TRANSCENDING CULTURAL BARRIERS IN THAI MYTHOLOGY: UNVEILING THE INTERCULTURAL DYNAMICS THROUGH THE "HOME SWEET HOME" VIDEO GAME'S TRANSLATION

Suttipong Permpoon*, Chappawit Piromnak, and Pattilada Pattanakraisin

Faculty of Liberal Arts, Ubon Ratchathani University, Thailand

ABSTRACT

This study examines the translation strategies employed for culture-specific terms from Thai to English in episodes 1 and 2 of the video game "Home Sweet Home" (2017–2023). Applying a thematic approach and textual analysis, the source language data were categorized into six groups: ghosts, humans, ritual and religious acts, abstract religious concepts, items, and places. The findings indicate that the most frequently used strategy was absolute universalization (41.5%), followed by linguistic (non-cultural) translation (27.7%), limited universalization (16.2%), deletion (11.5%), orthographic adaptation (2.3%), and intratextual gloss (0.8%). However, no instances of repetition, extratextual gloss, synonymy, or autonomous creation strategies were identified. The discussion explores why different strategies were used for various phrasal tokens. The study also highlights five major topics concerning video game translation: universalization versus preservation, translatability and untranslatability, language limitations, cultural barriers in the target language, and the game's future translations. It can be concluded that a comprehensive understanding of the language and culture used in the game and its translation is critical for the game's success and effectiveness for both players and creators. Furthermore, in the digital era, where postmodern imaginations and reinterpretation of Thai folk beliefs and superstitions can boost the economy, numerous opportunities for creative soft powers are always available.

Keywords: Localization; video game translation; Thai video games; culture-specific items

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation has emerged as a prominent area in applied linguistics, particularly in the present era of globalization, where new media forms for information and entertainment are being released across diverse fields. The gaming industry has influenced people's daily lives, and its worth is expected to grow substantially, with an estimated value of $321 million by 2026 (Read, 2022). In Thailand there is an increasing number of game developers who are creating video games that reflect the country's ways of life, folklore, and mythology. Therefore, comprehending the game mechanisms, language, and translation strategies used in cross-cultural

games is indispensable for both game players and developers to attain the greatest benefits and pleasure from the games. These knowledge sets can enable local game producers to create video games, introduce them to global audiences, and achieve successful marketing outcomes.

In 2017, the Yggdrazil Group, a Thai game studio, launched "Home Sweet Home" (HSH), a horror-themed video game that utilizes a first-person perspective and is centered around Thai mythology and beliefs. The game's principal gameplay mechanics revolve around the narrative and stealth, enabling players to evade the dangerous spirits pursuing them, as seen in Figure 1, with some puzzles that enhance the gameplay's diversity (Steam, 2017).

Figure 1: The game's screenshot of a player trying to escape from ghosts (Yggdrazil Group, 2022a)

The central protagonist in the original HSH is Tim, who, following his wife's disappearance, is haunted by different ghosts in an unfamiliar location (YggGame, 2023). The game's objective is for Tim to solve the mystery of his wife's vanishing and employ religious practices to escape and perform an exorcism. This game series is composed of two episodes with identical storylines, gameplay puzzles, and quests. Additionally, there is an online game available with gameplay similar to that of the two-episode story game.

Foremost, HSH is a video game that presents a unique challenge to players. Those who assume the role of a ghost (Figure 2) must strategically hunt the four survivors and avoid being killed by them to win the game. Each ghost possesses a distinctive set of skills. Meanwhile, the survivors must use their own skills to perform rituals. Once the rituals are completed, the survivors have the option of either collecting and defeating the ghosts, or escaping through the portal (or *niwon*) to win the game.

Figure 2: Warden (ghost) [left] (Yggdrazil Group, 2022b) versus human characters [right] in HSH (Yggdrazil Group, 2022c)

Interestingly, a diverse range of well experienced and novice gamers worldwide have been attracted to HSH, in addition to local Thai game players. Therefore, the exploration of how the game's production team provides a multicultural communication device for the target audience using written language and translation strategies of religious and culturally related terms is worthy of investigation. To find the answer, this study began by gathering data via gameplay to correctly identify appropriate translation techniques used for religious and cultural terms. The analysis was then conducted using the framework proposed by Aixelá (1996). In addition to Aixelá's framework, the framework espoused by Mangiron and O'Hagan (2013), argument that,

in-game language and translation can enhance gamers' enjoyment and understanding of video games, was also revisited and assessed to provide a more relevant and updated discussion. However, when translating, the intercultural gap, the more difficult it is to achieve an accurate translation (Hervey & Higgins, 1992), which poses a more challenging task to the translator. Thus, the translator needs to be aware of any possible cultural differences embedded both in the original and the target languages. By studying the present research's findings, it is hoped that game translators who deal with culture-specific terms will be better equipped with suitable guidelines and will be able to render better translations for non-local audiences.

In the final quarter of 2023, a discernible surge in soft power influence within Thailand led to notable support and promotion of popular social media content by both government-owned and private organizations across various national and global platforms. Additionally, as asserted by Ritman (2023), a film under Alexander Kiesl and Steffen Hacker's direction, inspired by the famous thriller HSH survival game, is currently being produced on location in Thailand. Moreover, the forthcoming live-action adaptation, derived from the popular HSH Rebirth video game, finalized its main casting in late November 2023. Consequently, the production and development of HSH is not only contributing significantly to the financial prosperity of the film and entertainment industries, but has also shed light on, and provided a deeper understanding of cultural assets and concepts inherent in Thai culture. This, in turn, holds potential relevance to neighboring ASEAN countries. Therefore, this phenomenon merits scholarly exploration and development.

1.1 Video game translation

Translation means conveying the intended meaning or message of a text from its original, or source, language to another, or target, language (Newmark, 1988). The translator, in this process, transforms the original text—the source text (ST)—from the original spoken or source language (SL) - into a written form known as the target text (TT) in a different spoken target language (TL) (Munday, 2008). It is worth noting that, according to Wiwutsorn (2014), culture significantly influences translation, requiring translators to possess a profound comprehension of both their own cultural background and that of the intended audience, given that each language carries its own distinct subtle cultural nuances. Accordingly, in order to achieve an effective translation, the cultural elements must be seamlessly incorporated into the text. Thus, when dealing with a specialized text genre, such as video games, a translator must also be familiar with the specific requirements, expectations, and limitations related to that genre to ensure accurate and appropriate translations.

