

Video game localization – the
transcreative approach in *Animal
Crossing: Wild World*

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Abstract

Technologies have graced humans with countless possibilities and functionalities that have crossed all borders and boundaries of the world. Internationalization and globalization have made it extremely easy to make all products accessible in every single country; however, it has also created the necessity to adapt these products to the rapid growth and demands of globalization in the technological world. For that reason, localization has been an important part in the process, helping in the linguistic and cultural adaptation of products to several countries. One of the most successful domains in localization has been the video game sector, important for its increasingly stratospheric exposure and risen sales. In the many ways of approaching the localization of a product, the most recurrent technique in the video game sector is transcreation, also known as the creative translation or localization of a product – that is why the center of this study is the game *Animal Crossing: Wild World*, a quintessential and renowned transcreative video game. In order to test the level of creativity used in the game, an analysis of the English and Spanish version has been made through a combination of two methodologies: the multidimensional ludic-narrative approach in Paredes-Otero (2021) for localization; and the translation techniques approach in González de Benito (2017) for translation. Thus, by following a multidimensional and multidisciplinary approach, the analysis has helped reflecting the dominance of the transcreation approach and the creative translation technique used in the version in English and the localized game in Spanish.

Keywords

Translation, localization, video game localization, translation techniques, transcreation, creativity-based video games, social-simulation video games, *Animal Crossing*, *Animal Crossing: Wild World*.

Resumen

Las tecnologías nos han otorgado innumerables posibilidades y funcionalidades que han traspasado todas las fronteras y límites del mundo. La internacionalización y la globalización han facilitado enormemente la accesibilidad de muchos productos en el mundo; sin embargo, también han creado la necesidad de adaptarlos al rápido crecimiento y las exigencias de la globalización en el mundo tecnológico. Por ello, la localización ha sido una parte importante en el proceso, ayudando en la adaptación lingüística y cultural de los productos a varios países. Uno de los ámbitos más exitosos de la localización en el sector de los videojuegos, importante por su exposición cada vez más estratosférica y el aumento de sus ventas. Entre las formas de enfocar la localización de un producto, la técnica más recurrente en este sector es la transcreación, también conocida como la traducción o localización creativa de un producto – es por eso por lo que este trabajo se centra en *Animal Crossing: Wild World*, un juego transcreativo por excelencia. . Para comprobar el nivel de creatividad empleado en el juego, se ha realizado un análisis de la versión en inglés y en español mediante la combinación de dos metodologías: el enfoque lúdico-narrativo multidimensional de Paredes-Otero (2021) para la localización; y el enfoque de técnicas de traducción de González de Benito (2017) para la traducción. Así, al seguir un enfoque multidimensional y multidisciplinar, el análisis ha ayudado a reflejar la dominancia del enfoque transcreativo y la técnica de traducción creativa utilizada en la versión en inglés y en la versión localizada en español.

Palabras clave

Traducción, localización, localización de videojuegos, técnicas de traducción, transcreación, juegos basados en la creatividad, juegos de simulación social, *Animal Crossing*, *Animal Crossing: Wild World*.

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1. Introduction

Our evolution has made technologies evolve, but its evolution has made us evolve and change our perspective on several aspects of life. It has had and has an impact on our everyday life. Whether we like it or not, technology is one of us – it accompanies us from the moment we wake up until the moment we go to sleep. And that, no one can deny. Technologies are our new form of interacting with the world, and that is why their development has reached new levels in the current society.

We have seen technologies grow over the years and manifest in various shapes and forms – computers, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, mobile phones, Artificial Intelligence and much more. These are diverse ways of entertaining a very technology-driven user. But one of the domains that is gaining more relevance and is becoming one of the best-selling forms of technological innovation is video games.

Super Mario Bros, *The Legend of Zelda*, *Nintendogs*, or *Pokémon*. If you are part of the Millennials or Gen Z, then these names will ring a bell for you. Or, if you have grown to see the technological advances the world has graced us with, you will have had the pleasure of grasping the amazing world of these and many other fantastic games. But how is that related to translation in question? What is the relation between having a very lovely dog in *Nintendogs* and the job of translating? It is as simple as it seems – you can understand that dog or figure out what *Princess Peach* needs thanks to a translator. But let us go further: it is not actually a translator to whom you should be grateful. It is another figure that may get confused with often: the localizer.

Localization is a very needed discipline in the technological world that we live in currently. The word, originated from the word *locale*, refers to the adaptation of a product to a specific *locale* or community of speakers, involving from the marketing aspect of it to the more graphic sections (*La Localización*, n.d.). It requires considering the conventions and rules established in each *locale* – that is, the textual and paratextual aspects of the localized product (González de Benito, 2017).

There are diverse ways to approach the localization of a product. Depending on several factors, the localizer may take a more literal and faithful perspective, or it will be down to the freedom that s/he considers is needed in the localization. However, in the video game sector the

approach that predominates is the freedom of translation, its more imaginative side – that is, transcreation (ibid.).

And this concept is the focus in the assignment – finding out how this transcreation reflects on a particular video game, that is, *Animal Crossing: Wild World*. Because giving freedom to localize is a double-edge sword, but you must use that sword wisely and adapt it to the content you are localizing. And in this case, transcreation must be used as a tool to convey the calmness and humor that characterizes this franchise, centered around a little village populated by your animal neighbors.

Through a thorough analysis of the various dimensions that the game provides, this research will help resolve several important questions, such as (1) how the elements in the game are localized and translated, (2) how transcreation is relevant in this process and how it is reflected, and (3) why *Animal Crossing* is considered a predominantly transcreative franchise.

In order to give an answer to the research question, we will first discuss in the Methodology and Objectives section the general and specific purposes of the assignment, these being to evaluate the transcreative elements of *AC: WW*. Then, we will explain the methodology used to evaluate the level and techniques of transcreation in the video game through a combination of two dimensions: (1) the localization dimension, through an adaptation of the multidimensional ludic-narrative analysis by Paredes-Otero (2021); and (2) the translation dimension, through the classification on translation techniques by González de Benito (2017). It will also include each step of the process of getting to solve the research problem.

Then, we will make a review of the field in the theoretical framework following a deductive approach – that is, from the more general aspects of localization to the localization of creativity-based video games and *Animal Crossing: Wild World* (*AC: WW*) in particular. Through the history and development of the field, to the interest in the video game sector, we will review every concept that relates to the assignment.

Finally, there will be a chapter for the results of the analysis. Here, we will give an objective description of the results along with an exhaustive discussion about the meaning behind them and the relevance for the purpose of the assignment. In the end, the conclusions will be an opportunity to reflect about the findings and the answer to the research question, and it will be a space to evaluate what the future holds for this domain.

2. Objectives and Methodology

2.1. Objectives

The main objective of this assignment is to detect and analyze the transcreative elements of the game *Animal Crossing: Wild World* through a comparison of the English and Spanish versions. Regarding the specific objectives of the assignment:

- Analyzing the various elements of the video game to find the different techniques used for its localization and translation.
- Detect if languages play a key role in the finalized version and how they impact the several elements that are localized in a video game.
- Determine the level of creativity and freedom of translation the localizers have used to adapt the game to the new languages.

2.2. Methodology

To achieve these goals, we will follow an adaptation and blend of two different methodologies that are used to evaluate translation and localization within the *Animal Crossing* franchise: (1) the multidimensional ludic-narrative methodology by Paredes-Otero (2021) in *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, and (2) the classification of translation techniques in video game localization by González de Benito (2017) in *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*. The objective is to try to intertwine three areas: (1) the video game, (2) its localization, and (3) its translation methods.

For the localization side of the study, we have chosen the multidimensional ludic-narrative analysis from Paredes-Otero (2021) because it involves all the dimensions in a video game and it can be easily adapted to this one, as it is the methodology used by Paredes-Otero (ibid.) for analyzing another game of the same franchise, *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*. This methodology consists of six categories divided into two factors – subcategories and factor in *Animal Crossing*. On the other hand, and in order to evaluate the translation dimension in the game, we have added to this methodology the classification of González de Benito (2017) on translation techniques because of its easy adaptability as well.

An adaptation of both methodologies has been made to adequate the type of research to the methodology of analysis by removing some categories in Paredes-Otero (2021) and including a new one – i.e., the translation techniques from González de Benito (2017), as can be seen in table 1. In that manner, we established four dimensions of analysis: categories, analyzable elements, subcategories, and translation techniques. For the first dimension, the six categories mentioned in Paredes-Otero (2021) have been reduced to the four that matched the analysis of transcreation in the localization of the video game. The second dimension refers to the elements that are going to be analyzed in this study and that are pertinent both to localization and translation. The third dimension reflects the several elements in which the main category breaks down and that are relevant to the study of localization. Finally, the last category reflects the possible techniques that the translation team may have used to reflect the ideas from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL).

