Translation, Localisation and Cultural Variation in Video Games: Adapting Japanese Humour to European Audiences

Raquel Sánchez Navas[1] iD

[1] Graduate Student (2020); Department of Modern Languages, Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Ciudad Real, Spain; Raquel.Sanchez36@alu.uclm.es

Abstract: This essay explores the pitfalls and cultural aspects of localising spoken and written language within the area of Japanese video games, paying special attention to an important device in narrative: humour. The analysis will chiefly focus on a selection of games released by some of the most famous Japanese companies, and on the process of cultural adaptation promoted by these companies in order to facilitate the reception of these games by European audiences. The analysis will not only deal with the translation of texts in video games into a specific target language, but this will evaluate the process of adaptation (localisation and transcreation) of certain situations and dialogues that look completely different from a European cultural point of view.

Keywords: Japanese video games, localisation, transcreation, humour, culture, Europe

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1. Introduction

The video game industry has gained considerable renown over the last few decades, and it is deemed to be the backbone of today's entertainment and pop art. This has been primarily thanks to such countries as Japan and the United States, considered the cradle of video games and the biggest exporters of these cultural products to the rest of the world. Without a doubt, video games have become a global source of leisure in our present days, not to mention that their recognition as such is reaching more audiences every day.

Their power to entertain can be illustrated by the contents that they normally offer, from an encouraging narration of a story, to the exploration of imaginary worlds. These are, among others, the most important elements within video games. It is so much so, that as Suvannasankha (2019: xii) rightly remarks using Erikson's words, video games can be considered "psychosocial moratoriums, a 'time out of life' in which the player can freely explore […] and take risks without real-world consequences."

Going further with this idea of narration as a means to evoke feelings in players, the use of humour is also present as a frequent and popular device that has been a decisive factor of success for many titles (Grönroos, 2013). However, the employ, as well as the interpretation, of this special use of language varies depending on the culture and customs concerning the different geographical areas. As mentioned earlier, Japan stands out for having set trends in the world with the creation of famous franchises and development of unique consoles, making the country the third largest producer in the industry and generating $14 million a year (Beddis, 2018). Japanese video games released in Europe have in general a positive reception by consumers, and that is because these games have been conveniently adapted to European cultures before their release or, more specifically, not only translated but also localised. Video game localisation, as González (2016) explains, has as its main objective the promotion of acceptance in the target culture. Therefore, this is a process that is performed for the game to be

successfully sold, cohesive in language and enjoyable for players in other territories with cultural norms far away from those in the area where the product was originally designed. Soon after games started to undergo such processes of localization, the promotion, expansion and publication of video games started to develop globally.

Humour helps players interact and get involved in the story and, normally, these audiences expect to create different kinds of emotional impact on them (Fernández- Costales, 2011). In titles where this use of humorous and catchy language is present, background knowledge of both source and target cultures by translators and localisers is essential for the success in the adaptation of humour in video games. Nevertheless, there are some occasions in which translatability of jokes, puns, riddles and catchy language can be a bit of a mountain to climb. Should this happen when adapting those video games to the target European audiences, transcreation (i.e. creative translation) must be done, and it can be an opportunity to build an accurate atmosphere of humour, although this might not always be completely fair to the original game.

This essay explores the different cultural perspectives towards humour within the video game field, together with the importance of its adaptation to European audiences in order to produce a profitable player experience in the different target languages. Additionally, this study will provide with a compared analysis of the original source games (namely, the Japanese version) and two selected European languages (i.e. Spanish and English) in their adapted versions. Besides clarifying information about the Japanese versions of the games selected, I will also comment on the strategies that localisers might have followed to adapt Japanese humour into European cultures. Finally, the European versions will be commented, justifying the resulting translations and judging their creativity and their reception.

