision 'involves making changes to an existing TT whilst retaining the major part, including the overall structure and tone of the former version'. To Gambier (1994), what distinguishes a revision from a retranslation is the amount of changes made to the text. Gambier sees the two as part of a continuum which goes from revision, where only a few modifications are made, to adaptation, where changes are so many that the original text becomes almost an opportunity to write a new text. Seeing the whole spectrum of cases as a continuum feels particularly appropriate, as any exact boundary between revision and translation would inevitably be arbitrary. In this view, the fan translation of *Discworld* sits between a revision and a retranslation, as many lines have been left untouched, although an extensive amount of editing has also been performed on the text. In fact, after defining a sample of lines that includes all the different types of verbal humor discussed in the chapter, we can see that 94% of the lines have been modified in TSOMI, while only 42% have been changed in *Discworld*.

The different approach between the translators of the two games should be taken into account when analyzing the text, as the different nature of these retranslations affects the conclusions that can be drawn from the data. In particular, changes made in *Discworld* can be considered a more reliable indicator of the translators' policy, as they simply left the old TL text unchanged when they deemed that version acceptable.

As remarked above, while the fan translation of *Discworld* works with the original game, the retranslation of TSOMI was made for a new updated edition of the game. In this *Special Edition*, the old SCUMM interface (described in 2.2), which had revolutionized the adventure genre two decades earlier, has been eliminated. This old interface was intended to be used with a mouse controller, which game

consoles do not normally have. For this reason, the new version has a graphical interface, where the pointer allows players to perform different actions depending on the object selected on the screen. For example, opening a door in the original game required players to select the verb 'open' from a list and then click on the door; in the *Special Edition*, the same action can be performed by hovering the mouse over the door and clicking a button on the controller.

Although the graphics have been remade in order to be up to the standards of contemporary productions, the developers tried to stay faithful to the original by making as few changes as necessary. As a consequence, *The Secret of Monkey Island: Special Edition* displays only superficial graphic differences with the original, as shown in Figure 43:

Figure 43. *The Secret of Monkey Island* (above) and its *Special Edition* with improved graphics (below) (copyright 1990, 2009 Lucasarts)

The similarity between *The Secret of Monkey Island* and its *Special Edition* is important for the purposes of this analysis. If the remake had involved a complete

aesthetic overhaul of the game, the changes in the audiovisual compartment could have affected translation choices. In particular, while realistic graphics might have forced translators to comply with lip-sync, the improvements made mostly consist in a higher resolution and more polished backgrounds and body animations: in the *Special Edition*, facial animations are still not detailed and the constraints for the translators remained largely unvaried.

Before moving to the text analysis, it is also worth looking at how the two retranslations were made. The translators of *Discworld* began their work with the intention of correcting typos and grammar mistakes in the first translation, but later widened the scope of the task, ending up with something that could hardly be considered a simple revision. From comments they left on the internet, it is clear that they were fully aware of this. In fact, the particular nature of the process, in which translators discussed modifications on a public message board, allows us to observe not only the completed translation, but also some of the steps that lead to the final version.

Fan translations are often the product of a collaborative effort (Ferrer Simó, 2005; Díaz-Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez, 2006; Muñoz Sánchez, 2009). This should not come as a surprise, as one of the main reasons fans choose to translate their favorite games is to be part of a community which gathers people who share the same passion. Furthermore, as fan translators perform this activity for free, dividing the job among a group of translators makes it easier to complete tasks that would otherwise take a huge amount of time, such as translating a whole text-heavy game. In the case of *Discworld*, the translators belonged to the online community *Old Games Italia*, whose members share an interest in old video games. Their website contains articles, a 'museum' collecting reproductions of the Italian boxes of many old games, and a forum; a section of the forum is used by translation groups to organize and discuss translation projects. These boards are public, anyone can view them, and a simple registration is required to post messages and open new topics of discussion. It is possible, then, to observe the evolution of the *Discworld* translation project.

As mentioned in section 4.6, the whole text of the game and its translated version can be found on the game discs as text files (.txt). Using editing software, it is possible to modify the original or the translation by replacing bits of text. The first edited version of the Italian translation was posted by a fan on the *Old Games Italia* board[40] in September 2009. In the accompanying message, he stated that he had only 'removed many misspells and other minor errors' (my translation). He added that 'regarding the translation itself, in many occasions the game should be retranslated', as the original also contained a number of mistranslations. At first, however, he had not taken upon himself to do it, for two main reasons: the sheer amount of work such a task required, and technical constraints, as he could not find a way to modify the length of the text strings. In particular, replacing a segment of text with a longer one would cause the game to display it incorrectly, which greatly limited the translator's freedom.

Nevertheless, the author invited other members to contribute to the translation, by highlighting mistakes in the first Italian version and suggesting new translation solutions. Over the next couple of days, another user added his contribution, posting another long list of mistranslations in the first translation and suggesting possible corrections. A third user, skilled with computers, dealt with the technical issues, solving the string length problem and managing to divide the text in smaller files that could be distributed for translation and then reassembled by using a simple program. At that point, the original author of the fan version started working on it in a more systematic manner, with the help of others who wanted to contribute. They used the message board to discuss possible translations, which now allows us to see how specific solutions were chosen. In particular, they devoted a special attention to many of the puns present in the text.

Some of the comments left on the boards highlight obstacles that are typical of video games localization; for example, one of the translators stresses the additional complications created by the fact that the lines of text in the translatable file do not follow the same order as in the actual game. Not only there might be no indication as to what item a description refers to, or between which characters a

[40] http://www.oldgamesitalia.net/forum.

dialogue takes place; lines of the same dialogue exchange are often separate from one another, e.g. because the player can choose different replies or because the same characters can say different things depending on the player's previous actions. In other words, the translator is lamenting the problems created by text fragmentation, identified by Bernal-Merino (2006) as one of the problematic issues of the localization process.

The next section, which follows closely the methodology and classifications adopted in chapters 4 and 5, uses these comments as a secondary source, to shed light on the processes that in many occasions have lead *Discworld* fan translators to opt for different procedures than the commercial translator (unfortunately, there was no similar information available for the retranslation of TSOMI). Toury (2012/1995: 87) has acknowledged the role of these 'extratextual sources' in the reconstruction of translation norms; however, we must always bear in mind that the translators' actual behaviour does not necessarily conform to their stated intentions.

6.3 The retranslation of *The Secret of Monkey Island* and *Discworld*

While obtaining the text of the new translation of *Discworld* did not present any particular problem – the translators published a text file on *Old Games Italia* containing the newly translated text with the lines in the same order as in the original file – the process was less smooth for *The Secret of Monkey Island: Special Edition*. Extracting the text was easy: in the PC version, all the text is contained in a file that is stored on the user's PC after installing the game. All the localized versions use the same file, which thus includes five languages – English, Italian, French, German and Spanish. This file is not as 'clean' as the one produced by extracting the text from the original game, but a simple tool developed for this research allowed me to convert it into a clean Excel file with each string of text displaying the various languages in adjacent columns (I have looked at the Italian version, keeping the other languages as a reference).

Preparing the data for the comparison between the old and new translations of TSOMI was slightly more challenging. In both games, each string of English text can be easily paired with its translation. The strings, though, do not follow the same order in the old and new games. In order to overcome this obstacle, a small utility was developed for this study by a member of the Old Games Italia community that performs a check of the two translations and orders the strings by 'hooking' similar pairs. The tool, which has a simple graphical interface, compares each string of text of the old Italian translation against the new text. When it finds a unique match with a similarity higher than 97%, it automatically associates the match to the selected text in the old translation. When it does not find such a match, or finds more than one, it leaves the corresponding space in the new translation blank.

The automated comparison produced a file where the great majority of strings had been assigned correctly. At this point, the process could be completed manually. For each string of text in the original translation, I just needed to assign a similarity threshold and perform a search of all the strings in the new translation that passed the threshold. For example, if I chose a threshold of 80% and started the search, the software would display all the strings in the new translation that were at least 80% identical to the string I was considering. Then, if one of the suggested options was clearly the new translation I was looking for, I could permanently assign it to the old string. If none of the candidates appeared to fit, or if the search gave no results, I lowered the threshold and performed a new search. The lower the similarity threshold, the higher would be the probability of finding a match; of course, the number of results found would also increase. Once the process was complete, it was possible to compare the two translations easily.

The following subsections will present the results of the comparison between old and new translations in both *Discworld* and TSOMI.

6.3.1 Puns – *Discworld*

Puns are an extremely important component of the humor that permeates Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* novels. The game stayed true to its literary source, featuring, as we saw in 5.4.5, an impressive number of puns. Many of them, however, are absent from the first Italian translation: 54 of the 136 puns observed in the English text were rendered in a non-punning way. The fan translation is very different in this respect, as only 15 puns were lost in the TT. More specifically, 40 puns that had been rendered as non-puns in the original translation were restored in the retranslation, while only one pun that had been kept in the original translation was instead lost in the retranslation. Comments posted by the fan translators on the message boards show that this is a result of a precise intention; the main translator explains that a large section of the text was particularly complex to render into the TL, being full of wordplay that the professional translators had disregarded altogether. In a game like *Discworld*, given the heavy presence of puns, dropping them in the translation process means altering the text substantially. The following exchange shows how a play-on-words in the ST was dropped in the TT:

> ST: Can I have one [plum] before I go?
> Having one before you go is the whole point of prunes.
> TT: Posso averne una, prima di andarmene?
> Dartene una prima che tu vada è una sciocchezza.
> BT: Can I have one, before I go?
> Giving you one before you go is silly.

Although one may argue that the TT could still be interpreted with the same humorous connotation, it makes the joke much less explicit, making it very likely that the audience will not catch any humorous tone. It is difficult to guess why such a solution was adopted, when a literal translation would have kept the original meaning. The fan translation kept the joke by rendering the lines as: *Posso averne una, prima di andare?* [Can I have one, before I go?] and *Se devi già andare, allora le prugne non ti servono* [If you already need to go, then you don't need the plums].

The same dialogue contains a different pun along the same lines. When Rincewind asks an apprentice wizard whether he just stands there all day, getting a wage for eating prunes, the other replies: ‘Certainly. Someone’s got to do it. It’s a plum job.’ The official translation rendered it as *Certamente. Qualcuno deve pur farlo. È un ottimo lavoro* [Certainly. Someone’s got to do it. It’s a very good job], replacing the pun with non-punning text. The fan translation found a way to use a pun in the TT, as they changed it to *Certamente. Qualcuno deve pur farlo. A me piace, ma a molti fa cagare* [Certainly. Someone’s got to do it. I like it, but many think it sucks]. Literally, the expression *a molti* [to many] *fa cagare* means that it ‘makes many people shit’; it is a slang form that means ‘many think it sucks’. Therefore, the sentence has a literal meaning in Italian that generates a pun by alluding to the laxative properties or prunes. In this case, it is possible that the official translators were limited in their choice of strategies by the fact that they could not use vulgar expressions in the TT. As mentioned in 1.2.2, fan translators do not have any such constraints, and thus are free from censorship rules (Di Marco, 2007; Zhang, 2012). In this case, this allowed them to create a humorous translation where the humor had been lost in the first one.

