

# Video game localisation: adapting superheroes to different cultures\*

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## Abstract

This article addresses the main translation strategies for the localisation of superhero video games into a different culture. This specific genre relies on narrative-driven plots, as the games are based on original scripts from comic books. The adaptation of superhero games therefore presents a series of additional challenges, since the so-called ‘transcreation’ is sometimes restricted by the need to consider editorial policies and user expectations when re-creating comic-based universes. Hence transcreation is confronted with the need to be faithful to the original source inspiring the title. Besides assessing the balance between loyalty to the comic books and the freedom allowed in game localisation, this paper also approaches the translation of humour and the difficulty of adapting puns and jokes into different languages, which can seriously challenge translators’ skills and creativity. In order to shed some light on these issues, this paper presents the results of a case study of the localisation into Spanish of one of the most acclaimed superhero games: *Batman Arkham Asylum*.

**Keywords:** Video game localisation; transcreation; comics; humour; audiovisual translation.

## Resum. Localització de videojocs. Adaptar els superherois a d’altres cultures

Aquest article tracta de les estratègies de traducció principals a l’hora de localitzar videojocs de superherois. Com que el gènere parteix dels guions dels còmics, l’argument d’aquests jocs es basa en una història; per tant, recrear mons basats en còmics presenta una sèrie de reptes afegits, perquè de vegades cal tenir en compte les limitacions que imposen les polítiques editorials i les expectatives dels usuaris; és a dir, la necessitat de ser fidel al còmic original. A més d’avaluar l’equilibri entre la fidelitat al còmic i la llibertat pròpia de la localització de jocs, l’article també aborda la traducció de l’humor i la dificultat d’adaptar jocs de paraules i acudits, tot un repte per a les habilitats i la creativitat del traductor. Per il·lustrar aquesta exposició, l’article detalla els resultats d’un estudi de la localització al castellà d’un dels jocs de superherois més lloats: *Batman Arkham Asylum*.

**Paraules clau:** localització de videojocs; transcreació; còmics; humor; traducció audiovisual.

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## Summary

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|--|--------------------------|
| 1. Introduction  | 5. Conclusions           |
| 2. Video games localisation:<br>where are we now?                  | Bibliographic references |
| 3. New challenges for translation:<br>multimodality in video games | Audiovisual resources    |
| 4. The adaptation of superheroes:<br><i>Batman Arkham Asylum</i>   |                          |

### 1. Introduction

The adaptation of multimedia products has opened up new horizons so far as translation is concerned due to the extraordinary technological evolution of recent years. Video games provide scholars with a particularly relevant source for analysis, as this form of entertainment has experienced a remarkable pace of development propelled by technological progress. In addition, the introduction into video games of more complex narrative techniques has allowed for the creation of more compelling and thought-provoking plots.

Besides the manifold tasks covered in any localisation project, in the case of video games, localisers may also be required to deal with compelling storylines, complex characters and multimodal environments that need to be successfully adapted in order to maintain the game experience for the target audience. The multimodality and complexity of current titles creates a challenging arena not only for localisers and translators but also for academia, as video games can be analysed and approached from different angles and disciplines. From the point of view of Translation Studies, one of the main research lines involves the way in which the essence of games can be transferred and preserved across cultures and how a particular effect in the target culture can be achieved by means of adapting the textual and non-verbal elements to the destination audience. As video games incorporate an increasing number and range of components (audio effects, voices, subtitles, cut-scenes, achievements, online features, etc.), adapting a title into a different locale is not a straightforward process. Due to the interdisciplinarity of this area of study, research has to be conducted not only into the technical side of localisation but must also focus on the possible strategies to be followed when adapting games, meanwhile considering all the cultural elements that surround multimedia products.

When dealing with story-based titles such as superhero video games (e.g. *Spiderman* or *X-Men*) or films (e.g. *The Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter*), translators need not only to select the best strategy to transfer the *look and feel* into the target culture, but they also have to take into account the original source (i.e. the story which inspired the title). Therefore, a tension can be observed between the aim of *adapting* the title to suit the preferences of a particular audience and *preserving* the essence of the original story, considering all the interrelated sources or universes to

which it may refer (in the case of superhero games, there is a huge industry based not only on the comic books but also on films, cartoons and merchandising).