2. Methodological framework

2.1. State of the art

Translation and localisation are crucial processes that need to be carefully performed to promote an audio-visual product globally. In general terms, research on game localisation and cultural adaptation remains pretty scarce as far as the academic field is concerned. Not to mention that the amount of investigation done to date on localisation of Japanese video games is much more limited. Furthermore, Fernández-Costales (2011) agrees that even though some of the issues concerning game localization have already been addressed by a few scholars, crucial elements within video games, such as the use of humour, is still a topic that needs to be explored.

So far, the issue has been addressed by Mangiron (2010), who reflects on what humour is, the role that humour plays in translation studies of video games and its use in these cultural artefacts. The reception of translated games by players is also addressed in her seminal work on the localization of humour in video games. Likewise, Fernández- Costales (2011), O'Hagan (2009), Grönroos (2013) and González-Almodóvar (2016) recognize in their own personal way the importance of humour localisation studies in the video game field, and most of them with special focus on Japanese as the source language.

2.2. Aims and methodology

Taking into account the scarcity of studies on the translation and localization of humour in videogames, the research will be aimed at:

- **Analysing of a set of 5 video games:** I have chosen 1-2 scenes from each game, on the basis of their funny, onomatopoeic or playful dialogues in Japanese, Spanish and English versions. In doing so, I can take a closer look into these versions and study their translations to English and Spanish, commenting on how their results might have been determined by these countries' culture and language.
- **Detecting humour localisation strategies:** I will try to explain the possible processes by which the use of humour in the Japanese versions of the games has been modified in the English and in the Spanish versions, providing reasons why these can guarantee better gaming experiences to the target European players. Whereas most localisation strategies analysed here (i.e. foreignization, characterisation) are based on Mangiron (2010), a few others (i.e. domestication and transcreation) have been described by Vázquez (2013) and González (2016).
- **Analysing transcultural translations and transcreation:** I will provide with a brief critique of the translations used in the English and in the Spanish versions, commenting on their creativity, their results, word choice and point out similarities and differences from the selected dialogues chosen in their original versions.

It is important to say that I will be focusing not only on classical joke-based humour, but I will also consider other dimensions of humour, such as the playful tone of some dialogues, play-on-words and puns,

onomatopoeias, riddles, some self-refencing jokes based on the lore of some previous video game series. Finally, I will present some cases in which transcreation, which I will explain below, has been performed as a means of overcoming translatability problems, in order to enrich the target text with creativeness. The games used in the corpus, which I will introduce in the next section, have been chosen in the basis of their popularity as Japanese franchise games released and commonly known in Europe. Some of them can be included among the most acclaimed ones, and all of them do offer some encouraging dialogues that I will examine in this paper. The dialogues in the scenes I am going to display later in this essay are endowed with catchy phrases, each differently displayed depending on the version one might be dealing with. In Japanese games, the most common way to display humour is using absurdity, bizarreness and exaggeration in both verbal language and images, like making use of visual face expressions or using the so-called *emoji*. This is a way to indicate that, undoubtedly, the expression of humour varies within cultures. In situations where laughable episodes are easily perceived, either within representative visuals of a scene in the game, the characters, or even by being slightly familiar with the story of the video game, it would not be a really hard task to adapt humour into the target language. There might be some occasions, though, in which the original version does not actually express something catchy or funny, so that the localisation team must adapt these situations, adding a playful tone for their audiences. Likewise, a source culture might mock at some topics which other countries might not consider funny at all, as in the case of exaggerated character design (e.g. infantilising and oversexualising female characters). Essentially, whenever a game is released in other countries, translators and localizers will not only focus on having a great economic success in terms of sales in the target culture, but also on helping players have an optimal gaming experience, regardless of their culture. Although it is true that localising a game requires complex technical and in-depth planned marketing processes, the participation of such agents asthe localisation coordinator, the translator(s), reviewers and testers is essential for the linguistic and cultural challenges the source game might pose (Mangiron, 2010)

