

The Queer Turn of Video Game Localization ‘Fills You With Determination’: A Case Study of *Undertale*

Olga Báez Humanes



Master's final project

Tutor: Dr. Robert Martínez Carrasco

Master's degree in Translation and Technologies

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

June 2021



Universitat Oberta
de Catalunya

AGRADECIMIENTOS (ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS)

Los agradecimientos expresados a continuación deben comunicarse de forma bilingüe para aquellas personas en el ámbito personal que me han apoyado durante el proceso de una forma u otra.

En primer lugar, a Robert, mi tutor, quien mostró fascinación por mis ideas desde el primer momento. Con su ayuda y apoyo he logrado hacer realidad los objetivos que pretendía alcanzar con este trabajo de tanto valor profesional y sentimental. Muchísimas gracias.

To Ryan, who never misses out on any of my (non) progress, and who is such an invaluable source of reassurance. I am wholeheartedly grateful for his immense support and all the affection filling my inventory.

Finalmente, infinitas gracias a las personas que nunca han dejado de cuidarme: mis padres, a quienes debo mi coraje y *determinación*, y mi admirable hermana, que además ha sido siempre mi confidente.

Dedicated to all the people who fail to be.

ABSTRACT

Video games are quintessentially queer platforms insofar as they constitute alternative realities that do not stem from solidly presupposed constructs and dynamics. However, only during the last decade has queer game studies become delineated in academia, prompting collaborations across several disciplines. This project aspires to engage with queer game studies from the field of localization, while simultaneously contributing to the sociological and activist turns of translation. For this purpose, a queer turn in video game localization is suggested, which uses the potential of translation for socio-political intervention to thoroughly explore and reproduce the inherent otherness in video games. In doing so, (self)critical and close-reading practices are applied to the queer analysis of the American video game *Undertale* for its Spanish translation. Such practices would put an end to the common domesticating method in audiovisual translation of resolving the linguistic and socio-political divergences between target and source locales through the erasure of alienness.

Keywords: *Queer studies, deconstructive theory, video game localization, reflexive translation, close reading, translation turns, translation barriers.*

RESUMEN

Los videojuegos son plataformas queer por antonomasia en la medida en que constituyen realidades alternativas que no se derivan de la presunción de construcciones y dinámicas sólidas. Sin embargo, el estudio académico de los videojuegos desde la perspectiva queer no empezó a tomar forma hasta la década pasada, provocando una corriente de estudios interdisciplinarios. Este proyecto aspira a implicarse con la ludología queer desde el campo de la localización, al mismo tiempo que contribuye a los giros sociológico y activista de la traducción. Para ello, se sugiere un giro queer en la localización de videojuegos, el cual utiliza el potencial de intervención sociopolítica propio de la traducción para explorar minuciosamente la otredad inherente a los videojuegos, y reproducirla. De este modo, se aplican prácticas (auto) críticas y de lectura atenta al análisis queer del videojuego estadounidense *Undertale* para su traducción al español. Tal giro pondría fin a los métodos de domesticación comunes en traducción audiovisual, que consisten en resolver las divergencias lingüísticas y sociopolíticas entre los contextos origen y meta a través de la eliminación de lo ajeno.

Palabras clave: *Estudios queer, teoría deconstructiva, localización de videojuegos, traducción reflexiva, lectura atenta, giros de la traducción, barreras de la traducción.*

CONTENTS

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	5
1. A Brief Introduction to Queer Studies	5
2. Video Games As Quintessentially Queer Platforms	8
3. Too-close Reading, Too Much Questioning	12
3.1. Queer Negativity: Losing and Playing the Wrong Way	14
3.2. Queer Game Design: Bonding with Pain	17
3.3. Reading and Recreating Alienness: The Activist Turn of Translation	18
3.3.1. The Queer Turn of Video Game Localization	21
EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK	25
4. Introduction to the Queer Turn of Video Game Localization	25
5. Objectives, Research Questions and Hypothesis	25
6. Methodology	27
7. Applying Queer Translation Practices: Too-Close Reading Undertale	28
7.1. Where Is the Queerness in <i>Undertale</i> ? or, Where Is the Queerness? In <i>Undertale</i> ..	28
7.1.1. Non-Productivity	30
7.1.2. Failure	31
7.1.3. Pain	34
7.1.4. Alienness	35
7.1.5. Intimacy	37
7.1.6. Explicit Queer Representation	39
7.2. Translation Losses: Presentation and Classification of Data	40
8. Discussion & Conclusions	45
References	49
Appendix	54

FIGURES

Figure 1. Screenshot of a homosexual villain character in Crime Fighters 2	8
Figure 2. Screenshot of The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass	10
Figure 3. Screenshot of Detroit Become Human	11
Figure 4. Screenshot of Flappy Bird	12
Figure 5. Screenshot of Super Mario Odyssey	16
Figure 6. Screenshot of Google Translate by Vargha (2021)	20
Figure 7. Screenshots of Animal Crossing: New Horizons	22
Figure 8. Screenshot of Undertale (2015). Warning message.	29
Figure 9. Screenshot of Undertale (2015). Pixelated and agitating style as characteristic of the game's interactive mode.	29
Figure 10. Screenshot of Undertale (2015). The gate will only open if all three rocks are in place.	36
Figure 11. Screenshot of Undertale (2015). Muffet introducing French in the English lexicon.	37
Figure 12. Screenshot of Undertale (2015). Intimate scene with Napstablook.	38
Figure 13. Screenshots of Undertale (2015). To the left, Mettaton performing cross-dressed. To the right, Mettaton in battle mode using his effeminate android form.	39

TABLES

Table 1. Spanish and English versions of the sixteen extracted texts.....	42
Table 2. Original and translated segments copied from SDL studio bilingual file.....	56

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. A Brief Introduction to Queer Studies

During the last decade of the 20th century, queer theory was introduced to feminist studies, constituting a prominent part of the Third Wave of feminism (Butler, 2011). Hitherto, it had become evident that the concepts of sex and gender were widely flawed interpretations of a social structure of power (Beauvoir, 2015). In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir (2011: 283), addresses this concern and enunciates the words that would become one of the most influential landmarks in the history of feminism: “one is not born, but rather becomes, [a] woman,” with which she drew attention to the social phenomena that situates ‘man’ as an indisputable synonym of ‘human’, and ‘woman’, as the second sex that cannot think itself without ‘man’.

The relation of the two sexes is not that of two electrical poles: the man represents both the positive and the neuter to such an extent that in French ‘hommes’ designates human beings. (Beauvoir, 2015: 6)

Such is the case for most languages, such as Spanish, where the word “hombre” (li. “man”) also designates “human being”; or English, where the word “wo-man” evidences the establishment of a secondary character (woman) to be thought as dependent on and servant of human beings (men). The Online Etymology Dictionary reveals the etymology of the word “woman” in English, explained as follows:

“Woman (n.): Late Old English wimman, wiman, literally ‘woman-man,’ alteration of wifman (plural wifmen) ‘woman, female servant’ (8c.), a compound of wif ‘woman’ (see wife) + man ‘human being’ (in Old English used in reference to both sexes; see man (n)).” (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2000)

At the turn of the century, a struggle with the same patriarchal focal point was subject of interest to theoreticians endeavouring to “open up possibilities” against the binary configuration socially imposed on people: the LGBTQIA community, a community of people who challenge the conventional designation of “femininity” and “masculinity” through their identity and sexuality, and who stand for diverse ways of existing (Lewis, 2016). In other words, a community that questions the cis-heteronorm:

One might wonder what use of ‘opening up possibilities’ finally is, but no one who has understood what it is to live in the social world as what is ‘impossible,’ illegible, unrealizable, unreal, and illegitimate is likely to pose that question. (Butler, 2011: 62)

Simultaneously, further issues arose from the distinction between the supposedly immutable character of biological sex, and the socially —and unfairly— constructed gender. That being the case, by what means is sex to be defined as opposed to gender? If there is a line to be drawn, where should it be? On the one hand, neuroscience is presenting these days emerging evidence on brain-development differences (Woolley, 2018) which could partially shape gender. On the other hand, sex is determined within a simplified binary classification of anatomical, chromosomal, and hormonal characteristics of individuals that often results in the pathologization of atypical variations of sex and the illusionary stereotyping of physical characteristics of both sexes (Butler, 2011: 659). On such grounds, one could ponder whether “the two sexes” are inherent self-contained qualities of living beings or yet another human construct so as to categorize its surroundings, an arrangement of gendered bodies, which, in the field of sociology, fails to present itself unproblematically unattached to the socially constructed expectations of society (ibid: 671). That is not to say such categorizations are not pragmatic in scientific contexts —most importantly, medical ones— or that it is possible to deconstruct sex, but rather to remind of the punctual dissonances of a forced mind-body duality that Butler (ibid: 791) compares to Plato’s.

Additionally, several inconsistencies can still be found in the unified and exclusionary concept of “woman,” and, in turn, in the identification of oppression as an entity of a singular form. As stated by Butler (2011: 846), “the insistence upon the coherence and unity of the category of women has effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of ‘women’ are constructed.” Thus, the intersectional approach to feminism suggested by queer studies surpasses the limits of privileged cis white women’s experiences and seeks to appear palatable to woman-aligned people¹ whose idea of “woman” remains unresolved, and whose experiences differ from those of cis straight women inasmuch as they have been conditioned by different forms of patriarchal oppression (Butler, ibid).

The term “queer theory” was coined by feminist and film theorist de Lauretis in a workshop organized in 1990 that aimed to disrupt the silence often built around certain aspects of the

¹ In this context, “woman-alignment” is used to describe the experiences that individuals might have in common with the unified and predominant concept of “woman.”

individual sexual experiences lived by non-heteronormative people, which ought not to be homogenized, including interracial or interethnic relationships (de Lauretis, 2015: 109). However, as de Lauretis (ibid) explains, the word “queer” was first introduced to LGBTQIA issues as a result of reappropriation:

The term ‘queer’ has a long history; in English it has existed for more than four centuries, always with negative denotations and connotations: strange, weird, eccentric, of a doubtful or questionable character, vulgar. In Charles Dickens' novels, ‘Queer Street’ was the name of an area in London where poor and sick people lived in debt. In the last century, after the well-known trial and subsequent imprisonment of Oscar Wilde, the word was primarily associated with homosexuality as a stigma. It was the gay liberation movement of the 1970s that made it a symbol of political resistance. Like the words gay and lesbian, queer has designated, in the first place, a social protest, and only in the second place a personal identity. (Translated from Spanish²)

Contemporarily, the word “queer” is used as an umbrella term for LGBTQIA people, as well as to describe an intersectional way of understanding non-conforming identities and their experiences. Brim (2020), in view of the elitist sectarian contexts in which research is regularly produced, suggests the incorporation of poor queer studies and pedagogies that are aware of class stratification in higher education. The author argues that “the field of Queer Studies as an academic formation has been and is still defined and propelled by the immense resources of precisely those institutions of higher education that most steadfastly refuse to serve representative numbers of poor students and to hire faculty without high-status academic pedigrees” (2020: 9). Consequently, as elucidated by Brim (ibid: 64-99), the language of rich queer studies is learned in queer theorizing, inducing the exclusionary upward-mobility myth of liberalism. Through his project, he demands a more intersectional approach as it is currently needed within queer studies:

What if we connected our queer ideas and pedagogies to the material realities of their production (our research budgets and our college websites, our course loads and our commutes, our embodiments and our built environments, our leave time and our overwork, our library holdings and our bathroom gender policies, our raced work sites and our service work, our salaries and our second jobs) in order to understand those ideas and pedagogies as class- and status-based knowledges that cannot be universalized? (Brim, 2020: 17)

² All translated quotations from texts in other languages are made by the author.

To all intents and purposes, from the origin of the term “queer” and its introduction to gender studies, the direction of the field has proven to be that of heterogeneous criticism.

2. Video Games As Quintessentially Queer Platforms

Dr. Bo Ruberg, media studies professor and pioneer in queer game studies, published *Video Games Have Always Been Queer* in 2019, where they claimed the need to apply close reading methodologies in the analysis of video games, emphasizing on embodiment, affect, and intimacy. Throughout their research, a multimodal approach was taken to reveal the ways in which video games can be understood as quintessentially queer platforms. That is, reading their narratology and ludology from a queer perspective in order to refute the hegemony of play as well as the misconception that queerness is relatively new to video games (a consequence of reducing queer analysis to explicit on-screen representation of LGBTQIA content). In that sense, the historical representation of LGBTQIA characters in video games has been far from ideal. Quite the contrary, the LGBTQIA community has been subject to constant humiliation by being depicted as odd burlesque characters and deranged villains, as Figure 1 below shows (Grau, 2020).