The dialogue excerpts in Table 6 contain a sequence of puns that are variations on a same theme and illustrate how fan translators tried to get closer to the original text where the official translation had steered from it. One of the NPCs that populate the city of Ankh-Morpork is a beggar that can be seen sitting in the same spot in all three acts of the game. However, while in the first act he still has all his limbs, in the second act we find out that he has cut off his legs, hoping to look more pitiful to passers-by and thus give a boost to ‘business’; in the third act, he has decided to go without his arms too, which apparently turned out to be a profitable strategy. In each act, the player can start a conversation with him, giving rise to puns related to his situation (e.g., upon finding him with no limbs, Rincewind asks him if he is not afraid that someone will steal his money, to which he replies that no one would attack an ‘unarmed’ man). In the second act, if the player initiates a dialogue with him, this translates into a series of lines featuring idiomatic expressions involving feet, steps and legs; we can see in column 2 that the original translation loses most of the humor:

	1 – Original English	2 – Official translation	3 – Fan translation
1	Ill work has been afoot!	Ormai sei pronto! [Now you're ready!]	Hai cominciato col piede giusto! [You started with the right foot! → You got off to a good start!]
2	You must really have the market on the hop.	Devi essere occupatissimo. [You must be very busy.]	Un bel salto di qualità. [A nice jump in quality.]
3	It's going forward in leaps and bounds, sir!	Va avanti a momenti, signore! [It moves forward in intervals, sir!]	Sto facendo passi da gigante, signore! [I'm making giant steps → I'm making giant leaps, sir!]
4	I'm trying to give business a leg up!	Sto cercando di dare una svolta agli affari! [I'm trying to make a breakthrough in my business!]	La mia attività sta prendendo piede! [My business is catching foot! → My business is catching on!]
5	Everyone says it's a good career move. Just think of the saving in footwear!	Dicono tutti che è un ottimo cambiamento di carriera. Pensi a quanto si risparmia nelle calzature! [Everyone says it's a good career change. Think of how much you save in footwear!]	Dicono tutti che è un ottimo passo per la carriera. Pensi a quanto si risparmia nelle calzature! [Everyone says it's a good career step. Think of how much you save in footwear!]
6	Didn't the city guard try to shoe you off?	La ronda cittadina non ha cercato di scacciarti? [Didn't the city guard try to send you away?]	Le guardie non ti hanno imposto di toglierti dai piedi? [Didn't the guard order you to get off their feet? → Didn't the guard order you to get lost?]
7	On no sir – I told them begging wasn't my sole reason.	Oh, no, signore, ho detto loro che l'accattonaggio non era la mia unica attività. [Oh, no, sir, I told them begging wasn't my only activity.]	Oh, no, signore, ho detto loro che fare l'elemosina non è l'unica attività che ho messo in piedi. [Oh, no, sir, I told them begging is not the only activity I've put on its feet → Oh, no, sir, I told them begging is not the only activity I've set up.]
8	Let me guess – you wanted a toe hold into a bigger market?	Fammi indovinare, volevi un punto d'appoggio all'interno di un mercato più importante? [Let me guess - you wanted a foothold into a more important market? *However, there is no wordplay with feet or toes in the Italian expression 'punto d'appoggio' (foothold)*]	Fammi indovinare, vuoi fare il passo più lungo della gamba? [Let me guess, you want to take a step longer you're your leg? → Let me guess, you want to bite off more than you can chew?]
9	Beggar: So do I have more legitimacy now, sir?	Beggar: Secondo lei, signore, adesso ho più legittimità? Rincewind: No, adesso	Beggar: Secondo lei, signore, adesso ho più legittimità? Rincewind: No, l'hai presa un po' sotto gamba.

	Rincewind: No. Now you just haven't a leg to stand on.	non hai più scuse che tengano. [Beggar: Do you think I have more legitimacy now, sir? Rincewind: No, now you don't have any excuses.]	[Beggar: Do you think I have more legitimacy now, sir? Rincewind: No, you've taken it under your leg → No, you've taken it too lightly.]

Table 17. Examples of retranslations of puns in *Discworld*

Of the nine humorous lines in this dialogue, only two (examples 5 and 9) keep the humorous element in the commercial translation; though in example 5, the wordplay disappears. On the other seven occasions, the humor, always based on wordplay, is lost. In the fan translation, shown in column 3, none of the puns is lost, as each of them has been replaced with a witty equivalent in the TT, keeping the same theme as in the original.

Comparing the two translations also shows that the fan translators changed the Italian text quite substantially in an attempt to create TT puns that were closer to those in the original text. It is the case, for example, of the 'P.A.Y.E tax' mentioned in 4.7.1.2. Here, the pun is based on an ECR, as 'Pay As You Earn' is a form of income tax common in many countries; in the game, the acronym stands for 'Pay As You Eat', a tax that someone wants to impose on a dragon in order to 'make a positive earning out of the thing'. The official translation changed the acronym to 'F.U.R.T.O.' (standing for *Fiscalizzazione Urbana Redditi Troppo Onerosi*, a made-up expression which could be translated as 'Urban fiscalization of too onerous incomes'), adding a further layer of meaning to the acronym, as the word *furto* is the Italian for 'theft'. In the amateur retranslation, the acronym becomes *I.V.A., Imposta sul Volume degli Alimenti* [tax on the volume of food]. *IVA* (*Imposta sul Valore Aggiunto*) is also the Italian VAT (value added tax), and its acronym is commonly known; this way, the TT pun restores both aspects of the original, using the acronym of an existing tax in relation to someone (or something, like a dragon) who eats large quantities of food.

In general, if we look at the occasions where a pun in the English text has been replaced with a pun in both translations, the fan translations often follow the original more closely than the official translations, while the opposite never

happens. All these examples demonstrate how the retranslation has brought the Italian text closer to the original. In addition to the textual analysis, another fundamental aspect of the translation of humor in games can be illustrated with the help of comments made by the translators themselves. One of *Discworld*'s puzzles requires Rincewind to catch a parrot which is flying around and sitting, now and then, on a palm tree out of the wizard's reach. The bird keeps repeating 'Polly wants a cracker', a phrase that is also a hint for the player: in order to get the parrot, Rincewind must throw a lit firecracker at it; the parrot will catch it in its beak and fall to the ground, stunned, at which point the player will be able to pick it up. It is not easy to make this joke work in the TL. The word *cracker* has entered the Italian language with the meaning of 'cracker biscuit', but there is no similar Italian term to indicate firecrackers. The official translation of the game left out the pun, replacing the parrot's line with *Polly vuole un biscotto* [Polly wants a cookie], while the firecrackers that the player was required to use were translated as *petardi*.

This is indeed one of the most distinctive issues related to the translation of humor in games, and to the translation of games in general: removing a joke from a game does not only make the game less funny, it can also change the difficulty level for the players. In the introduction of this thesis, I addressed this issue by providing examples from the well known games *Day of the Tentacle* and *Monkey Island 2;* section 2.6 also dealt with this problem, with further examples along these lines, taken from *Batman: Arkham Asylum.*, while 5.4.3 discussed a similar pun-based puzzle in *The Secrect of Monkey Island*. In *DOTT*, solving a puzzle involving a joke based on cultural knowledge is necessary to progress in the story. In *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, not being able to solve riddles based on puns would preclude access to optional parts of the game. In the two *Monkey Island* games, two puzzles based on wordplay (the 'monkey wrench' and the 'sleeping dogs' puzzles) may also interfere with players moving forward within the plot, as in one case the translation does not provide any hint to the player and in the other it makes the clue more obvious.

Discussing *Discworld*'s 'parrot puzzle' on the message board, the fan translators show that they are well aware of this problem and the main author of the fan

translation even says that the puzzle reminds him of *Monkey Island 2*'s 'monkey wrench puzzle' for its tight connection between language and gameplay. To maintain a similar connection, he suggests two solutions. The first one consists in replacing the parrot's line with *Polly vuole un botto di cracker*, which is a colloquial way of saying 'Polly wants a lot of crackers', where *un botto di* [a lot of] plays with the double meaning of *botto*, which also means 'firecracker'. The second solution would have the parrot say 'Polly wants to eat crackers until he explodes'. In the end, the first solution was chosen because, as another forum member pointed out, it was funnier (which he regarded as the most important factor) and it kept both the structure and the difficulty of the puzzle intact. The discussion on the message board (Web 7, my translation) sheds light on the process which led to choosing the final version:

> *Translator A*: I bumped into the millionth pun, but in this case the real problem is that it's integral to solving the puzzle: in order to get the parrot, which keeps repeating 'Polly wants a cracker', we need to throw a *petardo* (firecracker) at it. It kind of reminds me of that monkey wrench from *Monkey Island 2*.
> I had thought of 'Polly vuole un botto di cracker' (using 'botto' instead of 'petardo'), but I'm not sure it works.
> Maybe 'Polly wants to eat *crackers* [English in the original] until it explodes', but perhaps it becomes a bit too straightforward.
> What do you think?
> *Translator B*: I prefer the former ([…] so that the solution of the puzzle is not so obvious). For several reasons. The most important one is that it's funny, but I think it keeps the structure and difficulty of the puzzle unchanged.

6.3.2 Puns – *The Secret of Monkey Island*

TSOMI contains fewer puns than *Discworld* and although both translations of TSOMI 'lose' some of the original puns, the difference is less marked than in *Discworld*: the old translation loses 12 of the 28 puns featured in the original English, while the new one loses 9. Again, the latter version appears to be more 'faithful' to the original in this respect.

Eight phonological puns were brought into the TT exactly as they were in the original. They all belong to the subcategory of meaningful names: names of characters like 'Herman Toothrot', 'Droopface' or 'Six Fingered Pete' have been left untouched in the translations, which may entail a loss of humor. For example,

the name ‘Droopface’ is used as a mangling of Threepwood, the main character’s name; here, the humorous effect of combining meaningful words in an unexpected way to form a name is lost, if the Italian player is not familiar with the English words ‘droop’ and ‘face’. In some cases, the English name also has an additional meaning that is not conveyed in the target language. It is the case, for example, of sheriff Fester ‘Shinetop’, as an Italian audience might not see the obvious relationship between the character’s baldness and his name.

If we look at the sample in more detail, we can see that only one English pun has been rendered as a TL pun in the old translation but lost in the remake, while four that were lost in the old version were translated as puns in the remake. The strategies adopted to create puns in the new TL version varied. At times, the meaning has been slightly altered, if this meant achieving the same effect as in the original. For example, the line ‘booty for my beauty?’, translated literally in the old version as *un bottino per la mia bella?*, has become *Una mazzetta per la mia moglietta?* [A bribe for my little wife?] in the new translation. While the old translation kept the meaning intact but contained no wordplay, the later translation makes an attempt at retaining the humorous effect instead, through the rhyme between *mazzetta* and *moglietta*.

Trying to keep a pun whilst at the same time staying close to the literal meaning of the original text has generated puzzling results on occasions, as in the following example. In the line:

> You’ll never menace decent, tangible pirates again, you billowing bag of... of ... of something that begins with ‘b’!

addressed to the ghost pirate LeChuck, the main villain of the *Monkey Island* series, the expression ‘billowing bag’ creates an assonance that is underlined by the following ‘something beginning with “b”’. The first translation has rendered this line as:

> Non potrai più minacciare dei pirati decenti e tangibili, razza di pallone gonfiato di... di... qualcosa che comincia con ‘b’!

which is a literal translation, except for the expression *pallone gonfiato* [inflated balloon], used to indicate someone who is full of himself and that replaces 'billowing bag'. As *pallone gonfiato* contains no assonance and no letter 'b', keeping 'something that begins with "b"' seems like an odd choice. This oversight is corrected in the new translation by using the expression *fluttuante faccia di...* followed by *qualcosa che inzia con la 'f'*. Here, *fluttuante* [floating] refers to the fact that LeChuck is a ghost and *faccia di...* [face of a...] is the first part of an insult which is followed, in this case, by 'something that begins with "f"'.

Finally, just like we observed in *Discworld*, another factor highlights a tendency of the new translation to revert to the original text: if we look at the puns that have been rendered as TL puns in both translations, we see that some of the solutions chosen in the new version are much closer to the original text, while the opposite never happens. Again, it must be stressed that 'closeness' to the ST can take different forms depending on the type of text that is translated. The following example illustrates one way in which the new translation follows the original more closely. The line:

> There are some UNNATURALLY talented pirates in the area right now

which refers to the presence of ghost pirates, has been rendered in the old translation as:

> TT: Ci sono dei pirati MOSTRUOSAMENTE dotati nella zona in questo momento
> BT: there are some MONSTRUOUSLY gifted pirates in the area at the moment

which shows how the original pun has been replaced by an equivalent one in Italian. However, the text in the new edition follows the original even more closely, as the translated line reads:

> TT: Ci sono certi pirati nella zona, adesso, che sono dei talenti INNATURALI…
> BT: There are certain pirates in the area, now, who are UNNATURAL talents...

Here, the choice of the word ‘innaturali’ made the translated pun closer to the original in sound and not only in meaning, without making it less funny than the original translation.

When dealing with a pun based on an ECR, the new edition also stayed closer to the original by opting for the most SL-oriented translation procedure (i.e., retention) instead of replacing the ECR with an Italian equivalent. It is the case, for example, of the solution chosen for the wordplay in ‘shish keBob’. The name ‘shish keBob’ is a play on the Middle Eastern dish ‘shish kebab’ and the name ‘Bob’. In the game, it is used for a skeleton in pirate clothes that Guybrush finds in the jungle, impaled on a wooden pike. As mentioned in 5.3.5, the old translation has replaced it with *spieDino*, a TL equivalent which manages to convey both meanings of the original, as *spiedino* is the Italian for ‘skewer’ and *Dino* is also an Italian proper name. In the new translation, however, the term has reverted to ‘shish kebob’, a solution which preserves both the original ECR and name. In this case, as pointed out when discussing the translation of ECRs, various considerations may have guided the translators: on one side, the desire to be close to the original text; on the other, the awareness that many ECRs from different cultures have entered the Italian language during the years that separate the two editions of the game (1990 vs. 2009), and that ‘kebab’ is arguably one of them.