As video games have distinguished traits that makes them a challenging mode to localize (Szurawitzki, 2010, p. 23), game translation, is sometimes defined as game localization, the adaptation of a game and its language to cater to the cultural sensibilities of a particular target country. Frasca (2001) describes computer-based entertainment software, whether in text or image format, as a format utilizing electronic platforms, such as personal computers or consoles, involving one or more players existing in either a physical or networked environment. In light of this, according to Mangiron (2016), a game needs to be translated by employing more complicated methods in relation to cultural and linguistic structures because it is an electronic medium. This view is supported by Mangiron and O'Hagan (2006), who specifically noted that since the majority of locally adapted games are currently dubbed, subtitled, or both, game localization also shares many elements with audiovisual translation. Bushouse (2015) suggests that precise and concise conveyance of terms is essential to ensure efficient and convenient gameplay, given the limitations of the allocated space. Thus, game translation necessitates various complex procedures and strategies tailored to specific game genres, including religious- or business-based games.

The past decade has witnessed significant advancements and transformations in the field of game translation. One noteworthy study, conducted by Wongkittithon in 2011, examined the translation of video games, specifically action-based role-playing games *Bayonetta*. Wongkittithon's research drew upon six distinct theories, including the Text Typology Approach by Reiss (2000), the Text Analysis in Translation Approach by Nord (2005), the Guidelines for Translating Movie Subtitles (Gaston, 2008, as cited in Wongkittithon, 2011), the Interpretive Approach by Delisle (1989), Procedures in the Translation of Names in Children's Fantasy Literature by Lincoln (2006), and Video Game Translation by Mangiron and O'Hagan (2006). This analysis and classification of the in-game text into three components, namely guidelines, distinctive names, and subtitles revealed that the successful translation of video games necessitates an extensive understanding of the genre, including the intricacies of religions, gods, and mythologies. This knowledge is essential for ensuring accurate translations with respect to language level, phrases, and idioms. As a result, Wongkittithon's (2011) research is fortified by a robust theoretical framework, thus minimizing any potential weaknesses.

Al-Batineh (2021) conducted a comprehensive investigation into the challenges associated with the localization of Arabic video games. The research focused on the technical, linguistic, and cultural issues that arise during this process. One significant technical issue was the directionality of Arabic, written and read from

right to left, the opposite of English. The localization of Arabic language in video games, however, requires the use of left-to-right writing, resulting in complications with directionality. Another linguistic challenge was the cursive nature of the Arabic script, which requires the connection of letters, unlike in English. This poses difficulties in translating non-player character titles, video game terms, and acronyms into Arabic. Additionally, the research revealed cultural differences as a major challenge in Arabic video game localization. Arabic culture can be extremely conservative, especially concerning topics like profanity, nudity, and alcohol, resulting in the banning of numerous video games in Arabic countries. Thus, it is crucial for game developers to conform to Arabic cultural standards to minimize cultural dissonance in their localized video games. Therefore, to overcome these challenges, the researcher recommended a competent internationalization plan and a thorough localization process that incorporates individuals with knowledge of both Arabic language and culture. In conclusion, the importance of understanding the cultural background of Arabic countries cannot be overstated when translating video games into Aramaic languages. Failure to consider these delicate cultural nuances could result in financial loss or the banning of the video game in Arab countries.

Based on the researchers' preliminary observations, both pieces of research by Wongkittithon (2011) and Al-Batineh (2021) indicated that translators must fully understand the cultural background of the TL's audience to ensure successful video game localization. Wongkittithon emphasized the need for translators to have a firm grasp of the local religions, gods, and mythologies, as well as the game genre. Similarly, Al-Batineh suggests that game developers collaborate with individuals who possess a deep understanding of the target language. For instance, in Arabic, translators must be cognizant that the writing pattern is read and written from right to left, as well as the connectedness of the letters in the script, to avoid technical inaccuracies.

Comprehensive studies that integrate both the cultural and technical aspects of video game localization across diverse languages and regions are still needed. While previous research has focused on specific languages or cultural contexts, such as Arabic, and the complexities involved in their translation, there is a lack of holistic frameworks that address the simultaneous handling of multiple cultural, linguistic, and technical challenges in a unified manner. Future research could explore how these multifaceted issues can be systematically addressed to create more effective localization strategies that can be applied to a broader range of languages and cultural settings, thereby enhancing the overall quality and accessibility of localized video games.

1.2 Ghost folktales and witchcraft in Thai beliefs

Ghosts are a ubiquitous aspect of ethnic religious traditions across the world, with each country's ghost stories adapting to specific contexts. In Thai belief systems, well-known ghosts, such as *Pret* (Figure 3), *Krasue*, and *Phrai* (Figure 4), have been depicted in various media. Boonnak (2011) points out that *Pret*, the most significant demon, possesses the height of a toddy palm, but a much slenderer body, with hands the size of a *Bai Lan* (Fanleaf palm). In Thai folklore, individuals causing harm to their parents will be reborn as *Pret*. Another prevalent spirit is *Phrai*, or the nymph. Thammathi (2016) asserts that in Lanna's history, Thai *Phrai* nymph is a spirit that resides in people's bodies, while central Thai tales describe *Phrai* as a ghost that inhabits water.

Figure 3: *Pret* in Thai beliefs [left] (Watyangkhom, 2023) versus *Preta* in the HSH Video Game [right] (Yggdrazil Group, 2022d)

Figure 4: Nymph or *Phrai* in Thai beliefs [left] (Kao Metta Thai Amulets, 2023) versus nymph in the HSH Video Game [right] (Yggdrazil Group, 2022e)

The topic of ghosts is often intertwined with the concept of witchcraft in various ways, such as its role in rituals or exorcisms. Contemporary scholars have proposed various definitions of witchcraft. For instance, according to the record of Wat Somanas Rajavaravihara (2004), witchcraft involves the casting of holy discourse, which can be in the form of either beneficial or malevolent spells. One type of malevolent spell is the cursed-nail jinx, a well-known charm used to bring misfortune. Thammathi's study (2016) suggests that both witchcraft and cursed charms are intentionally employed to inflict harm on the target, such as through the insertion of numerous nails into their stomach.