Figure 1. Screenshot of a homosexual villain character in Crime Fighters 2. His attack consists of sexually assaulting the player. He can be distracted with lampposts, given their similarity to poles.

In addition to the negative nuances portrayed in queer fictional characters historically, whether they are explicitly degrading or concealed stereotypes, queer character representation in linear progress narratives conveying inclusivity also compromises the integrity of queer experiences, often leading to the erasure or simplification of their complexity (Ruberg, 2019). Ruberg (ibid), far from implying that the inclusion of on-screen queer content is to be dismissed, proposes an approach to the analysis, creation, and use of video game platforms that allows the player to experience queer gaming beyond representation, including the queer interpretation of

computational logics, modes, designs, or the decisions of players themselves. The close reading approach to games previously described is highly convenient in light of what the author calls “resonances” (ibid: 20): the multiple points where games and queerness intersect. This term will be used henceforth to identify these relationalities.

The first resonance discerned by Ruberg is the emotive connection between their shared ethos: the longing to imagine alternative ways of being, or, as expressed by Troughton (2021), to “escape” from a limited reality. Despite the ubiquitous queerphobia among game designers and society as a whole, gaming and the LGBTQIA community seem to have always shared an intimate bond (Ruberg, 2019: 43). Troughton (2021) discloses such connection in the following personal statement, where he also acknowledges the exclusion suffered regardless:

When I mustered up the courage and finally accepted who I was, the reception was mostly disbelief —“You, bi?”— or else people assumed it was a joke. I use sarcasm as a crux to cover up my anxiety a lot, but this still hurt. It wasn't something people were used to, it wasn't a part of life, and I felt alone in an orchestra full of heterosexuals. My escape was gaming, and even there I had no feeling of acceptance.

In a noticeably similar way to queer experiences, the longing for alternative uninhibited spaces in video games is obstructed by “a complex layering of technological, commercial, and cultural power structures [that] have dominated the development of the digital game industry” (Fron et al., 2007: 1); what is known as “the hegemony of play.” The Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) rightfully claims in their article on the hegemony of play (2007), that such is the result of the condensed schemes forming the game industry, majorly constituted by white abled cis heterosexual men—or, secondarily, Asian abled cis heterosexual men—who operate from an elite position of power and establish which media objects, systems, games, players, styles, genres, and designs can be admitted in the gaming sphere. The dogma dictates what is a real game, who gets to make real games, and also who is qualified to be a real gamer.

DiGRA (2007: 2) reports that, by virtue of this hegemonic culture, female players, more often than not and regardless of the number of hours they dedicate to playing video games, refuse to or are wary about calling themselves gamers. With that in mind, Ruberg (2019: 10) advocates an inclusive definition of video games that serves as a political statement, defining them as “digital media objects that understand themselves as games,” and highlighting the significance of “understanding themselves as games” to give free rein to games and game-makers to self-determine their own identity, their dissimilarity to settled genres notwithstanding. The self-

determination of individual identities against the power structures is a familiar matter in the queer context, more so are video games a platform for, as Ruberg affirms, resistance through play.

Resistance through play, as will be discussed later on, yields infinite possibilities to play queerly, understanding “playing queerly” as playing outside the hegemonic boundaries, whether the video game was intentionally designed to do so or not. Chang (2017: 825) calls this form of activism “queergaming”:

Queergaming is a challenge to this stereotypical, status quo intersection of game players, developers, cultures, and technologies, what I have elsewhere called the “technonormative matrix,” the digitized, gamified version of Judith Butler’s heteronormative matrix.

Despite the binary computational logics of digital objects in the technonormative matrix, queer players find resonances among the hardware and software initially created content that describe their experiences very plainly (Ruberg, 2019: 17). Some particular instances exposed by Ruberg (ibid: 29-132) in which video games have proved to be queer in nature include:

- **“Passing” and “playing down low.”** From the earliest video games to modern day, players have had to dodge surveillance (Figure 2) and pretend or disguise themselves to be inconspicuous in dangerous environments (Figure 3). These feelings portray the queer anguishes and pressures of cispassing, straight passing³ and closeting.



Figure 2. Screenshot of The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass, Battle Mode (2007). Link dodges “guards” as he tries to collect Triforces.

³ The term “passing” is used in this project to refer to the ability of LGBTQIA people to perform “acceptably” in dominantly cisheterosexual environments, but also, as opposed to “failing” in liberal narratives (See Section 3.1.).



Figure 3. Screenshot of Detroit Become Human (2018). Android changes clothes to pass as human and be accepted in public spaces.

- **Overcoming obstacles and failing.** Obstacles have always been, and continue to be, one of the most prominent features of video games—in fact, of games in general—, from villains and complex antagonists to walls, gaps, or arbitrary luck. Like obstacles in queer people’s lives, they have multiple forms, and one can attempt to overcome them (or not) in multiple ways. On failure, Macklin (2017: 4844) notes: “failure encourages us to try out new, unexpected strategies, ones that a game’s designer may have never anticipated (...) they [games] permit transgression (...) to a modern world obsessed with productivity and achievement.” There is much queer potential in “the art of failing,” indeed, as will be explored in depth in Section 3.1.
- **Embodiment.** The control scheme of video games permits players to manipulate on-screen and off-screen motions, access different fields of view, and, in some cases, it even prompts first-person character incarnation. On top of that, a physical connection is created in video games through input and interactive features of technologies such as the controllers’ vibration, the soundtrack, the position of players in relation to the screen, the players’ own movements, or the shot techniques used in scenes with the intention of evoking specific feelings (Perez-Marcos, 2018: 2-3). Video game embodiment is, ultimately, the remarkable queer experience of experimentation and exploration via one’s own body and senses. Additionally, awkwardness and uncomfortable interfaces or motions are recurrent issues in video games. In them, unlike in real life, mastering movements and control is not taken for granted (Figure 4). Such conformity, body-ableism, comfort within the commonplace, and

natural capacity of adaptation that is taken for granted in real life is completely off premise in video games.



Figure 4. Screenshot of Flappy Bird (2013). Bird fails to fly.

- **The queer backbone of video games such as virtual worlds and simulators.** One does not need to delve much into the ways in which queerness can occur in the large spaces for freedom of action and decision-making in which virtual worlds are intrinsically based to realize that they are essentially infinite. It is, once again, the queer ethos of “longing to imagine alternative ways of being” that Ruberg (2019: 1) recognized in games. On simulators, Ruberg (ibid: 113) finds an additional longing in common, that of performing “acceptably,” or better yet, if played in non-conformance, that of creating one’s own absurd performance, distorting, moulding, and mocking what is, otherwise, presupposed.

The aforementioned are some of the numerous resonances identified in games. However, the list would be endless. As Macklin (2017: 4838) asserts, “instead of the question ‘where is the queerness in games?’ we can ask, ‘where is the queerness?’ and answer ‘in games!’.”

3. Too-close Reading, Too Much Questioning

According to Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum (2011: 1), close reading is “a way of laying bare the faults and inconsistencies of a media artifact” but also “a celebration of the many ways in which a text can create meaning.” In other words, close reading is a method of analysis used in the humanities to reveal the superficially indiscernible qualities of a text subject to analysis and interpretation. In their article, the authors disclose the versatility of close reading, a notion that

has been recently expanded to the field of digital humanities (textuality in digital media), whose methodologies can be applied in most contexts, whether they are inconsequential or significantly substantial.

In the same way that, close reading printed texts involves the interactive partaking of text and reader, close reading in game studies is majorly founded on the very core of the definition of games: the experience of gameplay, entangling medium and message (Bizzocchi et al., 2011: 5). All the same, Miller (2016) offers a yet deeper analysis of audiovisual texts that transcends the techniques of close reading in the New Criticism movement of literary theory. In *Hidden Hitchcock*, Miller (2016) unimaginably exposes buried interpretations of several Hitchcock movies that were previously thought to have been exploited to the maximum extent, by virtue of what he calls “too-close reading.” Too-close reading requires a “too-close viewer” that not only interacts with the film, but also incarnates it: “As he⁴ [the too-close viewer] submits to the various mental states of surprise, suspense, suspicion, discovery, dizziness, disappointment, isolation, and folly entailed in looking at Hitchcock too closely, his ubiquitously rummaging eyes seem to turn watching a Hitchcock film into the experience of being one.” (Miller, *ibid*: 11)

Video games, as quintessentially queer platforms, depend upon Miller’s too-close reading and queer too-close players to be impartially analysed, which might be occasionally refuted by traditional hermeneutics and the hegemonic discourses of “unnecessarily reading too much into” and “shoving down one’s throat.” Likewise, the process of translation, a highly consequential intervention in the recreation of target localized products, ought to rely as well on too-close reading attitudes towards the source products and the source and target socio-political contexts, in conjunction with the self-awareness of translators themselves—for they are the active mediators performing from a personal standpoint (Kadiu, 2019). By and large, the queer production, localization, and consumption of video games require “too much” questioning to be earnestly considered by the dominant logics. As Halberstam (2011: 6) acknowledges: “Yet that [not being taken seriously] is my goal. Being taken seriously means missing out on the chance to be frivolous, promiscuous, and irrelevant.”

⁴ Throughout the book, Miller uses the pronoun “he” to refer to the too-close viewer as himself but specifies that the too-close viewer does not mean to “restrict the potential for too-close viewing to one gender.” (*ibid*: 11).

3.1. Queer Negativity: Losing and Playing the Wrong Way

We don't hate it. It's just kinda scary. But the world's made of light and darkness. You can't have one without the other, 'cause darkness is half of everything. Sorta makes ya wonder why we are scared of the dark.

King Mickey Mouse. Kingdom Hearts II (PS2 version, 2006)

As stated by Halberstam (2011: 15), “Through the use of manifestoes, a range of political tactics, and new technologies of representation, radical utopians continue to search for different ways of being in the world and being in relation to one another than those already prescribed for the liberal and consumer subject.” Such is the purpose of identifying queerness throughout different platforms and embracing conflictive understandings of the self, contrary to the structural forms of “successful” (re)production and wealth accumulation.

The current liberal model of optimistic resilience is constituted by a binary and mutually exclusive formulation of every concept: success and failure, the winner and the loser, the masculine and the feminine, the cisheteronormative and the queer; each paired item respectively associated with the other pairs (Halberstam, *ibid*). This binary system is also a feedback loop, for the failure of losers is necessary for the passing of winners to occur at its expense. Sustained by the belief that winners, unlike losers, are equipped with a merited almighty productive mindset, race, class, and gender matters are conveniently deemed unimportant:

Positive thinking is a North American affliction, ‘a mass delusion’ that emerges out of a combination of American exceptionalism and a desire to believe that success happens to good people and failure is just a consequence of a bad attitude rather than structural conditions. (Ehrenreich, 2009: 13)

The forgotten, oppressed and underrepresented then become immersed in a race under one-sided structural terms and conditions: A woman will admirably succeed if she gains access to masculine spaces, as long as she maintains—and despite maintaining—her womanhood as derived from male standards of female deficiency; a heroic attitude to be rewarded. A queer understanding of the self and the world that does not contribute to the preservation of, as Ehrenreich (2009: 13) calls it, a mass delusion of exceptionalism, would imply embracing all the invalidated experiences—failure, negativity, the absurd and unproductive, unmaking,

unbecoming, violating rules and forgetting to exist as expected, which might well break the loop (Halberstam, 2011: 3).

The hegemony of play mimics the binary social structures of power within Ehrenreich's "delusion" or Butler's "matrix." However, as demonstrated in the previous section, games — as defined by Ruberg (2019)— and their players also happen to be ideal channels for queerness to flourish and wane the prevalent system. From Ruberg's *Video Games Have Always Been Queer* and Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* it is possible to extract several forms of queergaming that serve as modes of resistance, which will be presented next.

Failure is a queer quality that resonates in games, turning playing to lose into a powerful counterhegemonic technique. Halberstam (2011: 5) refers to failure as a queer art that gives way to new understandings of "optimism" that do not sustain the heterotransphobic, white-privileged male-dominant social order through the delusions of liberalism. Rather, they claim, the new optimism would propose failing as an inevitable part of passing that conjures comfortable and uncomfortable feelings proportionately and would not rely on the invalidating and unfairly funded logics of liberal positivism. So as to create this new optimism, one must afford a new unheroic comprehension of "passing" that involves the acceptance of the finite, the negativity of critique, and the embracement of absurdity, stupidity, and counterproductivity. One does not pass when they become well-adjusted in the discriminatory modus operandi of productive common sense, but when the obstacles of "playing to win" become part of the accepted self and are enjoyed as much as they are suffered (Halberstam, *ibid*: 185-187). Obstacles are, after all, the essence of video games and of queer experiences. When playing to lose becomes the confronting alternative to playing to win, otherness is unleashed; as people who failed to comply with the constructs of a straight binary culture, LGBTQIA individuals lose catastrophically and repeatedly, they unlearn hegemonic logics, they forget success and they welcome feelings of frustration, liberation, anger, relief, sadness, happiness, loneliness, absurdity, and delightfulness from the unexplored paths of playing the wrong way. The assumption that it is only possible to feel pleased when succeeding audaciously, and to feel pain when losing catastrophically, is transgressed.