6.3.3 Parody and satire

Parody and satire can be discussed together when analyzing the retranslations of *Discworld* and TSOMI, as in both cases the retranslation is very similar to the old translation and both are very close to the original text. In fact, parody and satire have always been kept in the original translation of TSOMI, and the retranslation made for the Special Edition stuck to that choice.

As seen in 5.8, most examples of parody have also been translated literally in *Discworld*. In most cases, this has not caused any loss, as the objects of parody (e.g. fantasy literature, storytelling devices and conventions) are well known in

both the source and target cultures. In the new translation, however, two occurrences show significant changes. The first one can be found when, upon seeing a not very good looking young woman tied to a rock and about to be sacrificed, Rincewind exclaims:

> A maiden in distress! If we rescue her, I think we'll just give the 'kiss-thing' a bit of a miss.

In the original translation, the Italian line read:

> TT: Una fanciulla in pericolo! Se la soccorriamo, credo che avremo fatto abbastanza.
> BT: A maiden in distress! If we help her, I think we will have done enough.

Later, however, the fan translators rendered the line literally (*Una fanciulla in pericolo! Se la salviamo, penso che lasceremo perdere la questione-bacio* [If we save her, I think we'll skip the kiss-thing]), thus restoring the reference to the fairytale convention of the hero kissing the girl after saving her.

In the second case, the role of a minor character is referred to as 'a fantasy tradition'. While the official localized version of the game has kept the expression almost unchanged by using a direct translation (*una tradizione fantasy*), the fan translation has applied a generalization procedure, rendering it as *un tradizionale ruolo narrativo* [a traditional narrative role]. Here, the original translation is closer to the original than the retranslation, a rare exception to the pattern which has emerged in other areas.

Studying the examples of satire in the game provides similar results, as they are almost invariably translated literally both in the old and new translations. There are a few exceptions. A line spoken by an NPC reads 'I'm a victim of low educational standards', which has become, in the original Italian translation, *È colpa della mia scarsa istruzione* [It's the fault of my poor education]. The new translation has changed it to *Sono vittima dei bassi livelli di istruzione* [I'm a victim of low education levels], a more literal translation of the ST with a clearer

satiric intent. In general, literal solutions have been adopted, which effectively maintain the satirical effect of the original.

In addition, the fan translation is, again, closer to the original at times when the satire is based on wordplay. For example, a scene sees a character consider going to a 'psychiatrickerist', a term that calls to mind the words 'psychiatrist' and 'trickster'. The original translation has replaced it with *psichiatricista* [psychiatricist], which attempts to reproduce the humorous connotation by simply using a mangled version of the word *psichiatra* [psychiatrist], losing the pun with 'trickster'. The fan translation has used instead *psichiarlatano*, a portmanteau of *psichiatra* and *ciarlatano* [charlatan], thus remaining closer to the English version.

In conclusion, whenever the first translations were already very close to the original text, which happens most of the times, the retranslations did not use a different approach and simply recuperated the same solutions. In the few cases where the first translations had adopted a more TL-oriented approach, the new translation gets closer to the original text, confirming the speculations put forward by the advocates of the retranslation hypothesis.

6.3.4 ECRs

As their name suggests, extralinguistic culture-bound references are intrinsically linked to a specific culture and how they are translated depends on whether they are familiar to the TL audience or not. However, the borders between the cultural backgrounds of the SL and TL audiences change over time, as gamers from different countries get more and more exposed to the same cultural products. For this reason, the results of any diachronic comparison can be explained both by an evolution in the translators' approach and by a change in the cultural backgrounds of translators and users, and separating the two effects might not always be easy. In particular, as the common background shared by Anglo-American and Italian audiences is expanding, thanks to globalization, an increase in the use of SL-oriented solutions would be open to both interpretations.

Given this premise, the graph in Figure 44 displays, side by side, the absolute frequency of all the procedures used for ECRs in humorous occurrences in the old and new translations of *Discworld* and *The Secret of Monkey Island*:

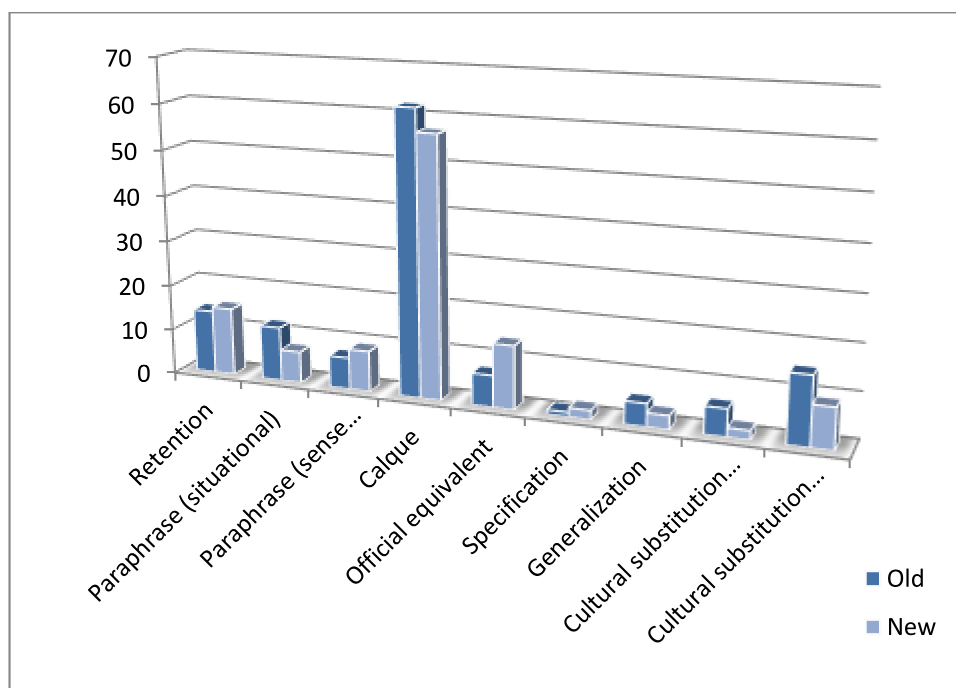

Figure 44. Procedures used for ECRs in the old and new versions of *Discworld* and TSOMI

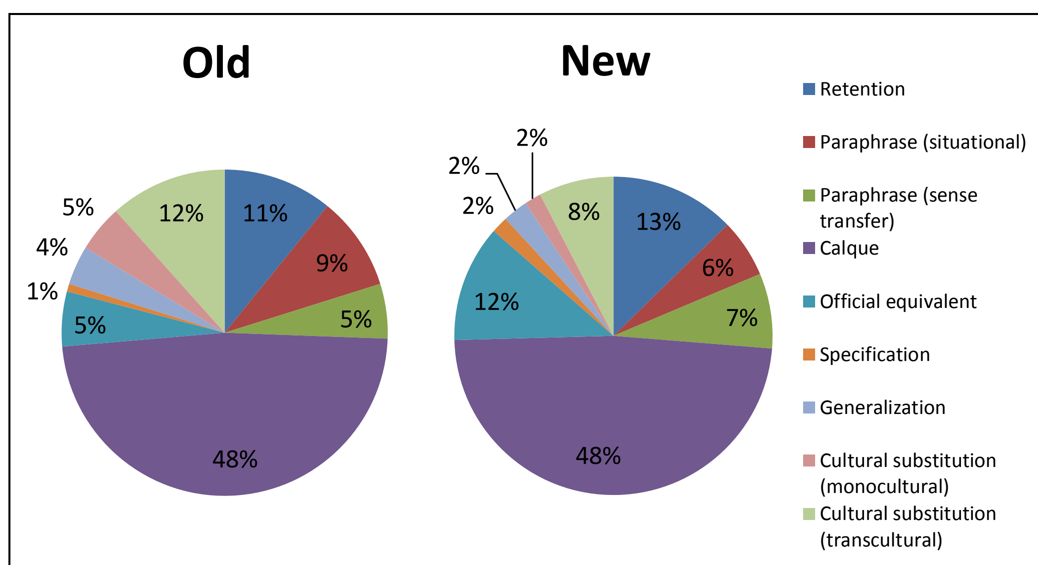

Figure 45. Procedures used for ECRs in the old and new versions of *Discworld* and TSOMI (percentages)

As an increase or decrease in the total is not necessarily due to an increase or decrease in both games, it is useful to observe the frequencies for each game,

which are displayed, respectively, in Figure 46 for TSOMI and Figure 47 for *Discworld*:

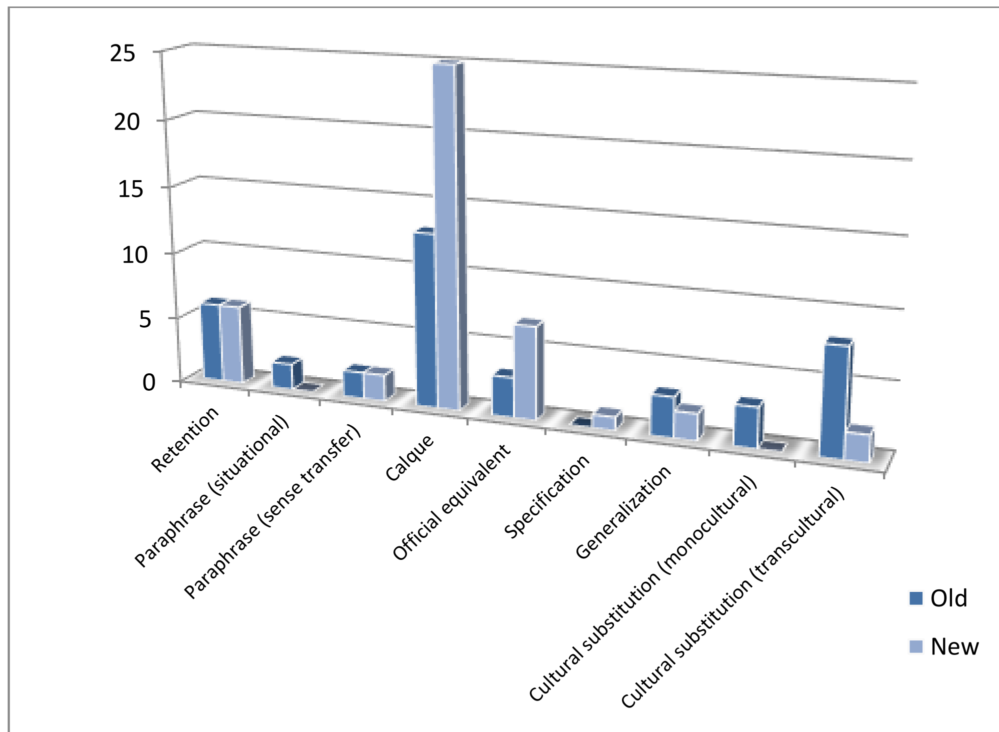

Figure 46. Procedures used for ECRs in the old and new translations of TSOMI (total frequencies)

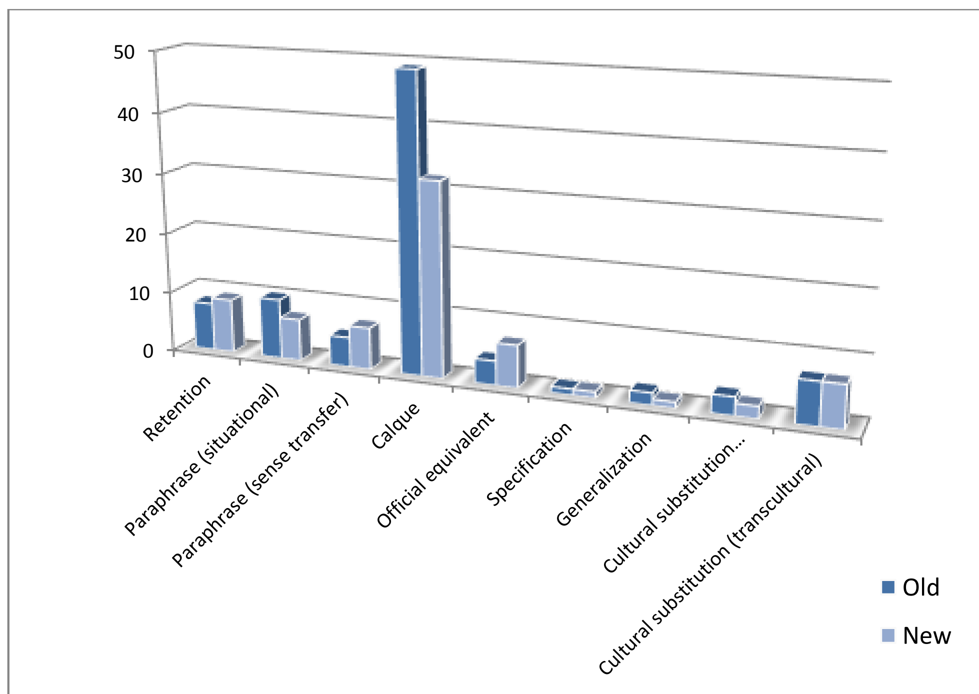

Figure 47. Procedures used for ECRs in the old and new translations of *Discworld* (total frequencies)