Table 1. Multidimensional ludic-narrative analysis + translation techniques

CATEGORIES	ANALYZABLE ELEMENTS	SUBCATEGORIES	TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES
Characters	Character's names	Main character's name Non-Playable Character's (NPC) names Physical appearance Personality Verbal information	Repetition Terminological adaptation Linguistic translation Naturalization Creative translation
Gameplay and setting	Gyroids (collectibles)	Playabilities Symbolic setting	
Narrative Time	Festivity names	Real time in synchrony	
Narrative Structure	Rhymes / Wordplay	Emerging narrative / Retronarrativity	

Source: adaptation from Paredes-Otero (2021) and González de Benito (2017)

2.2.0. Translation techniques

According to Molina and Hurtado (2002), translation techniques are the “[...] procedures to analyse and classify how translation equivalence works” (p. 509). As González de Benito (2017) explains, these are mostly the cause of the “lively and relatable quality of its verbal component” (p. 32). The analysis of translation in general and translation techniques in particular helps understanding the thought process of the translation team and the choices used in each element of the video game.

According to González de Benito (2017), there are five types of translation techniques in the game *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*, which can be extrapolated to *Animal Crossing: Wild World*:

- Repetition: technique that consists of the literal repetition of the original name. It is generally used when the name can be recognized in the target culture.
- Terminological adaptation: technique that consists of changing the original version of the name to reflect the official TL version. It is generally used to provide familiarity with the target culture (TC) or to convey humor.
- Linguistic translation: technique that consists of the replacement of the original name with another name in the TL to transmit the semantic content of the original.
- Naturalization: technique that consists of the replacement of the original with a name that is exclusive in the TL. It is generally used to bring familiarity into the TC.
- Creative translation: technique that consists of the use of creativity to create an original name/concept apart from the SL. It is generally used for humorous reasons.

2.2.1. Characters

Characters in *Animal Crossing* play separate roles in the game and can help you perform various tasks. As Pérez Rufi (2016) states, the objective of characters is to transmit information about the main plot, but they are also seen as independent beings with their own psyche. They are easily recognized because of their emotions, thoughts, and personalities (Eder, 2010).

In the case of *Animal Crossing* in general and *Animal Crossing: Wild World* in particular, we find that the characters are animals that populate our town or island. They are subdivided into

fixed characters and neighbors and, following the theory that Gill (2003) explains, personality is the feature that determines their behavior and their fundamental qualities.

In order to analyze personality, Gill (ibid.) discusses the three areas of personality according to speech traits – these are, extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism. Following this method, Anaya (2024) extracts eight diverse types of Non-Playable Characters (NPC’S) in the game: four are male characters (grumpy, athletic, sloth and petulant), and four are female characters (sweet, happy, normal, and presumptuous).

For this particular research, the interest in localization and transcreation resides in their names. All these types of personalities are reflected in several elements, such as their clothing or conversation interests, but the most representative one is their names. Given the wide range of characters and possibilities, the variety of translation techniques is extensive as well: out of the five abovementioned techniques, all five are present throughout the reflection of the characters’ names.

2.2.2. *Gameplay and setting*

In the case of *Animal Crossing: Wild World*, the video game space is located in a town far away, where the main character has moved to. The environment of the video games refers to the location where the action takes place (Paredes-Otero, 2021). The idea with the video game space is to explore and navigate the different possibilities it offers and how it affects the player and its relationship with other variables (characters, time, narrative, and so on).

The video game space in this case is based on the motto that the creator, Katsuya Eguchi, implemented – simpleness, relax and calmness (ibid.). According to Márquez (2020), the game is made following a “cozy design” that is founded on three basic points: abundance, comfort, and security. The environment in the game is made for the user to be relaxed and enjoy every bit of the game. There are no objectives nor obligations so that the user is in a safe space that will serve him as a way to escape reality. For instance, the player can see abundance reflected in all the possibilities that the game offers: hunting, fishing, collecting, buying carpets, clothing, and paintings, and so on – you will never have to worry about running out of anything. On the other hand, comfort is reflected through the “quiet and calm environment,” with diverse options like

talking to your neighbors, the owners of the shops or the mayor of the city (ibid.). About security, there are no threats nor rush to accomplish any objectives, as there are none in the game.

About gameplay, Paredes-Otero (2021) states that the video game does not present a story, but the characters that the user can interact with help him/her as guides through the game to profit from all the playabilities. The gameplay is made especially for casual gamers that do not invest a lot of time playing as they consider the game to be just entertainment (ibid.).

In this case, we will be analyzing one main feature: the collectibles' names. Items in the game play a bigger role, as they offer the user different possibilities and open up an entire range of prospects for the user to continue playing the game and extend its playabilities. We will put greater emphasis on the gyroids in the game, which are named in a specific manner, as we will see later. As these are not concepts that can be extrapolated to real life, the use of terminological adaptation and creative translation is crucial to project the unknown concept from the SL to the TL.

2.2.3. *Narrative time*

Narrative time is one of the most interesting and differentiating features of this game. Time is characterized in the game by its synchrony – that means that time in real life and the game are coordinated in every way (Paredes-Otero, 2021, p. 1241). When the sun is rising in real life, so it is in the game; when flowers start blossoming and allergies start having their way, so it does in AC: WW.

Time in the game offers a lot of playabilities. For example, when the night comes, neighbors start to disappear to go home to sleep, and stores start closing until the next day. Also, the four seasons of the year are reflected through flowers in spring, a scalding hot sun in summer, leaves in autumn, and snow and snowmen in winter. Moreover, if the user stops playing the game for a while, the neighbors will start leaving or the town will be infested with weeds.

For this section, the interest in localization resides in the festivity names. As a bit of a spoiler, the localizers did not use a literal or faithful translation for all festivities, so they are a way to reflect what translation techniques are used and, in this particular case, how transcreation is used to convey a similar meaning to the original. For that reason, three of the translation techniques are mainly used: repetition, terminological adaptation and linguistic translation.

2.2.4. *Narrative structure*

This game is based on one important variable: dialogues. Dialogues are seen as a way to achieve three main goals: (1) to know your neighbor, (2) to get information, and (3) accomplishing your objectives in the game. As Paredes-Otero (ibid.) states, the narrative structure of the game is structured around the interactions between the users and the characters in the game. Interactivity also comes into play in this case, as sometimes the neighbors will let you choose between several options, being rewarded if you choose the one that is most similar to them.

Communication in the game can be also used to get information: whether a new neighbor comes to the city, or an errant character has come today to sell us fake paintings, and also, when the festivities for Christmas are and how they are portrayed. The game is mainly based on the interactions that the user has with the neighbors of the city and the fixed characters.

A final goal that communication helps the player achieve is, in fact, to accomplish an objective. As an instance, getting the furniture that you always desired of, changing your hairstyle, getting bells (the money of the game), donating to the local museum, or accomplishing the daily tasks that the game proposes. You can get to these functionalities thanks to communicating with your neighbors, who sometimes will give you these tasks in order to maintain the playabilities of the game.

For this last section, the analysis will focus on bugs and fish, putting a special emphasis on the rhymes/wordplay when you catch them. These dialogues give the translator the freedom to choose the technique they will approach when localizing the game – whether to use a more literal, faithful translation, or using more freedom to convey the meaning of the dialogues. In the game, the last one is preferred, as there are differences between the source and target languages that are difficult to portray.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. *Localization*

If you make a quick Google search with the word “localization”, you will get various and diverse results: from the geographical perspective and meaning, to several Machine Translation tools (MTs) for translation. But you will not probably see any result indicating “localization of [product]”. You will only get “localization in translation” or “what is the difference between translation and localization?”, “why are translation and localization considered the same concept?”.

Of course, if these questions arise it is because there is a correlation between the two domains, but also a problem – localization is still a dim concept, even for the experts. There does not seem to be consensus among the specialists in the field about the scope of localization, its elements and process. And this leads to easily mistake it with translation.

As per the research about localization, it can be easily observed that there are two major theories – one coming from the translation sector and one focused on the localization side of the domain. And we can differentiate the two points of view depending on the main focus point when defining what localization is. Is it centered around the translation of linguistic elements of the adaptation of a product?

For the first approach, the translation-focused one, localization is just the process of translating a computer component or software. Localization, in this approach, is reduced to just the translation of linguistic components in a product. As Pym (2004) states, Translation Studies have always considered localization as a three-steps process: (1) producing the original text, (2) translating it, and (3) receiving the target text. As the author (ibid). states, “some things seem to be missing in the localizer’s view of the world” (p. 3).

In this theory, localization is considered a part of translation and translation theory. This is easily identifiable by the definition that some theorists provide about localization: if it starts as “localization is the translation of...”, then it is a translation-focused theory. For instance, Vynar (2019) determines that “localization is the translation of any software product” (p. 14). Ácsová (2022) provides a similar definition, stating that it is the translation “of a certain section of characters” from a linguistic point of view (p. 108).

However, as stated in *La localización* (n.d.), the scope of localization is broader than just translation. In this domain, translation is just a third part of the extent and range of a localization project. Sdobnikov (2018) also reflects this idea through the thought that localization is a completely different idea from “translation proper” (p. 1491). As explained, the person responsible for a localization project is no longer called “Translator”, but rather “Specialist in Translation/Interpreting and Localization” (ibid.).