This article is structured as follows: section two briefly presents the current state of game localisation and discusses one of the main theoretical contributions of video games translation research — the concept of transcreation. Section three focuses on the relevance of multimodality and multidimensionality to the development of more creative story lines. Section 4 presents a case study of the game *Batman Arkham Asylum*, commenting on the adaptation of the title into Spanish, the translation of humour and the need for balance between transcreation and loyalty when selecting translation strategies. Finally, section 5 includes the main conclusions of the paper.

## 2. Video games localisation: where are we now?

The progress of video games development has been such that a whole industry devoted to this area has been established in recent decades. The game industry is an important force within the wider entertainment market and is already beginning to rival the film industry as far as total revenues are concerned: according to the Entertainment Software Association (ESA), in 2010 consumers spent \$ 25.1 billion on video games, hardware and accessories, and 72% of American households play video games on a regular basis.\* The ESA's European counterpart, the Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE), also provides striking figures in its 2010 report: in 2009 sales of video games in Europe reached € 8 billion, with more than 95.2 million players in the 18 European countries covered by the survey.\*\* These figures may serve to highlight the global importance of the video games market and to underline the relevance of adapting these products into different cultures in order to allow players to enjoy the games in their own language.

The facts and figures of the game industry might also support the idea that video games should be investigated by academia; more importantly, the impact of video games on modern society also emphasises the need to study them from a scientific point of view, as many of today's parents and teachers have grown up playing video games and could be regarded as comprising the *Super Mario Bros generation*. However, even though digital entertainment is nowadays a widespread phenomenon, this field has been largely ignored by scholars, since video games «are easily and readily denigrated as trivial» (Newman 2004: 5). The analysis of this area of study from an academic and scientific point of view is still in an initial stage and many of the research avenues within the field have not thus far been sufficiently explored.

The adaptation of video games into different cultures has been addressed by several researchers who have analysed this process in detail: papers have been devoted to the study of the management process and different elements of locali-

\* Source: <http://www.theesa.com/facts>. Accessed April 7<sup>th</sup> 2013.

\*\* This report can be downloaded from the official website of the ISFE: <http://www.isfe-eu.org>. Accessed April 7<sup>th</sup> 2013.

sation workflows (Chandler 2005; Chandler and Deming 2011), the main challenges and components of video game localisation (Bernal 2007; Dietz 2006; Mangiron 2007), the connection between games and literature (Bernal 2009), players' experience and perception of localised games (O'Hagan 2009b), the multidimensional nature of video games (O'Hagan 2009a) and the place of video games localisation within the wider scope of Translation Studies (O'Hagan 2007).

Besides the work devoted to analysing localisation theory and practice, research has also been conducted into related areas such as romhacking (Muñoz Sánchez 2008), amateur video game translation (Díaz Montón 2011), game accessibility (Mangiron 2011), the translation of humour in video games (Fernández Costales 2011; Mangiron 2010), teaching video game localisation as part of audiovisual translation courses (Granell 2011; Vela 2011), subtitles in and translation strategies in the adaptation of video games (Di Marco 2007; Fernández Costales 2012).

For the scope of this paper, one of the most relevant contributions to video game localisation lies in the study of translators' flexibility or freedom to adapt titles into a different culture. In order to meet the objective of preserving the look and feel of a game for the target audience, Mangiron and O'Hagan (2006) rely on the concept of *transcreation* to define the *carte blanche* or unlimited freedom of the translator when adapting a game to the destination locale. In fact, O'Hagan suggests that «games localisation can involve adjustments that go far beyond the textual components of the verbal message and sometimes requires a completely liberal transformation approach» (O'Hagan 2007).