Without this localisation process, video games released in other cultural areas would not be successful, as they would not be enjoyed in the same degree as they are with a proper adaptation, not to mention the cultural disorientation that this would cause to players with poorly-adapted laughable dialogues. In a broader context, the goal of humour localisation should also consist in reaching a substantial upgrade of the game experience by European players. Transcreation plays an important role, as it involves recreating more than translating. It is, in a way, a resource that translators use to bring a software product and make it fit in their own culture. According to Bernal (2006), transcreation or transcreativity involves more freedom to work with the text, since transcreation involves a non-limited and free reproduction of a text, without losing neither meaning, nor intention, but giving the target text a more creative cultural adaptation. In connection to this, Vázquez emphasises that "employing transcreation techniques […] requires more effort from the translator's side, since his or her job is not only to adapt a text from one language to another, but also to invent new elements which fit in the new text to replace other items from the source text that cannot be translated properly." (2013: 17) As a matter of fact, transcreation is a term that is closely related to cultural adaptation, whereas translation requires more limitations (translators simply stick to what is being expressed in the source language by the author). Transcreation or transcreativity would be required in specific situations where impossibility of translation may occur. Vázquez (2013: 17) assumes that "texts which contain a high level of references to a specific culture may need a transcreative approach to their translations." To put it in another way, transcreation is an opportunity to overcome the challenge of the impossibility of translation, taking advantage or recreating a message by adapting it in order to get a creative and improved approach.

This being said, the main research question that needs to be addressed within this context is whether humour should have an *ad hoc* adaptation into the vast array of existing cultures in the video game localisation domain.

3. Corpus

In order to attain my goals, I have created my own corpus of Japanese video games. As already mentioned, in this research I will analyse and compare the Japanese original games to their English and/or Spanish translations, studying their cultural background, exploring and identifying the various dimensions of humour and commenting on the strategies that had led to some wholesome and original localised results. Further, I have provided with an estimated insight of their reception in the target European audiences. My corpus consists of the following video games:

- ***Final Fantasy X - or FFX*** from the Final Fantasy game series. Main author Tetsuya Nomura (野村哲). Developed by Square Product Development Division 1 (Square Enix). European Publishers: PAL Sony Computer Entertainment. Date of release in Japan 19.07.2001. Release date in Europe: 24.05.2002. Units sold: 2.11 million units in Japan, 2.4 million units in Europe.

- ***Final Fantasy XV – or FFXV*** from the Final Fantasy game series. Directed by Hajime Tabata (田畑端) Developed and published by Square Enix Business Division 2. Date of release (varies on the platforms) 29.11.2016. Units sold: 8.9 million copies worldwide on all platforms. Essentially, two games of the *Final Fantasy* saga were selected on the grounds of their popularity and improved localisation, not to mention that both count with dubbed voices which combine a mixture of both American and British accents. Essentially, I have picked just one scene-dialogue per game.[1]

- ***Animal Crossing:*** *Wild World* from the Animal Crossing game series. Developed by Nintendo and Nintendo Entertainment Planning & Development. Distributed by Nintendo of Europe GmbH. Date of global release: 23.11.2005. Units sold: 11.75 million copies sold worldwide. This is presumably Japanese company Nintendo's one of the most famous and acclaimed game series. Developed by Nintendo and released in Europe in the year 2006, the video game belongs to the Simulation or Virtual Life genre (GameFAQs, 2005: online), and it is part of Nintendo's IP (Intellectual Property), according to Vázquez (2013.) *Animal Crossing*, whose various titles have been published for consoles such as: *Nintendo 64, Nintendo Game Cube, Nintendo Wii,* and *Nintendo DS/3DS*, is currently continuing its new games release, having just released the new *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* for console *Nintendo Switch* this year. *Animal Crossing* localised games count with multiple transcreation and successfully adapted texts and dialogues. I will display one dialogue from *Animal Crossing: Wild World* and another one from the title launched on the Nintendo: 3DS console *Animal Crossing: New Leaf* (2012-2013), which both convey very accurate localised dialogues and creative translations within their target countries/cultures.