On the other hand, there are several studies that define localization as the adaptation of a product to a specific *locale*, that being the target market for the product (*La Localización*, n.d.). This market includes the target audience that shares a series of common topics, more specifically, the social values and habits (ibid.). Each locale is easily identifiable by the ISO codes – for example, ES-ES for the Spanish in Spain, and EN-US for the English in the United States (ibid.).

This is what the localization-focused theories implies. The focus point in this case is not the linguistic component, but rather the whole vision of the process, considering the localization process as a puzzle with several pieces that need to be adapted not only to the language, but also to the culture. It not only involves linguistic features, but also sounds, covers, read-me documents, legal components, and so on. According to *La localización* (ibid.), anything that can be considered “software” can be the object of localization.

This idea is reflected in Dunne (2006) as the following: “[t]he processes by which digital content and products developed in one locale (defined in terms of geographical area, language and culture) are adapted for sale and use in another locale” (p. 4). Esselink (2000) has also been an advocate for the development and recognition of this area, establishing that this process can be applied to software or web products.

However, the definition that Quah (2006) provides implies the most characteristics of the domain: localization is “the process of changing the documentation of a product, a product itself or the delivery of services so that they are appropriate and acceptable to the target society and culture” (p. 84). García-Saavedra (2002) goes on to add that this adaptation is aimed at satisfying “the linguistic, cultural and other type of requirements applied to an environment or specific target market” (p. 410).

3.1.1. History and development of localization

The roots of localization can be traced back to the 1980s and the outbreak of desktop computers and computer software. As the new US-based hardware was developing, the need to cater to non-English-speaking users made it necessary to extend the target languages for technological tools. As an interesting fact, Sun Microsystems and Microsoft started operating during these years. But the researchers started noticing the need to adapt software to other target audiences and questioning how that would be possible to do (Esselink, 2003).

Originally, computers and technologies were just destined for corporate jobs and experts in the field. However, as soon as it expanded to all users, the need to translate it increased even more than before – now, it was not about just language, but rather a convention of culturally established rules and habits (ibid.). As instance, Spain decreed in 1985 that all keyboards must have a “ñ” key (*La Localización*, n.d.).

The first steps of the localization industry were made by the engineers and programmers of these software products, but this led to many linguistic mistakes such as false friends or anglicisms. Then, it shifted to in-house technical translators or distributors, who were forced to acquire experience in the field in order to satisfy the requirements of localization (ibid.). Either way, the development of the product and its localization were done separately – that is, the developers just handed the corresponding documentation to the localizers (Esselink, 2003). The focal point of this expansion was Dublin, where many companies located their headquarters due to the geographical position and the fiscal incentives from the government (*La Localización*, n.d.).

It is worth mentioning in this decade that the European company INK started providing desktop publishing, localization engineering, project management and multi-lingual support to other companies. At the same time, TRADOS launched Translation Editor (TED), a workbench memory product used as a plug-in for INK’s TextTools (Thawdar, 2018.).

In the 1990s, the first localization providers emerged. This led to a more organized and unified approach of localization, as the localization teams were led by a project manager and included experts in the field such as linguists, engineers, and desktop publishers (Esselink, 2003). This development meant a professionalization of the domain through “industry organizations,

conferences, publications, academic interest, and generally increased visibility” (ibid, p. 26). It was also key to operating software development and localization together (Thawdar, 2018).

The growth of the Internet in the 1990s made a massive impact in the evolution of the domain. The localizer would not only have documentation as a work tool, but rather countless, endless texts about almost any topic in the world that were subjected to changes and updates (*La Localización*, n.d.). For the purpose of reaching larger, international audiences, localizers started translating websites and online content – this was the beginning of what we know as *web localization* (Vistatec, 2023). To achieve that purpose, MultiLanguage Vendors (MLVs) started taking on projects with diverse target languages, as opposed to Single-Language Vendors (SLVs), who worked from sundry source languages to one particular language (Thawdar, 2018).

During the 2000s, there were two major breakouts in the industry: one was the Simultaneous Shipment (also known as simship) and the shift from Translation Machines (TM) to Globalization Management Systems (GMS). Simultaneous shipment means that the localization of the product is done simultaneously to its development – that is, localizers usually translate an unfinished product. Regarding GMS, it was a new and innovative way for localizers to automatize the localization process by “storing and publishing multilingual content” (ibid, p. 27). This century helped take a new and fresh approach in the localization industry (Esselink, 2003).

Nowadays, localization operates not only in software, but also in other fields such as video games, digital marketing, or e-commerce (*A Brief History of Localization*, n.d.). According to Henry (2016), the process is now “transparent, collaborative with full visibility into tasks, schedules and deliverables”. Now, the process is completely automatized and accomplished by web browsers or apps. Currently, there seems to be a tendency towards content marketing, which is a logical move in a world that is focused on self-publishing and global content strategies (ibid.).

3.1.2. Types and process of localization

According to López (2021), there are various types of localization according to several factors, as time, budget, and sale expectations:

- No localization: the product is not localized, so it requires less effort and money.

- Box and docs: only the printed material is localized; the texts inside the game stay as in the original. These materials include the box, the manual, or other complementary components.
- Partial localization: all the on-screen text in the game is localized – the only component that is left as the original is the audio files, as dubbing is more expensive and may slow down the process.
- Total localization: the most successful games are usually localized as a whole, including the audio files. This is mostly because they can compensate for the total localization with the benefits from the sales of the game in the *locale*. This is the case, for example, of *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*.

About the process of localization, Loureiro (2007) gives insight into the steps and peculiarities of the domain. It is a lengthy process where several experts must participate in – e.g., client, project manager, translator, tester, and so on.

1. Preparing the product and team

The first step to start up localization is gathering around all experts involved in the localization project and determining the budget. After the client's acceptance, the team leader will manage the workload, deadlines, and economic and human resources matters. Then, the work will be passed onto the adequate translator depending on the type and parts of the game (ibid.).

2. Translation

In this second step, the translator will have to determine the type of translation required by the client and the needs. S/he will have to consider the function of the text in the video game – e.g., if it is *onscreen text*, it must be a concise and clear translator due to the restricted space. If it is, for example, a translation of the script, it will depend on whether it will be dubbed or subtitled (ibid.).

3. Coherence check

Then, the translator will have to focus on coherence. In a localization project, there are two types: terminological coherence and internal coherence. The first one has to do with the game console and game glossaries – depending on the platform, the terminology can vastly differ (ibid.). In the case of internal coherence, it refers to the consistency in the translation of all parts of the video game according to the requests of the client (ibid.).

4. Methodological matters

Following the coherence check, the translator will have to deal with some methodological matters. As instance, the formatting of the texts to localize, the Computer-Assisted Tools (CAT) and terminological databases, or the variables that s/he must not remove or modify. But Loureiro (2007) mentions two of the most important problems that the translator encounters in this phase: the lack of context and the restricted space. For the first one, translators usually work with an unfinished product, as translation is done simultaneously to the development of the game. The second one refers to the in-game text, as it is usually included in a restricted space that the translator must respect in order to maintain the atmosphere of the game (ibid.).

5. Dubbing

There are three types of dubbing in the localization process: dubbing with time restriction, dubbing without time restriction, and lip-synchrony – each one is used in various parts of the video game. The text that the dubber receives may have suffered several modifications in the previous phase (adjusting phase), as the artistic director must check and make sure that everything matches with restrictions and lip movements. When the dubbing is finished, the project manager will send it to the client in order to extract the first beta of the game. When the client ensures that this version matches the requirements, s/he will send it back to the localization team to start the next phase (ibid.).

6. Testing

The last step is the testing phase. Before submitting the game to the phase of submission, a comprehensive quality assurance control is done, consisting of playing the whole game to check the translation and possible mistakes. A bug report – these bugs that the tester finds during the quality assurance process – will be sent to the client so that s/he can correct them to create a new beta for testing. At this point, the work of the localization team is finished (ibid.).

3.2. Video game localization

3.2.1. Brief history of video game localization

Video game localization has been flourishing and growing since its emergence in the 1970s (Bernal-Merino, 2011). Although with a bulky start, now it is considered one of the best-selling domains in the industry. The growing exposure of multimedia products created the need to start a profession from scratch to cover its ever-increasing demands (ibid.).

It all started in the 1970s when the first games were created in the US for their national market. Considering the potential these games had, the Japanese emerged on the US-only industry to specialize in arcade games. However, this idea did not seem to be completely accepted by the general public, as there was a setback during the early years of the 1980s (ibid.).

During the last years of 1980s, nonetheless, the industry saw a breakthrough and an increase in quality and expansion, which made the discipline overcome the previous failure during the 1970s. For the localization of video games, it was common to translate the packaging and documentation, as the revenues compensated for the investments. It is during this period that two of the most notable events happened: the creation of *Super Mario Bros*, and the coining of the expression FIGS (French, Italian, German, and Spanish) (ibid.).