Within the perspective of playing to lose and playing the wrong way, it stands the story of pessimism, which, as stated by Halberstam (2011: 109) "lies quietly behind every story of success." Pessimistic queergaming grants critical capacity and acceptance of the "sensibly" impossible, and, consequently, it redefines common sense. If there is an aggressive dinosaur

causing distress and self-deprecating feelings of incapability every time players try to make Mario access collectables safely, or after dying uncountable times, they might as well dance, and dance pessimistically if necessary (See Figure 5 below). Ruberg (2019: 143) suggests that, in video games, “‘capital accumulation’ becomes accumulated points, ignored or wasted,” or, for that matter, collectables, ignored or wasted as part of the anti-capitalist mindset; and “‘nonreproductivity,’” they continue, “might translate to the squandering of extra lives, the abandonment of hard-earned unsaved games. The player who approaches video games under the banner of queer failure continues to play even when they are failing, not because determination drives them to succeed (...), but because such players enjoy losing or recognize its counterhegemonic potential.”



Figure 5. Screenshot of Super Mario Odyssey (2017). Mario forgets about saving kidnapped princess Peach and dances during several absurd and counterproductive minutes as commanded by the player.

Queergaming also implies the distortion of time and progress constructed in relation to achievement; forgetting one’s goals and duties, or the ones originally intended, and playing inaccurately. Ruberg (2019: 185), claims that “queer temporality” and “queer spatiality” represent a “resistance to the standard logics that dictate what one should do, where, when, and at what speed.” The linear narratives of the positivist doctrines of success can be ruptured by time-traveling (i.e., changing the configuration of the console), returning to a completed level, or getting stuck in obliviousness.

Playing the wrong way unlocks discouraging dialogues and events that are supposed to be avoided by the hegemonic player, but which are wittily or unproductively enjoyed by the queer player. Occasionally, it even unlocks alternative forms of success unintentionally made possible by game designers. A YouTube video posted in 2018 by a player of *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of The Wild* (2017), portrayed an unheroic, far more laborious, and potentially exasperating alternative to defeating villains through the attacks of the player character Link:

getting the commonly unnoticed add-ons of the game, i.e., the scenery chicken typical of the Zelda series which become infuriated when attacked repeatedly, to do the task for him. Among the comments, some players express their adverse feelings to such laborious absurdity, but, generally, a queer masochistic pleasure can be discerned, as shown in the following comment by a user: “3 hours of your time just to see a flock of pissed chickens kill a Lynel... is it worth it? ABSOLUTELY :D.” (Gara Ximenez, 2019)

3.2. Queer Game Design: Bonding with Pain

Although queer too-close reading can already be applied to any video game on the grounds of their queer core and through the approaches suggested so far, from Ruberg’s redefinition of video games —digital media objects that understand themselves as games— the programming of strangeness could be —and should be— expanded, aiming for an abundantly queer future of video games by queering game design. Stockton (2017: 4273) cleverly illustrates the way in which queer game design ought to challenge the systematic discourse of “straight until proven gay”:

From my childhood, I have kept alive a playful, phantasmatic, virtual pastime (...) I like to call it ‘Femmes at the Mall.’ You know what I do: hit a shopping center and imagine that every appealing woman who presents as feminine is a femme lesbian, until proven otherwise. Since I never test them, they are not disproven. And, therefore, due to this generous practice, the world is virtually full of lesbians, thanks to me.

Besides eliminating cisheteronormative assumptions, queering game design entails engendering strange and uncomfortable feelings, and leaving a trace of intimacy gradually drawn throughout the gameplay experience. It constitutes a collection of boring, annoying, alarming, sad, and painful games as categorized by Ruberg (2019: 168) in their definition of “no fun games.” Ultimately, no fun games are the widely considered “not real” games —when the latest are defined according to the hegemonic values (Fron et al., 2007)— that switch the liberal narratives of positivism and achievement to bonding and intimate experiences of pain and unproductivity embodied by the too-close player.

Although queer game design attempts to “open up” possibilities different to the consolidated concept of linear fun game expected to be won, game programming is ironically based on the binary numeral system, hence queering game design can only occur within such computational limitations (Chang, 2017: 839). However, some video game designs have hitherto been

developed unquestionably queer. For instance, *The Stanley Parable* (2011), an interactive drama and walking simulator created by Davey Wreden and William Pugh, is a game to be played against the rules of its own narrative. Revealing the queer original intention of *The Stanley Parable*'s design in *Wire* magazine, Schreier (2011) quotes one of its creators, Davey Wreden:

The design document was, 'Mess with the player's head in every way possible', throwing them off-guard, or pretending there's an answer and then kinda whisking it away from in front of them.

The Stanley Parable is, indeed, a queer game of devastation, victory, or nothingness to be explored, suffered, enjoyed, and manipulated by the players—but also for the players to be manipulated themselves.

3.3. Reading and Recreating Alienness: The Activist Turn of Translation

The product of a translation process is a new version of a text that is displaced and recreated in order to reach a target language and culture. This “recreation” of the source text is subject to several techniques based on the different approaches. The history of translation has experienced multiple shifting viewpoints, usually referred to as “the turns of Translation Studies,” such as the Pragmatic Turn of the 1970s or the Cultural Turn of the 1980s. More recently, as indicated by Angelelli (2012: 2), “The displacement of texts (whether written or oral) across time and space, as well as the geographic displacement of people, has encouraged researchers in Translation and Interpreting Studies to consider issues related to translation and interpreting through the lens of the Sociology of Language, Sociolinguistics, and Historiography.” Thus, the turn of the 21st century initiated a “Sociological Turn” of translation that focused mostly on the cognitive and sociological analysis of the figure of the translator as an active decision-maker, through their mental processes in particular contexts and influenced by particular circumstances:

Any translation is necessarily bound up within social contexts: on the one hand, the act of translating, in all its various stages is undeniably carried out by individuals who belong to a social system; on the other, the translation phenomenon is inevitably implicated in social institutions, which greatly determine the selection, production, and distribution of translation, and, as a result, the strategies adopted in the translation itself. (Wolf, 2007: 10)

Wolf (2012) takes a step further and suggests a possible “activist turn” of translation that focuses on the political structures in which the translator’s ideology operates. The activist turn consists of an introspective and self-critical attitude of translators that assume responsibility for their translatorial labour as potentially consequential and shape their product within their political awareness. In this regard, Wolf (2012: 15) claims that translators and translation institutions should acknowledge the “political control and its accompanying regulatory mechanisms (...) ruling economic, social, and cultural production and exchange,” as well as the fact that “their role is increasingly important to the point that they have to engage with questions relevant for the past, present, and future of humanity.”

This activist turn suggested by Wolf (*ibid*) also implies empowering the figure of the translator and their authorship, which have been traditionally hidden under the pretext that “good translation practices” require the ability to deceive the target public into believing that the product was originally produced in their native language and social context.

Likewise, in the last decade, fast-developing technologies allegedly offering accurate and automatic translations have been threatening the role of human translators. For instance, Neural Machine Translation systems (NMT) are programmed with artificial neural networks that can be trained mimicking the learning process of humans through Natural Language Processing. As Bell and Olavsrud (2020) point out, “Phrases, sentences, and sometimes entire books are fed into Machine Learning engines where they’re processed based on grammatical rules, people’s real-life linguistic habits, or both.” However, Machine Learning is determined by the prevalent habits reflected in society, for it feeds from it, as humans do. The only difference being that machines are not capable of assuming a self-critical approach.

A case in point is Vargha’s attention to gender bias in Google Translate (2021) (Figure 6 below), a strikingly gender-biased translation from Hungarian —a neutral language without gender pronouns— into English.

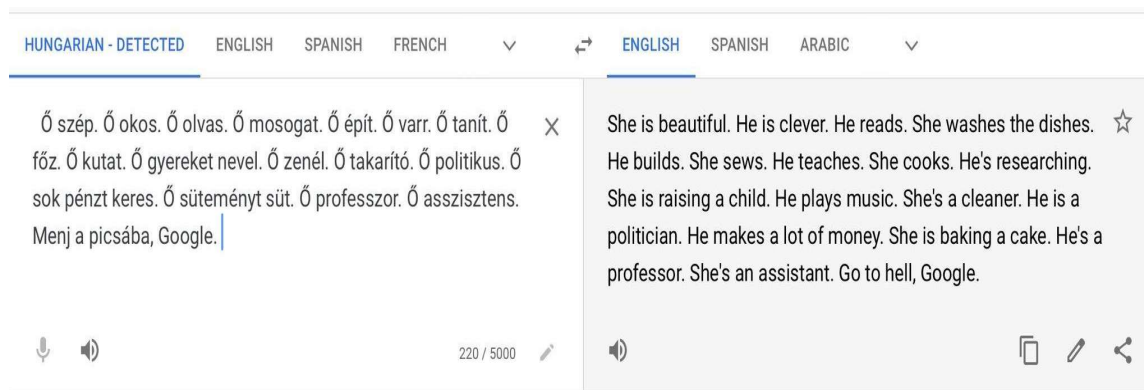


Figure 6. Screenshot of Google Translate by Vargha (2021). Gender-biased machine translation.

Wolf's activist turn would attempt to solve these issues by empowering the figure of the translator as a reflexive mediator with critical abilities. Kadiu (2019) also proposes translation as a critical process of reflection inspired by Lawrence Venuti's foreignizing approach (Venuti, 1998). Foreignization opts to recreate rather than hide the foreignness of the original version, and thereby it not only empowers the figure of the translator by making their intervention visible in the target text, but it also "counteracts the violent erasure of cultural difference at the core of any translating process" (Kadiu, *ibid*: 22). Venuti's approach, unlike the fluent and transparent domestication strategies of translation that aim to fully conform the target locales, offers an "ethical" form of translation that preserves otherness and imports it, providing the target reader with an "alien experience" outside their native norms.

Through foreignizing translation, several social terms have been introduced in the English language and spread throughout dominant western cultures, prompting a better understanding of minorities, marginalized categories or nameless realities that were elsewhere apprehended first. For instance, Baer (2021: 15) notes that "queer sexuality and translation are entangled in interesting ways" and argues that the words "homosexual"⁵ and "transvestite" first entered the English language through a translation from German. Along similar lines, Venuti (1998: 87) highlights the power of translation to configure cultural identities and construct or represent otherness. Translating through an activist foreignizing approach ultimately means ending the conforming illusionism created by translations that attempt to pass for its source text, ergo allowing the experiencing of alienness and the ethical safekeeping of foreign cultures despite liberal globalization, while avoiding the disregard for the translator's work.

⁵ The word "homosexual," as well as the word "heterosexual," were coined by the translator and human-rights campaigner Karl-Maria Kertbeny in the 19th century.

Altogether, foreignization is self-critical; it depends on the translator's social awareness, geopolitical stance, and reflected-upon choices to determine which concepts can be recreated and how. Foreign and marginalized elements can then be implemented as reminders of the target text's translated nature, while ensuring that the translation is still intelligible and engaging. The extent to which a text shall be foreignized, as indicated by Kadiu (2019: 33), is a self-questioning negotiation that the translators must espouse, for foreignizing does not imply a completion of strategies, but the (re)comprehension of translation as a critical activity subject to the introspection of individual translators. Such redefinition would then foster the anticipation of ethical products resulting from a task of critical nature. Therefore, translation practices avert invisibility and turn into a form of analyst authorship, a process of reflection, self-awareness, and socio-politically significant reproduction of the original work through the translator's own critical lenses. Kadiu (ibid: 141) emphasizes the contradictory responsibility of translators to "translate reflexively" while simultaneously acknowledging their own limits and ambivalence. Translating is "an act of self-interrogation," she asserts, that must be undertaken by "risking ourselves at moments of unknowingness. (...) Translating reflexively means pushing a text beyond itself, beyond its own boundaries, and in the process abandoning ourselves to the Other, calling for the Other to take us beyond ourselves."

3.3.1. The Queer Turn of Video Game Localization

To all appearances, there is a triangular interrelationship of dependence between queerness, video games, and the activist turn of translation that operates by means of various patterns of reflexion and deconstruction: (1) the acceptance and embracement of mental and physical discomfort amidst reality, (2) the acquisition of an analytical approach that reads "too much into," and (3) the intimate embodiment of alienness (interchangeable with otherness or queerness) from a state of self-awareness.