- ***The King of Fighters XIII (KOFXIII)*** (10th episode of the series). Developed and distributed by SNK Playmore. Date of release in Japan 27.10.2011. Date of release in Europe 25.10. 2011. This is a fighting Japanese video game, chosen mainly for its unique yet peculiar Spanish adaptation and localisation. The game itself was localised by the agency Active Gaming Media Co. and made some the characters in specific scenes to speak using *Chiquito de la Calzada*'s most famous phrases, which had a significant positive effect on Spanish players, and as was to be expected, the reception of the game was exceptional. For this game, I will display one scene that contains that Spanish localisation example.

- ***Persona 5 Royal*** complete and improved version of the sixth instalment (*Persona 5*) in the *Persona* game series. Developed by ATLUS and P Studio. Distributed by Koch Media. Published by ATLUS (Japan), Deep Silver and Sega (PAL). Date of release in Japan 31. 10. 2019. Date of release in Europe 31.03.2020. The newly released Persona 5 Royal has spawned a more positive feedback than the controversial previous edition *Persona 5* (2016 in Japan, 2017 for Europe). While it is true that the 2017 *Persona 5* was one of the most eagerly awaited video game titles in the world that time, the launch of *Royal* made some changes in the original game and its localisation, even censoring parts of some scenes. This was triggered by players' upset reactions to *Persona 5* scenes, were hatred towards the LGBT community was shown, alongside the perpetuation of its stereotypes. Consequently, I will display and analyse one scene in regard to this game.

All in all, I will analyse here five different Japanese video games and their adaptationsinto the English- and Spanish-speaking markets. In doing so, I will be able to describe some of the main strategies used by translators and localizers in order to adapt Japanese humour into these European cultures and markets, as well as the role of transcreativity in these processes of adaptation.

4. Data

I will now pay special attention to the different strategies and techniques of localisation used in each version.

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[1] As far as the *Final Fantasy* series franchise is concerned, its reputation has gained popularity over the years, apart from the fact that it is one of the most successful video game sagas to date. Another important aspect to mention is the case of most-acclaimed title *Final Fantasy VII* (1997), whose poorly and infamous English and Spanish localised versions marked a turning point in the improvement of the translation and localisation domain. Its famous localisation fiasco was marked by the famous Spanish translation *¡allé voy!* from English expression "let's mosey!", which at the same time was taken from the original Japanese volitional form of 'to go' 行こう.

Here, I introduce the data, which would be the source texts of the games (Japanese), in comparison to the target languages (English or Spanish).

4.1. Humour out of transcreation and domestication

I will start my analysis with the game *Final Fantasy X*, which includes one scene in which the team is having a conversation on planning their next journey to a temple, in order to complete a quest of the video game. The source dialogue in the scene involves Tidus, the main character in the story, who asks his party to head to "Macalania Temple", to meet the villain, named Seymour. However, when he says the name of the Macalania Temple, m a r a k a n y a j i i n Tidus mispronounces it as マラカニアァ寺院 "Maracania Temple". The use of humour in this scene in the Japanese version consists in simply swapping the syllables カ and ラ.[2]

As for both the US and UK English versions Tidus' mispronunciation was replaced by confusing the name of the temple with the title of the famous song by the Spanish duo *Los del Río* and decided to give this dialogue an addition of humour. (González, 2016) "They said Seymour went to *Macarena* Temple." Likewise, the Spanish localisation decided to use the same joke: «Seymour se ha ido al Templo de Macarena».
González (2016) claims that the localisation strategies performed here are labelled as "transcreation" and "domestication". The fact that the localisation team decided to use the title of the song was an act of creativity of the translation, replacing a pronunciation mistake by a humorous situation, which sounded quite natural to the Western audience. Additionally, as González says, this decision of using a popular song is already a strategy of domestication, since the use of an element of the Western pop culture would not have made any sense to the Eastern, however Westernised Japanese society may be today.