In the 1990s, there was a shift from the type *box'n'docs* to partial localization, in which the user interface would also be localized. This change improved the user's gaming experience, as they did not have to consult the manuals every time they played. However, the translation of audio files was not considered yet as a general option for localization, so it was reserved for the best-selling video games. One of the most important games during this decade was *Baldur's Gate* (BioWare/Interplay 1998), which was one of the first games to have a full translation done to Spanish (ibid.).

In the 2000s, the number of players highly increased with the emergence of globalization and sim-ship. As explained before, simultaneous shipment means that "[...] most games are unfinished (not playable) when localization need to get started [...]" (ibid., p. 16). One of the most relevant changes during this decade was the success of MMOs (Massively Multiplayer Online

games), where users could interact and play games online with people from different corners of the world (ibid.).

Nowadays, the topic of discussion in the localization industry is “deep” or “enhanced” localization: as Bernal-Merino (2011) explains, the game is brought closer to the user by adapting what can be considered “foreign” elements to a more successful approach in the locale. Another current topic in localization is the degree of creativity that the localizer must use to approach the localization of a video game, which is the fundamental point in the following section (ibid.).

3.2.2. *Types of video game localization*

As González de Benito (2017) explains, video games can be classified according to several criteria – e.g., according to the platform (Nintendo 3DS, PlayStation, XBOX) or genre (action, racing, social simulation, role playing games). However, video games in these classifications cannot fit into one category, as video games are multifaceted and interchangeable: one game can fit into different genres and platforms. For example, the video game *Resident Evil* has been launched for PlayStation, XBOX, Wii, and NDS, and it can be seen as an action-horror game, breaking the mold for categorization.

Nevertheless, the important classification for the localization of video games is presented by Bernal-Merino (2007) as a two-way classification according to the freedom that the translators are given to localize the game. As the author states, “[...] some games require more research than creativity, and others require more creativity than research” (ibid, p. 3). Consequently, we can say that the two types of video games according to localization are research-based video games and creativity-based video games. (González de Benito, 2017).

The first type, research-based video games, are built around elements from previous products, such as films or literature (Bernal-Merino, 2007). The freedom for the localization of the product is therefore extremely limited, as the localizer must stick to “pre-existing common knowledge” – that is, the jargon, universe, and expectations of the target audience (ibid.). An example is *Fantastic Four* for PlayStation 2, based on the Century Fox movie and Marvel comics; or *Shrek*, a PC-game based on the famous film saga (González de Benito, 2017).

The second type is what Bernal-Merino (2007) states as creativity-based video games. Being based on completely innovative ideas, the freedom for the localizer is much vast than in

research-based video games. This allows the localizer to use a more creative, playful approach to localization. As the author states, “[...] translators are encouraged to produce an exciting translation that sits well with the game and enhances players’ experience [...]” (ibid, p. 3). In these cases, localizers are attached to transcreation – that being the “quasi absolute freedom” to modify and adapt the elements that the localizers see fit to convey the original atmosphere of the game (González de Benito, 2017).

3.2.3. *Transcreation in creativity-based video games*

As Fernández Costales (2012) states, “transcreation is a concept applied to video game by Mangiron & O’Hagan (2006) in order to refer to the *carte blanche* of translator to meet the objective of preserving the game experience in the target locale” (p. 398). Dimitriadou (2023) also stated that localization involves using the localizer’s creativity and individuality in the process.

Although it is a strategy that can be applied in several parts of a game, there are some genres that are more likely to be adapted as a whole using this technique, as narrative-driven genres (ibid.). As the author (2012) explains, “the more complex and creative a storyline, the more useful transcreation may turn in the translation process” (p. 398). Examples of these types of video games are *Final Fantasy X*, *Metal Gear Solid 4* or *Uncharted 2* (ibid.).

As *The Importance of Transcreation in Video Game Localization* (2020) states, the transcreative approach helps make the product more accessible to larger audiences, but also improves the user’s experience. The “transcreator” should focus on making the user enjoy the video game and be “immersed” in its atmosphere (ibid). Dimitriadou (2023) states that “the key to game transcreation is learning how to balance these dynamics [originality and authenticity] out”.

As it is explained, there are several elements that can be “transcreatively” localized, such as names of characters, names of weapons and powers, instances of character restriction, jokes, or cultural references (*The Importance of Transcreation in Video Game Localization*, 2020). Terra Localizations (2023) goes on to add “artwork, voiceovers, marketing materials, and various aspects of the game” that can be localized with a transcreative approach. There are several occasions where the localizer may take a transcreative approach on localization (ibid.):

- Limitation on characters: the localizers have sometimes to turn the restraining space around by taking a more creative and free approach, especially with languages like

German or Spanish – these languages are considered to have longer strings than other languages, as English.

- Flavor text: this factor refers to the text in descriptions and background stories. Transcreatively localizing it may contribute to improving the game experience for the user.
- Cultural sensitivity: there are elements in video games that may be cultural triggers in some countries. Certain symbols or expressions may have different meanings from the source country where the video game was developed. The localizer must use his/her creativity to find a better way to substitute and adapt this cultural trigger to the target country.
- Consideration to the target audience: these elements is mainly based on the humorous part of the video game – that is, jokes, puns, and cultural references. The localizer must properly adapt them to find a new meaning in the target language, as the source language may not be properly understood in another country because of language.

3.3. *An example of creativity-based video games: Animal Crossing: Wild World*

As commented on the previous section, video games can be classified in two types according to the approach of translation: research-based video games and creativity-based video games (González de Benito, 2017). In this section we will be focusing on one of the main representations of the last group in the video game sector: the *Animal Crossing* saga in general; and more particularly, on the game *Animal Crossing: Wild World* (2005).

3.3.1. *History, development, and success of the franchise*

The *Animal Crossing* franchise is a video game series developed and distributed by the company Nintendo. Created by Katsuya Eguchi and produced by Hisashi Nogami, it was first published for Nintendo 64 in 2001, and it now counts with five main instalments: *Animal Crossing* (2001); *Animal Crossing: Wild World* (2005); *Animal Crossing: City Folk* (2008); *Animal Crossing: New Leaf* (2012); and *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* (2020) (Sánchez, 2021).

As Goodall (2020) explains, the video game series was just a product of the failed *Dobutsu no Mori* (meaning “Animal Forest” in Japanese) for Nintendo 64DD. As GameCube was sweeping away the success of Nintendo 64DD, the creators decided to focus on the development and adaptation of this game to the new video game console – that is where *Animal Crossing* was born in 2001 (ibid.). The most interesting feature in this game was the introduction of the hardware’s internal clock, making it synchronized with the time in real life (Cashon, 2020).

Then, the second instalment of the game was published in 2005 for Nintendo DS with the name of *Animal Crossing: Wild World* (ibid). It was really similar to the first game, but what made it highly succeed was the countless innovations and changes introduced in this game, considering the instalment almost close to perfection (Goodall, 2020). Some of these improvements include a curved and continuous world, the new options to customize the town, or the Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection that allowed users to visit other player’s towns (Lara, 2020).

In 2008, Nintendo released a Wii game called *Animal Crossing: City Folk* (ibid). The reception from the audience in this case was moderate, given that the game was particularly similar to its successful predecessor – the user had the same functionalities as in the previous game, but this time it was located in a city (Cashon, 2020). It included innovations as WiiConnect24, better graphics, or Wii Remote controls, but they did not seem to do enough for it to gain the success of *AC: WW* – the sales dropped to nearly a third (ibid.).

The next game was released in 2013 for Nintendo 3DS, and it is considered the most famous instalment of the franchise: *Animal Crossing: New Leaf* (ibid.). What differentiated this game from the previous ones was that the user took on the role of the mayor of the town, giving the player a boundless number of functionalities and endless control of the city – e.g., construction of new bridges and facilities, or passing of bills (Lara, 2020).

The last and most awaited game of the franchise is *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* for Nintendo Switch (2020). Published in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, this game has succeeded the most in comparison to its predecessors due to several factors: its position as a family-friendly, simple and relaxing game in a time of uncertainty, its innovations and new updates in line with the functionalities of Nintendo Switch, its previous success and recognition as a franchise, and so on (Hillier, 2020). Located now on an island, it added updates such as the customization

options for the location, the creation of furniture through the collection of materials, and even the more freedom of choice the user is given, having the possibility to set up the animals in the island (Albiges, 2021). Just in three days, it sold 1.8 million copies in Japan, and in 2 months it sold 13.4 million copies worldwide (Hillier, 2020).

3.3.2. Animal Crossing: Wild World – *dynamics of the game*

Animal Crossing: Wild World was first published for Nintendo DS in March 2006 (*Animal Crossing: Wild World*, n.d.). An open-ended game, *AC: WW* is considered a social simulation game; more specifically, a life simulation game. In this subgenre, “the user takes the role of one or various avatars and is in charge of keeping them alive through their daily care” (Paredes-Otero, 2021).