More recently, literature has emerged that offers contradictory findings regarding ghosts and spirit classes in Thai. Hengsuwan and Prasithrathsint (2014) analyze this by applying Berlin's (1992) five levels in plants and animals' ethno-biological classification in traditional communities. The highest and most comprehensive rank was represented with only one term that encompassed all other, such as *phi*, 'ghost + spirit', while life form, the second, referred to the bodily shape of an organism. There are two categories in this term, including *winyan*, which is an intangible or invisible 'spirit' with unidentifiable form, and *phi*, or 'ghost', which, in contrast to a *winyan*, can appear in any shape. The third level is a generic form. Such concepts are seen in *phi ha satan*, and *phutphi pisat*, which are considered bad spirits and *phisang thewada*, a good spirit. Additionally, words referring to ghosts of this type include *kra sue*, a woman-like demon with explicit, bare internal organs floating in the air; *pop*, a greedy-man ghost; or *luk krok*, a fetus ghost. The fourth level denoted the specific type of spirit and provides the names of ghosts under the generic one. Examples of ghost names with a good spirit are *chao pa, the* 'spirit of a forest', and *thewada*, an 'angel', while those of bad spirits include *phi pa*, a 'jungle demon', and *phi ha*, a 'bad spirit causing epidemics'. The last level is the varietal class, which can be categorized into 6 subtypes. Four of these classes fall under *nang mai*, or the 'female spirit of a tree' class and are *nang takhian*, the 'spirit of a takhian tree', *nang tani*, the 'female spirit of a banana tree', *chaomae thrai*, the 'female spirit of a bayan tree', and *chaomae makham*, the 'female spirit of a tamarind tree'. The last two are sub-categories of angels and include *thep thida, the* "female deity" and *thep, the* 'male deity'. These research findings and categorizations are attributed to Thai people's strong beliefs and a sense of care and respect for nature, resulting in a ghost naming tradition based on natural events, places, or objects, such as the spirit of a forest and the spirit of a mountain, whose duty is to protect forest or mountain, respectively. In other words, the idea is that this can scare people who harm nature and prevent them from causing damage to the environment. The presence of the female gender markers of *mae* or *nang*, as well as the absence of their respective male counterparts should also be noted. Additionally, the term *mae* is used to refer to good spirits, while *nang* refers to bad spirits. These detailed characteristics at the morphological level, and their word formation process, makes it even more challenging for people of different cultures to comprehend and translate.

Scholars have acknowledged the significant role that ghosts hold in Thai beliefs, as evidenced by their portrayal in Thai horror films. In a study conducted by Lee (2010), the representation and function of monsters or ghosts in Thai belief were examined by analyzing Thai horror films from 1999 to 2008. The study revealed that Thai horror films are heavily influenced by Thai cultural beliefs, including Buddhism and Thai animism. Furthermore, the ghosts and monsters depicted in these films are often linked to various social, cultural, or political issues. For instance, the movie "Khun Krabi Phi Rabat", which explored the fear of SARS, serves as a prominent example of such cultural commentary.

Both Lee's (2010) and Hengsuwan and Prasithrathsint's (2014) studies concur that Thai ghosts and monsters are shaped by the cultural and social backgrounds of the Thai people. Thai films, and other media forms that entertain and inform, present ghosts and superstitious beliefs that are timely and relevant to the

social situations in Thailand, all of which are related to a strong belief in *karma*. To bolster this notion, while ghosts are often portrayed as fearsome and malevolent, there are also benevolent ghosts that offer help and protection to those who consistently perform good deeds.

2. OBJECTIVES

As many Thai companies continue to release games that showcase the mysteries of Thai beliefs to the outside world, translating them from Thai to English accurately is crucial. It is also essential to consider whether such translations can enable people worldwide to understand the uniqueness and characteristics of Thai beliefs embedded in the game. Thus, this paper studies culturally- and religiously-specific terms and the translation strategies used to translate them from Thai to English in the HSH video games and explores the extent that these strategies are employed when translating from Thai to English.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The culture-specific item (CSIs) translation strategies by Aixelá (1996) were utilized as the main framework of the research, as they can be applied in various cultural themes and contexts. Aixelá (1996) posited the notion of CSIs as objects or artifacts of cultural significance in specific localities or societies that present difficulties when translated into target texts. This is because such items or concepts lack an equivalent or clear textual meaning in the cultural context of the target audience. For instance, the Thai Buddhist use of *saisin mat tra sang*, a tool employed to bind the hands of a corpse before a funeral, to prevent the deceased from returning and to allow them to rest in peace has no direct equivalent in many other languages, including English, where such beliefs are absent (Table 1). As such, the intratextual gloss translation strategy, involving the provision of lengthy explanations, is frequently utilized. Nevertheless, this approach may not fully convey some of the original language's abstract details or ideas.

Table 1: Example of intratextual gloss strategy applied in translating religious terms in HSH

Strategy	Source Text (Thai)	Target Text (English)
Intratextual gloss	*saisin mat tra sang*	the holy thread used in shrouding corpses

To further explain Aixelá's (1996) definition of CSIs, Daghoughi and Hashemian's research (2016) on the transference of CSIs using Newmark's (1988) taxonomy, a remarkable finding emerged. With an extensive dataset comprised of the Persian and English corpora, including translations of Jalal Al-Ahmad's "By the Pen" by Ghanoonparvar (1988), the Dehkhoda Dictionary (Dehkhoda, 1994), Farhang Farsi (Moeen, 2006), and the Oxford Learner's Dictionary, the authors screened CSIs based on Newmark's five different categories for foreign cultural words, i.e., ecology, social culture, material culture, customs, organizations, activities and practices, concepts, procedures, gesture, and habits. The results indicated that Newmark's functional equivalent strategy was employed the most when translating CSIs, accounting for 23.36% of the translations. In contrast, modulation and paraphrasing were applied the least, constituting only 0.16% of the translations. This suggests that the primary intention of translators was to enhance target language readers' comprehension of the source text. The research concluded that the functional equivalent strategy, one of Newmark's (1988) methods, is the most effective way to translate literary folklore texts containing a high concentration of CSIs. By employing commonly used English non-culture-specific words and phrases, this strategy enabled text readers of the TL to fully understand the ST. The detailed dataset depicting the rich cultural vocabulary in Persian further underscored the importance of the translator's competency in maintaining the original language's cultural relevance. To provide a more accurate interpretation of culturally specific item translation and transference, frameworks for translation of religious terms and monk specific vocabulary are also explored.