4.2. Characterisation and product placement

The *relatively* recently released *Final Fantasy XV* is said to own an underdeveloped and somewhat dull story within the game (Toledano, 2016), contrariwise to the characters appearing in it. In fact, *Final Fantasy* series never seem to fail players in the creation of iconic characters, as in this case, where they introduced a boyband-like childhood group of friends. The team made up of Noctis, Ignis, Prompto and Gladiolus, together with their wholesome personalities and dialogues, made the game definitely worth playing. A good example for *FFXV* characters' personalities is the case of Gladiolus—or *Gladio*—whose obsession with cup noodles is taken to the extremes, showing the character in different dialogues insisting on having *Cup Noodles*. The interesting thing about this is that the video game itself promoted a famous Japanese instant noodles brand (*NISSIN Cup Noodles*) every time Gladio referred to those. The humour strategies used in the game would be labelled as both *product placement* and *characterisation,[3]* as the game conveys the brand promotion with the absurd personality of Gladio.

Here I present a scene from the Japanese version in which Gladio and Noctis are having a conversation about the noodles in the middle of a side quest that involves finding c a p p u n a a d o r u ingredients to cook them (実際食ってみて改めて実感しをぜカップヌードルはすげえ よ). The literal translation for this would be: "¡After eating them, I realized once again that Cup Noodles are amazing!" This dialogue underwent a great change in both the English and Spanish versions. For the English localisation, Gladio's line would read: "You know something? Going through all that trouble to make our own custom cup, it's made me appreciate Cup Noodles even more." Gladio's line becomes quite expressive in the way his line was reproduced for the Spanish version: «¿Sabes qué? Todo lo que hemos sufrido por aspirar a la perfección me ha hecho apreciar aún más los fideos instantáneos.» In both cases, Gladio's characterisation remains, but it seems like the Spanish version decided not to indicate the presence of the name of the Japanese brand within the dialogue, replacing it by simply saying «*fideos instantáneos*». Nevertheless, in all versions of the video game one can perfectly see the *NISSIN Cup Noodle* stands with the logo on it. Regardless of the type of localisations described above, the reception of the game was quite favourable worldwide, so that it can be assumed that this localization was a success.

4.3. Transcreation and characterisation

For this specific case, the example I will describe for this category is *Animal Crossing: Wild World*. This

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2 . The Japanese language is characterised by the lack of an "/l/" phoneme, which is, in many times represented and transcribed as "<r>".

3 .Mangiron (2010) refers to "characterisation" as a strategy of humour performed through the design of the characters, including their look, the way they dress and behave, the way they speak, or a mixture of these

video game, and the rest of the titles released within the *Animal Crossing* saga, present a social simulation game set in a remote town inhabited by do o bu tsu no mori, adorable little animals, hence the title of the video game saga (どうぶつの 森) "The animal forest." The villagers or neighbours living in the town where the entire game occurs can be befriended by the player, developing a good friendship, offering them presents, doing them favours and even visiting their houses.

Animal Crossing counts with a handful of different characters or Non-Personal Characters (hence NPCs) divided into various categories, such as animal type, gender, or personalities. *Picture 1* includes a list of the different personalities depending on the gender of the villager.


Male [edit]
- Lazy
- Jock
- Cranky
- Smug

Female [edit]
- Normal
- Peppy
- Snooty
- Sisterly (Uchi)

Picture 1 *Villagers personality classification in English*

男の子			
ハキハキ	ぼんやり	キザ	コワイ
女の子			
普通	元気	オトナ	アネキ

Picture 2 *Japanese personality classification chart (appearing on a Japanese forum) showing "boys" on top, "girls" below. "Snooty" appears as* オトナ, *which translates into "adult."*