In *AC: WW*, the user plays with a human avatar that moves to a town inhabited by their animal neighbors. It has no main objectives, but there is a point that connects every task that the player can perform in the game – that is, paying the house mortgage to the main owner, Tom Nook. Each time the user pays the house mortgage, the house gets bigger and larger. In order to get Bells (the local currency) to pay for it, there are several functionalities in the game, like catching and selling bugs, fishes, or fossils: shaking the trees or hitting the stones with a shovel, and so on. The user can also contribute to the town in other ways, like donating to the local museum, interacting with the neighbors, changing the avatar’s appearance at the local store, or celebrating festivities like the Flea Market or the Bug-Off.

Regarding the atmosphere of the game, Paredes-Otero (2021) bases the saga on four main principles:

- Simplicity and relaxation: the user has complete freedom to do as s/he pleases with the world that s/he has in front of him/her. From the simplicity of the neighbors and their discussions to the lack of pain and game overs, the user is located in an idyllic town where there is no room for stress.
- Short games: the user does not have to be in the game for a long time, as there are no specific objectives or time to follow. An interesting fact is the following point to discuss about: real time.

- Real time: the time in the game is in synchrony with the time in real life. Day and night, the four seasons, the days, and the hours, all coincide with the ones in real life. The passing of time is also reflected in the game: if you have not played in a long time, the town will be infested with weeds, or a neighbor may have left to clear the way for a new one.
- Communication tool: the game is mainly based on the interaction that the user has with the neighbors. As said before, the user can interact with them to get to know the neighbors, to get new information, or to achieve his/her goals. The atmosphere in the game is highly reflected by the personalities and features of the characters, which are portrayed through the conversations that the user can have with them.

4. Analysis

As explained before, the analysis has been made following two models: (1) the adaptation of the multidimensional ludic-narrative approach by Paredes-Otero (2021) for the localization dimension of the study; and (2), the classification on translation techniques by González de Benito (2017). Four categories have been thoroughly examined to determine the transcreative elements of their localization: characters, gameplay and setting, narrative time, and narrative structure.

4.1. Characters

There are several criteria to subdivide characters in the game: one is related to personality and the other is related to position in the game. Characters are going to be analyzed according to the last criterion, but always considering factors like personality, physical appearance, and verbal information.

There are two types of characters according to their position in the game: special characters – referred to the fixed characters in almost every game –, and neighbors. We will be analyzing four in each group to offer a grasp of the transcreative approach that the localizers took in almost every character's names. As a side note, all information and pictures for this section were extracted from the *Nookipedia* (n.d.).

For the analysis of the characters, we will be using an adaptation of the model provided by Rodríguez (2021), as can be seen in Table 2. Four characters in each category have been chosen to reflect and explain the transcreative approach used in the game, followed by the type of translation technique elected by the translation team. To provide more context, a picture of the character is portrayed in the table, followed by the names in both languages – English and Spanish. All references were consulted in the *Nookipedia* (n.d.). for the first language, and *Animal Crossing Encyclopedia* (n.d.) for the second one.

Table 2. Model of analysis for characters

Picture of the character	
Name of the character in English	Name of the character in Spanish
Translation technique	

Source: adaptation from the model in Rodríguez (2021)

4.1.1. *Special characters*


Able Sisters – Las hermanas Manitas

Firstly, we have the Able Sisters: Mabel and Sable (table 2.1.). The Able sisters are two (in later games, three) porcupine twin sisters that own the local clothing store, where the user can buy and design clothing to customize the character. Sable is the oldest of the two, and she is very reserved and timid, while Mabel is more extroverted, making her the one attending the clientele (Sánchez, 2021).

In the English version of the game, the localizers opted for a rather innovative move that tried to encompass the personality of the characters: the technique they used was to call them “Able Sisters” and label them with names that rhymed with Able – Mabel and Sable. The correlation comes in two different ways for them: one for the “Able” meaning – like in having a certain set of skills –, and the other for the rhyming of their names. Just as a curiosity, there is a third sister that appears from *Animal Crossing: City Folk* on, called Label, maintaining the rhyming.

In Spanish, although the general name is a literal translation (*Las hermanas manitas* means “The Handy Sisters”), their particular names reflect the transcreation used by the translation team. In the case of each sister, the naturalization technique is reflected through the adaptation of the names from the source culture (SC) into a cultural item in the TT (*Pili y Mili*), but always maintaining the rhyme from the English version. For context, *Pili y Mili* were a Spanish comic duo formed by the twin sisters Pilar and Aurora Bayona, who starred in plenty of films during the 1960s. Their talent, self-confidence and humorous quality made them two of the most successful and recognizable actors in Spain and South America as well. This constitutes a case of naturalization: the team established a correlation of the characters to a specific phenomenon in the target culture.

Table 2.1. Able Sisters

	
Able Sisters (Sable and Mabel)	Hermanas Manitas (Pili y Mili)
Naturalization	

Blathers – Sócrates

Now, the owner of the local museum, called Blathers (table 2.2.). Blathers is the owl director of the museum, supervising all the exhibitions that it offers – i.e., art, fossils, bugs, and fish. He is known as a very talkative character, as he will give the user a detailed description of every donation that s/he makes to the collection. Along with his sister, called Celeste (*Estela* in Spanish), they take charge of the local museum of the city, apart from other tasks as making constellations and stargazing.

In the English version, he is called Blathers as a reference to the verb “(to) blather [on]”, meaning to talk a blue streak. This is used as a clear reference to his loquacious and conversational personality, which adds meaning to the character itself. In the Spanish version, the character is called *Sócrates* (“Socrates”), which is a clear reference to the Greek philosopher founder of Western philosophy. Maintaining the reference to personality from the English version, the translation team opted in this case to focus on his wisdom and knowledge. This can be considered as a case of creative translation, as the translator seemed to opt for creating an original, innovative name that has no direct correlation to the original.

Table 2.2. Blathers


	
Blathers	Sócrates
Creative translation	

Tom Nook – Tom Nook

Tom Nook (table 2.3.) is one of the main characters in the franchise. A businessperson/raccoon, he runs a different shop in each game, sometimes with the help of his two apprentices, Timmy and Tommy (“the Nooklings”). He is the character that sells the player a house, giving his/her a loan to pay and offering expansions after each payment. He is considered a money-driven character who dreams of fame and glory.

For Tom Nook, the use of repetition was used: the same spelling was used, as the name “Tom” is easily identifiable in both languages and versions. The name comes from the word *tanuki* in Japanese – referring to a dog-raccoon character in Japanese mythology –, and *-kichi*, meaning “stingy”. This is also reflected in both Spanish and English, as the pun is maintained through the musicality of the name – Tom Nook can be seen as another spelling of “tanuki”.

Table 2.3. Tom Nook


	
Tom Nook	Tom Nook
Repetition	

Saharah – Alcatifa

Saharah (table 2.4.) is a street vendor camel who sells carpets, wall papers, and floor coating. She has a different service in each game of the franchise. As Sánchez (2021) mentions, it seems that in the two versions (English and Spanish) it is a foreign character, as she commits grammatical mistakes often. And, as an interesting fact, it is considered male in the Japanese version, while in the localized versions the character is female (ibid.).

In the English version, the character was called *Saharah* as a clear reference to the famous desert to create a correlation to her personality and origins, as she comes from the Middle East. The termination -ah was used as a means to determine that it is a feminine name. In Spanish, the name *Alcatifa* is a word that went out of use a while ago, referring to “rug or thin carpet”. It contributes to the name in two ways – (1) reflects her personality and job as a street vendor, and (2) the beginning *al-* is of Arabic origin, which portrays, again, her origins. Regarding localization and translation, a creative translation was followed – although the point of view is similar (origins and gender nature), the word in the TL has been originally created to maintain the humor that characterized the game.

Table 2.4. Saharah

	
Saharah	Alcatifa
Creative translation	

4.1.2. Neighbors

Baabara – Beelén

To start with the villagers in the game, we have Baabara (table 2.5.). She is a haughty sheep character who has appeared in all games to date. Her catchphrase is, in fact, “daahling”, which is

the same technique used for her name. She has the fashion hobby and is considered a haughty character – her main discussion topics are makeup and gossiping.

In the case of English, the name is a mixture of the onomatopoeia of a sheep (“baa”) and the proper name “Barbara” – that is where “Baarbara” comes from. In Spanish, it is a mixture of the onomatopoeia (*bee*) and the proper name *Belén* – that is where the name *Beelén* comes from. The adaptation of this name is really important from a transcreative side, as onomatopoeia differ from one country and language to another. The replication of the name in the source language would not have been possible, as the onomatopoeia in Spanish is slightly different. The technique used for this character is linguistic translation, where the original (Baabara) has been replaced by a similar name in the TL (Beelén) to transmit the same meaning to that of the original.

Table 2.5. Baabara

	
Baabara	Beelén
Linguistic Translation	


Bob – Arándano

Bob (table 2.6.) is one of the most extravagant neighbors in *Animal Crossing: Wild World*. He has appeared in all games to date and, as an interesting fact, he was speculated to be the character that was created first for the game, so that is why he was born on January 1st. He is considered a lazy character with a play hobby and the catchphrase “pthhpth”, probably referring to the sound a cat does when coughing a hairball.