On the other hand, there are alternative points of view to those expressed in the previous paragraph and some scholars such as Bernal (2006) assert that the so-called fragmentation of Translation Studies does not benefit from the coining of neologisms and new concepts the exact nature of which is not quite clear: if localisation is a process that includes translation as its main engine but that also goes beyond examining technical, legal and marketing issues, it will therefore have a supra-linguistic status and is not as accurate a term as 'translation'. In addition, according to Bernal, the concept of transcreation does not seem to provide new insights to Translation Studies, as creativity and other questions mentioned by Mangiron and O'Hagan are inherent to the translation process itself:

The terms 'game localisation' and transcreation do not seem accurate enough to be used in Translation Studies, since 'localisation' is an industry-used term and includes non linguistic activities, and we do not have a clear definition of 'transcreation'. TS do not seem to gain anything from their acceptance. In my opinion, 'translation' is still the most adequate term to refer to any type of language transfer, but if 'localisation' is to be used it should always be preceded by 'linguistic' or 'cultural' (Bernal 2006).

The question as to whether translation and localisation are the same concept or should be considered as two separate disciplines is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the development of video games

makes them a rather complex object of study due to their multidimensional nature (O'Hagan 2005, 2007); in this sense, this paper relies on a wide and multimodal vision of translation which is far removed from the traditional concept of word-for-word adaptation and is able to integrate new phenomena and interact with other disciplines. Indeed, not only does translation deal with textual or linguistic elements but it also addresses non-textual, cultural, social and semiotic issues, as is argued by Mayoral in his seminal paper on constrained translation:

We cannot translate the text without understanding how the other communicative elements add to or modify the meaning; and, on the other hand, the non-linguistic elements of the message not only constitute part of the meaning but also, on occasions, impose their own laws and conditions on the text (Mayoral *et al* 1988: 363).

As for the concept of transcreation, the approach of Mangiron and O'Hagan seems to be quite useful for explaining the freedom that translators have to adapt a game into a foreign culture, bearing in mind the goal of preserving its essence (i.e. the look and feel of the game and the game experience) in the target locale. However, as is later discussed in this paper, the development of video games has led to a more complex arena with additional challenges as far as translation is concerned. For narrative-driven games and titles inspired by written sources (books, comics, etc.), translation is somehow *constrained* and the concept of transcreation is to a certain extent limited by the need to fulfil the users' expectations and conform to their previous knowledge of a product or franchise.

### 3. New challenges for translation: multimodality in video games

The basic and rudimentary interface and the plain storyline of the first games (e.g. *Spacewar*, *Pong*, etc.) are worlds away from modern titles, where the label *multimedia* is accurately applied. In fact, we have reached the era of truly multimodal and multidimensional video games (O'Hagan 2005). Today, video games are considered to be pieces of art, since they depict complex stories with well-developed plots and solid narrative techniques that are frequently supported by cut-scenes and/or cinematics. In addition, modern titles rely on sophisticated graphics and original soundtracks, and the voices of the main characters are recorded by professional actors. Indeed, it is standard practice to hire professional artistic designers, copywriters, illustrators, historians, cultural advisors and even film directors who will contribute to creating a seamless product that provides users with the best possible experience.\*

In order to improve users' experience and engagement with the game, characters have become more *alive* and less plain. One of the techniques used to achieve this goal is the addition of using human voices for in-game dialogues to replace

\* This is the case of the developer Virgil Games, which hired Joe Madureira, a well-known comic books writer, to be the creative director of the game *Darksiders*. Similarly, Paul Dini, the writer of Batman animated series, was in charge of writing the plot of *Batman Arkham Asylum*.

on-screen text (Chandler 2005: 186; Mangiron and O'Hagan 2006). The fact that the heroes and villains of the story actually *speak* was a watershed in the creation of compelling and realistic settings. The old technique of using on-screen text to represent the dialogues of the story was common practice in the 1980s and 90s, and even titles with well-developed plots (e.g. graphic adventures such as *The Secret of Monkey Island* (1990) or survival horror games like *Alone in the Dark* (1992) did not include spoken dialogues due to the technological constraints of the time at which they were developed. Nowadays, most games include recorded dialogues to make the stories more realistic, with professional actors dubbing characters such as Altair in *Assassin's Creed* (2006), Marcus Phoenix from *Gears of War* (2007) and Alliance Commander Sephard in *Mass Effect 3* (2012).