This classification is quite significant, since it means that the NPC appearing in the game will present different dialogues depending on the personality and according to the identity they belong to. The scene I would like to display for this analysis happens wihin the context of going to a neighbour's house to pay a visit. When that happens, villagers might be at home, or they might have simply decided to go out for a walk. If it happens to be the latter situation, the NPC will usually communicate they are not home through a small absence note near their door. In order to illustrate this situation, I am going to pay attention to this absence note that can appear in the case of female *snooty* type of character door.
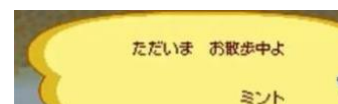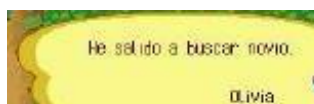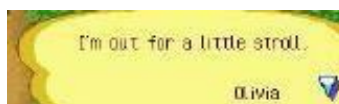
Pictures 3, 4 (Vázquez, 2013: 32) and 5: *Gameplay screenshots displaying snooty-type dialogue*

As Vázquez indicates, NPCs belonging to the *snooty* personality "are famous for being arrogant and presumptuous." (2013: 32). If one searches this term in an online dictionary, such as the Oxford English dictionary, Vázquez states that the words found along this term were those like "Supercilious, haughty, conceited; affecting superiority, snobbish; […] Occas., irritable, short-tempered" (2013: online).

The picture of the Japanese text above displays a dialogue from a different female character, Mint (Japanese ミント), who happens to belong to the *snooty* personality as "Olivia" in the English and Spanish localisations. The fact that this is a note from another NPC does not matter, since characters belonging to the same type of personality, as shown in *Picture 1*, usually are to have the exact same dialogues. I would translate the Japanese dialogue as: "I'll be back. I went out for a while." The meaning and tone in the Japanese version look quite similar to the English dialogue "I'm out for a little stroll", which both maintain the neutral tone of the message

and do not express humour at all. The Spanish localisation though, «He salido a buscar novio» dialogue seems to have been reproduced and adapted based on the very classification of personalities of the NPCs and taking advantage of the *characterisation* localisation strategy.

4.4. Pun-on-words, riddles, and playful language

Among the multiple activities that one can play in many of the most famous titles of *Animal Crossing,* we can find such things as building a house and paying the mortgage to a *tanuki* or a raccoon, gathering fruit from trees by shaking them, or collecting creatures like bugs and fish using tools.

The games released within the *Animal Crossing* game series are characterised by their playful dialogues, especially in those cases when the player's customised character obtains objects or achieves certain goals in the game. Some of these playful dialogues can also appear whenever the player catches a bug or a fish, showing an emotion (like excitement or indignation) or, as happens in the case of the Spanish localisation, these dialogues might include puns on words or rhymes.

The Japanese dialogue that appears whenever the player fishes a sea bass would be translated as "I fished a sea bass! You again?!"

Picture 6 *Japanese dialogue when fishing a sea bass (Animal Crossing: New Leaf; 2012)*

Analysing the kind of language used in this scene (mostly colloquial forms in Japanese), the original version expresses indignation and exasperation, caused by having caught a sea bass. The reason behind this is that, from the vast array of fish species that one can collect, the sea bass is the species that appears in the majority of the cases, which, for players, is actually rather irritating. The English localised version decided to maintain the emotional expression of desperation, so that the Japanese sentence was rendered as "I caught a sea bass! Not you again!". However, the Spanish localisers opted for the use of creative rhymes and playful riddles. In this case, they localised this moment as "¡He pescado una lubina! ¿Otra vez? ¡Qué mala espina!". Further, in other episodes of the game series, this moment has been translated as «alucina lubina». This particular use of language in this kind of dialogues has been perpetuated in the next and newly released titles, as it happens when the player goes out to catch bugs. For instance, if the player catches a snail, the Japanese speech bubble would display the sentence "I caught a snail!" with a phrase from a Japanese folk song on snails that is sung for kids called den   den mu shi mu shi でんでんむしむし. By cultural equivalence, and referring to the popular song «caracol, col, col, saca los cuernos al sol», the Spanish version did its localisation choosing «¡Un caracol! Que no le dé mucho el sol…». As for the English localisation, this exact dialogue did not follow the cultural translation approach. Instead, in English this expressed an emotion of indifference, localising this moment with the phrase: "I caught a snail! It's…not much to brag about." Thus, this result explains that the English localisation was not looking for a translation with a cultural approach, but the dialogue main aim was to express an emotion.