In the English version, the team decided to opt for a rather real, conventional name with a meaning alluding his physical appearance: he was named Bob as a reference to the expression *bobcat*, which is a feline typical in North America. In Spanish, he is called *Arándano* (blueberry), as a clear allusion to the character’s purple appearance. This constitutes a case of creative

translation as well: although there is a similarity in point of view (appearance), the names have no correlation and the name in the TL adds a completely new meaning from that in the original.

Table 2.6. Bob


	
Bob	Arándano
Creative translation	

Alfonso – Kaimán

Alfonso (table 2.7.) is a lazy alligator villager who has appeared in all games to date. His characteristic catchphrase, *it'sa me*, is a clear reference to the Mario Bros character *Mario*, which is also reflected in the election of his game in English, which we will explain better later. He is a relaxed, laid-back, and friendly character whose interests are food, rest, and humor.

In the English version, he has a rather generic, real name, “Alfonso”. This is probably a reference to both English and Italian: the first language, because his name starts with al-, which can be considered an allusion to the word “alligator”; and the second language, as it is a typical name in Italian, which can be an allusion to the Mario Bros feature mentioned before. In Spanish, it was localized to *Kaimán*, adding an original approach to the name in the other version. *Kaimán* is the Spanish name for the word “cayman”, but with the adaptation of the “k” instead of the “c”, as to create a portrayal of a real name as in the English version. For this name, the localizers took a creative approach, as they removed the meaning of real name in English in pursuit of a reference to his physical appearance in Spanish.

Table 2.7. Alfonso


	
Alfonso	Kaimán
Creative translation	

Octavian - Octavio

Octavian (table 2.8.) is an octopus character who has appeared in all dates to game. With a rather touchy personality and a general bad temper, he is the type of character that the user may have difficulties to have a good relationship with. Although reserved because of his old age, his has several hobbies, as participating in the town's competitions and spreading rumors about other neighbors.

In the English name, the prefix Oct- in the name alludes to two aspects: (1) as in the number eight; and (2) as in the word “octopus”, as this character is. In Spanish, only the reference to the number eight is maintained, as the word completely differs to the one in English (“octopus” is *pulpo* in Spanish). However, a new meaning is added: *Octavio* is a real, transparent name in Spanish used for men. The technique used in this case is terminological adaptation: the name from English has been adapted to the spelling in Spanish to make it more familiar to the TC.

Table 2.8. Octavian

	
Octavian	Octavio
Terminological adaptation	

4.2. *Gameplay and setting*

Collectibles, and more specifically, furniture, play a particularly significant role in the game. It adds to the playabilities of the game by expanding the possibilities – e.g., by helping the user decorate the house, by selling them and getting bells, or by exchanging them with the neighbors. There are different series of furniture, several types of plants and famous real-life paintings reproduced in the game. The player can even make an exhibition in his/her own home by displaying the bugs, fish, or fossils that s/he has captured or found.

However, the interest in localization for the furniture is the gyroids. Gyroids are in Japan referred to as *Haniwa*, which are grave figures used as protection in the houses of the Japanese (Engelke, 2020). In *AC:WW*, gyroids are special furniture that the user can find digging up after rainy or snowy days (ibid.). There are 127 distinct species of gyroids, and they are characterized by their unique movements and specific sounds that are usually linked to their names (ibid.).

For their translation, as there is no such concept as “gyroids” neither in English nor in Spanish, it was made in the first language according to its most relevant feature: the name actually comes from the word “gyrate”, meaning “to spin”. In Spanish, a literal translation of the name was made, as there is a similar word for the concept “to spin” (*girar*) – hence, *giroides* (“the spinners”).

In order to depict the differences between the English and Spanish versions, we have followed the same method as in the previous section – four transcreative examples followed by the translation technique. In this section, all elements happen to be following the creative translation, as for the phenomenon with gyroids is that they do not exist in either of the cultures or languages. For that reason, the translation and localization team had to resort to creativity to create a new situation in both cultures.

To achieve the abovementioned objective, an adaptation of the table used by Rodríguez (2021) has been made (Table 3). We are going to explain the meaning in English and then, the translation in Spanish to see where the transcreation component lies. The translation technique will not be included in the table, as we have previously mentioned that all cases happen to be creatively translated. All references in English were consulted in the *Nookipedia* (n.d.), and in *Animal Crossing Enciclopedia* (n.d.). for Spanish.

Table 3. Model of analysis for gyroids

Picture of the gyroid	
Name of the gyroid in English	Name of the gyroid in Spanish
Typical sound from the gyroid	


Source: adaptation from the model in Rodríguez (2021)

Mega Percoloid – Megacafetoide

The first gyroid to be analyzed is the Mega Percoloid (table 3.1.), part of the Percoloid family (Tall Percoloid and Mega Percoloid). As can be seen in the picture, they have a brownish appearance, similar to coffee or wood. Their sound resembles a hit in a hollow tree trunk.

As said before, the translation technique is creative translation, as there is no reference in either language for what gyroids are, which leads to the use of creativity. In English, the Mega Percoloid is a mixture from the word “to percolate” – to brew coffee in a percolator –, and the suffix -oid – having the form or appearance of. In Spanish, it is also a mixture between the word *café* – meaning *coffee* –, and the ending -oide – meaning the same as -oid in English.

Table 3.1. Mega Percoloid

	
Mega Percoloid	Megacafetoide
Sharp knock on a tree trunk	


Tall Bovoid – Gran becerroide

The Tall Bovoid (table 3.2.) belongs to the Bovoid family, composed of the Tall Bovoid and the Mega Bovoid. Their appearance is mostly greenish and white, with the interesting feature of the hat, resembling a Chinese hat. They sound like a cow mooing in both versions.

The translation technique used is, as mentioned before, creative translation to depict an unreal phenomenon. In English, the word is composed of the word “bovine” – referring to or

resembling a cow –, and -oid, as we have previously seen. In Spanish, it is made of the word *becerro* – meaning the offspring of a cow –, and -*oide*, as seen before.

Table 3.2. Tall Bovoid


	
Tall Bovoid	Gran becerroide
Cow-like mooing	

Tall Droploid – Gran flipoide

The Tall Droploid (table 3.3.) belongs to the Droploid family, with only one component (itself). They appear as purple and tall gyroids with an antenna at the top of its head and the eyes as plus signs. They sound like raindrops (“plop, plop, plop”).

The translation technique is once again creative translation. In English, the name is a composition of the word “drop” – as to the small portions of liquid that falls when it is raining –, and the suffix -oid. In Spanish, the meaning is completely changed, and the name turns out to be opaque – it is a mixture of the word *flipar* (“to be shocked”, “to be amazed”) and the suffix -*oide*. The reference in this version would be to its appearance, as it looks appalled and stunned.

Table 3.3. Tall Droploid


	
Tall Droploid	Gran flipoide
Like raindrops (“plop, plop, plop”)	

Warbloid – Gorgojoide

The Warbloid (table 3.4.) belong to the family with the same name, including three members – the Warbloid, the Tall Warbloid, and the Mini Warbloid. As can be seen in the picture, they have a pinkish appearance, with a kind of cloudy head and the little, round, and reddish cheeks. They sound like a woman gargling water in a lighter way than other family of gyroids, the Gargloids.

The technique used in this last gyroid is creative translation, as in the previous ones. In English, the name is composed by the verb “warble” – meaning to emit wavering sounds –, and the suffix -oid. In Spanish, the word is made of *gorgojear* – that is, to emit sounds from the throat –, and the suffix -oide.

Table 3.4. Warbloid

	
Warbloid	Gorgojoide
Woman gargling water	

4.3. Narrative time

Narrative time in *Animal Crossing: Wild World* is reflected through the synchrony with real time – when it is summer outside, it is summer in the game; when Christmas arrives, the user can find the Christmas tree in the town hall and the houses of the neighbors decorated with Christmas lights. The interesting part about this synchrony is that, depending on the month of the year, the player can enjoy different festivities and holidays with the purpose of extending the playabilities and possibilities for the user. They can be based on real-world holidays and be hosted by special characters or be neutral and uniquely created for the game (*Nookipedia*, n.d.).

In the years of development in the franchise, the localization approach for events has gradually evolved. For the first games, there were relatively few events that were mainly created

in order to maintain a neutral stance to favor localization, as festivities differ from one country to another (ibid.). However, from the last instalment, *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, region-specific events were removed to make the game understood, adapting the ones finally used with more universal names – e.g., Bunny Day for Easter, or Toy Day as Christmas (ibid.).

As said before, the events in *Animal Crossing: Wild World* did not replicate events in real life, as it was designed to be culturally neutral to favor localization (*Animal Crossing Enciclopedia*, n.d.). Nevertheless, the creators did decide to maintain festivities from previous games, like the fish tournament (ibid.). To analyze the creativity in translation, an adaptation of the previous tables has been made, as seen in Table 4. Again, four examples of the transcreation approach have been used, along with the translation techniques used by the translation team. The references in English are taken from the *Nookipedia* (n.d.) for English and *Animal Crossing Enciclopedia* (n.d.) for Spanish.