These global results show a noticeable decrease in the frequency of those procedures that can be regarded as more TL-oriented, such as cultural substitution

or paraphrase. At first glance, there seem to be exceptions to this pattern, but a closer look at the game text shows that this is not the case. For example, Figure 47 indicates that the retranslation of *Discworld* contains slightly more paraphrases with sense transfer than the old translation; however, the only two occurrences of 'paraphrase with sense transfer' that were not present in the original translation had been translated, in that version, with 'situational paraphrases', a procedure that is arguably more TL-oriented. In one case, for instance, the original line reads:

> ST: I'm thinking of calling them pound notes.

which refers to special credit certificates that the issuer promises to redeem 'for one punch in the face'. The ECR is the expression 'pound note', which involves a wordplay between the verb 'to pound' (beat up) and the British currency 'pound sterling'. The old translation has rendered the line as:

> TT 1: Credo che le chiamerò clausole.
> BT: I'm thinking of calling them clauses.

with a situational paraphrase that has lost both the wordplay and the ECR. The fan translation, instead, has opted for:

> TT 2: Sto pensando di chiamarle re-azioni al portatore.
> BT: I'm thinking of calling them *re-azioni* to the bearer.

keeping the wordplay with the word *re-azioni*, as this word means 'reactions', but *azioni* is also the Italian term for stocks. Therefore, the new translation does indeed contain one more paraphrase with sense transfer (a TL-oriented strategy), but it replaces the situational paraphrase featured in the old version, which was even more TL-oriented.

A similar reasoning can be applied to calque. The comparison between the old and new translations of *Discworld* shows that the new translation contains fewer calques when dealing with the transfer of humor. Looking at the specific occurrences, though, we can see that the only calque that has changed in the new

translation has been replaced by retention, a procedure that is arguably the most SL-oriented of all: 'United Alchemists', a movie production company in the game, had originally been translated with the calque *Alchimisti Uniti*, while the retranslation restores the name *United Alchemists*, keeping the reference to the US film studio *United Artists*.

The previous results illustrate the solutions chosen by the different translators. However, only a more accurate scrutiny of the single observations can confirm the pattern that emerges from them. The following analysis aims at seeing whether the comparison between old and new translations validates the retranslation hypothesis, according to which new translations are always closer to the original texts. What makes this type of comparison harder is that an objective rule to classify translation procedures according to their degree of 'closeness' to the SL language does not exist. Nevertheless, certain procedures can be considered more SL-oriented than others. For example, retention can be considered more SL-oriented than paraphrase; similarly, cultural substitition with a TT monocultural ECR can be considered more TL-oriented than a cultural substitition which uses a transcultural ECR in the TT, as explained in 4.7.3. Defining some guidelines by arranging the procedures on a 'Venutian scale' (Pedersen, 2005) can be of great help in the context of a descriptive approach like the one adopted in this discussion.

The relationships used to establish which version is more TL-oriented, some of which were mentioned above, can be represented graphically on a line, with the SL at one of the extremes and the TL at the other, as shown in Figure 48:

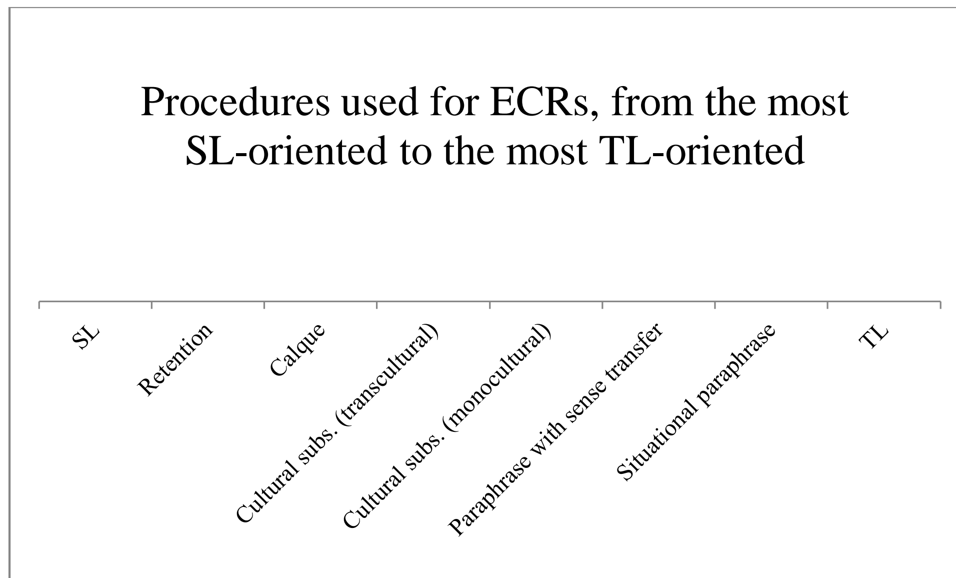

Figure 48. Relationship between translation procedures for ECRs

The following paragraphs illustrate the results of comparing the two translations using these relationships and provide examples from the games.

There is only one case where the guidelines listed above are not sufficient to establish which of the two translations is more TL-oriented, as one of the translation strategies is not included in the above-mentioned scale. In the line 'wildebeest baked in a poodle's-eye sauce' from *Discworld*, the old translation used generalization, with the term *selvaggina* [game], to render 'wildebeest', while the retranslation has resorted to the direct translation *gnu*, more SL-oriented than the generalization. In all other cases in which the two translations were not identical, the previous guidelines were sufficient to ensure a clear comparison.

The outcome of the comparison is quite striking: only 7 (5%) of the translations are more TL-oriented in the retranslation, while 36 (27%) are more SL-oriented. It is also interesting to notice that 4 of those 7 were calques that did not make the old translation more faithful to the meaning of the source text, as they resulted in a translation that would sound odd to the Italian target audience. For example, the measure '450 degrees' (Fahrenheit) used in TSOMI was translated literally as *450 gradi* [450 degrees], while the new edition opted for the official equivalent *230 gradi*, as European audiences would be more familiar with measurements

expressed in Celsius degrees. In such cases, being closer to the SL only implied losing the original meaning.

In the newer translations, cultural substitutions are less frequent, often replaced with more SL-oriented procedures like calque and. For example, *Discworld*'s 'butcher's guild', translated in the old version as *gilda dei salumieri* [deli owners' guild], reverts to the literal *gilda dei macellai* [butcher's guild]. In TSOMI, the expression 'I'm between jobs' had been rendered in the first translation as *Sono in cassa integrazione* [I'm in *cassa integrazione*], where *cassa integrazione* is a very specific Italian institution, as pointed out in 5.3.6; the new edition replaced it with *Sono tra un lavoro e l'altro* [I'm between one job and another], again a more literal (but less funny) translation of the original line.

Moreover, fewer cultural substitutions are used in TSOMI for food and drink references, for which that strategy was the most popular in the first translation. In the new edition of the game, calque and direct translation replace the various TL-oriented procedures that had been used for food and drink ECRs, as shown in Table 7:

The real mystery is why he's not simmering with carrots right now.	Mi stupisce di più il fatto che non stia cuocendo insieme alla pasta. [I'm more surprised that he's not cooking with the pasta.]	Il vero mistero è com'è che non stia sobbollendo con le carote, in questo momento. [The real mystery is why he's not simmering with the carrots, right now.]
Someone cooked a headcheese in this.	Qualcuno ci ha cucinato del formaggio qui dentro. [Someone cooked some cheese in here.]	Qualcuno ci ha cotto dentro della carne in gelatina. [Someone cooked some jellied meat (*Italian paraphrase for* headcheese) in here.]
Yes, especially in a light wine sauce.	Sì, specialmente in una salsa piccante. [Yes, especially in a hot sauce.]	Sì, specialmente con una delicata salsa al vino. [Yes, especially in a delicate wine sauce.]
Like pork trimmings.	Come i ciccioli di maiale. [Like pork rind.]	Tipo scarti di maiale. [Like pork trimmings.]
rump roast	arrosto di carne [meat roast]	arrosto di culaccio [rump roast]

Table 18. Food and drink ECRs retranslated in TSOMI

This analysis seems to suggest a decidedly more SL-oriented approach in the new translations of both games, which, as discussed previously, is in line with the retranslation hypothesis. Still, as highlighted above, inferring a change in the translators' intentions from this should not be immediate: ECRs are a very specific entity, and how they are treated in translation always depends on whether, at the time of the translation, they belong to the target audience's encyclopaedic knowledge. Such background knowledge varies continuously, and terms which were well known in Anglo-American culture but not familiar to Italian audiences of twenty years ago (e.g. *kebab*, *happy hour*) are now commonly known in Italy, which might in part explain why more SL-oriented procedures have been used when retranslating the same ECRs.

6.3.5 Understatement

Section 5.6 discussed how understatement, a very British type of humor, was dealt with in the first Italian translations of the games. The analysis showed that some instances of humorous understatement were lost in the TT both in *Discworld* and in *Day of the Tentacle*, whereas TSOMI only contained one clear example of understatement, which was left unchanged in both its translations. In particular, the official Italian version of *Discworld* lost the majority of those present in the original version (keeping only 37% of all occurrences), as shown in Figure 49 below. This can be considered a significant loss, as *Discworld*, the only British game in the corpus, is also the game where most examples of understatement can be found. The fan translation followed a very different approach, keeping 66% of the original occurrences of understatement, as also illustrated in Figure 49:

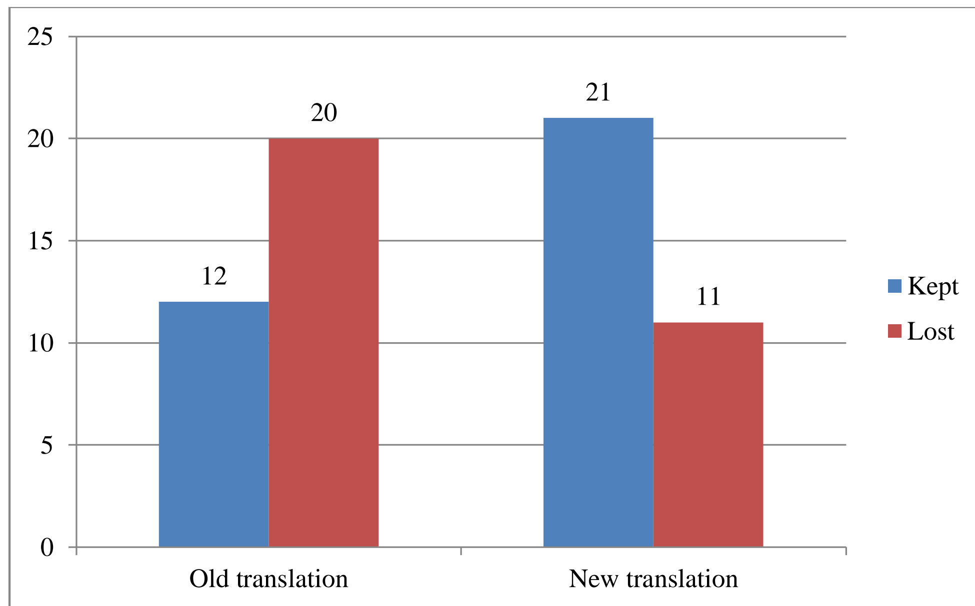

Figure 49. Translation of humorous understatement in *Discworld*

Table 8 shows how the examples of understatement discussed in 5.6 became, in the new translation, much closer to the original text.

	Old translation	**New translation**
Bwah ha ha ha ha – I'm comfortably well off!	Buah ah ah ah ah, sono ricco sfondato! [Bwah ha ha ha ha, I'm filthy rich!]	Buah ah ah ah, sono incredibilmente benestante! [Bwah ha ha ha, I'm incredibly well off!]
Rather nasty, really.	È una cosa terribile. [It's a terrible thing.]	È piuttosto spiacevole, in effetti. [It's rather unpleasant, in fact.]