According to AlGhamdi (2016), religious texts are frequently written in long-established or ancient languages, rendering them incomprehensible to the majority of readers. Therefore, it is necessary to translate difficult religious words in order to make them understandable and appropriate. As translations from one language to another have different cultural and religious structures, Shunnaq (1997) points out that according to the linguistic and cultural gaps between the two languages in question, the scope of differences between languages in terms of cultural patterns and linguistic forms might vary widely. Paralleling the implications of these statements, Dweik and Abu Shakra (2010) stated that translators are constantly confronted with a variety

of translation issues, including, finding the exact lexical equivalents in the TL, dealing with the cultural dimensions implicit in the SL, transferring the intended semantic message in the SL to TL and searching for the most suitable strategy for conveying these aspects successfully in the TL." Therefore, it can be hypothesized that the translation of religious texts entails comprehensive knowledge of both the TL and the SL. This assumption is supported by Riangsiri (2018), who conducted extensive research on the translation strategies employed for Buddhist terms using the framework proposed by Beekman and Callow (1974) and Pinmanee (2014) for the translation of culture-specific items at the lexical and phrasal levels. The translator utilized five translation procedures to deal with the challenges of translating Buddhist words. Below are the translation strategies used in The Thai-English Translation Strategies of Buddhist Terms in *P.A. Payutto's Dhutanga: What to do? Where? What for?* according to Riangsiri's framework (2018):

1. Translation with non-literal lexical equivalents: To apply this specific strategy, the translator selects the word with the meaning that is most similar to the word in the source language. For example, in HSH the Thai Buddhist term *patchai si* (Thai source language text aka ST) is translated into the English target language text (aka TT) as the four requisites.

2. Translation with descriptive phrases: In this method, the translator selects a word or phrase that can convey the concept of the culture-specific item in the target language (ST: *phu khatklao kilet* → TT: One who polishes defilement).

3. Translation by applying a more generic word and a descriptive phrase to identify roles, purposes or appearances: The translator selects a word or phrase that can express the characteristics, functions, or intentions of the culture-specific item that 'makes sense' in the TL (ST: *chiwon chak pha khlukfun*→ TT: A robe made from dirt-covered rags).

4. Translation by applying a more generic word: To successfully employ this method, the translator selects a phrase or word to express the culture-specific item's more general meaning (ST: *chiwon*→ TT: A robe).

5. Translation by applying a loan word and a brief description: The translator translates the phrase or word into the TL and includes an additional explanation or a brief description in order to help the readers better comprehend the context of that culturally specific item (ST: *phansa nueng* → TT: One Vassa [4 months in the rains retreat]).

According to Riangsiri (2018), among all of the translation strategies, nonliteral lexical counterparts are the most commonly utilized approach. This phenomenon can be attributed to the extensive use of these words by proficient translators in previous publications, which have made their meanings widely understood and accessible to readers across diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. In contrast, the use of loan words accompanied by a brief explanation is the least preferred strategy, as it often results in lengthy target language translations due to the need for additional clarifications, thereby leading to an unnatural and cumbersome translation.

Aungsuwan (2017)'s investigation on translation strategies for religious terms with integrative frameworks based on the concept of cultural term categorization and translation proposed by Larson (1984), Newmark (1988), and Baker (2005) sheds light on the fundamental translation process. Six translation strategies were used to translate religious terms 1) translation with a more general word (superordinate), 2) translation with a specific word, 3) translation by using cultural substitution, 4) translation using a loan word, 5) translation by paraphrase or explanation, and 6) translation by omission. All the strategies used were effective and appropriate, resulting in the successful translation of religious terminology.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Using a mixed research method approach, the data was collected from HSH's in-game original Thai texts and English subtitles. The researchers then classified the religious terms into 6 categories; namely, 1) ghost species (e.g., *pret* or a hungry ghost), 2) humans (e.g., *phu mi akhom* or a person with magical powers), 3) ritual and religious acts (e.g., *sen ahan* or offering food), 4) abstract religious concepts (e.g., *khunsai* or black magic, *rapkam* or accepting karma), 5) religious items (e.g., *tapu sangkawanorn* or a nail of the ordained monkey (Figure 5), *tukkata siakkaban* or a decapitated doll (Figure 6), and 6) places (e.g., *pa cha* or a cemetery).
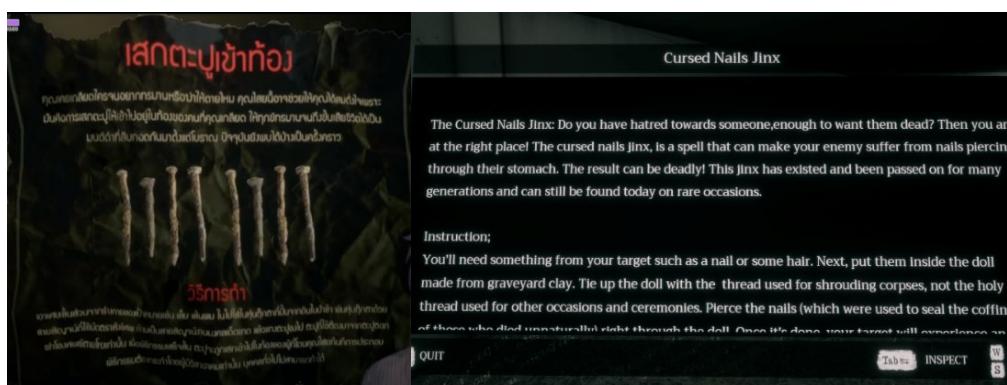
Figure 5: The Nail of Sangkawanorn's Thai in-text game description and its English translation (Yggdrazil Group, 2022f)

Figure 6: The Nail of Sangkawanorn [left] (Yggdrazil Group, 2022f) and the Lechery Jinx Dolls illustration [right] (Yggdrazil Group, 2022g)

In translation studies, a key concern is the accuracy and effective translation of terms with cultural and linguistic nuances. To address this issue, scholars have offered various translation methods and strategies for dealing with culture-specific items (CSIs). Aixelá (1996) suggests 10 strategies for translating CSIs, specifically in the context of the terms used by a professional translator. These strategies include: 1) repetition, 2) orthographic adaptation, 3) linguistic or non-cultural translation, 4) extra-textual gloss, 5) intra-textual gloss, 6) synonymy, 7) limited universalization, 8) absolute universalization, 9) deletion, and 10) autonomous creation strategy. By analyzing the source text and considering its specific functions and connotations, translators can use these strategies to minimize translation difficulties that may arise from the absence of, or a distinct meaning for, a cultural context in the target text's audience.