Obviously, voices are intimately linked to audiovisual translation since they need to be localised into different languages; the addition of dialogues to video games has resulted in the need to translate them into languages other than English or Japanese, mainly the FIGS languages -French, Italian, German and Spanish- (Bernal 2006). When developing a game, lip-sync techniques are used in order to make the characters display facial expressions that seem to fit with the particular phonemes they are uttering (Chandler 2005: 121).\*

Subtitles are another feature which need to be taken into account (see Mangiron 2012), as most games allow users to turn subtitles on or off at any given point in the story. Intralingual subtitles allow the deaf and hard of hearing to enjoy the complete user experience, while interlingual subtitles cater for those people who do not speak the language of the game (Díaz-Cintas 2003: 200; Gottlieb 1998: 247).

Dialogues and subtitles are to be found throughout the whole game, although they are particularly relevant at certain moments when users are not interacting with the machine because they are watching how the story develops: these are the so-called cut-scenes that can be easily compared to those of animated films such as *Toy Story*, *Monsters Inc.* and *Shrek*. Cinematics, which are «movies inserted within games to provide a back story or to advance the plot in the game» (O'Hagan 2009b), are a fashionable resource used in video games development and are increasingly employed as narrative techniques, bridging the gap between simple games and more sophisticated art forms such as films.

Finally, another aspect which needs to be addressed in the translation and localisation of modern video games is one which has gained momentum in recent years: online gaming. Video games are increasingly focused on online scenarios where players from all over the world collaborate or compete with each other in tournaments, challenges, contests and open or private matches. Despite the fact that the user interface is already translated into the corresponding locale, the adaptation of online content will become increasingly important because players

\* Besides Japanese companies, American and British studios develop most of the games distributed in Europe and North America. Therefore, facial expressions are designed to match English phonemes and modifying cut-scenes would be an expensive task (new sequences should be developed from scratch for each particular locale).

interact with the rest of the world and customization sometimes extends beyond the original elements of the game, with jokes, new maps, mods, customs or weapons created by users or third parties in a given language. In this respect, fan translation is an unexplored field that needs to be addressed by academia in the short term (Díaz-Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez 2006; O'Hagan 2009a).

#### 4. The adaptation of superheroes: *Batman Arkham Asylum*

Video games can be classified into different categories or genres, such as sports, action, arcade or simulation games. There are also more precise and accurate taxonomies that apply to certain titles: first person shooters, hack and slash, graphic adventures and role playing games are just a few examples of the descriptive labels associated with some titles (Bernal 2007; O'Hagan 2005; Scholand 2002). Nevertheless, the complexity of certain games makes it more difficult to include them in one single category, as the classification of video games can be «extremely nebulous» and does not include all the fixities and nuances of certain titles (Newman 2004: 12). Moreover, the evolution of video games and their current multimodality have also contributed to a certain *hybridisation* whereby genres are more difficult to categorize and classify, which has certain implications for translation. Although some regularities or tendencies can be observed in the use of particular translation strategies employed in the adaptation of specific types of games, the hybridisation of many genres does not allow us to conclude that some strategies are more suitable for certain categories than others (Fernández Costales 2012).

The title chosen to exemplify some of the ideas and hypotheses expressed in this paper falls into the category of a hybrid product, as it is a third person action game with some of the components and elements of several other genres. More importantly, it is a game based on the comics of the DC universe: *Batman Arkham Asylum* is a Triple-A game launched in 2009 by Eidos and Warner Bros, and was followed by the sequel *Batman Arkham City*, released in 2011. Superhero games, in common with those titles based on literary works (e.g. *The Witcher*) or films (*Indiana Jones*, *James Bond* or the *Star Wars* universe), are particularly interesting because their translation involves a combination of the freedom of the translator to adapt the content to the target locale and a sense of loyalty and faithfulness towards the original source text (a novel, a film, or a comic book). This is a notable difference to other mainstream games, even when the characters are well-known to a global audience: Mario Bros, for instance, depicts a mainly digital-based universe and essentially includes intra-textual references to other games in the saga but not to written materials as occurs in the case of other meta-textual games such as those based on the legend of the Dark Knight.