Table 19. Examples of understatement in the two translations of *Discworld*

6.3.6 Language varieties

The treatment of language varieties in the retranslation of the two games depended strongly on their specific type. In *The Secret of Monkey Island*, as highlighted in 5.9, pirates sometimes use a language that mixes English, Caribbean dialects and made-up expressions. The game even jokes about it, as the player can ask one of the pirates he encounters on Mêlée Island:

Why do you guys talk so funny?

to which, in a typical meta-referential joke, the pirate replies:

> Pirate Lingo!
> It's how everybody talked back then.
> Come on Guybrush, play along.

Such a peculiar way of speaking is nearly always lost in the old translation, as the only way the old TT preserves this 'lingo' is by borrowing expressions such as 'Arr' or 'Aye' and using them at the beginning of certain sentences. The retranslation adopts a different approach and uses language varieties in the text on 8 of 13 occasions, which amount to 61% of those in the ST. When the old translation borrows expressions from the ST, the new translation for the *Special Edition* does the same; however, in addition to that, it creates a variation of Italian that is used for the pirate lingo. For example, the sentence:

> I don't loan me money to no one, 'specially lubbers like yerself.

is translated, in the old (TT1) and new (TT2) versions, respectively, as:

> TT1: Non presto il mio denaro a nessuno, specialmente agli zotici come te. [I don't loan my money to anyone, especially louts like you.]
> TT2: Io me non presto pecunia a nessuno, 'pecialmente zoticoni come tu. [I me don't loan money to anyone, 'specially yokels like you.]

where the retranslation uses incorrect grammar like *Io me* [I me] and *come tu* [like you], instead of the correct form *come te* [like you], and the odd-sounding crasis in the calque *'pecialmente* ['specially] instead of *specialmente* [especially].

At other times, even when no dialect is used, the new translation is closer to the original in its attempt to convey an unusual speech pattern. It is the case of lines such as:

> Fear for thy life, ye who enters!

which the old and new versions translate, respectively:

> TT1: Chi varca la soglia, sfida la morte! [Those who enter, challenge death!]

TT2: Abbiate paura della vostra sorte, o voi che entrate! [Fear your fate, you who enter!]

Here, the new translation is closer to the original text in both the choice of words and the syntactical construction, which attempts to replicate the archaic-sounding formulation of the original.

In a similar fashion, the retranslation of *Discworld* tries to preserve a few archaic expressions that are present in the original game and that the old version had simply dropped. The example mentioned in 5.9, where 'Ye illustrious tome of levitation' had become *Tomo illustrato della levitazione* [Illustrated tome of levitation], displays this slight change in policy: while the Italian expression used in the old translation does not have any particular connotation, the fan translation renders it with *L'Illustre Tomo della Levitazione* [The Illustrious Tome of Levitation], where both the capitalization of all initial letters and the article at the beginning indicate the use of a more 'solemn' language.

However, both translations of *Discworld* fail to reproduce one of the most relevant functions of language varieties in the game (and in the novels), which is to signal different social classes. All the characters who use a sociolect intended to represent a lower class ('highbrow' language to signal members of upper classes is never used) simply speak correct Italian in the translations, thus causing a 'flattening' of the language used, as shown in this example:

ST: Well, shovin' a pint in me hand would be nice!

TT 1: Per esempio offrendomi da bere!
BT: For example by offering me a drink!

TT 2: Be', sarebbe cortese se mi offrisse una pinta!
BT: Well, it would be kind if you offered me a pint!

Finally, there is one more occasion on which the fan translation of *Discworld*, again, follows the original text more closely than its old translation. In the original game, one character who had been given a German accent when speaking also showed traces of it in the written text (see 4.7.6); in the official translation, as discussed in 5.9, the phonetic representation of his German pronunciation

disappeared, and only a few borrowed words such as *ja* [yes] or *nein* [no] remained in his speech. The fan translation restores his peculiar way of speaking by using a phonetic representation that would sound similar to a German accent to an Italian player. For example, the statement 'Just say your lines and v'e'll see' is translated literally as *Reciti le sue pattute e fedremo* [Say your lines and we'll see], in which *pattute* is used instead of the correct *battute* [lines] and *fedremo* instead of *vedremo* [we'll see].

6.3.7 *Discworld*: fans of the game, fans of the novels

As discussed in 4.5.4, the original translation of the game did not adopt a consistent policy towards elements that already had an Italian translation in the *Discworld* novels. Many of these elements deserve a mention, as they have a humorous connotation.

Some of these elements are proper names; some are play-on-words or idiomatic expressions. However, the policy adopted by the fan translators when dealing with them seems independent of their type, as they are nearly always rendered with the translation used in the books – a strategy that in this case can be assimilated to the 'official equivalent' in Pedersen's (2005) classification of translation strategies for ECRs, described in section 5.3, as several of Pratchett's books had already been translated in Italy when the game was released.

It is interesting to note that, while they were retranslating the game, the fans clearly expressed the will to be faithful to the original translations of the books on the message board where they discussed the ongoing translation project. One of the translators suggested that the Unseen University should go back to being the *Università Invisibile* instead of the *Università Occulta* of the first translation because it was 'officially translated as *Università Invisibile*' (Web 8) in the books. The line 'a veritable vision straight out of the dungeon dimensions' had been rendered as *una visione senza dubbio uscita dalle profondità della terra* [a vision that had no doubt come from the depths of the earth], but was retranslated as *un'autentica visione uscita dalle dimensioni sotterranee* [an authentic vision out

of the dungeon dimensions], as someone argued that *dimensioni sotterranee* was the expression used in the books.

The witch Nanny Ogg, originally *Nonna Ogg* [Grandma Ogg] in the Italian books became *Tata Ogg* [Nanny Ogg] in the first translation of the game, but switched back to *Nonna Ogg* in the fan translation. It should be noted, however, that the Italian translation of the *Discworld* novels is not consistent across all the books: the Italian translation *Tata Ogg* used in the game when it was first released was also used in the later translation of the book *Witches Abroad*, published in Italy in 2009 with the name *Streghe All'estero*.

Despite a general tendency by the fan translators to adopt the names used in the books, which therefore appear to be considered as canon, there are exceptions in the retranslation. The character Cut-Me-Own-Throat Dibbler, a street vendor who appears in several *Discworld* novels and is an NPC in the game, was named *Dibbler Mi-Voglio-Rovinare* in the Italian books. The first translation of the game used the name *Ci-Rimetto Dibbler* [I'm-taking-a-loss Dibbler] instead, and the fans kept that translation in their version.

6.4 Summary of findings and future research

Despite enjoying a huge popularity, video games are still young, compared to other forms of entertainment. This might in part explain why the number of retranslations of games is still small. However, as a consequence of the fast technological advances in the field, games tend to become quickly obsolete: to today's users, a video game released 30 years ago, with its archaic graphics and sound, looks and feels comparatively much older than a movie or a book of the same age. Except for a minority of players who enjoy the so-called 'retro games', most would rather play the latest releases than old titles, and this is another possible reason why games are rarely retranslated.

On the other hand, the rapid changes occurring in this sector make it particularly interesting to study if and how localization has taken part in this evolution. This chapter aimed at investigating the issue by looking at two retranslations that have several common traits, as the games belong to the same era and genre and share many similarities in both style and content, as illustrated in chapter 4.

The study focused on different types of humor, but the analysis yielded similar results in all categories. Overall, it appears that the strategies used in the retranslations are overall more SL oriented, and that the first translations of the games dropped a large number of humorous elements. It is the case of puns, cultural references, language varieties and understatement. When this happened, the retranslations restored many of these elements, resulting in a text that is, under this respect, closer to the original. This 'return to the source text' seems to confirm the retranslation hypothesis, a theory which claims that new translations get increasingly close to the original texts. Furthermore, the same result also emerges when both translations have attempted to maintain the humor, as the new solutions adopted often follow the source text more closely. As there are many ways in which two texts can be more or less close to each other, this 'closeness' takes different forms depending on the specific type of textual element that is being translated. For example, cultural references are often rendered in the retranslations with translation procedures that are more SL-oriented than those used in the first TL versions. While it can be argued that this may be the consequence of an expanding common background shared by the source and target audiences, this return to the original is also observed in the translation of puns and wordplay: in the retranslations, there are many cases where the TT puns are more similar to the original ones, in both the mechanism and the choice of words.

In conclusion, the chapter showed how the new translators produced a text that in many respects is closer to the source text than the first TT. The limited size of the corpus, made up of only two games belonging to the same genre, prevents from drawing general conclusions. However, the consistency of the results may provide a basis for future studies of the evolution of game localization through the analysis of retranslation.

Chapter 7

Conclusions and further research

Although the research in the field of video game localization has been growing over the past 15 years, the area is still object of little academic interest. From a methodological point of view, systematic studies on sizeable corpora of video game texts are lacking; this is likely to be due to the scarce availability of texts, both source and target, as obtaining the complete text of a game is not as immediate as it can be for other types of written or audiovisual material. In addition, few scholars have looked into how humor in video games translates into different languages, which remains a largely unexplored issue.

This thesis was aimed at identifying and classifying the main types and functions of humor in video games, as well as at analysing the way in which its translation from English into Italian has been tackled, with particular attention to culture-specific elements used in the creation of humor.

The analysis has highlighted certain peculiarities of humor in games. First, humor is often in the hands of the actual players, as many of the humorous situations are determined by their actions. There are even times when players must be able to understand the jokes inserted by the creators of the game in order to advance in the story, a circumstance that does not apply when readers or viewers want to get to the end of a movie or a novel. Furthermore, interactivity is quintessential in this field, shapes all aspects of the videoludic experience, and affects humor in a relevant way when it allows for customization of the level of humor through dialogues and multiple story paths, another feature that is not present in other audiovisual media. Finally, meta-referential humor, which exploits the special relationship between the player and the game world, is particularly effective in games, as is humor based on intertextual references. Humor, it has emerged from

the analysis, is much more present in games than it appears at first glance, as games often present content to the player in a multilayer format and 'hidden' humorous elements, which require some degree of effort on the part of the player to be accessed, are sometimes inserted even in games where comedy is not considered to be one of the main components.

Before addressing the issue of humor in translation, the thesis has also discussed a variety of audiovisual features of games that produce many different constraints for translators. Despite the increasing number of studies dealing with game localization (Bernal-Merino, 2011b and 2014; Chandler and O'Malley Deming, 2012; O'Hagan and Mangiron, 2013), a theoretical framework for the study of the translation of games has yet to be established. This lack of a systematic approach could be due, in part, to the plurality of communication channels they use. Video games are characterized by an uncommon variety in form and content, and the specific audiovisual features of a game can depend on its genre, time of release and on many other factors, including stylistic and functional choices made by the authors. While they share many common traits with other media like films, they also have several peculiar characteristics that set them apart. Just like other audiovisual media, games commonly feature off-screen narrators, dialogue exchanges and inserts such as signs, newspapers cuttings or letters. However, in addition to these standard verbal items, games almost invariably include messages that are addressed directly to the player and written text that is part of the game interface, two categories which often overlap. Video games are much more varied than other types of media, but scholars have often applied to the study of games categories used to discuss and analyse other media, without specifying that their meaning varies slightly when referred to video games. In view of these considerations, the thesis also set out to contribute to the existing literature in the field by illustrating the main features of audiovisual communication in games, reviewing various of their distinctive traits, such as:

- different players may see different lines of text, as dialogues and scenes may be triggered by their actions;
- 'subtitles' (and the option for turning them on or off) can be available only in certain parts of the game;

- often, the players themselves determine, with their actions, when certain elements of text should appear and how long they should stay on the screen;
- lines of text may appear before they are actually spoken, which is the case in multiple choice dialogues, where players have a choice of options for what they want to say;
- many games are not voiced; hence, written text is sometimes the only way in which dialogues are presented, without any need for synchrony with a soundtrack.

Furthermore, different games feature different combinations of lip sync, kinetic synchrony and isochrony. Some games only have written text, while the characters simply move their lips without producing any sound; others are voiced but do not adhere to lip-sync and the written dialogue is displayed above the character who is speaking, in a fashion that resembles comics. The presence of both voiced and unvoiced dialogue in the same game is more common than having voices for all the dialogue.

In fact, if we look at some of the most popular games of the last decade, we immediately notice that this is still another area characterized by considerable variety. While some games (e.g. *Kingdom Hearts*, 2002) only feature speech in scripted scenes, others, such as the *Professor Layton* series (2007-2011), also have voices in other dialogue exchanges that are deemed particularly relevant for the plot. At times, voices are only provided for the main characters. As a result, established AVT terms like ‘dubbing’ or ‘subtitling’ cannot always be applied to video games on the same terms. In particular, the term ‘subtitle’, traditionally intended as a textual element accompanying a soundtrack, has a much wider meaning in video games, where subtitles do not necessarily complement a verbal message coming through the audio channel.

