

A Study of Game Localization Translation under the Perspective of Skopos Theory--Taking the Game Red Dead Redemption 2 as an Example

Tailei Yin

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College, Zhuhai, China

Corresponding author: r130025137@mail.uic.edu.cn

Abstract:

As economic globalization continues to advance, the international market for video games is rapidly growing. For game companies aiming to expand their business globally, the localization of game translations is a crucial aspect. A well-executed localization can greatly boost a game's international sales and appeal, attracting players from diverse regions. Thus, game localization is a vital strategy for companies seeking success on the global stage. Skopos theory, a key framework in translation studies, offers valuable insights for different types of translation work. This paper applies the principles of Skopos theory to examine the Chinese localization of various texts in the large-scale single-player game *Red Dead Redemption 2*. The analysis reveals that, under the guidance of Skopos theory, the localization enhances both the gaming experience and the sense of immersion for Chinese players. During the localization process, the translation, adaptation, or even rewriting of the original text is performed with the goal of aligning the final product with the cultural and linguistic preferences of local players.

Keywords: Game Localization; Skopos Theory; *Red Dead Redemption 2*

1. Introduction

In recent years, the video game industry has experienced significant growth, emerging as one of the dominant forms of entertainment. Its revenue has now exceeded the combined income of both the movie and music industries. From 2018 to 2020 the industry's revenue steadily increased from \$139.8 million in 2018 to \$179.8 million by 2020[1]. Consequently, many game developers have recognized the potential of this industry and are now targeting not only domestic markets but also the global market. In addition to the high quality of the video game itself, the localized translation of the video game is also critical to developing overseas markets. Localization refers to a product's linguistic and cultural adaptation to the target region where it is used and sold [2]. Localization is not just about translating from one language to another; Translation is just one aspect of localization, which also includes adapting the content to ensure it aligns with the cultural and linguistic nuances of the target audience. An excellent localized translation of a video game allows gamers from all over the world who speak different languages and have different cultural backgrounds to understand the content

more efficiently, allowing them to have a better experience and sense of immersion when playing the game. In addition, some high-quality game localization can also enable people from different countries to learn about their own culture from the game, which is also an essential method of cultural dissemination. Therefore, to increase the global sales of their games, game developers in more and more countries are paying more attention to the localization of their games [3]. However, in the current game market, the quality of localized translations is still mixed, which leads to the fact that even though some games have high quality, they don't sell well overseas due to the lack of excellent localization. Although the game industry is growing, the research on game localization translation is far less than that of other entertainment industries such as movies and music, so this paper will explore how Skopos theory is used in game localization through further research on video game localization.

2. Research Method

Based on Skopos theory, this research examines the Chinese translations of various game texts in *Red Dead Re-*

demption 2 to determine whether they successfully convey the source text's message while aligning with the cultural and linguistic habits of Chinese players.

Skopos theory asserts that the purpose of the target text guides the entire translation process, influencing the choice of methods and strategies. Rather than focusing on maintaining strict consistency between the source and target texts, the primary consideration is whether the intended purpose is conveyed effectively and appropriately[4]. This theory moves away from the traditional goal of equivalence and emphasizes that the translator should prioritize the target text's function. As a result, this functional approach grants the translator flexibility to choose the most appropriate translation techniques based on the specific context. While Skopos theory emphasizes the function of the translated text, it also considers the importance of readability and coherence within the target language. However, these aspects must ultimately serve the text's purpose, which remains the central principle guiding the translation strategy.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Game Localization

As economic globalization accelerates, international economic exchanges are becoming more frequent, making localized translation a key component of modern translation services. The same is true for localization services for video games; as the digital game market continues to expand, so does the need for video game localization. Compared with the localization translation of other traditional software, such as office software, the localization of electronic games has more difficulties and challenges [5]. Some research suggests that localization and translation should be regarded as separate but intertwined fields [6]; when localizing games, many factors other than translation need to be considered, such as cultural differences and local policies. In addition to high-quality text translation and layout changes, video game localization must also consider the legal standards of different countries and regions. For example, some countries have strict age classification systems for electronic games. Therefore, in the localization of the game content to ensure that the requirements of the age rating system, some sensitive images or language, need to be properly handled.

