Game localization : the role of translation in cross-cultural communication

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GAME LOCALIZATION: THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Game localization is a relatively new domain within Translation Studies and remains under-researched by academia. The game industry is projected to make up a significant portion of the global entertainment industry, with game localization playing an important part in bringing video games across borders, as a cultural and an entertainment product. Research into this domain can contribute to the understanding of the localization industry, with the possibility of specialized training being established to groom translation professionals for this industry. With the growth of the game development scene in China, an increasing number of games are developed with Chinese as a source language. These games are often localized into English for release in the North American market, or localized into other languages using English as a pivot language. However, few studies have been conducted on game localization from Chinese to English. This paper aims to address this research gap by conducting a qualitative study on the diegetic texts in a Chinese to English localized game, *Strike of Kings*. The challenges in cross-cultural communication between these two languages and cultures are identified. In addition, the translation strategies adopted in the localization process are analyzed, with the constraints imposed on game localization are discussed in this study.

1. Introduction

1.1 Game Localization

The globalization of the computer and software industry in the 1980s, gave birth to the localization industry, to deliver specific needs to localized software for international markets. Localization goes beyond language transfer, because translation alone was insufficient to bring a software program developed in one country to a form suitable for release in other markets (Esselink, 2000). Since localization addresses the demand of the computer and software industry, it evolves constantly as new electronic contents are created which need to be localized. New dimensions in translation studies are surfacing because of localization practices, requiring further research into this domain.

In *A Practical Guide to Localization*, localization is defined as "taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale (country/region and language) where it will be used and sold" (Esselink, 2000:3). In the *Localization Industry Primer*, published by The Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA) defines localization as "the process of adapting and manufacturing a product so that it has the look and feel of a nationally-manufactured piece of goods" (Fry and Lommel, 2003:3) and "the process of modifying products or services to account for differences in distinct markets" (Fry and Lommel, 2003:13). The document differentiates between localization and translation and pointed out that localization is not just a linguistic process. Localization needs to take into consideration not only the linguistic issues but also the content and cultural issues and technical issues, to deliver a localized product which is comparable to a local product.

Game localization is defined by Chandler (2012:4) as "the actual process of translating language assets in a game into other languages". She (ibid:10) elaborates that game localization process has three main phases, involving translation of language assets and other non-translational activities. O'Hagan (2015:747) defines game localization as "a set of

procedures involved in adjusting games technically, linguistically and culturally to a given market to distribute them in territories other than their countries of origin". Localization projects may differ based on the content to be localized, the workflow of a typical localization project is summarized by Esselink (2000:17), where translation only appears in two steps out of the fourteen steps in the process. From the definitions discussed above, it can be inferred that game localization involves more than translation of the language assets.

Game localization in the 1980s was a new industry which came along as a result of the birth of video games. Bernal-Merino (2011) summarizes the phases of localization as 'Box and Docs', 'partial localization', 'full localization' and 'deep localization. The 'Box and Docs' localization in the 1980s involved translation of packaging and documentation of the game for distribution, making them more accessible for consumers in different markets. In the 1990s, game publishers started moving towards 'partial localization' of games, where the text in games, such as the user interface (UI) and on-screen subtitles are translated. Some publishers recognized the importance of providing a fully translated game in important and strategic markets, where the product selected for "full localization" will include the in-game text translation as well as localized audio in the game. From the 2000s onwards, the industry is moving towards what is termed 'deep localization'. This means that other than text and audio localization, game developers and publishers are identifying other aspects of a game which can be adapted to increase player immersion and engagement with the game.

Game localization is often linked to software localization, because of the similar characteristics shared by games and software. A video game is an entertainment product in the form of software, therefore the UI in games need to be localized, similar to the UI in software or applications. Both localization processes involve language translation and software integration (O'Hagan, 2006). Similarly, the aim of localization for games and software is to deliver a product that is suitable for release in the target markets. However,

there are also distinct differences between software and game localization. While software localization focuses on the functionality of the product, game localization focuses on delivering equivalent user experience in the target market, which often requires a high degree of creativity and decision making in the translation process.