With this premises in mind, the second part of the analysis has examined three games that feature many humorous dialogues and situations: *The Secret of Monkey Island* (1990, with its 2009 retranslated remake), *Day of the Tentacle* (1993) and *Discworld* (1995, first translated at the time of its release and again, unofficially, in 2009). The results have showed that while certain types of

humorous elements (i.e. satire, parody and meta-referential humor) were preserved in the translations with little changes, others (i.e. puns and humor based on cultural references, understatement or language varieties) were modified to various degrees and sometimes removed altogether. The empirical analysis has also demonstrated that the choice of a certain translation strategy to account for the transfer of ECRs is closely connected to the nature of the references. In fact, the strategies seem to be correlated with the cultural category to which each ECR belongs. For example, cultural substitution is used very often to account for institutions and, to a lesser degree, for food and drink references; whilst official equivalent is frequently used for fictional characters, measures and entertainment. When the sample of ECRs was divided into proper and common names, retention proved to be the most popular strategy by far for dealing with proper names.

TL-oriented strategies such as paraphrase and cultural substitution were especially frequent for ECRs in *Discworld*, a game which also saw many occurrences of puns and wordplay being replaced with non-humorous elements. This way, the translated version of the game ended up being less funny than the original. Such a substantial loss of humor in a game where most of the lines have a humorous connotation can undoubtedly be considered a drastic change in the TT when compared with the SL text. Despite the descriptive nature of this study, the research conducted on the corpus seems to show that it was not impossible to successfully render the humor into Italian, and a translation of *Discworld* which preserved a larger number of humorous elements could have better recreated the experience of the original game for the TL users.

The final part of the thesis has analyzed the retranslations of two games in the corpus (*The Secret of Monkey Island* and *Discworld*), showing that the second TL versions of the games are closer to the originals in several respects, as suggested by the 'retranslation hypothesis' emerged in the 1990s in Translation Studies (Berman, 1990; Gambier, 1994). In particular, the new translations have restored many of the humorous elements that had been lost in the first translations.

While this result mirrors something that has been observed in the translation of literature (as far as I am aware, there are no studies dealing with the retranslation

of video games), its meaning is not necessarily the same. The conditions in which the retranslation of a literary work is produced differ only slightly from the conditions in which the original translators had worked. Both have the original text available; in addition, retranslators normally have access to the previous translations, and sometimes they also have available further studies on the work that may have been produced during the years that separate them from the original publication. In games localization, things are likely to be different. When a game is first released in more than one language, translators cannot normally see the finished product they have to translate. They often have little or no context for the lines they are confronted with, that can be presented to them in an order that does not necessarily follow the order in which they are spoken or found in the game (Bernal-Merino, 2007). The second time round, however, translators are able to see and play the finished game. As a consequence, it is perhaps less surprising that the new translations are closer to the original texts than the old ones and take gameplay into consideration to a greater extent. Still, the analysis performed on the sample of games in this thesis shows that even lines that do not seem to require further context to be correctly interpreted have been modified to a larger extent in the first translations, while retranslations deviate less from the SL text.

It should also be acknowledged that this study presents certain limitations. The games in the corpus were chosen because they contain numerous dialogues, humorous elements and a plethora of cultural references, but all three games belong to the same genre – graphic adventures – and present very similar audiovisual features. Since, as discussed in chapter 3, video games make use of an impressive variety of audiovisual modes, the corpus offers a limited perspective in this regard. In order to be able to draw more general conclusions, a text analysis should be conducted on games that present a larger sample of audiovisual modes and belong to different genres.

Also, the thesis repeatedly stressed the importance of interactivity as the fundamental trait of video games; interactivity shapes the relationship between the player and the game, which is what makes meta-referential humor and humor based on references to the external world so popular in this medium. The importance of gameplay affects the translation of humor, as the translation of puns

or the loss of the humorous tone of the original can hinder the fruition of the game by making it harder (or easier) for players to understand what they need to do in order to advance the plot. For this reason, reception studies would be particularly important for a thorough investigation of this area of translation. The analysis presented in this thesis only looks at how humor has been translated from English into Italian and, in the section on retranslation, compares different translations of the same SL elements. However, it would be most useful to gather some feedback provided by the users on the translations.

Further research could address these limitations. Specifically, the research conducted in this thesis could be complemented and expanded in various directions, such as:

1) Textual analyses carried out on video games that make use of different audiovisual features. For example, while the thesis focused on games with cartoonish graphics, a considerable number of games now feature realistic cutscenes and detailed facial animations with lip-synching. Repeating the study on games that raise different constraints for the translators would provide a better idea of how these constraints affect the translation of humor.

2) Textual analysis on video games where humor has a different function. This thesis looked at games which could be considered ‘comedies’, as they constantly try to make the player smile or laugh. However, humor can have several functions in games (Dormann and Biddle, 2006 and 2009); in a multiplayer game, for example, humor can enhance social bonding, whereas in a horror game it can provide comic relief. It could be interesting to see whether there are any differences in the treatment of humor in the translation of games where humor plays a different role.

2) Statistical methods. The thesis has only used descriptive statistics to synthesize and illustrate the results of the analysis. With a large enough corpus, more complex methods could be applied. Logit and probit models – statistical models which allow the study of the effect of specific variables on a binary outcome – could be profitably applied to the study of several aspects of the translation of

humor. For example, these models could be used to estimate which factors affect the probability of a given textual element to be translated using a TL- or SL-oriented approach. For video games with a considerable amount of text, these methods are likely to provide statistically significant results.

3) Reception studies. Further research could be useful to interpret the empirical results obtained, with experiments where the point of view of the users is the catalyst. As many humorous elements are based on cultural references, it would be important to have an understanding of whether – and to what degree – TL users are able to correctly identify them. Experiments could be devised along the lines of those conducted by Leppihalme (1997) in her study on the translation of allusions; questionnaires could be used to investigate whether TL players recognize the references and if they find them funny. The analysis of retranslation could also be extended by gathering feedback on which translation is preferred by players who were not familiar with the first translation of the games.

Finally, reception studies could provide evidence on one of the most relevant issues of games localization, which is how translation affects gameplay. When understanding a joke or a pun is required for solving a puzzle or, in general, for progressing in the game, observing actual player behaviour could offer insight on this issue better than textual analyses – for example, by studying how long it takes for players of the TL version (or of different TL versions) to complete specific parts of a game, compared to SL players. The potential for customization offered by games opens up new avenues for developers and new topics for humor researchers, as studies of audience perception of humor should be complemented by analyzing players' choices, in order to take into account the audience's active role as an integral part of video game humor.

However, these are only a few of the possible research topics with great potential in the future but which seem to be lurking in the shadows at present. As this thesis has tried to show, this area is worthy of further research, as humor is a fundamental part of many video games, and a good translation is essential for TL players to fully enjoy the game experience.

Appendix

Sample of humorous elements from the corpus

Table 20. Examples of satire				
	Original English	Old translation	Retranslation (if present)	
DOTT	Do you think I should be the "ecology president" or the "education president?"	Credi che dovrei essere il "presidente ecologico" oppure il "presidente dell'istruzione?"		The line is said by George Washington.
DOTT	An argument has broken out over whether we should separate church and state or legalize bingo parlors.	E' scoppiata una lite sulla questione di dividere la chiesa dallo stato o legalizzare le sale da tombola.		The Founding Fathers are discussing what to put into the US Constitution.
DOTT	Is that a W-390/B Frivolous Spending Report?	Cos'è? Un Rapporto sui Costi Frivoli W-390/b?		
Discworld	They said I really ought to find myself a trauma, then go and see the psychiatrickerist. Everybody's doing it!	Mi hanno detto che dovrei inventarmi un trauma e poi andare dallo psichiatricista. Lo fanno tutti!	Mi hanno detto che dovevo trovarmi un trauma e poi andare dallo psichiarlatano. Lo fanno tutti!	
Discworld	One of the remarkable innovations introduced by the Patrician was to make the Thieves' Guild responsible for theft, with annual budgets, forward planning, and above all, rigid job protection.	Una delle più evidenti novità introdotte dal Patrizio fu di rendere la Gilda dei Ladri responsabile per il furto, con budget annuali programmati, e soprattutto per una severa protezione del lavoro.	Una delle novità più degne di nota tra quelle introdotte dal Patrizio fu rendere la Gilda dei Ladri responsabile per il furto, con budget annuali, pianificazione a lungo termine, e soprattutto una rigida protezione del lavoro.	
Discworld	Woman: Are you a member of the dragon protection society? Rincewind: My dear woman, there's a dragon out there that is bent on burning this whole city to the ground! Woman: It's usually the owner's fault, you know.	Woman: Sei un membro della società per la protezione del drago? Rincewind: Mia cara signora, là fuori c'è un drago deciso a radere al suolo l'intera città! Woman: Sai che di solito è colpa del proprietario.	Woman: Sei un membro della società per la protezione del drago? Rincewind: Mia cara signora, là fuori c'è un drago deciso a radere al suolo l'intera città! Woman: Sai, di solito è colpa del padrone.	
Discworld	Rincewind: Um - so	Rincewind: Ehm... quindi	Rincewind: Ehm... così	

	you're a torturer then? Torturer: Please sir - we professionals within the industry prefer the term Information Extraction Technician. A little nicety, sir, that marks an otherwise very old and dignified profession. Always does well to take pride in ones new line of work, sir. Rincewind: So you're new at the job, then? Torturer: Well more like a promotion really. I started off as a tax collector, and it's all the same department.	saresti un aguzzino? Torturer: Ti prego, noi professionisti del settore preferiamo usare il termine 'Tecnico per l'Estrazione delle Informazioni'. E' solo un vezzo, ma serve a identificare un'antica e dignitosa professione. E' sempre utile dimostrarsi orgogliosi del proprio nuovo stile di lavoro. Rincewind: Allora, sei un novellino? Torturer: Più che altro sono stato promosso. Ho cominciato come esattore delle tasse,comunque il dipartimento è lo stesso.	tu sei un aguzzino? Torturer: La prego, signore, noi professionisti del settore preferiamo usare il termine 'Tecnico per l'Estrazione delle Informazioni'. È solo un vezzo, ma serve a identificare un'antica e dignitosa professione. È sempre utile dimostrarsi orgogliosidel proprio nuovo ramo d'attività, signore. Rincewind: Allora sei nuovo del mestiere? Torturer: Più che altro sono stato promosso. Ho cominciato come esattore delle tasse. Il dipartimento è lo stesso.	
TSOMI	NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING "There will be a meeting Wednesday evening to discuss the recent occupation of the Sacred Monkey Head by the ghost pirate LeChuck^" "and the subsequent impact on the environment and the tourist trade. "All Monkey Island cannibals are encouraged to attend."	AVVISO DI ASSEMBLEA PUBBLICA Ci sarà un'assemblea mercoledì sera per discutere della recente occupazione della Testa Sacra di Scimmia da parte del pirata fantasma LeChuck… ...e le sue conseguenze sull'ambiente ed il commercio turistico. Tutti i cannibali di Monkey Island sono pregati di partecipare.	AVVISO DI RIUNIONE PUBBLICA Mercoledì sera si svolgerà una riunione per discutere la recente occupazione della Sacra Testa di Scimmia da parte del pirata fantasma LeChuck… …e il conseguente impatto sull'ambiente e sul commercio del turismo. Tutti i cannibali di Monkey Island™ sono invitati a partecipare.	
TSOMI	He's in a place beneath this island somewhere in a huge system of catacombs a hellish place filled with the wailing of tortured souls trapped forever in the rock where the walls bleed and the air is thick with the rancid smell of pure evil.	Si trova in un posto sotto quest'isola… ...da qualche parte in un labirinto di catacombe… ...un luogo infernale che trema con i lamenti delle anime torturate, intrappolate per sempre nella pietra… ...dove le pareti sanguinano e l'aria è colma del puzzo putrefatto del male. I turisti facevano la fila per	È in un posto sotto quest'isola… …da qualche parte in un immenso sistema di catacombe… …un posto demoniaco pieno di anime torturate e urlanti intrappolate per sempre nella roccia… …dove i muri sanguinano e l'aria è	