The first strategy, repetition, involves retaining as much of the original reference as possible in the translation process. This strategy is commonly applied to specific names in Thai to preserve the context and meaning of the SL. However, the preliminary study conducted in this paper found that this strategy was not used in HSH's translation. The closest method used was translation with a loan word, or using a loan word and a brief explanation. In contrast to this orthographic adaptation, involves using analogous letters, or transliteration, to translate a word from the SL to the TL.

The third strategy, linguistic (non-cultural) translation, is used to prevent readers from recognizing the exact meanings of the source word by utilizing terms from the target language that are similar to the word form or structure from the source. The fourth and fifth strategies are extratextual gloss and intratextual gloss, respectively, which provide additional information about the original texts in the endnotes or footnotes, or within the text itself.

Notably, the sixth strategy, synonymy, is used to avoid repeating words by using synonyms in the TL, especially when certain words in the SL are considered inappropriate in the TL. The seventh and eighth strategies, limited universalization and absolute universalization, respectively, involve translation by replacing the original texts with texts that are familiar and well-known to the target audience, or eliminating a CSI's foreignness from the target culture to translate it into a term that is entirely neutral and does not originate from either the source or the target cultures. These strategies are employed to minimize translation problems caused by an absence of, or a distinct textual meaning for, what is being translated in the cultural context of the TT's audience.

Unlike the preceding 8 strategies, the ninth strategy, deletion, involves the complete removal or non-translation of a CSI due to its unacceptability or irrelevance. This aligns with Baker's (2018) concept of translation by omission, which involves the omission of translation in sections that are deemed insignificant or too prolonged to reduce the length of the text. Finally, the tenth strategy, autonomous creation, entails the translation of a culturally specific item in the target language when no corresponding item exists in the source language.

The main HSH game translator, Ponprasert Pongwan, is an experienced game translator. As a coordinator of The Monk Studio, a company that creates high-quality visual effects, or VFX, animations, and video clips for documentary and feature movies, as well as advertisements, undoubtedly Pongwan is extensively familiar with video games.

5. RESULTS

The present study investigated the translation strategies utilized in rendering religious terms in first and second episodes of the HSH, as translated from Thai to English. The analysis of 130 occurrences of such terms indicate that the predominant strategy was absolute universalization, representing 41.5% of cases. Additionally, linguistic (non-cultural) translation, limited universalization, and deletion were among the top strategies employed, constituting 27.7%, 16.2%, and 11.5% of instances, respectively. Conversely, orthographic adaptation and intratextual gloss were utilized to a lesser extent, only accounting for 2.3% and 0.8% of cases, respectively. Finally, the translation strategies of repetition, extratextual gloss, synonymy, and autonomous creation were absent in this context. These findings provide valuable insight into the translation practices employed in the localization of religious vocabulary in the HSH Game and may inform future game localization efforts, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: The frequency of translation strategies used for culture-specific items found in HSH

Translation Strategies of Culture-Specific Items	Frequency	Percentage
Absolute universalization	54	41.5%
Linguistic (non-cultural) translation	36	27.7%
Limited universalization	21	16.2%
Deletion	15	11.5%
Orthographic adaptation	3	2.3%
Intratextual gloss	1	0.8%

Table 3: Data samples from "HSH" categorized by translation strategy used for culture-specific items

Translation strategy	Source language text	Target language text	Religious term category
[1.] Absolute universalization	*yat yom [relatives + layman's addressing term] thanglai phueng fang wai*	All of **you** please listen.	Human
[2.] Linguistic (non-cultural) translation	*ai phuak thi wonwian yu kap khwam tai ma thang chiwit khong man [The group that lingers around is tied to the death in its entire existence] rit ron chiwit khong phu uen dang pen rueang pokkati yangchen phuak khatkakon thahan rue phetchakhat [one who carries out capital punishment]*	A body with his special ability has to have belonged to a person **who surrounded himself with death all his life**; a murderer, a soldier, **an executioner.**	Human
[3.] Limited universalization	*yom tong tang sati man [One must firmly establish mindfulness over it]*	Compose yourself.	Ritual/religious act
[4.] Deletion	*rao wang wa mit akhom [knife with magical powers] lem ni cha chuai rao chatkan thuk yang dai*	I hope that this **knife** will help.	Religious item
[5.] Orthographic adaptation	*tapu sangkha wanon [nail of the ordained monkey] pen tapu thi chuea kan wa*	The **nail of Sangkawanorn** is a holy nail. Believed to have mystic powers. Used for protection and to defend against bad spirits.	Religious item
[6.] Intratextual gloss	*laeo thaeng tapu long pai tapu thi chai tong ma chak tapu tok fa long sop phi taihong [a ghost of someone who died a violent or untimely death] thaonan*	Pierce the nails which were used to seal the coffins of **those who died unnaturally** right through the doll.	Ghost
[7.] Repetition	-	-	-

Table 3: Data samples from "HSH" categorized by translation strategy used for culture-specific items (continued)

Translation strategy	Source language text	Target language text	Religious term category
[8.] Extratextual gloss	-	-	-
[9.] Synonymy	-	-	-
[10.] Autonomous creation	-	-	-

Table 2 (with detailed data samples in Table 3) shows that the predominant strategy for translating religious terms in the context of episodes 1 and 2 of the HSH Game was absolute universalization. This strategy, involves substituting neutral terms from the target language for religious terminology that is exclusive to the source language due to a lack of equivalence. Specifically, for example, in Table 3, the Buddhist term *yat yom*, used by monks to address lay individuals, is translated through the use of the word "you" in instances where the target language does not possess a comparable term for addressing people within a particular religion, or where the term is specific to religious settings. This approach represents a neutral and effective means of conveying the intended message of the SL term to the TL audience. Two additional examples of absolute universalization applied in the study are presented below.

[1.1] SL: *chuea kan wa mi akhom chai pongkan khun sai*
Gloss: Mutual belief that [someone] has magic [and] uses it to protect against black magic.
TL: Believed to have mystic powers.

[1.2] SL: *fangrup fangroi pen kan tham khun sai phuea hai pao mai koet khwam long lai saneha rakkhrai phu pen chaokhong tukkata pai chua kan nan*
Gloss: Absorbing cures and hexes is a means of using black magic to the target to arouse affection for the owner of the doll forever.
TL: The Lechery Jinx is a spell that can forcefully make people fall in love.