The standardization of the localization practices which benefits software localization is not always applicable to game localization. Games can be categorized into broad genres, such as role-playing game (RPG), first person shooter (FPS), massive online battle arena (MOBA), real-time strategy (RTS), simulation, action, sports, racing, and so on. Retention of the distinct flavor in the original game and delivery of an equivalent user experience to a player in the target market, necessitates different localization approaches for each genre. The localization approach is further complicated by hybridization of game taxonomies, where a game is a mixture of genres, hence the difficulty in the decision of localization strategies for the game is increased.

Besides software localization, game localization is often associated with audiovisual translation, because the dialogues in games are dubbed or subtitled, or both (O'Hagan, 2006; Chandler, 2005). Although similarities in practices between audiovisual translation and game localization do exist, the techniques used in AVT are not always applicable to game localization. While guidelines have been established for film subtitles in Code of Good Subtitling Practices (Ivarsson and Carroll, 1998), the same cannot be said for dialogue subtitles in games. Subtitles in games are often displayed at a faster speed than those in films, without consideration of the average reading speed. Limitation on the number of characters allowed per line and the number of lines of subtitle allowed on the screen do not usually exist in games. Besides the subtitles, other assets in games, such as UI text, system texts, error messages, may be displayed onscreen simultaneously with the subtitles. While subtitles usually contain full semantic units, in-game texts can be fragmented because of the

concatenation of different text strings (Bernal-Merino, 2007). Variables which address individual player performance and profiles are often found in in-game texts, which is a result of the interactive nature of games (Bernal-Merino, 2007). Hence, unlike audiovisual translation, singular and plural, gender differences and syntax must be considered when game translators translate text strings with variables.

Game localization encompasses more than translation in the adaptation of an entertainment software product to the target culture and language. There are two different stages of the localization process in video games. Localization can involve 'linguistic' localization (the language translation process) as well as 'product' localization (such as changing the art asset in the game or changing the background music to suit local tastes), Since the scope of this paper will discuss the role of translation in game localization, only the language transfer process from the perspective of translation studies will be discussed. The process of translating the language assets in a game and making the game linguistically and culturally appropriate for the target market will be explored in this study. The localization of game art, music or gameplay is excluded in this study, because it is beyond the domain of translation studies.

The growth of the film industry resulted in an increase in the demand for subtitling and localization of subtitles. Driven by industry demand, more studies have been conducted in the domain of audiovisual translation by academics. Though the video game industry has overtaken the film industry in terms of revenue, research into this new area is relatively far and few. The importance of game localization and the vital role played by translation in localization is largely ignored in games studies, while video games remain similarly under-researched in translation studies (O'Hagan, 2007). A substantial part of the games industry continues to operate without a clear understanding of the processes of game localization and with the assumption that only linguistic transfer is involved in game localization. Research

into this new domain will be beneficial to this industry because game designs are becoming increasingly sophisticated and complex, and localization is becoming increasingly challenging. Game localization is a domain which the industry is leading the foray into the evolving approaches to localization, while academia trail behind. With the significant growth potential projected for this industry, it is crucial to recognize this as a valuable area for research in translation studies.

1.2   Gap in Existing Research

Existing research into game localization can be broadly categorized into the following areas in translation studies. Studies were conducted on game localization as a genre associated with software localization and audiovisual translation (Bernal-Merino, 2006; O'Hagan, 2005; Mangiron 2013, O'Hagan and Mangiron, 2013). The localization paradigm in games highlighting the multidimensionality characteristic of games which require different approaches from both software localization and audiovisual translation to deliver the intended player experience are explored in these studies.

There have been attempts at documenting the localization process from the perspective of industry practitioners (Chandler, 2005; Chandler and Deming 2011) and academia (Bernal-Merino, 2014). Though these studies serve as a good foundation for the understanding of the localization process, evolution of new dimensions in games, e.g. motion sensors, voice recognition, virtual reality, etc., means that the information needs to be constantly updated to keep up with technological advancement.

Research studies were also conducted on the translation strategies utilized in game localization with specific games as case studies (Mangiron and O'Hagan, 2006; Fernández Costales, 2012; Van Oers, 2014). These studies indicate that game localization is driven by delivering the desired player experience, therefore translators tend to take the functionalist

approach, which prioritizes the player experience in the target culture. Despite a preference for the domestication approach (Venuti, 1995) over the foreignization approach, game translators utilize a range of common translation strategies and new strategies, e.g. transcreation, which were developed to address the creative needs of game localization. The preference for domestication approach is even more apparent in game localization when jokes, puns, plays on words are involved, which is often coupled with the translation strategy of adaptation (Mangiron and O'Hagan, 2006).