	Tourists used to line up for hours to see it.	ore per vederlo.	spessa per l'odore rancido del male allo stato puro. I turisti stavano in fila per ore, per vederlo.	
	To Herman Toothrot "From Yammer, Hem, and Haw, attorneys at law" "Re Suit against cannibal tribe over malicious tossing of your oars into a chasm." "I think we have a case here." "We can probably soak them for emotional distress and possibly punitive damages as well."	A: Herman Toothrot "Da: Yammer, Hem, e Haw, avvocati in legge" Rif: Causa contro la tribù cannibale per l'oltraggioso abbandono dei tuoi remi in un abisso. Penso che qui abbiamo una causa. Probabilmente possiamo chiedere i danni per turbe emotive e possibilmente anche danni punitivi.	A Herman Toothrot Dallo Studio di Avvocati Yammer, Hem, e Haw. A proposito della causa contro la tribù di cannibali per il malevolo lancio dei vostri remi in una voragine. Penso che un caso ci sia eccome. Probabilmente possiamo estorcere loro denaro per stress emotivo e forse anche danno materiale.	Herman Toothroot is an old man who was shipwrecked on Monkey Island. Guybrush can find this letter from his attorneys in a bottle on the beach.
	Cannibal A: Ah, the banana thief returns to the scene of the crime. Cannibal B: Maybe we should just eat him right now. Cannibal A: Do you have any idea how much cholesterol is in one of these things? Cannibal B: We ARE cannibals, for crying out loud! Cannibal A: Yeah, but cannibals have to watch their saturated fats just like everyone else.	Cannibal A: Ah, il ladro di banane torna sulla scena del delitto. Cannibal B: Forse dovremmo mangiarlo subito. Cannibal A: Hai idea quanto colesterolo contiene una di queste cose? Cannibal B: Noi SIAMO cannibali, perdiana! Cannibal A: Sì, ma anche i cannibali come tutti gli altri devono stare attenti ai grassi saturi.	Cannibal A: Ah, il ladro di banane torna sul luogo del delitto. Cannibal B: Forse dovremmo mangiarlo adesso e basta. Cannibal A: Hai idea di quanto colesterolo ci sia in una di queste cose? Cannibal B: SIAMO cannibali, per la miseria! Cannibal A: Sì, ma i cannibali devono stare attenti ai grassi saturi proprio come tutti gli altri.	The cannibals of Monkey Island are discussing whether they should eat Guybrush.

Table 21. Examples of understatement			
DOTT	It looks pretty broken.	Sembra un tantino rotta.	
DOTT	It's not exactly his size.	Non è esattamente la sua taglia.	
DOTT	Somehow I don't think this washer will get it very clean.	Ritengo che questa lavatrice non lo pulirà affatto bene.	
DOTT	That wouldn't be nice.	Non sarebbe carino.	
Discworld	You are an extremely silly man.	Sei proprio un idiota.	Sei un tipo decisamente stupido.
Discworld	Ah - yes, this might not be quite my sort of bar…	Ah, sì, non credo che questo sia il mio genere di	Ah, sì, non credo che questo sia il mio genere di

		bar…	bar…
TSOMI	I have no desire to blast myself out to sea.	Non ho proprio voglia di essere sparato in mare.	Non ho voglia di farmi sparare in mezzo al mare.
TSOMI	Actually, I'm not THAT curious to find out what's inside. Probably poisonous snakes.	Veramente, non son poi COSI' curioso di conoscerne il contenuto. Probabilmente serpenti velenosi.	A dire il vero, non sono poi COSÌ curioso di scoprire cosa c'è dentro.
TSOMI	I don't think I want it.	Non credo di volerla.	Non penso di volerla.

Table 22. Examples of metahumor

	Original English	Old translation	Retranslation (if present)	
Discworld	Why can't I just have an inventory window like anybody else?	Perché non posso avere una finestra di inventario come chiunque altro?	Perché non posso avere una finestra di inventario come chiunque altro?	
Discworld	If only I had another dimension I'd teach you a thing or two!	Se solo avessi un'altra dimensione ti insegnerei in paio di cosette!	Se solo avessi un'altra dimensione ti insegnerei un paio di cosette!	
Discworld	A rain barrel! Gad, there's no expense spared on this set!	Una botte per l'acqua piovana! Per la miseria, qui non si è badato a spese!	Una botte per l'acqua piovana! Per la miseria, qui non si è badato a spese!	
Discworld	I knew this game would drive me over it [the edge] eventually.	Sapevo che alla fine questo gioco mi ci avrebbe spinto oltre!	Sapevo che alla fine questo gioco mi avrebbe spinto oltre!	
TSOMI	Seems like it's ALWAYS ten o'clock on this island.	Sembra che siano SEMPRE le dieci su quest'isola.	Sembra che su quest'isola siano SEMPRE le dieci.	
TSOMI	I can't help but feel like I've been ripped off. I'm sure you're feeling something similar.	Ho la netta sensazione d'essere stato fregato. Sono sicuro che senti la stessa cosa anche tu.	Non riesco a pensare ad altro se non che sono stato fregato. Sono certo che sia lo stesso anche per te.	After spending money on sword-fighting training, Guybrush turns to the screen and says this line to the player.
TSOMI	This is much too heavy to pick up... let alone carry around this godforsaken island for god knows what reason.	E' troppo pesante da prendere su… per poi trascinarlo su quest'isola dimenticata da Dio per chi sa quale ragione.	Questo è troppo pesante da sollevare… figuriamoci a trasportarlo in questa isola dimenticata da Dio per chissà quale motivo.	This is Guybrush reply if the player tells him to pick up a sacred idol.

DOTT	This is Farley Krock at LucasArts Games. I just discovered your contract among some very old files. And, well, our lawyers say that we, uh... ...have to pay you two million dollars in back royalties. Uh, for the use of your family in the Maniac Mansion video game.	Parla Farley Krock della LucasArts Games. Ho appena scoperto il tuo contratto tra i vecchi archivi. Ebbene, i nostri legali mi dicono che, uh... ...dobbiamo pagarti due milioni di dollari di royalty scadute. Uh, per l'uso della tua famiglia nel gioco Maniac Mansion.		*Maniac Mansion* is a previous *LucasArts* game, released 16 years earlier, in 1987; some of its characters are also present in *Day of the Tentacle*. The whole *Maniac Mansion* is included in a fully playable version in DOTT; the player can access it by turning on a computer in one of the rooms in the game.
DOTT	No way! It was hard to get it!	Affatto! E' stato difficile procurarlo!		
DOTT	What on earth am I going to do with a flag pole?	Cosa dovrò mai fare con un'asta di bandiera?		Hoagie's reply if the player enters the command "Pick up flag pole".

Table 23. Examples of puns				
	Original English	Old translation	Retranslation (if present)	
Discworld	Hi! Do you mind if I monkey-about in the library for a while?	Ciao, ti dispiace se do un'occhiata alla biblioteca?	Mi è venuta la scimmia di visitare la biblioteca… posso?	In *Discworld*, the librarian of the Unseen University is an ape (due to a magical accident) and gets offended if he's called "monkey" - or if he hears the word. Therefore, the fact that Rincewind says *monkey about* in the conversation is relevant. The pun, lost in the first translation, is restored in the fan translation. The expression "avere la scimmia" (literally, to "have the monkey") is a colloquial expression to indicate having an irresistible desire to do something.

Discworld	Now that's what I call a guarded conversation.	E' quella che si potrebbe definire una conversazione sorvegliata.	È quella che si potrebbe definire una conversazione "guardinga".	Referred to a conversation among City Guards.
Discworld	Still - I suppose it's torture a lesson!	Eppure, suppongo che ti serva di lezione!	Comunque, non ti torturare in questo modo!	
DOTT	We're not sure if we should guarantee the right to bear arms, or if it will generate too many atrocious puns.	Non siamo sicuri se garantire il diritto al porto d'armi, o se questo causerebbe troppi bisticci pericolosi.		Jefferson says this line as he explains Hoagie the problems they are encountering while framing the Constitution.
DOTT	Will you need anyone to tape down mike cords? Who is Mike Cords and why does he need to be taped down?	Avrai senz'altro bisogno di sistemare i microfoni? I Microfoni? Non sono razzista. Non dovrò sistemare nessuno?		
DOTT	Using one of my newest inventions. I like to call it THE FRANK-O-COPTER!	Usando una delle mie nuove invenzioni. Mi piace chiamarlo IL FRANK-O-COTTERO!		
DOTT	Now, that's a heavy sleeper.	Quello sì che ha il sonno pesante.		
TSOMI	And I've got a little TIP for you. Get the POINT?	Ed anch'io ho una piccola PUNTA per te. Capito?	Che lingua TAGLIENTE... mai quanto la mia SPADA, però.	The line is spoken during an insult-swordfighting duel (see 5.2.2). In the original language text, there are two puns (the double meaning of the word *tip* and the expression *got the point?*, both also referred to the point of the sword. In the original translations, the puns are lost; the retranslation replaces the puns with a different one, as *tagliente* (sharp) can be used both in a literal sense (for a blade) and in in a figurative way (in this case, in *lingua tagliente*, sharp tongue).

TSOMI	I'm the only CIVILIZED person on the island. There's a native tribe of hunter/gatherers-- --well, HEADhunter/gatherers, actually--	Sono l'unica persona CIVILIZZATA sull'isola. C'è una tribù di cacciatori/raccoglitori -- --beh, cacciatori di TESTE, veramente--	Io sono l'unica persona CIVILIZZATA sull'isola. C'è una tribù autoctona di cacciatori— —beh, cacciatori di TESTE, a dire il vero—	
TSOMI	Hi! I'm not bothered a bit by the fact that you waltzed right into my home without bothering to knock.	Ciao! Non sono affatto arrabbiato che tu sia entrato in casa mia senza neanche bussare.	Salve! Non mi dà affatto fastidio che tu sia balzato in casa mia senza curarti di bussare.	The double meaning of the word "bother" is lost in both translations.

Table 24. Examples of language varieties

	Original English	Old translation	Retranslation (if present)
Discworld	Zzzzo mister V'izard! Tell me v'at you think this first picture represents.	Salve signor Mago! Mi dica a cosa le fa pensare questa prima immagine.	Allora signor Mago! Mi dica a cosa le fa pensare qvesta prima immacine.
Discworld	I've done me apprenticeship, sir!	Ho fatto un po' di esperienza, signore!	Ho fatto il tirocinio, signore!
Discworld	Prepare to meet thy doom!	Preparati ad affrontare il tuo fato!	Preparati ad affrontare il tuo fato!
TSOMI	Sure! No problemo!	Sicuro! Nessun problema!	Certo! No problemo!
TSOMI	Move outta the way, or I cuts my way through!	Togliti dai piedi, o mi faccio strada con la spada!	Levati di mezzo, o mi faccerei strada a sciabolate!
TSOMI	Get lost, ya beggin' skulk, before I cuts ya to pieces.	Vai al diavolo, codardo mendicante, prima che ti faccia a pezzi.	Smamma, ladruncolo, prima che tittaglio in pezzi.
TSOMI	Arrr... What be that noise?	Arrr... Cosa sarà quel rumore?	Arrr… Cos'è quel suono?
DOTT	How's it hangin', Harold?	Come ti va, Harold?	
DOTT	I don't got nothin' to prove.	Non devo provare niente a nessuno.	
DOTT	Ye Olde Outhouses.	I Gabinetti	

Table 25. Examples of ECRs used for humorous purposes (in puns, humorous situations, etc.)