4.5. Domestication vs. foreignization

Regarding this localisation strategy, I would like to analyse *The King of Fighters XIII*, a popular Japanese fighting game. Again, this title presents another example that conveys good character and stage design. This is done both through amazing dialogues and characterisation, since the game deals with characters like medieval Japanese-like warriors. The stage design in this video game conveys multiculturalism, as one can encounter locations from all parts of the world (i.e. India, Japan, England, France) working as the fighting stages. One can also encounter creativeness in their TT,(i.e., Target Text) making a completely different version from what was written on the ST (i.e. Source Text) but with the mere purpose of adapting the content to the source culture in the best way possible.

As highlighted by Mangiron and O'Hagan (2006) the person (or team) in charge of localising the game is given (i) a complete freedom to change, adapt, and remove any cultural references, or funny language that would not many make any sense in the TT; as well as (ii) the liberty to include new jokes, or any other element of the target culture which localisers deem vital to preserve the game experience through an engaging translation.

This being said, I will show here an example of how the strategy of domestication has been performed. The example I intend to describe shows a combination of the two strategies under scrutiny, foreignization and domestication. Paloposki described both terms as the following: "*domestication* is often used to refer to the adaptation of the cultural context or of culture specific terms […] and *foreignization* to the preserving of the original cultural context, in terms of settings, names, etcetera." (2011: 40).

Before starting a fight, the game usually displays a dialogue or cut-scene between the opponents, either confronting themselves or just chatting in a casual way before the fight begins. Studying the Japanese dialogue, Ralf Jones, a character from this game, is talking to Yuri (female karateka). Ralf, who usually talks in a very informal way, seems to be flirting with Yuri, since he tells her he really wished his princess were as lovely as Yuri. Here is a rough translation of the Japanese dialogue: まったく、ウチのお姫さんにもアンタくらいの愛嬌があればいいんだがな ("Oh to have a lovely princess as you are/Oh how I wished our princess were as lovely as you are"). Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that between these lines, there is a reference to a popular comedy a   n   ta   ccha   boru   duo in Japan, アンタッチャブル "Untouchable", usually abbreviated as *Anta*, composed by Hiroya Yamazaki and Eiji Shibata.

The Spanish version of *KOF XIII* is somewhat curious, the team in charge of adapting the game to the target culture (Active Gaming Media Co.) decided to add some catchphrases said by the Spanish comedian Chiquito de la Calzada, whose references made the game reception in Spain to be both acclaimed and slightly disesteemed. In the Spanish version, Ralph says: «¡Ay…! Cómo quisiera que nuestra princesa fuera encantadora como tú, bomboncito de Málaga». González (2016) labelled this strategy as *domestication,* since addition of this phrase is usually expected to be recognisable in the target culture. Considering that the Japanese dialogue makes a reference to a local comedy duo, the cultural adaptation in this case seems to be completely accurate. Nevertheless, González sceptically reacted towards this Spanish adaptation, insisting on the idea that the translator should be aware to what extent a domestication or foreignization approach is correct, since domestication can sometimes look strange for the player, seeing a medieval warrior speaking like Chiquito (2016). This reasoning shows that this adaptation, however funny the dialogue is, might have not been done correctly. Mangiron (2012) argues that, in such cases, the localised video game should be somewhere in between domestication and foreignization. Due to this, the localiser(s) seem to have to take the liberty with adapting the original text with complete creativity, but it is doubtful whether this can be correctly adapted or not.