Table 4. Model of analysis for events

Picture of the festivity	
Name in English	Name in Spanish
Time of the year	
Translation technique	


Bright Nights – Noches con Chispa

The first event to analyze in *Animal Crossing: Wild World* is Bright Nights (table 4.1.), a competition where the neighbors compete for the best decorated house in town. The player is the judge who decides the winner through a thorough analysis of each house – the best-decorated house will be announced to the mayor, Tortimer, and then he will declare the Bright Star, i.e., the winner of the competition.

In English, the name was created according to the theme of the competition, which is to compete for the best lighting in the houses. However, the localizers in the Spanish version decided to take on a different approach and renamed it as *Noches con Chispa* (“sparkling nights”), which can be seen in two different lights: (1) as a reference to the lighting competition, and (2) the expression in Spanish *tener chispa* (“to have spark”) refers to an element that is gracious, lively or ingenious. In this case, we find a case of linguistic translation: the name was adapted almost word

for word to convey the semantic meaning of the original, although with a new added meaning in Spanish.

Table 4.1. Bright Nights


	
Bright Nights	Noches con Chispa
Second Monday of February – following Sunday	
Linguistic translation	

Yay Day – Día Guay

Yay Day (table 4.2.) is quite a particular festivity in the game: during the fourth Sunday of January, March, May, July, September and November, the player and the neighbors have the only goal to complement each other. Along the day, the neighbor will complement the user, and then ask him/her back for another compliment, increasing their level of friendship (which can give the user, in fact, several advantages in the game). If they like the compliment, they will be happy; however, if they do not like it, they will ask you for a new, more elaborate compliment.

In English, the name of the event is made after “yay”, an interjection that indicates joy and enthusiasm. In Spanish there is no such interjection to express happiness, but the localizers opted to use the adjective *guay* (“cool”), used to refer to something great and wonderful. Therefore, this is a case of change in the grammatical category – we go from an interjection expressing joy, to an adjective expressing coolness. Yay Day is translated into Spanish through terminological adaptation: the name is translated in a way that the target audience can recognize it in the TL.

Table 4.2. Yay Day

	
Yay Day	Día Guay
Fourth Sunday of January, March, May, July, September, and November	
Terminological adaptation	

Countdown – Día de Año Nuevo

The localization of this festivity in the game is one of the most curious and particular ones. The Countdown event (table 4.3.) is the celebration of the new year, and it is followed by New Year's Day, on January 1st, as in real life. As can be seen in the picture, the countdown is shown in the city hall to start the new year, with an exhibition of fireworks at midnight.

The curious aspect in this case is that in English it is named “Countdown” for obvious reasons – the countdown from the end of one year to the beginning of another. However, in Spanish, the same event is called *Día de Año Nuevo* (“New Year’s Day”), which can be considered as the complete opposite of the version in English: in English, the countdown (end of the year) is the main reason to celebrate, hence its name. Nevertheless, in Spanish it is the beginning of the year that is being acknowledged. For this event, terminological adaptation is used: an equivalent, official concept in the TL is used to reflect the phenomenon in the culture.

Table 4.3. Countdown

	
Countdown	Día de Año Nuevo
December 31 st from 11PM to 1AM	
Terminological adaptation	

Bug-off – Caza de Bichos

For the last event, the Bug-off (table 4.4.). It consists of a bug catching competition during summer, where the character with the highest score wins. In order to win, the character has to give the mayor, Tortimer, the bugs that they catch, and the biggest one wins. The winner receives a gold trophy through the mail from the city hall. It is the counterpart of the Fishing Tourney – as the name suggests, it is a fishing tournament where the winner also receives a prize.

In English, the name of the tournament is composed by the word “bug” for evident reasons, and the suffix -off, which combined with a noun refers to a competition or contest. Nonetheless, the situation for this event is similar to Yay Day, where there is no suffix to express competition or tournament. That is why the localizers decided to use *Caza de bichos* (“bug hunting”). It loses the meaning of “tournament”, but properly reflects the main objective of the contest, which is to hunt bugs. The technique used in this event is linguistic translation, as the name in the TL is changed to a semantically similar one in the language.

Table 4.4. Bug-off

	
Bug-off	Caza de Bichos
Fourth Sunday of January, March, May, July, September, and November	
Linguistic translation	

4.4. Narrative structure

The narrative structure in *Animal Crossing: Wild World* is one of its most relevant features, as it is the means of conveying the essential information to achieve different goals and extend the playabilities, as explained before. As González de Benito (2017) explains, the dialogues in the game are mainly done through a colloquial register, with the primary use of “colloquialisms, idioms, puns and jokes” (p. 40). For that reason, the author (ibid.) considers that transcreation is the main technique used for this section of the game, as “[...] the translator is free to reformulate the text, even deleting or adding words, for the sake of creating culturally adapted dialogues that preserve the comedy value of the source game” (p. 40).

The most characteristic and well-known feature in the narrative structure for this game is the transcreative approach the localizers took when the user catches a bug or a fish by means of using a wordplay in English and a rhyme in Spanish. This changed the whole dynamic of the game in each language, but always maintaining the meaning and humor that makes *Animal Crossing: Wild World* distinctive. As Rodríguez (2021) explains, wordplay is a resource aimed at entertaining the user, and they can be based on several features as pronunciation or vocabulary. In the case of the translator, there are several techniques to transfer wordplay into the target language, e.g.,

translate the wordplay into another wordplay, into a similar rhetorical device or just omitting it (ibid.).

In the case of *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, which is the object of study in Rodríguez (ibid.), the translation of wordplay in English is representatively reflected into rhyming in Spanish both for bugs and fishes. If we dug deeper, we would find that the rhyming in Spanish is mostly consonant – that is, “phonemes coincide from the last stressed vowel onwards” (ibid, p. 14, own translation). However, in the case of *AC:WW*, we can see a difference between bugs and fishes: to translate the wordplay into bugs, another wordplay is used; with fish, a rhyme is usually the case.

In order to depict this phenomenon in both languages, the same adaptation of Rodríguez (2021) used previously has been followed, and four of each of the elements have been selected as a representation of transcreation in the game (table 5). Although the translation technique in all wordplay cases is creative translation, the translation of the animals’ names will be also considered into the analysis on translation. All references in English were consulted in the *Nookipedia* (n.d.), and in *Animal Crossing Enciclopedia* (n.d.) for Spanish.

Table 5. Model of analysis for bugs and fish names

Picture of the bug/fish	
Name of the animal in English	Name of the animal in Spanish
Sentence in English	Sentence in Spanish
Translation technique	

Source: adaptation from the model in Rodríguez (2021)


4.4.1. Bugs

Fly – Mosca

First up, the fly (table 5.1.). As said before, all elements included in this In the English version, it is referred to with a wordplay according to the typical sound that a fly does. The expression “buzz off” has a double meaning in this case – (1) as to go away, (2) as a reference to the buzzing of a fly. In the Spanish version, the wordplay is maintained but referring to its appearance; more particularly, the number of eyes a fly has. The sentence in Spanish means that, even with many eyes, the fly has not been able to see the user catching it.

The wordplay, as said before, is considered a case of creative translation: as there is no equivalent or similar concept to “buzz off” in English, the team in Spanish had to make a sentence from scratch that maintained the same humor that in the original. Regarding the name of the animal, terminological adaptation is used: as González de Benito (2017) explains, in these cases there is a familiar nomenclature in the target culture that helps the user get immersed in the game.

Table 5.1. Fly


	
Fly	Mosca
I caught a fly... Buzz off!	¡Tantos ojos y no me ha visto las intenciones!
Creative translation + terminological adaptation	

Grasshopper– Saltamontes

Then, the grasshopper (table 5.2.). In English, there is no wordplay to refer to the bug – the sentence just refers to the fact that they appear only on holidays (July to September). The main humorous input comes from the fact that, even in summer, they do not seem to stop working. However, in Spanish there is a wordplay that strictly refers to its name (literally translated as “the mountain-jumper”): what the sentence states is that it must jump a lot, but not as much as mountains.

Regarding the translation side, we have a similar case to the previous one: the wordplay is a case of creative translation, where the Spanish version opted to add a humor touch through a wordplay with the name of the grasshopper in the language. The name itself is a case of terminological adaptation, as there is a established, equivalent concept in the language that can be easily recognized in the TL.

Table 5.2. Grasshopper


	
Grasshopper	Saltamontes
I caught a grasshopper! No vacationing for these guys, even in the summer!	Hombre, salta mucho, pero tanto como montes...
Creative translation + terminological adaptation	

Firefly – Luciérnaga

For the firefly (table 5.3.), there is no wordplay in English – the sentence just refers to the fact that the light that the firefly emanates is very calming. However, there is a different approach in Spanish, which uses a wordplay related to the light of the bug as well. In this case, the user wonders when he catches it where the batteries are put, as if it were a kind of machine or lamp.

This is a wordplay translated through a creative perspective: there could have been a direct equivalence in both languages, as it did not involve exactly a wordplay but rather a phenomenon, but the translators in Spanish decided to use humor to add an innovative meaning. In the case of the name, terminological adaptation was used to allude to the same, established concept in the TL.