A few scholars advocate for the need for translator training to meet the needs of the booming global games industry (Mangiron, 2006; Mangiron and O'Hagan, 2006; Bernal-Merino, 2008a, 2014). Specific issues in the domain of game localization are highlighted and the need for specialized courses for establishing translator competence is explained in the studies.

The approaches and decision-making processes in game localization to deliver the desired player experience are the main focus in earlier research. However, a new line of investigation, in the form of understanding players' perception of games across different cultures, is gradually attracting researchers (O'Hagan, 2009; Fernández Costales, 2016). The player perception is not the sole indication of game localization quality, but their opinions as end users of games as entertainment products are important to localization practitioners. Understanding the gaps between expected outcomes of localization and actual players' experiences will be beneficial to establishing practices in the localization industry.

Adaptation of video games across cultures was investigated to gain greater insights into the role of culture in game localization (Di Marco, 2007; O'Hagan, 2009; Edwards, 2012, 2014; Fernández Costales, 2014). Despite the skopos of game localization, there is no preferred approach for cross-cultural transfer, because factors such as games hybridization,

multidimensionality, and games being part of an entertainment ecosystem. However, there is no study focused on the cross-cultural challenges in Chinese to English game localization.

Previous studies in cultural adaptation were conducted on games which are localized from English or Japanese as a source language. Traditionally, the United States and Japan as the two major game producing countries in the world, therefore games are developed in either English or Japanese. With the growth of the China games industry, an increasing number of games are developed by Chinese developers in Chinese. Therefore, Chinese is increasingly used as a source language for game development, but few studies have been conducted on Chinese as a source language in game localization. Previous case studies were conducted on Japanese to English (Mangiron and O'Hagan, 2006; O'Hagan, 2009), English to Spanish (Fernández Costales, 2016), English to Italian (Di Marco, 2007), and English to Dutch (Van Oers, 2014). However, localization challenges between each language pair are unique and are further complicated by the game genre and game hybridization, so studies which are conducted in other language pairs cannot be applied to Chinese to English localization. Furthermore, Chinese developers who wish to bring their games to other European markets will use English as a pivot language for further localization into other European languages. Hence, it is important to conduct in-depth research into the cross-cultural issues in localization involving Chinese to English translation.

1.3   Research Aims and Objectives

The objective of this study is to highlight the cross-cultural communication challenges and other issues present in Chinese to English game localization.

A case study is conducted on the game *Strike of Kings*, which is a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA), in which the player controls a character in one of the two opposing teams. This game is selected because it contains characters from Chinese literary classics

Journey to the West and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. There are also references made to Chinese classics such as *The Thirty-Six Strategies* and *Sun Zi Art of War*. In addition, there is frequent usage of Chinese idioms, cultural and historical references, and neologism.

Using this case study, the common occurring cultural specific references in in-game texts are identified and categorized as real world references or intertextual references, which will be discussed in section 2.2. This study also aims to explore the effectiveness of common translation strategies, which will be discussed in section 2.1, in the cross-cultural transfer of Chinese to English. In addition, this study will discuss another factor in game localization: the constraints imposed on the translations by other published sources. The aim is to understand the role of translation in cross-cultural communication in game localization.

The translation strategies proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), Toury (1995) and Mangiron and O'Hagan (2006) are used in the discussion of the approaches adopted the localization of this game. These Chinese literary classics are widely adapted in movies, television series, manga, anime, games and other medium, which players in the target market will take reference to when playing the localized game based on the same classics. The constraints imposed on the game localization process by other published sources will be discussed in this case study.

2.   Literature Review

2.1   Translation Strategies in Game Localization

The classic translation approaches of 'foreignization' and 'domestication' (Venuti, 1995) within translation studies were widely used to categorize the way in which video games are translated in the target market. This conflict is a negotiation process in every sentence when a choice had to be made between target- and source-oriented approach (Eco, 2003). In game localization, the domestication approach involves rendering the cultural specific elements in the source culture to equivalent elements in the target culture, which the players in the target market are more familiar with. Using the domestication approach, the cultural elements in the source culture is mapped to the elements of the target culture by the translator, with the intention of bringing the game closer to the target culture. The foreignization approach, on the other hand, would retain the culture-specific elements in the source culture, when translating the text for a target culture. Using this approach, the atmosphere and flavor of the source culture are re-created in the target culture by the translator, thus preserving the foreign characteristics of the game in the localized version. Although the foreignization approach is more didactic and risks alienating players, it is often chosen over domestication because the emphasis placed on adapting games for the receiving culture (Fernández Costales, 2006).