	Original English	Old translation	Retranslation (if present)	ECR

DOTT	George Washington: Cold? Why, you don't know the meaning of the word! I spent a winter at Valley Forge, now THAT was cold! Why, my spit would freeze before it hit the ground!	Freddo? Questo è niente! Passai un inverno a Valley Forge, là SI' che era freddo! Il mio sputo si ghiacciava ancor prima di colpire il suolo!		Valley Forge
DOTT	Even 911 won't handle THIS kind of emergency.	Neanche il 112 potrà risolvere QUESTO tipo di emergenza.		911, an emergency telephone number used in the US and in many other countries
DOTT	It says, "Dear Thor, just one drop of your mighty juice in the hands of a genius like me could illuminate the entire world!"	Dice, "Caro Thor, solo una goccia del tuo potente succo nelle mani di un genio come me potrà illuminare il mondo intero!"		The Norse god of thunder Thor
Discworld	You didn't say "Simon says".	Non hai detto "Simon dice".	Non hai detto "Simone dice".	Simon says', a game for three or more people where one of them issues orders and the others must follow it only if it begins with 'Simon says', otherwise they are out of the game.
Discworld	"United Alchemists - now in preproduction for Trolls Prefer Blondes!"	"Alchimisti Uniti - preproduzione di: I Troll Preferiscono le Bionde!"	"United Alchemists - preproduzione di: I Troll Preferiscono le Bionde!"	United Alchemists [United Artists] Troll Prefer Blondes [*Gentlemen prefer blondes*, the 1953 movie directed by Howard Hawks]
Discworld	That's a place where curiosity not only kills the cat, but also weights it down and throws it in the river.	C'è un luogo dove non solo la curiosità uccide il gatto, ma lo schiaccia e lo getta nel fiume.	È un luogo dove la curiosità non solo uccide il gatto, ma lo lega a un peso e lo getta nel fiume.	the English idiomatic phrase 'curiosity killed the cat'
Discworld	Look! It's not a dress! It's a wizard's robe!	Basta! Questo non è un abito da donna! E' una tunica da mago!	Sentite, non è un abito da donna! E' una tunica da mago!	wizard's robe
TSOMI	I'm Bobbin Threadbare. Are you my mother?	Sono Bobbin Threadbare. Tu sei mia madre?	Sono Bobbin Threadbare. Sei mia madre?	Bobbin Threadbare is the main character in *Loom*, a previous *LucasArts* game.
TSOMI	I'll use my spear and magic helmet.	Userò la mia spada ed il mio elmetto magico.	Userò la mia spada e l'elmetto magico.	The phrase is a quote from the *Bugs Bunny* episode named

				'What's opera, Doc?'
TSOMI	Stan: Did I tell you about the porthole defoggers? Guybrush: I think I can live without that particular piece of junk. Stan: Okay, but don't blame me if you run into an iceberg or something.	Ti ho parlato del sistema di sbrinamento degli oblò? Penso che sopravviverò senza una robaccia del genere. Va bene, ma non prendertela con me se ti schianti contro un iceberg o qualcosa.	Ho forse menzionato gli oblò antinebbia? Penso di poter sopravvivere senza quell' ammasso di cianfrusaglia. Okay, ma non prendertela con me se finisci contro un iceberg o cose simili.	*if you run into an iceberg or something* is an indirect reference to the *Titanic*.

Table 26. Examples of parody

	Original English	Old translation	Retranslation (if present)	
DOTT	You can't have a high-tech laboratory like this and not spew poisonous filth all the other mad scientists would laugh.	Non sarebbe serio avere un laboratorio così avanzato senza sputare fuori sporcizia velenosa gli altri scienziati pazzi mi prenderebbero in giro.		
DOTT	What brings a hot tentacle babe like you to a dump like this?	Cosa ci fa uno schianto tentacolare come te in un posto come questo?		
Discworld	Well aren't you going to tell me that you won't do the task until I find some obscure item from somewhere? Why? Well, it's traditional. Nothing's easy for adventurers. There's always just one more object to collect. Well if you want it that way, I suppose... All right - go, and return only when	Non è che per caso ha intenzione di dirmi che non lo farà finché non riuscirò a trovare qualche misterioso oggetto perduto chissà dove? Perché? Be', di solito succede così. Niente è facile per gli avventurieri. C'è sempre qualche nuovo oggetto da trovare. Be', se la metti così, penso... Va bene, torna solamente quando puoi portarmi…	Be', e non ha intenzione di dirmi che non lo farà finché non troverò un qualche misterioso oggetto perduto chissà dove? Perché? Be', è la tradizione. Niente è facile per gli avventurieri. C'è sempre qualche nuovo oggetto da trovare. Be', se la metti così, suppongo... va bene, torna solamente quando potrai portarmi...	

	you have brought me... um… A glass of elderberry wine. That's it! Complete your quest and then return! How was that?	ehm... Un bicchiere di vino di sambuco. Giusto! Completa la tua ricerca e poi torna! Come andava?	ehm... Un bicchiere di vino di sambuco. Giusto! Completa la tua ricerca e poi torna! Come andava?	
Discworld	And I survived the valley of the scantily clad amazingly well-hairstyled Amazon women.	E sono sopravvissuto alla valle delle Amazzoni seminude e dalle splendide acconciature.	E sono sopravvissuto alla valle delle Amazzoni seminude e dalle splendide acconciature.	
Discworld	The dragon's been destroying housing, so rent just went through the roof!	Il drago ha distrutto le abitazioni, quindi il reddito si è notevolmente abbassato!	Il drago ha distrutto le abitazioni, quindi gli affitti sono saliti alle stelle!	
Discworld	Why, the creature's nothing but a lizard with big ideas. Just a scaly, bloated, cowardly-- I mean, I am a hero. Heroes win. Well-known fact.	Quella creatura è solo una lucertola che si è montata la testa. E solo una squamosa, tronfia, codarda… Voglio dire, io sono un eroe e tutti sanno che gli eroi vincono.	Quella creatura è solo una lucertola che si è montata la testa. E solo una squamosa, tronfia, codarda… Voglio dire, io sono un eroe e tutti sanno che gli eroi vincono.	
Discworld	I mean, it's not even as if I have a real social role! All I do is stand around providing background colour, getting me cheeks pinched and gathering all sorts of clandestine information. The sort that wandering adventurers eventually find useful.	Cioè, non è come avere un ruolo sociale! L'unica cosa che faccio è gironzolare, dando colore alla scena, lasciando che la gente mi pizzichi le gotee cercando di raccogliere un bel po' di informazioni segrete. Cosa che gli avventurieri talvolta trovano utile.	Cioè, non è come avere un vero ruolo sociale! L'unica cosa che faccio è gironzolare, dando colore alla scena, lasciando che la gente mi pizzichi le gote cercando di raccogliere informazioni segrete di qualunque genere. Quel genere che gli avventurieri alla fine trovano utile.	
Discworld	Alms, sir? Alms for teh poor! Why should I give you money? Well, it's your traditional medieval	La carità, signore? La carità per un povero! E allora perché dovrei darti dei soldi? Be', capo, non è forse la tradizionale	La carità, signore? La carità per un povero! E allora perché dovrei darti dei soldi? Be', capo, non è forse la tradizionale	

	street transaction, isn't it guv! It's an expected part of your fantasy environment You're saying that you're just here to add a bit of colour? Authenticity, guv, authenticity. .	transazione medievale da strada? E' un avvenimento atteso in ogni ambientazione fantasy. Mi stai dicendo che sei qui solo per dare un po' di colore alla scena? Esatto, capo, esatto!	transazione medievale da strada? È una parte prevista in ogni ambientazione di fantasia. Mi stai dicendo che sei qui solo per dare alla scena un po' di colore? Autenticità, capo, autenticità.	
Discworld	Redmond Herring: That's me sir. Redmond Herring, supplier of plot modifiers and moderators to the gentry, sir. Rincewind: Plot modifiers and moderators? You mean false clues, tedious in-jokes - that kind of thing? Redmond: That's the stuff, sir! We look upon our service as proving all those things which make up the true essence of a story. Rincewind: What - you mean complicating the plot so that the poor stupid protagonist wastes half his time on false leads? Redmond: Yeah.	Sono io, signore. Redmond Herring, fornitore di modificatori e di regolatori di trame per la gente, signore. Modificatori e regolatori di trame? Vuoi dire falsi indizi, trucchetti noiosi e cose del genere? Esattamente, signore! Consideriamo il nostro servizio una verifica a tutte quelle cose che nascondono la vera essenza di una storia. Il che significa complicarne la trama cosicché quell'idiota del protagonista passa la metà del tempo a seguire piste false? Esatto.	Sono io, signore. Redmond Herring, fornitore di modificatori e di regolatori di trame per l'alta borghesia, signore. Modificatori e regolatori di trame? Vuoi dire falsi indizi, battutine noiosi e cose del genere? Esattamente, signore! Consideriamo il nostro servizio una verifica a tutte quelle cose che compongono la vera essenza di una storia. Vuoi dire complicarne la trama così che quell'idiota del protagonista passa la metà del tempo a seguire false piste? Sì.	
TSOMI	Oh good, more inventory.	Oh bene, altra roba per l'inventario.	Oh, bene, altre scorte.	(also metahumor - Guybrush says the line if the player commands him to 'pick up ghost tools')

TSOMI	Guybrush: What happened to your eye? One-eyed pirate: Well, I was putting in my contact lens when-- Hey, wait a second! That's none of your business!	Cosa ti è successo all'occhio? Beh, mi stavo mettendo le lenti a contatto quando-- Ehi, aspetta un momento! Non son affari tuoi!	Cosa ti è successo all'occhio? Beh, mi stavo mettendo le lenti a contatto, quando— Ehi, aspetta un secondo! Non sono affari tuoi!	

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Sam & Max Hit the Road. 1993. LucasArts.
Shadowgate. 1987. ICOM Simulations, Inc. Mindscape.
Silent Hill Homecoming. 2008. Double Helix Games. Konami Digital Entertainment.
Simon the Sorcerer. 1993. Adventure Soft.
Skyrim. 2011. Bethesda Game Studios. Bethesda Softworks.
Sonic the Hedgehog 2. 1992. Sonic Team and Sega Technical Institute. Sega.
Sonic the Hedgehog CD. 1993. Sonic Team. Sega.
SoulCalibur. 1998. Project Soul. Namco.
StarCraft. 1998. Blizzard Entertainment.
Star Fox. 1993. Nintendo EAD. Nintendo.
Star Wars: The Old Republic. 2011. Bioware. Electronic Arts and LucasArts.

Super Paper Mario. 2007. Intelligent Systems. Nintendo.
Tales of Monkey Island. 2009. Telltale Games. LucasArts.
Tales of Vesperia. 2008. Namco Tales Studio. Namco Bandai Games.
The Curse of Monkey Island. 1997. LucasArts.
The Legend of Kyrandia. 1992. Westwood Studios. Virgin Interactive.
The Longest Journey. 1999. Funcom. Empire Interactive.
The Portopia Serial Murder Case. 1983. Horii, Yuji. Enix.
The Secret of Monkey Island. 1990. Lucasfilm Games. LucasArts.
The Secret of Monkey Island – Special Edition. 2009. LucasArts.
The Sims. 2000. Maxis. Electronic Arts.
The Whispered World. 2009. Daedalic Entertainment. Deep Silver.
Uninvited. 1986. ICOM Simulations, Inc. Mindscape.
Virtue's Last Reward. 2012. Chunsoft.
Warcraft – Orcs & Humans. 1994. Blizzard Entertainment. Blizzard and Interplay Entertainment.
World of Warcraft. 2004. Blizzard Entertainment.
Xenoblade Chronicles. 2010. Monolith Soft. Nintendo.
Zak McKracken and the Alien Mindbenders. 1988. Lucasfilm Games.
Zork I: The Great Underground Empire. 1977. Infocom.

Filmography

TV series

Title. Year. Creator. Country.

'Allo 'Allo. 1982-1992. Jeremy Lloyd and David Croft. UK.
EastEnders. 1985-present. Julia Smith and Tony Holland. UK.
Father Ted. 1995-1998. Graham Lineham and Arthur Matthews. UK.
Fawlty Towers. 1975-1979. John Cleese and Connie Booth. UK.
House, M.D. 2004-2012. David Shore. USA.
Star Trek. 1966-present. Gene Roddenberry. USA and Germany.
The Office. 2005-2013. Greg Daniels. USA. Based on *The Office*, 2001-2003, Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant. UK.
The Simpsons. 1989-present. Matt Groening. USA.
Yes Minister. 1986-1988. Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn. UK.

Movies

Title. Year. Director. Country.

Airplane! 1980. Jim Abrahams, Jerry Zucker and David Zucker. USA.
Blade Runner. 1982. Ridley Scott. USA, Hong Kong and UK.
Duck Soup. 1933. Leo McCarey. USA.
Good Bye Lenin! 2003. Wolfgang Becker. Germany.
Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. 1989. Steven Spielberg. USA.
Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull. 2008. Steven Spielberg. USA.
Monty Python and the Holy Grail. 1975. Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones. UK.
Oliver! 1968. Carol Reed. UK.
Star Wars. 1977. George Lucas. USA.
The Artist. 2011. Michel Hazanavicius. France, Belgium and USA.
Les Belles-de-nuit. 1952. René Clair. France and Italy.
The Godfather. 1972. Francis Ford Coppola. USA.
The Godfather II. 1974. Francis Ford Coppola. USA.
The King and I. 1956. Walter Lang. USA.
The Naked Gun: From the Files of the Police Squad. 1988. David Zucker. USA.
The Sound of Music. 1965. Robert Wise. USA.
The Terminator. 1984. James Cameron. UK and USA.
Touch of Evil. 1958. Orson Welles. USA.
Vertigo. 1958. Alfred Hitchcock. USA.