In this sense, superhero games become postmodern works portraying a world inside (and connected to) other worlds or universes. In a nutshell, the text is a meta-text or a polysystem. Bernal (2009) supports the idea that good quality writing and storytelling and a well-developed narrative provide the basis for successful video games:

I believe that, despite all the technical improvements and awesome eye-candy, good quality writing plays a great part in the success of many video games because it enhances gameplay and anchors players' immersion with good storytelling that give an extra dimension to the interactivity in the game. Yet, if the product of creative writing is not in the pages of a book but in a game, it seems unnatural and even outrageous to call it literature. The fact is that, from the translation point of view, very similar talents and skills are required to deal with both these products. This is why I defend the study of video games as a legitimate area of study in relation to books (Bernal 2009).

The example of superhero video games resonates with the aforementioned explanation, since these titles need to represent a world that has already been created in the corresponding comic books. These graphic novels address children and young adults who on many occasions have come of age whilst reading them and are now able to actually control their favourite characters with a gamepad. A certain degree of loyalty to the original source must therefore be maintained, at the same time taking into account the editorial policies of the corresponding country (since the translation of the comics into one language may affect the way in which a video game has to be adapted to meet the expectations of its players). The example of the Batman video games includes specific challenges, such as conveying the whole atmosphere of Gotham City and its villains to the Spanish audience. This implies the necessity for an awareness of the existing differences in the original comics, as the names of the main characters may vary across different countries and cultures: the Joker was translated as *el Joker* in the Spanish version of the comics, but the Mexican editorials preferred a local expression for Batman's most intimate enemy, choosing the name *el Guasón* (a literal translation of joker). It would be a major pitfall if the translators of the video game into Spanish (be they Spanish or Mexican) did not take local preferences into account. Similarly, whilst in Spain, Bruce Wayne, Batgirl, Catwoman and Gotham City all keep their original names under a no-translation strategy, in Mexico they respectively become *Bruno Díaz*, *Batichica*, *Gatúbela* and *Ciudad Gótica*.

These differences can be appreciated in the case of *Batman Arkham Asylum* (and also *Batman Arkham City*), as the names of the heroes and villains in Gotham City are translated differently depending on the locale of the user's console (in this case Spain or Mexico).

The translation strategy to be followed in the case of Batman is somehow influenced by the editorials that have published the comic books: while Spanish editorials such as Norma and Planeta DeAgostini rely on a no-translation strategy for many proper names,\* the Mexican editorial Vid (which distributes comics to Central and South American countries) uses a different strategy and translates the names in a literal way. This could also be seen as a strategy of foreignization in

\* However, there are some exceptions to this general rule, as the names of some characters were indeed translated in the comics published in Spain: the villain Poison Ivy is usually translated as *Hiedra Venenosa* while Killer Croc is sometimes adapted as *Cocodrilo Asesino*. In the case of the video game analysed in this paper, the two names have been translated into Spanish.



the case of the former versus a domestication approach in the case of the latter, following on from Venuti's classification (Venuti 1995).

In the particular case of *Batman Arkham Asylum*, the story of the game is based on the graphic novel *Batman Arkham Asylum: a Serious House on Serious Earth* (1989) written by Grant Morrison and illustrated by Dave McKean. Hence, in order to preserve the game experience, when transferring the content (both textual and non textual) translators have to balance their own creative freedom with a loyalty to the existing Spanish version of the graphic novel. In this case, the depiction of an oppressive and insane atmosphere is the main feature of the game, which aims to represent the wickedness and corruption of the inmates imprisoned in the psychiatric asylum of Gotham City.