In [1.1] and [1.2], the word "*khunsai*" itself connotes the use of magical power in a negative way. The HSH translators, on the other hand, employed the phrases "mystic powers" and "spell," which are significantly more neutral or positive in English. Another similar rendering is presented below:

[1.3] SL: *yom mai samat fuen kam dai*
Gloss: You can't resist the law of karma.
TL: You can't change fate's design.

In this context [1.3], instead of using the word "karma", the direct ready-made equivalent Pali loan word in English commonly used when referring to Buddhism and Hinduism, the translators opt for "fate's design", which is more generic.

In linguistic (non-cultural) translation strategy, the second most employed approach, similar linguistic structures between the source and target languages are introduced to enhance comprehension while preserving the cultural system inherent in the source language. The table above illustrates that the linguistic structures of *ai phuak thi wonwian yu kap khwam tai ma thang chiwit khong man* and "who surrounded himself with death all his life" are unequivocally analogous. Moreover, the linguistic structure of the term *phet-cha-khat* and its English equivalent "an executioner" share a high degree of similarity. According to the Dictionary of the Royal Institute of Thailand 2011 (Royal Institute, 2013), the term *phet-cha-khat* is originally from a Pali word "*wat-cha-ka-ta*" which is formulated from the morphemes *wat-cha* + *ka-ta*. The former word unit wat-cha means those who perform executions, while the latter *ka-ta* means killing. Conversely, the English term executioner is derived from the word "execution" + a derivational bound morpheme suffix -er, which converts the nominal abstract word "execution" into a personal noun. Three supplementary examples of linguistic (non-cultural) translation are provided below.

[2.1] SL: *niyom chai kan nai ngan awamongkhon chen ngan sop rue chai nai phithi thon saiyasat*
Gloss: Typically used in inauspicious events like funerals or used in rituals of removing the effects of sorcery or black magic.
TL: Typically represents a darker event such as a funeral or an attempt to repel the occult.

[2.2]   SL: *khon bap yang mueng mai mi sit tham*
Gloss: A sinner like you do not have the right to do (it).
TL: The sinner has no right to question.

[2.3]   SL: *dek wat wa at pen fimue nai am*
Gloss: A temple boy said it might be done by Mr. Um.
TL: Some of the temple boys believed it could have been that old man Um.

To some extent, following linguistic rules at a phono-morphemic, or even syntactic, level does not necessarily require strict adherence to every linguistic restriction or element. For instance, the compound word formation structure [person noun *khon* (person/people)] + [conceptual noun *bap* (sin)] in Thai, as demonstrated in [2.2], is reversed in English ('sin' + '-er' morphemes), as most nouns of similar type in the two languages are constructed differently. However, efforts have been made to replace nouns in the original language with equivalent target language nouns. Similarly, [person noun *dek* (boys) + place noun *wat* (temple)] in Thai is substituted by [place noun + person noun] in English in [2.3], while a strict structural or linguistic translation is still observed in [2.1], with the structure [VP + NP] in both the ST and TT.

In regard to the limited universalization strategy, religious-specific terms in the source language are replaced with ones more commonly used in the TL, while striving to keep the original context. Nevertheless, this substitution may result in a loss of detailed cultural context from the source text, which may be replaced by a more concise social or functional context in the target text. In the context of HSH, the phrase *tang sati man* in the original language signifies the act of calming one's emotions and thoughts. This phrase is commonly translated as 'compose yourself' in the TL. The following instances illustrate limited universalization strategy in HSH:

[3.1]   SL: *hak tae mi khrai bang khon chai dia-rat-chan wicha dueng khao ma*
Gloss: But there was someone using immoral black magic to attract it.
TL: But someone has used unorthodox occult magic to make it so.

Dia-rat-chan in [3.1] refers to a depraved and unkind person or thing. To some Buddhist practitioners' interpretation, it is often used to emphasize some characteristics or qualities different from human qualities, i.e., ignorance and indiscriminateness, which express heresy. Likewise, unorthodox in English or most Western cultures means different from what is usual or expected in behavior, ideas, and methods. As such, "unorthodox" is commonly used as a translation for *dia-rat-chan.*

[3.2]   SL: *sat lok tong pen pai tam kam na yom*
Gloss: Beings of the world must follow the karma.
TL: What goes around comes around, as they say.

In Thai culture and Thai Buddhism, the SL in [3.2] can be directly translated as how one's life will go on depends on one's own karma or actions. Similarly, the feeling and reflection gained by reading this Thai idiomatic expression and proverb is still maintained in the TL's counterpart proverb.

Furthermore, the deletion strategy corresponds to the omission strategy propounded by Davies (2003) and Baker (2018). When translating the noun phrase *mid akhom* or "magical knife", the word *akhom* in the target language is omitted. This, perhaps, is because English is a more concise and direct language compared to Thai. It could be that the translators may have wanted to avoid the noun phrase magical knife simply because the player would clearly have understood that this was not a normal knife and would assume that it is a magical artifact. See other supplementary examples:

[4.1]   SL: *kan wianthian khue phithikan doen rop pu chaniya watthu rue pu chaniya sathan phuea sadaeng khwam khaorop bucha to sing nan nan*
Gloss: Candle-circling is a ceremony (for people) to walk around sacred objects or sacred places to show respects and to worship to that particular thing (or place).
TL: A candlelight procession is a ceremony in which people walk in a circle around an object or place to show reverence and respect.

The word *pu chaniya* in [4.1] is an adjective, meaning to be reverend or worshiped in SL, but this information is not present in TL.

[4.2]   SL: *phra thet kiaokap samphawesi lae kot haeng kam*
Gloss: A monk is preaching about wanderer spirits and the laws of karma.
TL: Sermons about ghost and karma.

Likewise, the non-constituent phrase *kot haeng* in [4.2]'s SL, meaning the rules of [karma], is not delivered in the target language.

Orthographic adaptation, which comprises such translation procedures as transcription and transliteration, is utilized exclusively when the source reference is presented in an alphabet other than the one used by the target readers. Only three excerpts of this were found, as seen in the following examples:

[5.1]   SL: *pret pen winyan praphet nueng thi lao to to kan ma nai klum chao phut lae hindu rue nai nikai uen uen*
Gloss: A hungry ghost is a kind of spirit that is told from generations to generations among Buddhist beliefs and Hinduism or in other sects.
TL: A Preta is a type of ghost widely known throughout Buddhism, Hinduism, and related religions.