In addition, video game localization must account for the cultural adaptability of the target audience. Different translation methods should be employed depending on the context, and creative adaptations are often necessary to make complex or culturally specific content more accessible to players [7]. For instance, characters may use idiomatic expressions unique to their culture, which may be dif-

icult for foreign players to grasp. During localization, it becomes essential to find equivalent phrases in the target language that convey the same meaning or to creatively adapt the dialogue to align with the original intent of the source text.

What's more, the localization of the game also needs to consider the compatibility of some translated text with the game screen, such as fonts, sentence length and other factors, which also involves some modifications to the game source code [8].

3.2 Skopos Theory

Skopos theory, developed in Germany in the late 1970s, is a functional and sociocultural approach to translation. It views translation as a form of human behavior with a specific purpose[9]. This purpose should be established before the translation process begins, as it influences the strategies and methods used throughout. The theory outlines three core principles: the Skopos rule, the coherence rule, and the fidelity rule[4]. The Skopos rule is the central principle, stating that the main focus in translation is the communicative purpose the target text should achieve in its cultural context. According to this rule, the translation should not simply replicate the source text but instead focus on fulfilling the communicative needs of the target reader. The coherence rule stresses the importance of making sure the translation is both coherent and understandable in the target language. The Skopos rule serves as the foundation of the translation process[10]. The coherence rule emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the translation is coherent and understandable within the target language. This involves considering the cultural background of the audience and ensuring cultural appropriateness and readability. The fidelity rule underscores a translator's obligation to remain faithful to the source text, although the extent of this loyalty may vary depending on the specific purpose of the translation and the translator's discretion. In contrast, Skopos theory moves away from a strict equivalence between the source and target texts, promoting a translation approach that prioritizes the intended function of the target text. This perspective offers greater flexibility in the selection of translation techniques, emphasizing communicative effectiveness over literal accuracy. While readability and coherence are essential considerations, they must always align with the overarching Skopos principle[4].

4. Case Analysis

4.1 Introduction of Red Dead Redemption 2

Red Dead Redemption 2, an action-adventure open-world game developed by Rockstar San Diego Studios,

was released on October 26, 2018. Set in the American West during the late 19th century, it follows the journey of Arthur Morgan and the Van der Linde Gang. Players can traverse the expansive wilderness of the western U.S., partaking in activities such as robbery, hunting, and fishing. The game offers an immersive experience, reflecting the customs and way of life in the late 19th-century U.S. It features a diverse environment, ranging from bustling cities to Native American settlements, providing a rich portrayal of the social and cultural dynamics of the era. Rockstar Games invested more than \$800 million into the game's production, which took eight years to complete. Upon release, it was an immense success, earning \$725 million within the first three days. By 2024, the game had sold over 61 million copies globally, ranking as the seventh best-selling game of all time. Additionally, *Red Dead Redemption 2* has received numerous accolades, including Best Game Narrative, Best Game Music, and Best Sound Design at The Game Awards in 2018, as well as Game of the Year at the Steam Awards in 2020, reflecting its widespread acclaim among players.

4.2 Expressive Text Analysis

The primary purpose of expressive text is to convey the author's views and emotions, so it is necessary to pay attention to the style of the source text when translating this kind of text.

In the following expressive text, the cultural dimension of game localization is reflected.