#### 4.1. *Lost in translation*

One of the most noticeable features when comparing the original script of the video game in the English version and the translation into Spanish are the differences in the register and in the degree of formality of some of the game's characters: due to certain characteristics of the two languages being analysed (English and Spanish), there are a number of nuances and shades of meaning that are inevitably lost in translation. More precisely, in the English version, the conversational style of the two most relevant and active criminals in the story—the Joker and his partner Harley Quinn—is much more informal: they use a significant number of colloquial expressions with the corresponding Spanish being more formal. To illustrate this with an example, on quite a number of occasions these characters mock Batman by modifying his name in various ways: *Bats*, *B-man*, *Mr. B*, or *B* are quite often used in the English version, whilst in most cases these are all uniformly translated as *Batman* into Spanish. In addition, Harley Quinn and other characters in the game refer to the Joker as *Mr. J* or simply *J*, which both become *Joker* in Spanish.

Similarly, the villains of the game frequently use informal expressions such as *watcha*, *gonna*, *gotta*, *Hiya B-man!* and *You ok?* In the Spanish version, this informal register is lost, with no perceptible shortenings, abbreviations or omissions. Indeed, in the (English) universe of Batman, this is a feature that differentiates the villains from the hero from a linguistic point of view: while the former use colloquial and informal speech, the latter relies on a more polite and neutral style without the use of slang or idiomatic expressions. This is a consistent and regular tendency throughout in the game, and also mirrors the characters' personality in the original story (where Batman uses a more neutral discourse compared with the teasing and satirical Joker).

#### 4.2. *Heroes, villains and clowns: humour and puns*

Humour is one of the many features included in modern titles, presenting a real challenge for translators and bridging the gap between video games and audio-

visual translation where the adaptation of jokes has already been attempted (Mangiron 2010, Zabalbeascoa 2001). Beyond the use of colloquialisms, slang and idiomatic expressions which abound in the discourse of video games, some titles also provide examples of puns that prove to be extremely difficult to adapt into other locales due to the intimate relation between humour and culture (Fernández Costales 2011). In the case of *Batman Arkham Asylum*, players have to overcome a series of interrelated challenges and missions in order to advance in the game. Aiming to maintain playability and user experience, it is essential that players are profoundly engaged in the story and to this end, translation is vital.

One of the most intriguing of Batman's enemies, Edward Nigma (*Enigma* in the Spanish version, or the Riddler in the English version), poses a reasonable number of riddles in *Batman Arkham Asylum*. The player's task is to solve these puzzles in order to advance in the game: to unlock objects and stages, to collect trophies, etc. As these riddles rely on puns, transferring the associated message into other languages without a loss in meaning in some cases proves to be an unattainable objective. A notable example of just such a scenario is when Batman has to find a particular clue hidden behind a portrait of the warden of Arkham, Quincy Sharp, players receive the message «Don't cut yourself on this sharply observed portrait». In the translation *No te cortes con este retrato tan 'afilado'*, the adjective *afilado* is written in inverted commas in the game in an attempt to compensate for the loss of meaning, providing users with a subtle clue, as the pun with the word *Sharply*, which in the English makes reference to the name of Quincy Sharp, cannot be successfully reproduced in Spanish.

Another example of the degree of difficulty surrounding the transfer of puns between languages without losing their meaning can be observed in a riddle where Batman has to uncover a clue about Bane (another of his enemies) by examining a teddy bear that belonged to the villain in his childhood. The riddle says «Is this bear the Bane of his life?» where *Bane* has a double meaning, as it can also refer to the villain's nickname or to something which is a pain or a burden to someone (as in «this person is the bane of my life!»). In Spanish the sentence has been adapted as *¿Este oso es el victorioso de su vida?* In this case, it is more difficult for Spanish players to establish a correlation between the teddy bear and Bane as no references to this character are provided.