[5.2]   SL: *tapu sangkha wanon pen tapu thi chuea kan wa mi akhom chai pongkan khun sai rue phut phi pisat*
Gloss: The Nail of Ordained (Monk) Monkey is the nail that is believed that it has magical powers used to protect against black magic or spirits, ghosts, (and) demons.
TL: The Nail of Sangkawanorn is a holy nail. Believed to have mystic powers. Used for protection and to defend against bad spirits.

[5.3]   SL: *tae hak chai mit thi sang chak nawaloha laeo nia at pho to kon man dai yu*
Gloss: But if (we) use a knife forged of nine sacred metals, we might be able to fight it.
TL: We need a knife forged of Nona-Metal to stand a chance.

It is worth noting that that the Nona-Metal translation strategy in the game is a combination of transliteration and equivalent word replacement. The first morpheme is created through sound imitation of the Thai word *nawa*, which translates to "nine or new". Rather than transliterating it as *nawa* or "nova", the term "nona" is used in the game's translation, which has no lexical meaning in English. This appears to be a typographical error caused during the translation process. Alternatively, it could be argued that the translators intentionally created a new term to be exclusively used in the game as a new game language term.

Intratextual gloss was the least frequently employed translation strategy, observed in only one instance in the examples provided. This strategy involves including glosses within the text itself to clarify any ambiguities that may arise in the translation process. This method is typically used to avoid disrupting the reader's attention. The example provided in [6.1] demonstrates the use of intratextual gloss, as the translator includes a gloss to clarify the meaning of a term without interrupting the flow of the sentence.

[6.1]   SL: *laeo thaeng tapu long pai. tapu thi chai tong ma chak tapu tok fa long sop phi taihong thaonan*
Gloss: Then pierce the nails in it. The nails used must be the nails sealed the cover of the coffin of a corpse of an unnatural death.
TL: Pierce the nails which were used to seal the coffins of those who died unnaturally right through the doll.

The translation strategies of repetition, extratextual gloss, synonyms, and autonomous creation were not found in the translation of HSH.

Through an analysis of the source language data and its corresponding translations they were categorized according to Aixelá's (1996) strategies. Building upon this categorization, a generic framework comprising four broader categories that clearly illustrate the trends and common features of the translation methods were deemed suitable for game translation of culture-specific terms. Refer to Table 4 for a comprehensive overview of the recreation of these strategies.

Table 4: Revised integrated translation strategies

Culture-Specific Item Classification	No. of Instances	Percentage
Abstract religious concepts	47	36.15%
Religious items	24	18.46%
Rituals and religious acts	19	14.61%
Ghost Species	15	11.53%
Humans	14	10.77%
Places	11	8.48%
Total Number	**130**	**100%**

From the classification presented in Table 4, the translation strategies of limited universalization and absolute universalization have been reconceptualized as forms of localization. This is due to both approaches aiming to transfer the cultural context of the SL to the TL. Alternately, repetition, orthographic adaptation, and linguistic translation are grouped together due to their mutual characteristics of preserving the source language. Although the linguistic modification translation strategy does not deliberately preserve the target language at the contextual level, it preserves the linguistic traits. Another category, which covers extratextual gloss and intra-textual gloss, is the insertion of culturally specific information and other needed descriptions as deemed appropriate.

Apart from the attempt to clarify the translation techniques in HSH, Table 5 displays the specific topics presented in HSH.

Table 5: Frequency of the culture-specific items in HSH

CSIs Strategies by Aixelá (1996)	Newly Created Translation Strategies	Percentage
Limited universalization Absolute universalization	Localization	57.8%
Repetition Orthographic adaptation Linguistic (non-cultural) translation	Preservation	29.7%
Deletion	Deletion	11.6%
Extratextual gloss Intratextual gloss	Addition	0.9%
Synonymy	-	0%
Autonomous creation	-	0%
Total		**100%**

Table 5 shows the quantitative summary of terms denoting the most prominent topics. The thematic analysis of these culture-specific terms reveals that abstract religious concepts were the most frequently depicted theme in HSH, whereas places were the least mentioned. This implies that religion is portrayed as something that is largely unseen and intangible. There is a relatively lower frequency of words that classify humans as religious performers as well as those that describe religious boundaries and places, which are comparatively more objective and concrete. Both the "humans" and "places" categories denote real, physical entities that can be seen and described in the real world. Therefore, it is also interesting to investigate why such references are fewer than the other types.

Upon analysis of the incorporation of culture-specific items (CSIs) with translation strategies in HSH, the study found that abstract religious concepts were primarily translated using the strategy of absolute universalization, also known as localization, which accounted for 61.7% of the translations. This was followed by linguistic translation, limited universalization, and deletion, which made up 14.9%, 12.8%, and 10.6%, respectively. In contrast, religious items were predominantly translated using linguistic translation, with orthographic adaptation being the only strategy used. Rituals and religious acts were conveyed by four strategies, including limited universalization, linguistic translation, absolute universalization, and deletion, accounting for 31.6%, 26.3%, 26.3%, and 15.8% of translations, respectively. Unexpectedly, ghost species were mainly translated using absolute universalization, accounting for 60% of the samples. The translation of words referring to humans and places utilized linguistic translation and absolute universalization, with limited universalization accounting for only a small percentage. It was also discovered that each classification or theme utilized several translation strategies relatively evenly.

6. DISCUSSION

By analyzing the translation of HSH, this paper explores how these strategies impact the transmission of Thai cultural elements to an international audience. It also highlights the delicate balance translators must achieve between making content accessible and preserving its cultural essence. The discussion of these strategies illuminates the broader intercultural dynamics and challenges of transcending cultural barriers in media and entertainment.

In essence, the strategy of localization or domestication can be viewed as the complete opposite of preservation. These are pivotal in understanding how intercultural dynamics are navigated, and the video game HSH serves as an excellent case study for examining these strategies due to its rich incorporation of Thai mythology, which is deeply embedded in its cultural context. According to Venuti (1995), while localization or domestication seeks to minimize cultural differences to enhance comprehension and relatability, preservation emphasizes maintaining those differences to foster cross-cultural understanding and authenticity. The previous research by Al-Ma'ruf (2015) was consistent with the findings of other studies, as well as with the current study. Upon comparing all the findings, it was revealed that translation strategies vary depending on the source texts and the translators involved, such as whether they are students or professional translators. Unlike in Al-Ma'ruf's study, where students frequently used the calque or repetition strategy to preserve the ST meaning, repetition was not employed in HSH. Instead, absolute universalization, i.e., localization, was predominantly used, resulting in a more natural and smoother translation. Hence, it can be concluded that the absolute universalization strategy is effective for translation, especially when the translators are well-versed in the target language's culture and contexts. However, as seen in Al-Ma'ruf's study, adopting too much of the calque or repetition strategy can lead to a misunderstanding of the translation products. This also aligns with the results of Riangsiri's (2018) study, which indicated that selecting a term that closely resembles the meaning in the source language is one of the preferred translation methods. Such a process is similar to the limited universalization strategy, which involves replacing the original texts with closely related target language texts to convey both similar meanings and contexts. Therefore, it is possible to employ precise and consistent techniques for translating religious terms from Thai to English, with the choices of absolute universalization, repetition, or even loan words with a short description.