In view of the unmeasurable power of translation to actively influence society and target cultures, the recurrent linguistic obstacles characteristic of any translation might as well be solved through the queer act of reflexive foreignization (Kadiu, 2019). It is much more ambitious to attempt to evade some of these linguistic obstacles—and the way they are resolved in certain target products—when contemporary video game designers intentionally portray otherness in their original games. Whereas localizing a video game without partaking in the critical process of (self) reflection and too-close reading misses out on any possible queer element in the game—attested that there is a vast number of queer elements in every game—

(Ruberg, 2019), localizing it by deliberately choosing to remove intentional queer content in the guise of untranslatability is, simply, unethical (Venuti, 1998: 163). Among the meaningful losses taking place in video game localizations that consciously decide to erase otherness to comply with the target locale, a conspicuous instance is the character Gurēsu (Gracie), a fashion-designer giraffe from the *Animal Crossing* series. The character is a male crossdresser with the pronouns ‘he’, ‘him’ and ‘his’ attached to its persona in the original Japanese version. Nonetheless, it becomes a female that uses ‘she’ and ‘her’ pronouns in all the western localizations.

Similarly, the latest release of the same series —*Animal Crossing: New Horizons* (2020)— stresses the lack of gender of its player character by using ‘they’, ‘them’ and ‘their’ as neutral third-person singular pronouns in the English localization, a quality that is nowhere to be found in the Spanish version, which uses feminine or masculine pronouns based on the player’s first customization of their character’s style⁶ at the beginning of the game (Figure 7).

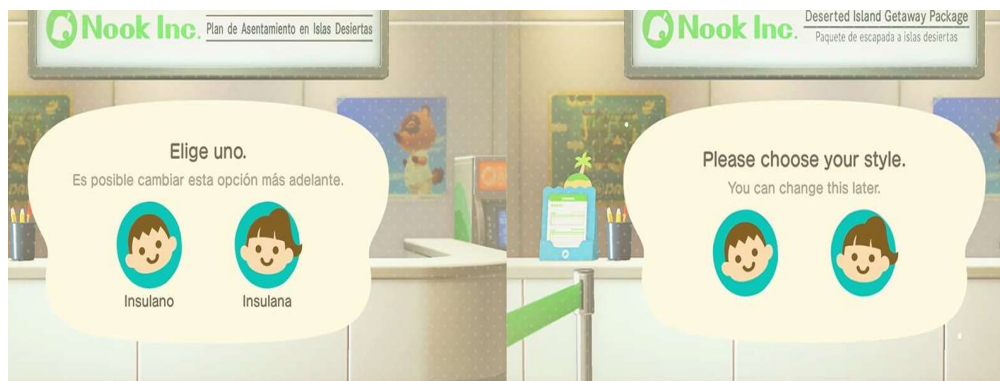


Figure 7. Screenshots of *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* (2020), Spanish and English versions.

In respect of this, Baer (2021: 24) maintains that “translation has been used both to erase or domesticate queer sexuality, and to highlight queer understandings and experiences of sexuality.” In some cases, he reckons, it has been used “to resist the incorporation of queerness into a Western —and perhaps specifically Anglophone— conception of ‘gay’.” The author adverts to the significance of the Anglophone market, which acts as a “third player” in the process of intercultural exchange. In other words, as a consequence of linguistic imperialism and the neoliberal demands for rapid and fruitful target production (nowadays, target releases are usually simultaneous to the original product’s release), English becomes a medium

⁶ There are no clothing or hairstyle restrictions based on gender, and styles can be changed later, but not gender-marking morphemes and gender pronouns in the Spanish version.

language or, more precisely, the new original. Such is the prevailing procedure of video game localization. Provided that designers have, as expressed by Baer (2021: 60) “an eye on their international reputation,” their product will first be localized—and most certainly domesticated—into an Anglophone locale, and, from there, to the rest of locales of economic and hegemonic interest. One can then estimate the amount of alienness dismissed in the process.

Comparably to queer and postcolonial studies, or the essence of “playing queerly” in video games, Baer (2021) suggests applying the critical dynamics of deconstruction of binary oppositions (the two sexes, the two genders, success and failure, hard-working attitudes and negative or counterproductive ones, happiness and sadness, signifier A and signifier B...) to the linguistic code. Applied to linguistics, these dynamics involve dismantling the distinction between sameness and difference, and approaching language—a construction that only functions through divergences among its signifiers—paradoxically, by means of exposing the semantic or etymological imperfections in equivalents or the similitudes in seemingly unrelated words:

Derrida (1986, 14-15) stated: “If I had to risk a single definition of deconstruction (...) I would say simply and without overstatement: *plus d’une langue*—more *than* one language, not more *of* one language.” (...) This *plus d’une langue* informs the construal of translation as paradox: it is impossible but constantly being done. (Baer, 2021: 55)

Baer (2021) argues that linguistic phenomena such as cognates, false friends, homophony, homography or polysemy are the result of “accidents” in the history of language coding caused by semantic dispersion or loaning words, and such phenomena hinder the process of translation axiomatically. Note the connotations of “accident” and “hinderance” within the logics of perfectionism and positivism, elements to embrace as far as queerness is concerned. Thus, through the exposition of complexities, binary codes shall be deconstructed along with the reluctance to reflect, embody, and recreate, rather than systematically exchange equivalences after products have been simplified by passing them through imperialist languages.

An additional linguistic phenomenon with such an impact that tends to be used as a defining variable of linguistic typologies is grammatical gender, an evident obstacle in the process of translation from languages without grammatical gender to those with two or more grammatical genders and vice versa. To this classification of gendered morphemes, Nissen (2002) adds the discerning of languages with compulsory gender pronouns, which may or may not have

grammatical gender (e.g., English). In this way, the gender-biased consequences of translation exposed by Vargha above (Figure 6) become one more aspect for the activist translator to reflect upon.

An experimental study carried out by Boroditsky and Phillips (2003) revealing that language in general —and grammatical gender specifically— is capable of shaping cognition, may incorporate further concerns into the issue. The findings entail that speakers of different languages perceive different versions of reality, and that grammatical gender, even that of inanimate objects, is not to be thought as semantically arbitrary or irrelevant. From their first experiment, Boroditsky and Phillips (ibid: 929) deduced that “Spanish and German speakers indeed end up thinking about objects as more similar to biological males and females, depending on the object’s grammatical gender in their native language.” Consequently, forasmuch as the interaction with a gendered reality differ from locale to locale, embodiment and the gameplay experiences triggered by said reality depend, once again, on the translator’s analytic partaking prior to the critical translation of grammatical gender beyond the representation of humans or personified objects and animals.

Originating at the triangular interrelationship of dependence between queerness, video games, and the activist turn of translation mentioned at the beginning, a “queer turn” in video game localization becomes the starting point of this work. Such turn would attempt to develop a queer, introspective, foreignizing and ethical mindset in the figure of the translator as part of the localization process of video games, primordially based on the complexities and contradictions of otherness and the quintessential abundance of queerness in games. In doing so, the too-close reading and (self) critical dynamics mentioned throughout the sections above shall constitute the approach to the analysis of video games prior to and during any translation.

EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK

4. Introduction to the Queer Turn of Video Game Localization

The suggested queer turn in video game localization derives from the activist turn of translation (Wolf, 2012) applied to queer game studies. Deconstruction and problematization of the oppositions upon which society and language are constructed are the contradictory strategies of this turn. In *A History of Bisexuality*, Angelides (2001) urges the advocacy of bisexuality as a spectrum that unequivocally subverts the imposition of the opposed monosexual duality and binary gender constructions that enforce its erasure. Simultaneously, the contradictory nature of queer deconstructive approaches is explained:

“History” has been in some ways bracketed out as the proper object of constructionism, and “theory” the proper object of deconstruction, with little critical reflection on their complicitous interlacings. (...) Social constructionist history has been, and is, an extremely positive development, without which I and the many other scholars in gender and sexuality studies would not be able to do the work we are doing (Angelides, 2001: 9).

Extrapolated to critical translation, deconstructive approaches shall operate within the linguistic and socio-political constructive knowledge in which society, language and translation come into being. While questioning and problematizing structures that both create and marginalize otherness, translators are encouraged to identify too-close read instances of difference, and to reproduce it in clear contrast with the dominant context in which it occurs.

In the queer turn of video game localization, close-reading queerness for its target reproduction involves analyzing the experiences obtained from a multimodal immersion in the product. Additionally, it involves the acknowledgement of barriers, limitations, and one’s means to face them.

5. Objectives, Research Questions and Hypothesis

The main objective of the empirical framework is to implement Miller’s too-close reading and Kadiu’s (self) critical approach in the analysis of *Undertale* (Fox, 2015) and its Spanish translation. The analysis is intended to display the reflexive mindset that ought to be adopted by translators before and during any translation, especially those that take part in the

localization process of video games—given their queer nature. The critical analysis of both versions and locales shall disclose the effects that translation, and the socio-political context in which it is produced, may have in the final product.

Thus, the aforementioned overall objective—to implement too-close reading and (self) critical approaches in the analysis of *Undertale* (Fox, 2015) and its Spanish translation—is broken down into the following sub-objectives:

- To identify queer resonances in the American video game *Undertale*.
- To identify possible translation barriers emerged from the linguistic and socio-political divergences of the American and Spanish locales.
- To discuss instances in which queerness is removed as a result of the linguistic and socio-political barriers.

In order to meet said objectives, a set of research questions have been designed along with their respective hypothesis:

- Where is the queerness in *Undertale*?

Queer resonances are to be analyzed thoroughly to demonstrate the first hypothesis of this research: *Undertale* is a conspicuous example of queer game design, and its otherness is plentiful. On that account, the critical and analytical potential of translation for social and political intervention can—and should—be used to transmit such queerness.

- What are the barriers obtruding in the queer experiencing of the translated product?

The self-critical and reflexive role of translators is to be implemented revealing the importance of careful decision-making. The possible challenges encountered in the translation of *Undertale* shall be identified in order to question the translator's options in facing them. Hence, the second hypothesis: the translator's linguistic and socio-political contexts, as well as the extent to which they are self-aware of their power and biases, influence gameplay experiences in the target locale.

- Under what circumstances is queerness erased in translation?

By answering this question, it is attempted to expose the different decisions made by the translators depending on the available sociolinguistic flexibility. The last corresponding hypothesis is: Barriers or apparent untranslatability often result in the erasure of queerness. However, a too-close reading approach to the analysis of video games, and a reflexive and self-critical approach to translation, ensure that the process of localization becomes more ethical.

6. Methodology

The material subjected to analysis in this project consists of the original version of the American video game *Undertale*, and its translated version into Spanish.

The only Spanish version of *Undertale* is available online (undertale-spanish.com) in the form of a downloadable language patch to be attached to the original PC game. Given the lack of an official localization, this Spanish version is the product of a fan translation remarkably provided by a non-profit team of four translators who are introduced in their own website.

Undertale is the story of a human child who accidentally falls into the Underground, a confined subterranean area inhabited by monsters who were sent into exile by humans. The adventures of the protagonist attempting to return to their home are embodied by the player, who might feel defenceless in the figure of an infant expected to face numerous confrontations while being “the other” in an alien kingdom. It is a game with multiple endings, which are categorized in three types according to the player’s general attitude reflected in their decisions. Said types are the “neutral” ending, the “true pacifist” ending and the “genocide” ending. For the purposes of this study, the analyses were based on the true pacifist route, as it represents a better conception of the societal values that humans very determinedly attempt to comply with while struggling to progress, often in vain. The different underground lands constituting the player’s journey in the game are “the Ruins,” “Snowdin,” “Waterfall,” “Hotland,” and “New Home.”

Regarding the development of the empirical framework, it encompassed two main tasks involving descriptive and comparative analyses. Firstly, queerness in *Undertale* was too-close read through a guided process of identification of instances according to six different elements that characterize video games as quintessentially queer platforms. These elements, which shall be presented in the following section, are the result of a compilation of the topics covered in the theoretical framework. The material required for this task consisted of the original version of the video game —for an in-depth analysis— and the list of elements —to support such analysis. The result constitutes a number of instances in which queerness is encountered, represented in the form of extracted texts. The reflexive process undertaken during the identification of queerness was noted for description along with each text.

Secondarily, the data extracted from the first analysis was revised in comparison to its translated equivalents from the Spanish version of *Undertale*. For a more extensive and (self) critical analysis, the computer-assisted translation program SDL Trados Studio was used,

dividing all texts into smaller segments. Subsequently, the identification of translation barriers was performed through a second reflexive process that contemplated the ways in which queerness in the original segments could be translated to the new locale, considering their contexts within the game. Once the barriers and possible solutions had been studied, the resulting translation from said reflexive process (See Appendix) was contrasted with the available target version.