Table 5.3. Firefly


	
Firefly	Luciérnaga
I caught a firefly! The gentle light... It relaxes me...	¿Dónde irán las pilas?
Creative translation + terminological adaptation	

Saw stag beetle – Escarabajo alce

In the case of the saw stag beetle (table 5.4.), we find in English a wordplay that is probably related to two dimensions through the word “mandibles”: (1) the word “saw”, as referring to the serrated blades in the tool to cut wood, or (2) the word “stag”, referring to the appearance of the animal. In the Spanish version, the translators went a step further and decided to opt for a meaning relating to the appearance of the bug itself, more particularly, to its horns. Horns can be seen in Spanish in two different lights: (1) as the hard and pointed outgrowth in some animals, and (2) as an equivalent of the expression of surprise “damn!” – the combination of both meaning is where the wordplay lies.

About the translation, we have two cases of creative translation. In the first case, the translation team could have opted for a literal, faithful translation and the equivalence would still keep its meaning. However, they decided to go for the humorous route, adding a completely new meaning to the bug. In the second case, the name itself, there is no exact nomenclature between the two versions, so the translation made in this case was completely free and not based on real life.

Table 5.4. Saw stag beetle

	
Saw stag beetle	Escarabajo alce
Yes! I caught a saw stag beetle! Look at those mandibles!	¡Cuernos! ¡Se ve bien de dónde le viene el nombre!
Creative translation + creative translation	


4.4.2. Fish

Bluegill – Pez sol

The first fish in the list is the bluegill (table 6.5.) – in both languages, a wordplay based on their name is used. In English, the reference is made upon the “blue” part of the name – it alludes to the expression “to feel blue”, which means to be sad. That is why the sentence “Why is this little guy so sad?” is used. In Spanish, the name of the fish is *pez sol* (“sunfish”), so the localizers used a different wordplay: the user, when s/he catches a bluegill in the Spanish version, wonders whether the *pez sol* (“sunfish”) is going to turn into a *pez luna* (“moonfish”) or *pez lobo* (“wolf fish”).

In the case of the wordplay, it happens to be a creative translation – although focused on different meaning of the same part of the name (“blue” and *sol*), the wordplay could not have been transferred because of these meaning differences. For that reason, the translators had to use creativity to maintain the humor but conveying a completely new meaning. In the case of the name of the fish, as it is an animal existing in real life and with a corresponding equivalent in the TC, a terminological adaptation was used.

Table 6.5. Bluegill

	
Bluegill	Pez sol
"I caught a bluegill! Why is this little guy so sad?"	¡He pescado un pez sol! ¿Se convertirá en Pez Luna por la noche? ¿En Pez Lobo?
Creative translation + terminological adaptation	


Dace – Leucisco

For the dace (table 6.7.), a wordplay is used in the English version through a typical expression – that is, “ace in the hole”, used when a person has an advantage towards the opponent. In this case, “ace” in the expression is used as the fish in question, “dace”, probably giving a hint

that the user has an advantage because s/he just captured a dace. In Spanish, a rhyme is used to convey the humorous side in English – the word *leucisco* (dace) is rhymed with the proper name *Francisco* in Spanish. The sentence means that what a particular name for a fish *leucisco* is: it would be better to use a proper name, *Francisco*.

For the translation, a similar approach as the previous one has been followed: for the wordplay, creative translation had to be used, as the equivalent saying in Spanish lost meaning because of the difference in the name of the fish. For that reason, Spanish translators resorted to rhyming with the name to try to maintain the same humor as in the original. In the case of the name of the fish, it has a corresponding equivalence in the TC, so terminological adaptation was the best technique to use.

Table 6.7. Dace

	
Dace	Leucisco
"I caught a dace! Dace in the hole!"	¡He pescado un leucisco! ¡Vaya nombre! ¡Era mejor Francisco!
Creative translation + terminological adaptation	


Carp – Carpa

This is one of the most interesting combinations in the game: the carp (table 6.8.). In English, a famous saying has been used as wordplay: *carpe diem* (“seize the day”). As *carpe* in the expression is remarkably similar to the name of the fish, “carp”, a change has been made to maintain the humor: *carpe carp* (“seize the carp”). In Spanish, the focus was on the meaning of the word in the language, *carpa* (polysemic word also meaning “circus tent”). The literal translation would be “I’ve caught a carp (circus tent)! I can now set up a circus!”.

In the translation dimension, the same techniques as in the previous ones have been followed. Although the saying can be transferred into Spanish perfectly (e.g., stating something similar as *carpa diem*) and it would have been completely understood, the translators seemed to prefer focusing on the polysemic nature of the word in Spanish and go for a more humorous side

of the wordplay. For the name of the fish, a terminological adaptation following the equivalent in the TC was used.

Table 6.8. Carp


	
Carp	Carpa
"I caught a carp! Carpe carp!"	¡He pescado una carpa! ¡Ya puedo montar un circo!
Creative translation + terminological adaptation	

Bitterling -- Amarguillo

For the bitterling (table 6.6.), a wordplay is done in both languages but from a different perspective. In English, the focus is on the “bitter” part of the word, as in the opposite of sweet – that is why it states that, although being so small, it happens to be very bitter. In the Spanish version, there are two wordplays included: in the *amarg-* part of the word, it is a similar concept to “bitter”, but it can also mean “[to] ruin something”. For that reason, the player stated that he has ruined (*amargar*) the day of the bitterling (*amarguillo*).

This is a unique case of creative translation on both ends. For the wordplay, although focused on the same part of the word in both languages, the Spanish version adds a creative meaning to the word by comparing it with a similar word in the language. For the name of the fish, as there is no correspondence nor equivalent in the real world, the translators had to make an almost literal, but creative translation to convey the same meaning of bitter.

Table 6.6. Bitterling

	
Bitterling	Amarguillo
I caught a bitterling! So small, so very bitter!	¡He pescado un amarguillo! Y encima voy yo y le amargo el día...
Creative translation + creative translation	

5. Conclusions

As a summary, this research has been focused on the use of transcreation in the localization of the video game *Animal Crossing: Wild World*. The main objective has been to correlate the localization of this specific video game to the transcreative approach that characterizes this franchise through the analysis of its elements and a comparison between the English and Spanish versions. A thorough study of the different translation techniques has been included as well to reflect the various approaches the localization team has relied on to try and adapt the meaning in different languages and cultures.

The analysis of the transcreative approach in the game *Animal Crossing: Wild World* has been functional to determine the elements that have been localized following a creative, free perspective. This procedure has led to label the Spanish version of the game as an icon in the video game industry, as it is one of the best-selling games in a yet-to-be-developed domain for the period. The calming, simple and easy gameplay has made this particular game and the whole franchise an instalment for reference in the social-life simulation video games.

For the purpose of analyzing transcreation from the English version to the Spanish localization, the study has been divided into two parts: (1) a multidimensional ludic-narrative approach – i.e., considering all aspects in the game (characters, gameplay, narrative time, and narrative space) –, and (2) and an approach on techniques used in the translation industry. The most representative elements have been studied to show that the localizers in Spanish decided to convey the meaning from English in a rather free, more humorous way. In this regard, we have seen that they have used several techniques, e.g., the adaptation of names to the target language, the reinvention of the name to express a similar meaning or adding innovative information.

Thanks to this thorough examination of the localization approach in the video game, we can conclude that creative translation is the preferred choice for the localizers in this particular game and in the whole franchise. It not only helps maintain the humorous and entertaining side of the original, but also gives the freedom for the localizers to create ingenuous and inventive paths for the next generations to follow. Moreover, it contributes to keeping the past games alive, and to providing more feedback and ideas to the already-created games and the next-to-be ones.

This study provides a new insight into this saga of games. There are many analyses focused on the translation techniques, the characters, or the wordplay in the franchise (especially the ones centered around the last game, *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*). Nonetheless, we tried to explore all avenues of enquiry by correlating several elements thanks to the methodologies that we followed. Consequently, we were able to (1) analyze the translation side of the game following the translation techniques in González de Benito's (2017) methodology; and (2) analyze the localization side of the game following the multidimensional ludic-narrative approach in Paredes-Otero (2021). This has helped give several perspectives on the localization process and choices of the localizers to have a broader perspective.

However, there is still a lot to investigate in these domains. For localization, there are still many video games that can be the object of study for several reasons – be it the approach, be it the process, or the impact of localization in two different versions. In the study of localization techniques, we have also a long way to go – even though the main techniques are considered to be foreignization, domestication and transcreation, the development of the domain has certainly created many other translation techniques that are being applied now or that can be applied in the future.

We, as scholars in the domain, believe that the future for video game localization is bright. More games are developing, the processes are being optimized, and the interest from the public grows more each year. The studies that can come from this prospective are endless: from the viability of the simship technique, to the improvement of the testing part to avoid bugs, or the evolution and growth of the innovative "deep" or "enhanced" localization perspective. In a few years, what we know today as video games may have varied enormously from our vision today. And if it is for the best, we will welcome it with open arms.

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