Previous research has emphasized that, to translate languages in video games successfully, translators must be extensively familiar with the game's genre and the target language (Wongkittithon, 2011). The evidence is shown in both the high frequency of use of absolute universalization and limited universalization, which is over 50% (57.7% to be precise), in the present research. Both of these strategies are globalization strategies as defined by Davies (2003). Globalization is the process of replacing culturally specific terms with more neutral or universal ones, to make them more accessible to audiences from different cultural backgrounds. Despite HSH's main translator's excellent language ability, there were a few typographical errors in the target and source languages, possibly resulting in some degree of audience annoyance.

The fact that extratextual gloss, repetition, synonymy, and autonomous creation were not employed in HSH's translation can be attributed to various factors, including the nature and distinction of languages. Overall, the findings suggest that the in-game text was rendered into the target language naturally and smoothly. However, HSH is a Thai horror video game, and the target language in-game text contains only three cases of using the strategy of orthographic adaptation. These findings reflect the translators' intent to ensure player enjoyment and engagement, and facilitate smooth gameplay through language, as well as the other audiovisual elements within the game. Moreover, the lack of employment of these four strategies was likely due to constraints associated with Thai localization and game screen vision, as well as cultural and language policies, which are discussed further in subsequent sections.

6.1 Translatability and untranslatability: game translation limitations

The findings of this research support Al-Batineh's research (2021) on the challenges of dealing with technical issues in game translation. Al-Batineh's (2021) results help explain why there was no use of extratextual gloss strategies translation of the video game. In the HSH game's translation, adding too much in-game text by using footnotes or endnotes might encrust the visual presentation of the video game. It is possible translators intentionally avoided this strategy. However, intratextual gloss is used once in HSH simply to describe the manner of death to the audience. A possible reason for this might be that while in-game text may obscure game visuals, with the proper use of a relatively low number, it helps the players to comprehend the original message more clearly with the least nuisance.

A comparative analysis of the present study's results with those of previous research reinforces the notion that technical constraints constitute one of several challenges in translating video games. This is reaffirmed by the work of Mangiron and O'Hagan (2006), which stressed space limitations as a significant impediment to video game translation. Video games often incorporate unique and imaginative names for

weapons, objects, and abilities that are integral to the game's identity. These names frequently require the creation of new TL equivalents that may or may not be exact translations. Literal translations may be infeasible, and often, even when possible, they may take up too much space. This issue can be further exacerbated by differences in writing systems. For instance, in the case of Japanese, which uses the Kanji writing system, two or three-character combinations can be sufficient to describe foreign concepts or names. However, in most European languages, more space may be necessary to convey inventive names effectively. Consequently, translators of video games encounter a range of technical issues resulting from the stylistic differences between the SL and TL.

The absence of any cases of using autonomous creation strategy in the translation of the HSH videogame from Thai into English, as found in this research, is intriguing. This strategy, as described by Aixelá (1996), is commonly utilized in the translation of Spanish film titles to make them more appealing in the Spanish language. While the absence of this strategy may be attributed to the nature or conventions of certain languages, it is possible that other translation genres or media may incorporate it to varying degrees, particularly in culturally oriented games such as HSH. Further study is needed for the investigation of the applicability and impacts of this strategy in various contexts of game translation.

6.2 Cultural restrictions of the target language

Some countries' language policies can make it difficult for translators to entirely keep the original source language messages. Unlike the present study's results, where synonymy strategy did not occur, Fahim and Mazaheri (2013) found that the synonymy strategy holds the lowest mean in all romance novels in Iran's pre- and post-Islamic Revolution periods. A notable example found in the study is the word 'wine', translated as 'هوهق', which in Arabic means 'coffee ', due to religious prohibitions on alcohol in the Arabic-speaking population. However, in the present study, no unacceptable words were found in the Thai original text of HSH as the target language allows for full freedom of speech, regardless whether it includes taboo or swear words. Therefore, the translator did not opt for the synonymy strategy in the findings.

6.3 The future of game translation

The HSH Game can be purchased through a global online gaming platform known as STEAM. Thus, it can be predicted that HSH will gain more popularity on a global scale. Steamcharts (2019) reported that upon its initial release, it had a download rate of more than 100%, with the first episode performing at a rate of 109.33 percent and the second episode performing at a rate as high as 339.13 percent. Moreover, global streamers who broadcast HSH live to their followers as they play the game, experienced a huge flood of viewers. For instance, the famous Swedish streamer and comedian Pewdiepie, who has over 111 million YouTube subscribers, uploaded a video of himself playing the game that received 6.9 million views. The game was also played by CoryxKenshin, an American horror game streamer who is regarded as the fourth most popular YouTube creator with over 15 million subscribers, and he received 17 million views. Evidently, the number of downloads and views of games from all around the world demonstrates the excellent success of Thai games that feature in-depth conceptions of Thai culture and beliefs. Games can therefore be developed to bridge cultural gaps, regardless of language or cultural disparities.

7. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The present research highlights various important findings on the translation strategies employed in the Thai horror video game HSH. Despite this, further research is required to provide a deeper understanding of the possible reasons and rationales behind the use of specific translation strategies, together with their impacts on the target audience. Specifically, it would be valuable to conduct interviews with game translators or English-speaking game players to gain insights into the decision-making process for the choice of specific translation strategies. This would provide a more nuanced understanding of how and why certain words and concepts are translated in a particular way and how effectively they are understood by the target audience.

Future research could investigate the implications of these findings for the translation of other new media genres, such as films or twitterature, and how cultural and linguistic differences impact the translation process. The translation study in other media forms can unveil the underlying principles and practices of translation, leading to more effective and accurate translations to serve their intended audience.

Overall, the present study contributes to the research on game translation and provides insight into the challenges and opportunities regarding translating video games across different cultures and languages.

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