7. Applying Queer Translation Practices: Too-Close Reading *Undertale*

The six different elements used to guide the process of identification of queerness in *Undertale* are non-productivity, failure, pain, alienness, intimacy, and explicit LGBTQIA representation. Posterior to the description of queer instances according to such elements in Section 7.1., the resulting extracted texts are presented alongside with their Spanish translation in Section 7.2. In such presentation, queer losses and the causes for loss will be marked and described.

These analyses are meant to demonstrate the reflexive and self-critical approaches needed to apply queer translation practices in the localization of video games.

7.1. Where Is the Queerness in *Undertale*? or, Where Is the Queerness? In *Undertale*

The first interaction of the player with *Undertale* consists of choosing their character's name, which is, as early as that, a queer resonance. No gender indications are provided, as the character's gender is never meant to be specified, in such a manner that the player's experimentation with their own identity can occur without limits. It lies with the player the herculean responsibility to decide a name for a digital body through which they will immerse in a long journey of diverse emotions, a name that is pleasant enough to embody. Faced with such a privilege—that of choosing one's own identity without constraints—several minutes of reflection are often required to savor the opportunity and choose wisely or, for one's own playful enjoyment, to choose absurdly.

Only in the case of previously knowing and typing in the official name of the character, given by its designer, a warning message (Figure 8) appears, and an alternative, much shorter, and much more painful version of the game is unlocked. Given names and pre-established identities causing distress to the people that are supposed to assimilate them is another self-evident point

of intersection between this game and queer experiences. Eventually, the player is forced to replay the game choosing a different name.



Figure 8. Screenshot of Undertale (2015). Warning message.

Uncountable replays and infinite patience are essential in *Undertale*, which is referred to as “determination” throughout the game. Recalling Ruberg’s collection of “no-fun games”: boring, annoying, alarming, sad, and painful games (2019: 168), players may notice that all of these adjectives could well be applied to *Undertale* at some point. Feelings of instability and wariness conveyed in the agitating typography, and in the pixelated vexatious style in which the game design is based (Figure 9), are encountered from the very beginning.

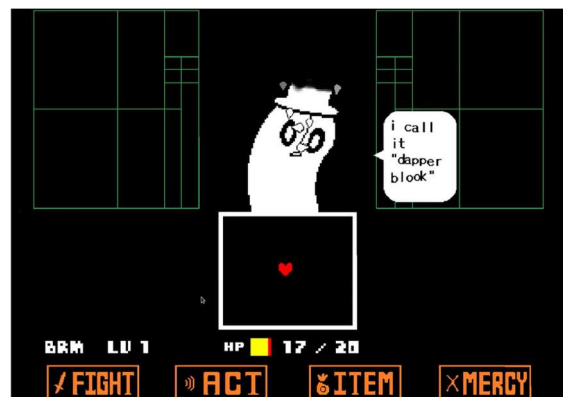


Figure 9. Screenshot of Undertale (2015). Pixelated and agitating style as characteristic of the game’s interactive mode.

In the subsections below, several cases of queerness in the narrative and dialogues of *Undertale* will be described following the elements proposed earlier. It should be noted that the selected texts are a few selected instances of the way in which queerness takes place in the game,

extracted for their illustrative significance. These instances are meant to represent the proposed elements, but they do not contain the integrity of queerness in the game.

7.1.1. Non-Productivity

In the following texts, non-productivity is mainly transmitted through erratic humor:

TEXT 1. A sign in the Ruins that reads “press [Z] to read signs!”

The introduction of *Undertale* is majorly constituted by mockery of conventional narratives of progress and gradual acquisition of skills, usually formulated in the form of subtle tutorials. In this game, these tutorials are excessively obvious, and the first puzzles and challenges are meant to cause no struggle whatsoever⁷. A case in point is the first selected text, extracted from a pointless sign that has no other aim but to be humoristically counterproductive. This type of unprofitable dynamics is exceptionally frequent, and purposely designed to unsettle the player for their inability to progress or obtain any sort of material reward. These frustrations are also portrayed in Text 2.

TEXT 2. A passage in Waterfall: “It’s a legendary artifact. Will you take it? You’re carrying too many dogs. You deployed the dog. The dog absorbs the artifact”

This instance of non-productivity takes place within an entirely dispensable passage, which is irrelevant to the plot and significantly distracting. It requires the completion of a series of tasks that consecutively lead the player towards a so-called “legendary artifact,” to eventually be deprived of it abruptly and providing no explanation on its value or use. Annoying Dog is a character designed to occasionally hinder manoeuvres, and, in this instance, to furtively intrude the game’s menu and absorb a mysterious fought-for reward after being released from the items carried by the player. Resolution and closure being so deliberately and irrationally taken away from the player, causes a feeling of discomfort that must be overcome to continue with the game—that is if, at this point, they are determined enough to continue.

Despite the player being frustrated by such an unproductive overall design, they are also bound to engage with every item and input to which they are exposed, for some may be meaningful

⁷ In fact, Toriel, a motherly character who (unnecessarily) guides the player through their first steps in the game, very possibly owes her name to the word “tutorial.”

or consequential. Playing *Undertale* entails playing at the risk of being constantly aggrieved by the game, which presents itself as a self-aware entity that recognizes the ingrained western ideology of meritocracy, involving the need to achieve an illusionary “happy ending.” Thus, the game challenges the player, and, aware of how disturbing it is for them to simply quit, it explores the extent to which they are willing to suffer trying.

TEXT 3. Toriel’s diary in the Ruins: “Why did the skeleton want a friend? Because she was feeling bonely”

Jokes and silly puns are presented in the game as a form of coping with pessimism, which is learned by the player as the plot unfolds. Such is the attitude of the characters living in the world where the player lands, and so it is embodied by the player and reflected in the way they play. Humor is an instance of joy among frustration, defeat and regress that sabotages the binarism of comforting success versus invalidating failure. The player is driven to appreciate the perks of being helpless in the unpreventable event of misfitting in the narrative. Thus, counterproductivity is awarded too. The humoristic effect of Text 3 was inspired by the reality of one of the characters in the game, whose despair incites creativity and enjoyment of the absurd. The joke’s author is revealed through the player’s deduction long after finding the joke written down in a diary. He is, naturally, a skeleton. It might be the case that the subject of his creation being an opposite-gendered skeleton was a quality carefully devised not to give away his real inner connection to the joke.

7.1.2. Failure

In *Undertale* most—if not all—characters fail to compel with their own intentions or assigned duties. The following are some examples.

TEXT 4. Miniboss fight with Toriel in the Ruins: “Pathetic, is it not? I cannot save even a single child”

Toriel is a character that carries the devastation derived from repeatedly failing to be a mother. Not only does she lose her two children in a timeline prior to the game, but she is also incapable of restraining the insistent player from undertaking a painful and dangerous journey—even after offering them protection, a safe home, and affectionate upbringing. Nevertheless, she is not to be condemned for her failures, as failing is not her choice. Rather, it is the player who

decides to accept the dangers of the world that they encounter despite being warned time and again. Certainly, there would be no game without the masochistic logics of the general player, illustrated by their determination to accept and embrace discomfort for the mere experience of intimacy during gameplay.

By any means, the causes of Toriel's failures are always external and inevitable, yet she describes her performance as pathetic. Her comprehension of her own circumstances resonates with the hegemonically imposed belief that failure is a consequence to be dealt with by those who are not worthy of success due to their undesirable attitude. Given that the player later experiences similar feelings of constant defeat, their embodiment of pain yields the development of a critical perspective that reveals the intertwined and complex nature of failure and success. At any rate, it permits a new attitude towards failure that obviates self-deprecation and selective invalidation.

TEXT 5. The second encounter with Flowey: "I bet you feel really great. You didn't kill anybody this time. But what will you do if you meet a relentless killer? You'll die and you'll die and you'll die. Until you tire of trying. What will you do then? Will you kill out of frustration? Or will you give up entirely on this world...?"

The system, timeline, and functions of the present video game are controlled by Flowey, an evil flower that is capable of resetting saved files and deriding the player's relentless attempt to make progress and achieve a happy ending. The entire gameplay experience is, therefore, not linear, but chaotically queer. Flowey takes advantage of the human's determination within their liberal understanding for its own entertainment and destroys every achievement just when the player is closest to winning. Only when Flowey decides to end the game, the game eventually ends. Thus, the player is not a heroic figure, but rather a relatively powerless individual that can only interact with the game to become part of—or annihilate—a net of intimacy built among its characters, for their progress is illusional.

Furthermore, in the true pacifist route, besides being an unheroic figure, the player also needs to dodge attacks, and flee or spare every opponent—an incredibly arduous task at times. One could deem such depiction of the nuisances of being cowardly one of the most peculiar characteristics of *Undertale*. Once the player becomes conscious of the humble intentions and motivations of villains in the game, they understand that there are never two morally opposed sides in conflict, but an indiscernible multitude characterized by different types of failure in

which they also belong. In view of this, Flowey expresses its burlesque amusement once again as pronounced in Text 5.

The text manifests the pessimism conveyed in the impossibility of achievement through harmless attitudes. Refusing to contribute to binary systems that so clearly define “the good” and “the bad” while advancing in one’s path is often frustrating and contradictory—one can even fail to fail, and thus succeed according to the hegemonic values.

TEXT 6. A conversation with Alphys in Hotland: “but the experiment failed. You see, unlike humans’, monsters’ bodies don’t have enough physical matter to take those concentrations of “determination.” Their bodies started to melt and lost what physicality they had. (...) I couldn’t tell their families about it”

Text 6 is another instance of accidental yet catastrophic failure. Alphys, a kind-hearted scientist who comes across as desiring to be the hero of the story on several occasions, fails dreadfully despite her righteous intentions. As asked by the king of monsters, she is firm about originating a scientific solution that brings freedom to the inhabitants of her world, yet her experimentation leads to an extremely disturbing outcome that inflicts great harm on others.

TEXT 7. Papyrus’ note in Snowdin: “Human!! please enjoy this spaghetti... This spaghetti is a trap designed to entice you. You’ll be so busy eating it... That you won’t realize that you aren’t progressing!!”

The defeat of villains is binding for the players to be victorious in any game. However, it is not so often that the player empathetically bonds with villains through failure. Papyrus, whose assigned duty is to capture humans that land in this underground world of monsters, is, in fact, an inoffensive whimsical character. He attempts to effectuate his duty through ludicrous puzzles and “traps” that do not require any real effort to be transcended. Thus, he does not fail as a villain, rather, he fails to be one, just as every character in *Undertale* seems to fail to comply with their assigned roles.

In Text 7, it is also worth noting the way in which monsters understand the player as “the other” (i.e., “the human”). On multiple occasions, monsters do not refer to them by their name, for their human condition is alien enough to be their most defining feature. Such queer condition

diminishes the importance of other constituents of their identity, such as gender or personality, comparably to the way a monster would be perceived in the human world.

7.1.3. Pain

Some of the previous texts convey painful sentiments such as frustration, blame or self-deprecation derived from non-productivity and failure. In the following, pain is depicted as a consequence of the self-being, rather than a temporary and/or resultant experience. It consists of a self-aware pain that does not stem from external circumstances, but from one's own existence.

TEXT 8. Miniboss fight with Undyne in Waterfall: "You know what would be more valuable to everyone? IF YOU WERE DEAD!!!"

Text 8 has been selected to portray the emerging pain in the player as they learn that their own defeat against king Asgore, who they expect to be "the final boss," would grant all monsters their freedom. As mentioned previously, in this instance, pain is not caused by the confrontation of obstacles in the narrative. Instead, it is caused by the fact that the player exists. Such realization forces them to accept pain, not only as a part of life, but also as a part of the self. Undyne pronounces the cruel yet truthful words in Text 8 as an attempt to discourage the player to keep advancing, as, besides dying, there is no possible heroic action to be performed by a human in the Underground. Similarly, queer individuals that impersonate otherness and impoverishment or regression in western societies, question the functionality of their existence in such a world.

TEXT 9. Napstablook's intervention in Waterfall: "Sorry, i interrupted you, didn't i? as soon as i came over, your friend immediately left... oh no... you guys looked like you were having fun... oh no... i just wanted to say hi... oh no..."

Napstablook, an introverted ghost whose being seems overall uncomfortable, is a queer instance of intrinsic struggle. Painful feelings such as insecurity and anxiety are portrayed in their actions and discourse. Pain, far from emanating from external sources, resides in their personality permanently. Their speech is peculiarly arranged to radiate instability, as shown in Text 9 ("i" in lowercase, expressions of alarm and repeated ellipses), and Figure 9 above

(agitating typography), where they are shown creating an elegant hat out of their own tears. Moreover, lowercase “i” is a precise representation of the character’s low self-esteem, considering that the first personal pronoun is used to refer to oneself, and, contrary to its usual distinctive size within a text, in this case it is minimized.