Finally, a clear example of a strategy for compensating for loss of meaning can be found in a riddle that makes reference to one of Batman's most well known enemies, Harvey Dent, who is also known as Two-Face. On a wall, we find a promotional poster for the election of Harvey Dent as the district attorney of Gotham City, and the Riddler gives us the following clue: «Let's face it, there are two Dents on the wall». With the expression *two Dents*, the pun is denoting the duality of Harvey Dent, who has both a good and a bad side. In addition, we see the use of the verb *face*, which can also be associated with Dent's alias, Two-Face. This has been translated into Spanish as *Hay que reconocerlo, esta pared tiene dos caras* ('this wall has two faces'). Even though the word *Dent* is not used, the translated riddle keeps the hidden message linked to Two-Face, so in

this case users do not lose any meaningful or significant detail necessary in order to solve the puzzle and continue advancing through the story.

The above examples are not intended to test the quality of the translation of the text from a linguistic standpoint, but rather to support the idea of the complexity of adapting video games that are based on literary or written texts: the translator has to be aware of the meta-textual information and know all the possible references included in the source material. In this respect, the translation of the riddles in *Batman Arkham Asylum* underpins the idea that use of humour and puns in some video games makes it almost impossible to adapt the message into another language without suffering a loss in meaning, and compensation strategies may well be required (Di Marco 2007).

#### 4.3. Translation strategies: targeting transcreation

The exploration of the translation strategies followed by translators when adapting video games is a fertile area for further research (Fernández Costales 2012). If we accept the hypothesis that functionalist approaches may be appropriate in the case of video game translation, as the goal is to preserve the game experience and the *look and feel* of the game in the target culture (Mangiron and O'Hagan 2006), the concept of transcreation seems to be a suitable tool for application in this instance. However, I assume this not to be an absolutist term and would suggest that transcreation, as with any translational activity, is context-sensitive and, therefore, depends on the 'product' (to use market terminology) or 'assignment' (to take a more academic approach) being analysed. In other words, it can be argued that different games will require different translation strategies (Bernal 2007). Furthermore, it can be stated that the hybridity of many current games may result in the need for the use of different strategies and approaches within the translation process of a single title (Fernández Costales 2012). This is the case of *Batman Arkham Asylum*, where transcreation (understood here to be a type of *creative translation* which clearly differs from rendering a literal translation into the target language, and rather favours achieving a particular effect in the target audience) is evident in specific elements of the game (such as the in-game dialogues and cut-scenes) but cannot be observed in other areas of the game where a more literal approach has been followed (as in the translation of the terminology relating to Batman's universe).

As has been commented on in the previous section, a great deal of creativity was necessary to translate many of the Riddler's conundrums into Spanish, with compensation strategies that could be regarded as examples of transcreation. Furthermore, some of the characters' speeches (particularly those of the Joker) are full of jokes, puns and funny sentences which have been translated into Spanish whilst attempting to keep their essence intact. The sentence that opens the game after the initial cut scene —«Welcome to the madhouse, Batman! I set a trap and you sprang it gloriously!»— was translated as ¡Bienvenido al manicomio, Batman! *Te he tendido una trampa y has caído con todo*. Here, *caído con todo* provides the sentence with an informal and colloquial nuance that fits very well with

Joker's personality. In addition, the way Harley Quinn frequently addresses his beloved Joker as *pudding* needs to be creatively transferred into Spanish, where he is referred to as *bomboncito*.

That said, some of the insults and bad words in the English version of the game have been modified in some passages, as for the instance when Commissioner Gordon calls Harley Quinn a *crazy bitch* which is softened in the Spanish version in which he shouts only *será imbécil*. These few examples support the idea that there is some flexibility in the degree of creativity applied by the translators of the Spanish game.

The fact that translators may have a *carte blanche* to fulfil the established objectives does not necessarily mean that they have to produce a text that differs significantly in meaning from the original source. Although in some cases translators might decide to produce a new text from scratch (as sometimes happens when places or weapon names have to be translated, as in Role Playing Games), in the case of superhero games, the adaptation has to be done with a certain degree of faithfulness aimed at meeting the expectations of players who might also have read the original comics.