4.6. Surpassing humour limits: the case of Persona 5- Persona 5 Royal

When in March 2020 ATLUS released *Royal* (a remastered version of the previously launched RPG -*Role-Play Game Persona 5*), it was clear that the modifications made to some of the dialogues were due to censorship towards some scenes which were said to incite hatred. The *Persona* saga commonly uses vulnerable topics to be laughed at, as there still exist some of *P5*'s narrative that promote and reinforce outdated stereotypes. (Lewis, 2020). In the original *Persona 5*, there is a scene set in Tokyo's red-light district in Shinjuku, where two homosexual characters in the game are portrayed not only as comic relief, but also as violent predators. The characters in the *P5* version are aggressively seducing NPC Ryuiji, to which he reacts in a disgusted way, as if he considered homosexuals a threat or rapists. In the P5 Japanese version Ryuji reacts saying ko i t su ra (うおつ!? 何だコイツら…!?) The word *koitsura* refers to a rude and disrespectful way to refer to "people", so he would be saying "who the hell are these freaks?" The English dialogue in *P5* shows Ryuji crying out "Gah! Wh-Who are you!?" and would continue the dialogue saying "H-Hey, wait…*Lemme* go!" The NPC's reaction was changed (or rather, censored) in *Persona 5 Royal*, who tries to explain the two characters talking to him he had no intention to stay with them whatsoever. Unfortunately, this was very detrimental to the efforts of LGBT minority groups in Japan, who are campaigning for equality, fighting for their rights and acceptance (Fabre, 2019).

Picture 7 Oppressive situation in P5 gameplay. Left shows P5 Japanese dialogue. Right displays English localisation.

5. Concluding remarks

Video games are becoming increasingly influential in present society, to the extent that they are now considered a crucial interactive means of entertainment. For example, a report by the ISFE (Interactive Software Federation of Europe, 2010) about entertainment habits in Europe indicates that one in three Europeans declare that they spend between five and sixteen hours a week playing some sort of video game. Undoubtedly, a main factor for the success of video games as a modern form of entertainment relies on the narrative component that they offer and, more specifically, their use of humour, which plays an important role in their process of reception by players.

As I have indicated, today's video game culture is frequently connected with Japan, one of the main world actors in this industry. For Japanese games to become successful overseas, much more than an ambitious marketing plan is required. In general terms, companies intending to release their projects globally will also need an appropriate localisation process in order to conveniently adapt the original Japanese cultural artefact into other target cultures. Within this context, this research has focused on the use of cultural adaptation strategies (such as transcreation, domestication, characterisation, etc), highlighting the importance of the challenging work done by linguists, who strive to adapt foreign products into a specific target country or culture in order to engage in a successful interpretation of the humorous use of language. Furthermore, it has also been observed here that, according to the examples analysed in this research, linguistic and cultural barriers can be overcome by making use of correct (and sometimes original and creative) adaptations depending on the targeted European culture. However, greater care should be taken to avoid making the same mistakes as, for example, in the *Persona 5* scenes described above. Although it is true that European societies have progressed a lot in terms of LGBT rights, it is also true that pop culture and mass media frequently make use of this and other minorities as a source of comic relief. Allowing this would only hurt recently-gained rights. Regretfully, Japanese society is still backwards when it comes to LGBT rights, which favours the perpetuation of exaggerated stereotypes in video games. In brief, it is obvious from this research that a bad localization of these video games might threaten the social principles of the targeted European cultures, importing biases and taboos overcome many years ago. The fact that video games are usually surrounded by the social stigma of being considered a detrimental and a problematic source of entertainment has deeply encouraged me to demonstrate their value and how they can really make a significant impact through their narrative and interactive components. I have always found humour conveyed within video games a key feature that enriches the quality of the narrative and the play, which has not stopped me from playing and analysing video games and their different strategies of localisation to the culture of the countries where those are released.

To sum up, our satisfactory experience of the playthrough of a Japanese video game by Europeans ca be considered an achievement of the industry of localisation and of localization professionals, who are constantly striving to find the best ways to adapt the games to new audiences. The examples I have studied in this essay are a clear illustration of how some of the cultural barriers posed by Japan can be broken through thanks to the good work of experts in language and culture. Further, I have also shown that more awareness is required on the issue of how crucial the work of a linguist can be. This might be a good opportunity for experts in this area to outdo themselves in their profession through their translations, thus improving the quality of a product released in a specific target country and thus promoting multiculturalism.

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