TEXT 10. Miniboss fight with Mettaton in Hotland: “So what if a few people have to die? That’s show business, baby!”

A completely different type of pain is attached to the identity of Mettaton, a robot machine initially thought to have been accidentally programmed for human bloodshed by scientist Alphys—his real motivations are revealed later. Despite the homicidal feelings residing in him, Mettaton is a loved character in the Underground, for he was created to provide the lonesome inhabitants with television entertainment. Once again, complexity is shown in the game dismantling simple binary concepts—Mettaton is not an evil character as opposed to dignified ones, although the integrity of his being is exasperatingly painful for the player.

As a performer, Mettaton aspires to reach fame and fortune in the world of humans, where he would have a much larger audience. However, in order to fulfil his dream, the player must be eliminated, which, in actual fact, motivates his homicidal tendencies. In Text 10, this situation is expressed through a reference to business dynamics in liberalism—success is achieved by some, at the cost of (the) others.

Mettaton, as well as his creator, Alphys, are explicit queer characters in the game, as will be discussed later on.

7.1.4. Alienness

Alienness has been identified in *Undertale* as instances of sociolinguistic difference within the American and/or Spanish locales.

TEXT 11. Conversation with a rock in the Ruins: “WHOA there, pardner! Who said you could push me around? HMM? So you’re ASKIN’ me to move over? Okay, just for you, pumpkin.”

Regardless of the unuttered nature of dialogues in *Undertale*, a variety of idiolects can be discerned from the characters’ written speech. Text 11 is generated by a personified rock who

complains about being pushed as part of a puzzle manoeuvre typical of video games (Figure 10). The rock’s idiolect is distinguished —within the American variation of the English language— through the spellings of “partner” (“pardner”) and “asking” (“askin”), as well as the appellative expression “pumpkin.”



Figure 10. Screenshot of Undertale (2015). The gate will only open if all three rocks are in place.

TEXT 12. Miniboss fight with Muffet in Hotland: “Don't look so blue, my deary~”

As a spider who sells tea and pastries, Muffet resembles a European style among mostly American characters. From her appearance and speech, British features can be observed. For instance, the appellative “my deary” in Text 12. However, from her name and the script unlocked once the true pacifist route has been completed, unambiguous French alienness is noticeable, as shown in Figure 11.



Figure 11. Screenshot of Undertale (2015). Muffet introducing French in the English lexicon.

TEXT 13. Papyrus’ conversation with Undyne in Waterfall: “Regarding that human I called you about earlier... huh? Did I fight them? Yes! Of course I did! I fought them valiantly!”

Alienness in the human (i.e., the player) was previously discussed in Text 7 with regards to their exclusive condition in the *Underground*. In Text 13, a sociolinguistic tool of the English language is used to stress the alien lack or irrelevance of a binary gender in the player. That is, using the third-person plural pronoun “they” —”them” in this case— as neuter third person singular, and thus avoiding gender specifications of the singular third person pronouns “she” and “he.”

7.1.5. Intimacy

This variable is crucial for any gameplay experience. Intimacy is developed through the players’ interaction with the video game’s features and narrative, as well as their embodiment. The following instances of intimacy in *Undertale* portray the connection of the player with other characters, with their own journey, and with the game itself.

TEXT 14. Visiting Napstablook’s home in Waterfall: “After a great meal i like to lie on the ground and feel like garbage... it’s a family tradition... do you want... to join me...”

Choosing to visit Napstablook after being invited to their house yields the possibility to strengthen the player’s relationship with them in an intimate recreation. As intimacy between them develops, the atmosphere gradually turns into a galactic illustration of profound comfort

(Figure 12). Text 14 is yet another proof of the viability of content within pain. Similar tender instances can be discerned when the player chooses to interact with other characters between their missions, including those confronted in fights.

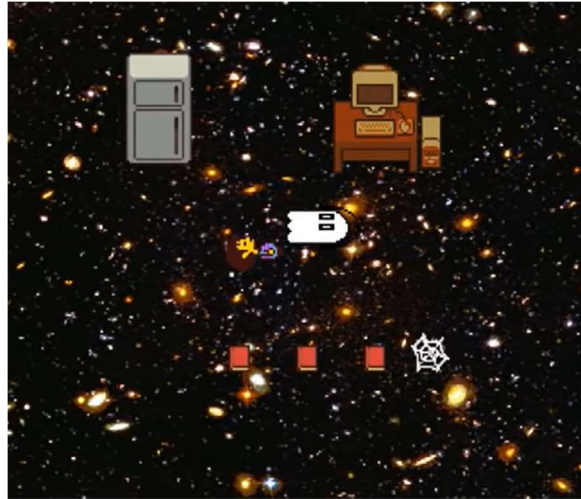


Figure 12. Screenshot of Undertale (2015). Intimate scene with Napstablook.

TEXT 15. A mirror in New Home: “Despite everything, it’s still you.”

Asgore’s house in New Home is a replica of Toriel’s house in the Ruins at the beginning of the game, where the player can interact with a mirror that exclaims “it’s you!” The mirror found in New Home, shortly before confronting Asgore in the supposedly “final-boss fight,” states the words in Text 15. This replica is monochromatic and accompanied by an emotional soundtrack, which, along with Text 15, prompts nostalgia and the appreciation of all the experiences embodied during the player’s journey.

TEXT 16. The real final-boss fight with Flowey: “I’m not ready for this to end. I’m not ready for you to leave. I’m not ready to say goodbye to someone like you again. So please, stop doing this and just let me win!!! I’m so alone, [player’s name]... I’m so afraid, [player’s name]...”

As representative of the game itself, Flowey suggests reciprocity by exposing a similar emotion to that generally held by players as they complete a game. During this last encounter, the character is transformed, abandoning its previous soulless condition. In his real form—that of a monster named Asriel—his sorrows and fears in relation to the finite are manifested, and the affinity between the player and the game is disclosed. In an attempt to endlessly maintain amusement, the game (i.e., Flowey or Asriel) consistently manipulates its own system.

Consequently, it precludes a happy ending until eventually giving in. This mutual affection expressed by the game reinforces alternativity to reality by rewarding the player's implication, not with combative success or material winnings, but with intimacy and pure embracement of pain.

7.1.6. Explicit Queer Representation

Explicit LGBTQIA representation also takes place in *Undertale*. Firstly, through the non-conforming gender of some characters—as previously discussed—and secondly, through the characters presented in the following paragraphs. No text has been extracted to depict explicit representation, as there is no need to too-close read particular instances in order to identify their queerness.

The first conspicuously queer character in *Undertale* is Mettaton (Figure 13), distinguished by his gender expression. Although portraying queer characters as villains is neither distinctive nor unbiased, Mettaton's personality and his relationships with others bear fair resemblance to the complexity of queer identities. Moreover, Mettaton's charisma can be interpreted as a queer resonance, considering that queer individuals tend to resort to art and performance as forms of uninhibited self-expression derived from a pessimistic status.

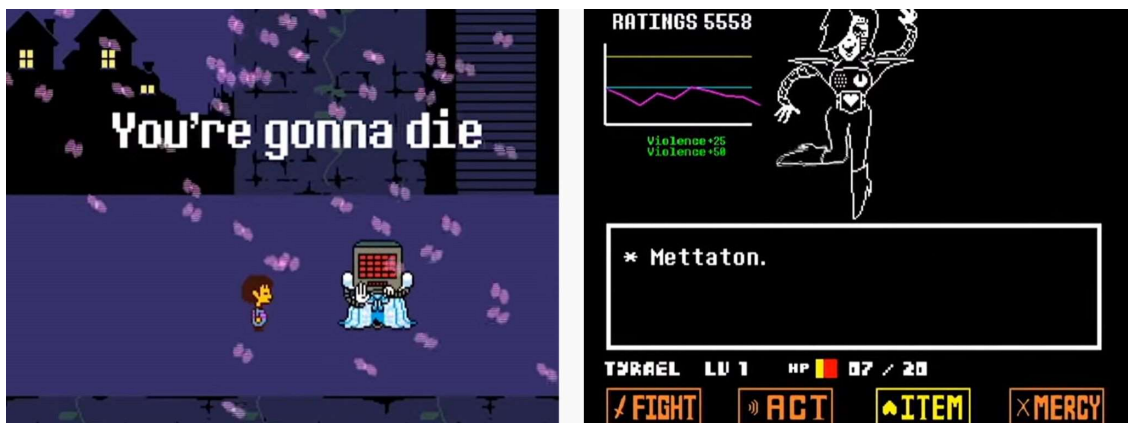


Figure 13. Screenshots of *Undertale* (2015). To the left, Mettaton performing cross-dressed. To the right, Mettaton in battle mode using his effeminate android form.

Additionally, there is a transparent affair between the female characters Undyne and Alphys, whose first romantic date can be witnessed by the player. It is worth noting that their relationship is not portrayed by means of mockery, nor is it humiliated. During the credits, after completing the true pacifist route, Undyne can be seen kissing Alphys, who rapidly reddens at it and collapses from excitement.

7.2. Translation Losses: Presentation and Classification of Data

The present section is aimed to mark queer losses in the Spanish translation of *Undertale*, and to simultaneously identify their causes. The sixteen texts described in the previous section and their respective Spanish translations are the constituents of this comparative analysis, whose results are presented as a textual table (Table 1) and followed by the description of the data classification according to the causes for translation loss. The explicit representation of LGBTQIA characters in the game is not subject to analysis, as the investigation at hand has its genesis in the queer core dynamics implicit in the video game, rather than its superficial features.

TEXT	ENGLISH VERSION	SPANISH VERSION	CAUSES
1	Press [Z] to read signs!	¡Pulsa [Z] para leer los carteles!	-
2	It's a legendary artifact. Will you take it? You're carrying too many dogs. You deployed the dog. The dog absorbs the artifact.	Es un artefacto legendario. ¿Lo tomas? Llevas demasiados perros. Pones al perro en el suelo. El perro absorbe el artefacto.	-
3	Why did the skeleton want a <u>friend</u> ? Because <u>she</u> was feeling bonely.	¿Por qué quería <u>el</u> esqueleto un <u>amigo</u> ? Porque se sentía huesolo...	G, SP
4	Pathetic, is it not? I cannot save even a single <u>child</u> .	Patético, ¿verdad? No puedo salvar ni a un solo <u>niño</u> .	SP
5	I bet you feel really great. You didn't kill anybody this time. But what will you do if you meet a <u>relentless</u> killer? You'll die and you'll die and you'll die. Until you tire of trying. What will you do then? Will you kill out of frustration? Or	Apuesto a que te sientes genial. No has matado a nadie esta vez. ¿Pero qué harás si te encuentras con un asesino <u>despiadado</u> ? Morirás y morirás y morirás. Hasta que te canses de intentarlo. ¿Qué harás entonces? ¿Tu frustración te llevará a matar? O te rendirás y abandonarás	D

	will you give up entirely on this world...?	este mundo...	
6	But the experiment failed. You see, unlike <u>humans</u> ’, <u>monsters</u> ’ bodies don’t have enough physical matter to take those concentrations of “determination.” Their bodies started to melt, and lost what physicality they had. (...) I couldn’t tell their families about it.	Pero el experimento falló. Verás, al contrario que <u>los humanos</u> , los cuerpos de <u>los monstruos</u> no tienen tanta materia física para esos niveles de “determinación”. Sus cuerpos empezaron a derretirse, y perdieron su fisicalidad. (...) No podía contárselo a sus familias.	G
7	<u>Human</u> !! please enjoy this spaghetti... This spaghetti is a trap designed to entice you. You’ll be so <u>busy</u> eating it... That you won’t realize that you aren’t progressing!!	¡¡ <u>Humano</u> !! Por favor, disfruta de este espagueti. Poco que sabes, este espagueti es una trampa diseñada para tentarte. Estarás tan <u>ocupado</u> comiéndotelo... ¡¡que no te darás cuenta de que no estás progresando!!	G, SP
8	You know what would be more valuable to <u>everyone</u> ? IF YOU WERE <u>DEAD</u> !!!	¿Sabes qué sería de más valor para <u>todos</u> ? ¡¡¡Que estuvieses <u>muerto</u> !!!	SP
9	Sorry, <u>i</u> interrupted you, didn’t <u>i</u> ? as soon as <u>i</u> came over, your <u>friend</u> immediately left... oh no... you guys looked like you were having fun... oh no... <u>i</u> just wanted to say hi... oh no...	Lo siento, os he interrumpido, ¿verdad? justo cuando llego, tu <u>amigo</u> va y se marcha... oh no... parecía que os lo estabais pasando muy bien... oh no... solo quería saludar... oh no...	L, SP
10	So what if a few people have to die? That’s show <u>business</u> , baby!	¿Y qué si hay gente que debe morir? ¡Así es el <u>mundo</u> del espectáculo, baby!	D