From a theoretical standpoint, there are approaches within Translation Studies that are compatible with the concept of transcreation: functionalism provides solid grounds for explaining how the process of translating a text is highly dependant on the function it needs to produce in the target audience. Even though functionalist concepts such as the translation brief (Nord 1997: 30) or the commissioner (Nord 1991: 93) might seem old fashioned in the globalised world of fast-paced markets and ship, this model can be applied to the concept of transcreation. Nord optimized and streamlined functionalist approaches by supporting a rational or moderate model of functionalism (1997: 126). According to Nord, functionalist translations do not have to forget about the source text, but will be subject to the function the message has to render in the target audience. The concept of loyalty (Nord 1997: 125) is a relevant tool for translators in order to maintain a balance between the purpose of the message to be conveyed and respect for the original intentions of the author of the text.

#### 4.4. Loyalty, or meeting users' expectations

As has been previously explained in this section, creativity and transcreation are definitely visible in *Batman Arkham Asylum* in the translation of puns, humour and also many of the dialogues in which there is a good deal of colloquial language and expressions. However, in order to recreate the Dark Knight's universe and the obscure atmosphere of Gotham City, loyalty to the original comics can be clearly appreciated in the faithful adaptation of the video game's setting and scenario. As has already been commented upon, the names of the characters are translated according to the editorial policy of the comic books, which provides a good example of faithfulness to the original text: some names, such as Harley Quinn, Ra'as al Guhl, Alfred Pennyworth, Bane, Hugo Strange or Zsasz are not translated in Spanish and are kept the same as in the original stories, whereas oth-

ers such as Mr. Freeze, Scarecrow, Killer Moth or Two-Face are effectively translated as *Mr. Frío*, *El Espantapájaros*, *Polilla Asesina* and *Dos Caras*. Similarly, the names of places and locations, and all the documentary information included in the game (i.e. personal records with complete information on every character, the chronicles of Arkham which provide a comprehensive narrative of the history of the asylum, data about Wayne technology, etc.) has been translated whilst taking the original comics into account. In a similar way, the gadgets used by Batman have been adapted by following a rather literal translation and taking into account their previous adaptations in the DC comics: to quote some examples, the Batmobile, the Batarangs or the Batclaw are naturally rendered as *Batmóvil*, *Batarangs* and *Batgarra*.

Although the adaptation of Batman is somewhat conditioned or *constrained* by the terminology of the original stories, this does not imply that transcreation is not permitted in the translation of superhero games, but this must be used in combination with other strategies in order to conform to the prior knowledge of those playing the game.

## 5. Conclusions

The addition of new narrative techniques and technological advances have contributed to the development of video games, which are no longer simple software applications. Current video games are multimedia and multimodal forms of entertainment that allow for a greater level of interaction between the user and the story and also amongst different users connected to each other electronically in different parts of the world. New technologies have allowed for the development of more sophisticated and creative games where the visual element is combined with audio features and the stories themselves rely on more complex narrative patterns and techniques supported by cut scenes.

In this context, it is possible to produce games that are able to be related to other art forms such as cinema, novels or comic books. The case of *Batman Arkham Asylum* can be used as an example of the meta-textual type of content that translators have to deal with when adapting modern video games into other cultures. The transfer of language strings from A to B has been replaced by the process of adapting a whole multimedia and cultural universe into the target locale.

Several translation strategies are therefore required, as the creativity of translators has to be accompanied by a sense of loyalty to the original story. In this sense, this paper supports the idea that, in the case of comic-based video games, a balance between both approaches is required when selecting translation strategies.

In order to conform to users' expectations, superhero games (and by extension, any title based on comics, graphic novels or books) have to be in tune with players' previous knowledge of the story and characters, as these types of games are not just isolated products (i.e. products without any relation to existing films or books), but instead form part of a particular artistic ecosystem or universe. This specific consideration might well be a conditioning factor for the translation strategy to be followed.

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