Example 1

Source Text: You need to pay a toll to pass though here

Target Text: 要想此处过, 留下买路钱

This line occurs when Arthur Morgan, the game's main character, passes through the territory of another gang and is robbed by them. According to skopos theory, the purpose of this sentence is to tell the other party that a robbery is in progress and that they need to hand over money if they want to pass through. Therefore, in the process of translation, the translator did not choose to use the literal translation method, but chose the words commonly used in many Chinese novels when robbers carried out robbery. Through this translation, Chinese gamers can quickly learn the identity of the robbers and have a first impression of the gang. In addition, the use of such "proverbs" that are unique in Chinese culture can also reduce the cultural gap between English and Chinese; by finding the corresponding elements in the target audience's culture and replacing them, players can have a better sense of inclusion, and thus have a better game experience.

The communicative dimension in localized translation can be seen in the last example.

Example 2

Source Text: Is that Foreman with an "e"?

Target Text: 福尔曼的“福”是幸福的“福”吗?

In this example, the context of the source text is that Arthur catches a man who regularly harasses gang members, and after noticing the man, Arthur makes fun of his name. It can be seen that the purpose of this sentence is to joke about his name rather than trying to determine the name of the person to reflect Arthur's humorous character. Therefore, in the localization translation, the translator did not choose to literal translation of this sentence but chose the translation method of creation. Because the pronunciation of the word “福” in the name is similar to Foreman, the word was selected from for creation in the translation, reflecting Arthur's mockery of this man. Through this translation method, the target text can be more in line with the Chinese culture and language logic, Chinese players can easily understand the hidden meaning of this sentence, to realize that Arthur has some humorous character, but also to add some relaxed atmosphere to the plot.

4.3 Vocative Text Analysis

The primary purpose of the vocative text is to trigger a specific reaction or behavior in the reader, and it is concerned with the response and effect of the reader. When translating this kind of text, the translator needs to consider the differences in culture and language to ensure that the information can produce the expected effect in different contexts. Hence, it needs to pay attention to its appeal and persuasion.

Example 3

ST: *Red Dead Redemption 2*

TT: 荒野大镖客 2

This example is a translation of a game's name, typically a Vocative Text, because its purpose is to attract the player's attention and get them interested in the game to make a purchase. In the Chinese version of the translation, the translator chose “Red Dead Redemption” as the title of the game; first of all, the word “荒野” indicates that the game's story is set in a wild area, which is also the same as the game set in the undeveloped areas of the Western United States. In ancient China, “镖客” refers to a profession that holds weapons to protect and transport goods, and they often move from one place to another due to the needs of work. In this game, the protagonist and his gang are a group of cowboys living in the western United States, who make a living by robbing. With the development of the region of the west of the United States, their criminal behavior is also intolerable by the government, so the government issued a wanted warrant for them. Countless bounty hunters and Pinkerton detectives are chasing them. They can only continue to transfer, and change different camps to cover their tracks, it can be seen that the

experience of “镖客” is also similar to the characters in the game; the use of this translation can also make players easily understand the content of the game and the general gameplay, so as to play a propaganda role.

In addition, the Chinese translation of the game’s name is also the same as the Chinese translation of the film *A Fistful of Dollars* released in 1964. Figure 1 shows the covers of both works. The movie also tells the story of an American western cowboy, and the image and clothing of the protagonist in the film are very similar to Arthur Morgan on the cover of the game, so using this translation can make the player quickly understand the general content and background of the game. At the same time, since the film is also very famous, using the same name as the film can also interest people who like the cowboy genre, to promote the effect of the game.