11	<u>WHOA</u> there, <u>pardner!</u> Who said you could push me around? HMM? So you're ASKIN' me to move over? Okay, just for you, <u>pumpkin.</u>	¡Quieto ahí, <u>colega!</u> ¿Quién te dijo que pudieras empujarme? ¿HMM? ¿Me 'tas PIDIENDO que me mueva? Vale, solo por ti, <u>calabacita.</u>	D
12	<u>Don't look so blue, my deary~</u>	<u>El rojo no te sienta bien, mi cielo~</u>	D
13	Regarding that <u>human</u> I called you about earlier... huh? Did I fight <u>them</u> ? Yes! Of course I did! I fought <u>them</u> valiantly!	Respecto a ese <u>humano</u> del que te he hablado antes... ¿Eh? ¿Si luché contra <u>él</u> ? ¡Sí! ¡Por supuesto que sí! ¡Luché contra <u>él</u> valientemente!	G, SP
14	After a great meal <u>i</u> like to lie on the ground and feel like garbage... it's a family tradition... do you want... to join me...	Después de una gran comida me gusta tumbarme en el suelo y sentirme como basura... Es una tradición familiar... ¿te unirías... a mí...?	L
15	Despite everything, it's still you.	A pesar de todo, sigues siendo tú.	-
16	I'm not ready for this to end. I'm not ready for you to leave. I'm not ready to say goodbye to someone like you again. So please, stop doing this and just let me win!!! I'm so alone, [player's name]... I'm so afraid, [player's name]...	No estoy listo para que esto termine. No estoy listo para que te vayas. No estoy listo para decir adiós a alguien tan especial como tú de nuevo. Así que detente, por favor ¡¡¡y déjame ganar!!! Estoy tan solo, [player's name]... Tengo tanto miedo, [player's name]...	-

Table 1. Spanish and English versions of the sixteen extracted texts. The elements to be discussed are underlined and marked according to the classification elaborated below.

The main losses of queerness detected among the texts can be classified as follows according to their causes: grammatical gender (G), linguistic correctness (L), domestication (D), and

socio-political conventions (SP). It must be clarified that the aspects covered next are not intended to criticize the authors of the translation, as many are the factors influencing and limiting the choices of translators, and much is the gratitude owed to them. Furthermore, ethical translation frequently faces contradictions to be resolved by each translator differently. Rather, the aim is to use their product as a field of experimentation in order to apply the queer turn suggested in this project.

- **Grammatical gender:** texts 3, 6, 7 and 13.

In texts 3, 7 and 13 the translators were driven to alter the gender identity of certain individuals in order to comply with the grammatical gender rules of the target language. The subject of the third text is originally female. However, given that the word “skeleton” is masculine in Spanish and, for the most part, skeletons are conceptualized as inanimate objects, her gender was automatically replaced by that of the object’s grammatical gender. In the seventh and thirteenth texts, a similar issue is encountered. The neuter concept “human (being)” comprehended as an objective and non-personified type of living being, is translated using its natural masculine equivalent “(ser) humano.” While the grammatical gender of “ser humano” is uniform, “humano” can, as a matter of fact, be personified. Therefore, it allows a feminine form (“humana”) that is secondary in socio-political conventions, as will be discussed later. Text 6 contains the same issue when referring to “humans” and “monsters.” Nevertheless, no one’s true gender identity is directly compromised.

The translated texts expose the problematics in complying with grammatical gender rules in video games, where reality is distorted, and objects or even abstract ideas can become self-conscious characters.

- **Linguistic correctness:** texts 9 and 14.

As discussed in the descriptive analysis of text 9, ungrammaticality is used as a tool in the character’s speech to portray emotional instability and low self-esteem. Although this intention is partially transmitted in the Spanish version, a distinctive instance of pain is dismissed—the presentation of the first-person pronoun in lowercase. Text 14’s ungrammaticality is also corrected in a question that is originally left unmarked, possibly portraying the lack of adequate intonation in anxious speeches.

- **Domestication:** texts 5 and 10, 11, and 12.

Domestication can occur as a result of a lack of equivalents, or as an attempt to naturalize language and concepts in the target locale. In text 12, the translators resorted to the player’s

heart color in battle mode (red) to offset the lack of an equivalent expression for “to look blue.” That way, the reference to the player’s anguishes was replaced by a casual comment on their appearance. In addition to that, the domestication of text 12 obviates the character’s alienness by translating “my deary” to an appellative that is commonplace within the Spanish locale (ponlo). The affectionate nature of the original term is maintained, but not the foreign and refined attributes that stand out in the American locale. Obviation of alienness partly occurs in text 11 as well, where an attempt to distinguish a personal idiolect was made, yet it differs from the American non-standard dialect represented in the original.

In the translation of texts 5 and 10 a naturalization of language is produced, consisting of substituting source terms for different target ones that appear more fluent or harmonious in the target locale. In doing so, the liberal allusion to business dynamics in text 10 is removed, and the frustratingly persistent attitudes of “relentless killers” in the game is reduced to simple mischievousness proper of “asesinos despiadados.”

- **Socio-political conventions:** texts 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 13.

A particular socio-political convention affecting translation was identified prevailing in the entire target version. That is the use of masculine generics in cases of ambiguity, uncertainty, or grouping.

In the target texts 3, 4, 8, 9, and 13, the masculine gender was associated with an individual, or a group of individuals, whose gender was not specified originally (“amigo” in texts 3 and 9, “niño” in text 4, “ocupado” in text 7, “todos” and “muerto” in text 8, and “él” in text 13). Leaning towards masculinity in cases where gender is unknown is the socio-political convention of perceiving masculinity as neutrality. Far from being a grammatical gender issue, the personified nouns in these texts have feminine forms that are natural in Spanish, yet there is a predilection for the masculine.

In addition to such predilection within the binary, the use of neuter non-binary forms —such as singular “they” in English— is generally avoided in Spanish due to the lack of an official common rule or structure. A variety of gender-inclusive proposals are a current subject of debate, the most common one being the use of the suffix “e” as an alternative to the feminine “a” and the masculine “o.”

8. Discussion & Conclusions

This research project has attempted to introduce a queer turn in video game localization that explores the quintessential queerness of video games and accentuates it through the critical figure of the translator. Nonetheless, it is binding for the purposes of its application to the professional world that translators are regarded, both by themselves and others, as creative authors, and that their services are understood as elaborate processes of analysis, reflection, and decision-making.

In the current information age, audiovisual translation has been delegated to precariously produce target products instantaneously while complying with the neoliberal demands and customers' instructions. Hence claiming authorship and aspiring to implement the suggested too-close reading approach is undoubtedly burdensome. Furthermore, contemporary Anglocentrism and westernization of translation do not leave much space for reflection due to the usual procedure of localization from non-anglophone source locales to multiple targets. As discussed in Section 3.3, such process involves translating first into English as “the new source” from which the rest of target products are localized. Therefore, translators can only produce their work from a unified preestablished anglophone perspective where difference has already been erased. In spite of this, by being closely attentive, one might perchance be presented with the opportunity to translate queer, in which case it would be unethical to ignore it.

On that account, the objectives of this study encompassed a (self) critical mindset that could be of substantial use among translators that take part in video game localization. In this way, the neglect of the queer potential of video games and the influential power of translation could be avoided. Through the chosen objectives and methodology, it was possible to discern queerness in *Undertale*, to venture in the reflexive process of translation while identifying possible barriers, and to contrast the source and target versions in order to recognize queer losses and their causes.

The translation resulting from adopting the role of the translator for the identification of barriers (see Appendix) provided a number of noteworthy solutions such as the following:

- Justified grammatical transgression.

S7	Traducido (0%)	Why did the skeleton want a friend?	¿Por qué quería <u>la esqueleto</u> una amigue?
----	-------------------	-------------------------------------	---

In the alternative reality of video games, one must not take for granted that objects are inanimate. Provided that unified comprehensible patterns are used throughout the entire content, it is plausible to rigorously introduce ungrammaticality as a solution for grammatical gender issues with personified objects.

- Proliferation of gender-inclusive proposals.

S38	Traducido (0%)	Did I fight them?	¿Si luché contra <u>elle</u> ?
-----	-------------------	-------------------	--------------------------------

The proliferation of inclusive proposals and the adaptation of alien tools to name obscured realities in the target locale is a salient example of the influential power of translation. For the most part, it is a political decision to be made by the critical translator, as this type of proposals is not usually esteemed by institutions of linguists. The Royal Spanish Academy (Real Academia Española) (2020:105) rejects them alluding to their alienness as an inconvenience:

The use of @ or the letters "e" and "x" as gender inclusive marks is alien to the morphology of Spanish, as well as unnecessary since the grammatical masculine already fulfils that function as an unmarked term of gender opposition.

In any case, it is factually accurate to argue that language evolves according to the reality of its speakers. Unequivocally, the admission of new terms and grammar structures is entirely subordinate to their popularity among speakers of a community, and the use of inclusive proposals is a growing reality.

- Creative transmission of original peculiarities.

S28	Traducido (0%)	Sorry, <u>i</u> interrupted you, didn't <u>i</u> ? as soon as <u>i</u> came over, your friend immediately left... oh no... you guys looked like you were having fun... oh no... <u>i</u> just wanted to say hi... oh no...	Lo <u>siento</u> , os he <u>interrumpido</u> , <u>¿verdad</u> ? Tan pronto como <u>llego</u> , tu amigue va y sale corriendo... oh no... parecía que os lo estabais pasando muy bien... oh no... <u>yo</u> solo quería decir hola... oh no...
-----	----------------	--	---

Peculiarities in the source product are opportunities to enhance queerness and remind of the creative role of translators. In this case, subscripts and inverted question marks were used to reproduce the self-diminution (“i” instead of “I”) and awkwardness portrayed in the character’s original speech. In this manner, all first-person singular pronouns and terminations representing the character’s self were minimized, and instability was highlighted.

- Foreign reminders.

S35	Traducido (0%)	Okay, just for you, pumpkin.	<u>Okay</u> , solo por ti, <u>pumpkin</u> .
-----	----------------	------------------------------	---

Idiolects are also peculiarities among the source text to ideally be queered in the target products. Therefore, it is convenient to regard them as opportunities to foreignize translation, as long as the result is comprehensible or does not imply a complete disorientation during gameplay.

All of the choices presented above were based on the conclusions obtained from a previously performed too-close reading analysis. As hypothesized, the number of queer resonances identified during that first analysis was large, which attested the significant oversight caused by the common mistake of reducing queer analysis to explicit on-screen representation of LGBTQIA content. For instance, in *Undertale*, queerness is majorly reflected in its counterhegemonic narratives and its whimsical essence. Cambridge Dictionary’s (2021) online definition of the latest adjective offers a fully suitable description of this queer game: “whimsical: unusual and strange in a way that might be funny or annoying.”

In taking implicit queerness into consideration and aiming for ethical translations, translators must also reflect on recurring paradoxes that inevitably preclude the certainty of choosing right. Ultimately, ethics are constructed from the personal, social, historic, cultural, politic, religious,

and moral premises that shape one's stance in contrast with the rest of individuals in the world. For that reason, the queer turn of video game localization does not profess to ensure faultless ethics. Rather, it promotes the translators' experimentation of difference in order to question conventional modes of operating while acknowledging their own disposition and accepting uncertainty.

In future lines of research, the suggested turn shall be further elaborated through a more contrasted analysis of *Undertale* and other video games. Due to the limited scope and means for this master's final project, several influential aspects could not be considered, such as the team of translators to whom Spanish-speaking players owe the opportunity to experience *Undertale*. Having reiterated the importance of regarding the figure of the translator, it would be practical to conduct semi-structured interviews so as to obtain information on their process, externally imposed limitations, challenges, guidelines, and personal remarks. A wider scope would also permit to delve into the different routes and endings of *Undertale*, hence examining the player's choices. After all, it is their queer journey.



* Despite everything, it's
still you.

References

- Angelelli, C. V. (2012). *The Sociological Turn in Translation and Interpreting Studies* (Vol. 66). Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Angelides, S. (2001). *A History of Bisexuality (The Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society)* (1st ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Baer, B. J. (2020). *Queer Theory and Translation Studies (New Perspectives in Translation and Interpreting Studies)* (1st ed.). [E-book]. London and New York: Routledge.
- Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The second sex* (2nd English ed.). New York: Vintage.
- Beauvoir, S. (2015). *Extracts from: the Second Sex* (M. Reid, & N. Haynes Eds.). London: Vintage Classics.
- Bell T. & Olavsrud, T. (2020, March 16). *What is natural language processing? The business benefits of NLP explained*. CIO. Available at: <https://www.cio.com/article/3258837/what-is-natural-language-processing-the-business-benefits-of-nlp-explained.html> [Last accessed: May 18th 2021]
- Bizzocchi, J., & Tanenbaum, T.J. (2011). Well read: applying close reading techniques to gameplay experiences. In D. Davidson (Ed.), *Well Played 3.0: Video Games, Value and Meaning* (1st ed., pp. 262–290). Pittsburgh: ETC Press.
- Boutonnet, B., Athanasopoulos, P., & Thierry, G. (2012). Unconscious effects of grammatical gender during object categorisation. *Brain Research*, 1479, 72–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brainres.2012.08.044>
- Brim, M. (2020). *Poor Queer Studies: Confronting Elitism in the University*. Durham and London: Duke University Press Books.
- Butler, J. (2011). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (Routledge Classics)* (1st ed.) [E-book]. New York and London: Routledge.

- Cambridge University Press. (2021). Whimsical. In *Cambridge Dictionary*.
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/whimsical> [Last accessed: June 7th, 2021]
- Chang, E. Y. (2017). Queergaming. In B. Ruberg & A. Shaw (Eds.), *Queer Game Studies* (1st ed., pp. 825–995). [E-book]. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press.
- Davidson, D. (2008). Well Played. *Games and Culture*, 3(3–4), pp. 356–386.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412008317307>
- DougDoug (2018, September 6). *Can you kill a Lynel with Chickens? (Zelda Breath of the Wild)*. [Video]. YouTube. Available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0OfXTXfj5E> [Last accessed: April 19th, 2021]
- Douglas Harper. (2021). Woman. In *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Available at:
<https://www.etymonline.com/word/woman> [Last accessed: 15th April 2021].
- Ehrenreich, B. (2009). *Bright-sided: How Positive Thinking Is Undermining America* (First ed.). New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Ferguson, F. (2015). Now It's Personal: D. A. Miller and Too-Close Reading. *The University of Chicago Press*, 41(2), 521–540.
- Fernández Costales, A. (2012). Exploring translation strategies in video game localization. *MonTI. Monografías de Traducción e Interpretación*, 4, 385–408.
<https://doi.org/10.6035/monti.2012.4.16>
- Fox, T. (2015). *Undertale* (PC version) [Video game]. GameMaker: Studio.
- Fron, J., Fullerton, T., Morie, J. F., & Pearce, C. (2007, September 24). *The Hegemony of Play*. Proceedings, DiGRA: Situated Play, Tokyo. Available at: <http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/the-hegemony-of-play/> [Last accessed: April 16th 2021]
- Martínez González, M. C. (2015). *The turn in Translation Studies I*. Final year dissertation. Faculty of Translation and Interpreting. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona Available

at:

https://ddd.uab.cat/pub/tfg/2015/tfg_25420/MARTINEZ_GONZALEZ_CARLA_1303847_TFGTII4-15.pdf [Last accessed: April, 26th 2021]

Grau, J. (2020, June 5). *Crime Fighters 2* [Screenshot]. Twitter. Available at: <https://twitter.com/manganxet/status/1268978988317388801> [Last accessed: April 5th 2021]

Halberstam, J. (2011). *The Queer Art of Failure (a John Hope Franklin Center Book)* (Illustrated ed.). Durham and London: Duke University Press Books.

Kadiu, S. (2019). *Reflexive Translation Studies*. London: UCL Press. <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781787352513>

Lauretis, T. (2015). Género y Teoría Queer. *Dossier*, 21, 107–118.

Lewis, H. (2016). *The Politics of Everybody: Feminism, Queer Theory, and Marxism at the Intersection*. London: Zed Books.

Macklin, C. (2017). Finding the Queerness in Games. In B. Ruberg & A. Shaw (Eds.), *Queer Game Studies* (1 ed., pp. 4723–4879). [e-book]. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press.

Nissen, U. K. (2002). Aspects of Translating Gender. *Linguistik Online*, 11(2/02), 25–37. <https://doi.org/10.13092/lo.11.914>

Perez-Marcos, D. (2018). Virtual reality experiences, embodiment, videogames and their dimensions in neurorehabilitation. *Journal of NeuroEngineering and Rehabilitation*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12984-018-0461-0>

Real Academia Española. (2020, January 16). *Informe de la Real Academia Española sobre el uso del lenguaje inclusivo en la Constitución Española, elaborado a petición de la Vicepresidenta del Gobierno*. Boletín de Información Lingüística de la Real Academia Española. Available at: <http://revistas.rae.es/bilrae/article/view/397/874> [Last accessed: June 4th 2021]

- Ruberg, B. (2019). *Video Games Have Always Been Queer (Postmillennial Pop, 16)*. [E-book]. New York: NYU Press.
- Ruberg, B., & Shaw, A. (2017). *Queer Game Studies* (1st ed.). [E-book]. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press.
- Schreier, J. (2017, December 22). *Brilliant Indie Game The Stanley Parable Will Mess With Your Head*. Wired. Available at: <https://www.wired.com/2011/08/the-stanley-parable/> [Last accessed: 21st May 2021]
- Stockton, K. B. (2017). If Queer Children Were a Video Game. In B. Ruberg & A. Shaw (Eds.), *Queer Game Studies* (1 ed., pp. 4266–4515). [e-book]. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press.
- Troughton, J. (2021, March 24). *The Developers Of Bugsnax And The Sims Explain Why LGBT Representation Is So Important For Gaming*. TheGamer. Available at: <https://www.thegamer.com/bugsnax-sims-devs-lgbt-representation-gaming/> [Last accessed: 10th May 2021]
- Vargha, D. (2021, March 20). *Gender Biased Machine Translation* [Screenshot]. Twitter. Available at: <https://twitter.com/DoraVargha/status/1373211762108076034?s=20> [Last accessed: 22nd April 2021]
- Venuti, L. (1998). *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.7202/037380ar>
- Webb, P., & Boroditsky, L. (2003). Can Quirks of Grammar Affect the Way You Think? Grammatical Gender and Object Concepts. *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society*, 25(25), 928–933.
- Wolf, M. (2012). The sociology of translation and its “activist turn.” In C. V. Angelleli (Ed.), *The Sociological Turn in Translation and Interpreting Studies* (Vol. 66, pp. 7–21). Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Woolley, C. S. (2018). Sex-Dependent Mechanisms of Synaptic Modulation. *NEW COVER TK*, 78-85.

Zhou, P., Shi, W., Zhao, J., Huang, K. H., Chen, M., Cotterell, R., & Chang, K. W. (2019). Examining Gender Bias in Languages with Grammatical Gender. *Proceedings of the 2019 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing and the 9th International Joint Conference on Natural Language Processing (EMNLP-IJCNLP)*, 3(7), 5217–5284. <https://doi.org/10.18653/v1/d19-1531>

Appendix

ID de segmento	Estado del segmento	Segmento de origen	Segmento de destino
S1	Traducido (0%)	Press [Z] to read signs!	¡Pulsa [Z] para leer los carteles!
S2	Traducido (0%)	It's a legendary artifact.	Es un artefacto legendario.
S3	Traducido (0%)	Will you take it?	¿Lo tomas?
S4	Traducido (0%)	You're carrying too many dogs.	Llevas demasiados perros.
S5	Traducido (0%)	You deployed the dog.	Usas el perro.
S6	Traducido (0%)	The dog absorbs the artifact.	El perro absorbe el artefacto.
S7	Traducido (0%)	Why did the skeleton want a friend?	¿Por qué quería la esqueleto un amigo?
S8	Traducido (0%)	Because she was feeling bonely.	Porque se sentía huesola.
S9	Traducido (0%)	Pathetic, is it not?	¿No es patético?
S10	Traducido (0%)	I cannot save even a single child.	No puedo salvar ni a un solo niño.
S11	Traducido (0%)	I bet you feel really great.	Seguro que te sientes fenomenal.
S12	Traducido (0%)	You didn't kill anybody this time.	No has matado a nadie esta vez.
S13	Traducido (0%)	But what will you do if you meet a relentless killer?	Pero ¿qué harás si te topas con un asesino infatigable?
S14	Traducido (0%)	You'll die and you'll die and you'll die.	Morirás y morirás y morirás.
S15	Traducido (0%)	Until you tire of trying.	Hasta que te canses de intentarlo.
S16	Traducido (0%)	What will you do then?	¿Qué harás entonces?
S17	Traducido (0%)	Will you kill out of frustration?	¿Matarás por frustración?
S18	Traducido (0%)	Or will you give up entirely on this world...?	¿O te rendirás y abandonarás este mundo por completo...?
S19	Traducido (0%)	But the experiment failed.	Pero el experimento fue un fracaso.
S20	Traducido (0%)	You see, unlike humans', monsters' bodies don't have enough physical matter to take those concentrations of "determination."	Verás, a diferencia de los humanos, el cuerpo de los monstruos no tiene suficiente materia física para esas concentraciones de «determinación».
S21	Traducido (0%)	Their bodies started to melt, and lost what physicality they had.	Sus cuerpos empezaron a fundirse y perdieron toda su fisicalidad.

S22	Traducido (0%)	(...)	(...)
S23	Traducido (0%)	I couldn't tell their families about it.	No podía contárselo a sus familias.
S24	Traducido (0%)	Human!! please enjoy this spaghetti... This spaghetti is a trap designed to entice you.	¡¡Humane!! Por favor, disfruta de este espagueti... Este espagueti es una trampa diseñada para tentarte.
S25	Traducido (0%)	You'll be so busy eating it... That you won't realize that you aren't progressing!!	Estarás tan ocupade comiéndotelo... ¡¡Que no te darás cuenta de que no estás progresando!!
S26	Traducido (0%)	You know what would be more valuable to everyone?	¿Sabes que sería de más valor para todes?
S27	Traducido (0%)	IF YOU WERE DEAD!!!	¡¡QUE ESTUVIESES MUERTE!!
S28	Traducido (0%)	Sorry, i interrupted you, didn't i? as soon as i came over, your friend immediately left... oh no... you guys looked like you were having fun... oh no... i just wanted to say hi... oh no...	Lo sient, os he interrumpid, ¿verdad? Tan pronto como lleg, tu amigue va y sale corriendo... oh no... parecía que os lo estabais pasando muy bien... oh no... yo solo quería decir hola... oh no...
S29	Traducido (0%)	So what if a few people have to die?	¿Y qué si algunas personas tienen que morir?
S30	Traducido (0%)	That's show business, baby!	¡Así es la industria del espectáculo, baby!
S31	Traducido (0%)	WHOA there, pardner!	WHOA there, pardner!
S32	Traducido (0%)	Who said you could push me around?	¿Quién te dijo que pudieses empujarme?
S33	Traducido (0%)	HMM?	¿HMM?
S34	Traducido (0%)	So you're ASKIN' me to move over?	¿Me 'tas PIDIENDO que me mueva pa'llá?
S35	Traducido (0%)	Okay, just for you, pumpkin.	Okay, solo por ti, pumpkin.
S36	Traducido (0%)	Don't look so blue, my deary~	No lo veas todo tan gris, mon amour~
S37	Traducido (0%)	Regarding that human I called you about earlier ... huh?	Respecto a ese humane sobre le que te hablé antes... ¿eh?
S38	Traducido (0%)	Did I fight them?	¿Si luché contra elle?
S39	Traducido (0%)	Yes!	¡Sí!
S40	Traducido (0%)	Of course I did!	¡Por supuesto que lo hice!
S41	Traducido (0%)	I fought them valiantly!	¡Luché contra elle valientemente!
S42	Traducido (0%)	After a great meal i like to lie on the ground and feel like garbage... it's a family tradition... do you want... to join me...	Después de comer un buen plato me gusta tumbarme en el suelo y sentirme como la basura... es una tradición familiar... quieres... unirte a mí...

S43	Traducido (0%)	Despite everything, it's still you.	A pesar de todo, sigues siendo tú.
S44	Traducido (0%)	I'm not ready for this to end.	No estoy listo para que esto termine.
S45	Traducido (0%)	I'm not ready for you to leave.	No estoy listo para que te vayas.
S46	Traducido (0%)	I'm not ready to say goodbye to someone like you again.	No estoy listo para decir adiós a alguien como tú otra vez.
S47	Traducido (0%)	So please, stop doing this and just let me win!!!	Así que, por favor, ¡¡¡para ya y déjame ganar!!!
S48	Traducido (0%)	I'm so alone, [player's name]...	Estoy tan solo, [player's name]...
S49	Traducido (0%)	I'm so afraid, [player's name]...	Tengo tanto miedo, [player's name]...

Table 2. Original and translated segments copied from SDL studio bilingual file.