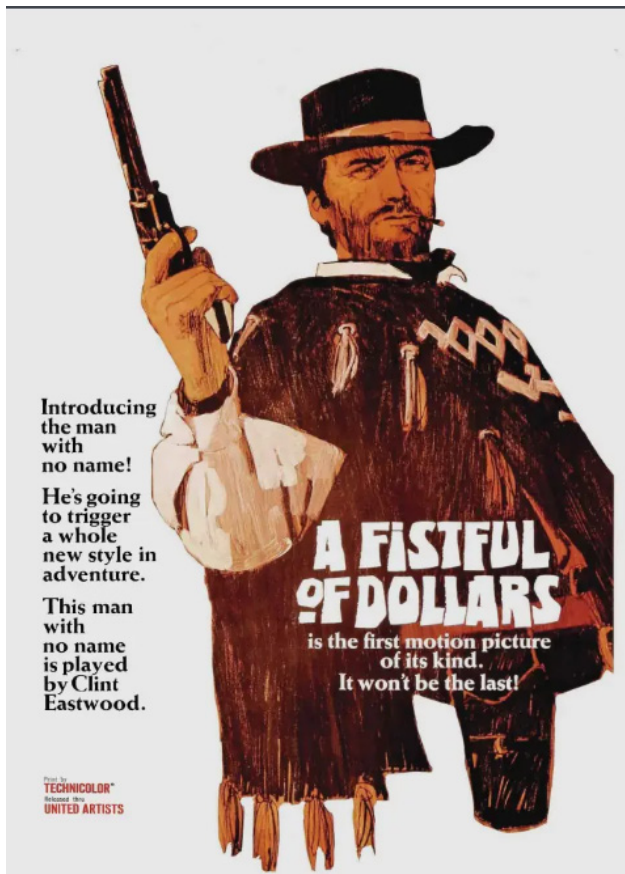


Fig 1. Cover of RDR2 and A fistful of Dollars

4.4 Informative Text Analysis

The main purpose of Informative Text is to convey facts, information, knowledge, or ideas. The content of this type of text is first and foremost, it is concerned with the delivery of information, and it is not much concerned with the manner of delivery of information. When translating this type of text, accuracy and clarity are key to ensure that the data is not lost or distorted during translation. The primary purpose of this type of text is to let the player know the actual name of the item in the game. In *Red Dead Redemption 2*, there are various items, such as different kinds of guns, different kinds of horses, various wild animals, and trade names in stores. In the translation of the Chinese version, the translation of these items often uses the literal translation method because their basic purpose is to tell the reader the item’s name; there is no more hidden meaning. Players can have a deeper understanding of the lives of people in the western United States at the end of the 19th century according to the names of these items,

through these professional terms to experience a variety of different exciting products at that time, which also plays a significant role in the dissemination and promotion of traditional American culture.

Although the Chinese version of *Red Dead Redemption 2* has been translated very well on many items, there are still some problems found after players play. One of the most widespread problems is that the place names on the game map are not translated into Chinese. As shown in Figure 2. Still, directly in English, but in the mission dialogue, the place names are used in translated Chinese when the protagonist talks with other missions. Therefore, many Chinese players are reacting that it is easy to find the way when playing the game; for some players who do not speak English, finding the right place will take a long time, and a long time to find the way will consume the player's patience, resulting in a decline in the player's game experience.



Fig 2. map of RDR2

5. Summary

Through the analysis of three different texts in the game *Red Dead Redemption 2*, this study can see that the Skopos theory has a great impact on the localization translation of games. According to the purpose of each text, the translator adopts different translation methods so that the Chinese translation version can be more in line with the reading habits and cultural habits of Chinese players. Without changing the purpose of the source text, the player can understand the information the source text wants to express in the shortest time. At the same time, it will allow players to shorten the cultural differences between the two languages to have a more immersive experience, leading

to a better game experience. At the same time, it can be seen that an excellent localized translation of a game can make a game have better sales in different markets, which has a significant impact on increasing the revenue of a game company.

In the existing research, more scholars will focus on some large-scale online games, while some scholars will focus on the specific game localization process and difficulties and challenges. Therefore, this study can provide some suggestions for game companies that want to develop stand-alone games or for translation companies that provide localization services.

However, this study still has some shortcomings. First, this study uses a game as the object of analysis, so there may be exceptional cases for some other games. Secondly, there are many different types of stand-alone games, such as first-person shooter games, simulation business games, etc. This study uses action-adventure games as the research object, so there are different localization translation methods for various games.

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