Despite a general tendency towards a foreignization approach, game developers often emphasize that each game is unique, so there is no one-size-fits-all solution to game localization, instead, a customized approach is required for each game. The traits of the main characters in a game can only be retained through a foreignization approach and the distinctive flavor of the game can be maintained. Therefore, conscious choices being made on both technical and cultural aspects of a game are entailed in game localization, and not a standardized approach that is applied to all games regardless of the game genre or the original

intention of the creators, to create the same game experience in a localized version for such a multidimensional product.

Skopos theory proposed by Vermeer (1978) focuses on the purpose of the translation, which determines the translation strategies adopted to achieve that purpose (Vermeer, 1989). Since the function of the translation in the target culture is prioritized, game localization is essentially a purpose-driven functionalist approach, and it is associated with the skopos of the translation. Sometimes the localized versions of the game may deviate from the design of the original game because the game developer chose to alter the game design to adapt to the culture of the target markets, this is an example of 'deep localization' discussed under section 1.1. The localization industry often holds a narrow view of translation as a strictly linguistic transfer process, but translation studies have expanded to include broader cultural contexts. The cultural turn was declared in translation studies (Bassnett and Lefèvere 1990) where attention was devoted to both cultural and linguistic aspects and their influence in shaping translation.

Successful game localization is dependent on adoption of appropriate translation strategies to deliver gameplay experience in a target market, which should be as close as possible to the gameplay experience in the original. In this paper, cultural specific references will be identified and the translation strategies adopted will be analyzed. As mentioned in section 1.3, the translation strategies which will be used in this study are proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), Toury (1995) and Mangiron and O'Hagan (2006).

Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) propose several translation strategies, amongst which literal translation, the calque, and adaptation are applicable to games localization. Literal translation is the most common strategy in game localization if all texts in a game are taken into consideration. As implied by the term, the source text is transferred into the target literally, only grammatical changes are made for the target language in literal translation. A

second translation strategy is the calque, where the meaning of a word or expression is borrowed from the source language and translated literally into the target language. This strategy is often used when the cultural element in the source language do not have an equivalent concept in the target language. Adaptation is used to replace certain foreign concept in the source language with one that is more easily understood in the target language, creating an equivalence for that occurrence.

Toury (1995) lists omission as a translation strategy. When faced with a cultural specific reference in the source culture, which has no equivalent in the target culture, the translator chose to not translate this cultural element into the target language. This approach is utilized when none of the above translation strategies, can translate the source text into the target text adequately due to socio-political or cultural constraints. In games localization, omission is used as a strategy when the game content in the source culture is either offensive or inappropriate in the target culture. Thus, omission of the text will likely remove the negative impact it has on the game. In other cases, the omission of these elements is a result of space constraint imposed by the UI on the on-screen text or time constraint on the spoken dialogue lines.

Mangiron and O'Hagan (2006) list five strategies which were observed in the localization of the game *Final Fantasy* from Japanese to English. The translation strategies which are of interest in this study are contextualization by addition, re-creation of play on words and transcreation. In contextualization by addition, additional information not present in the source text in included in the translation, to provide more context in the target language. The re-creation of play on words is usually adopted in cases when humor in the source language cannot be literally translated to achieve the same effect in the target language. This strategy involves the substitution of the joke or pun in the source language with another in the target language to re-create a similar experience for the player.

Lefèvere (1992) introduces the concept of translation as rewriting, arguing that it is critical for a translated work to project the desired image and to ensure it is accepted in the target market. When there is no clear method of transferring a content across cultural borders, rewriting is adopted as an approach by translators to make the game linguistically and culturally acceptable in the target culture. One similar strategy to rewriting is transcreation.

Transcreation is described as a process where "translators are often given carte blanche to modify, adapt, and remove any cultural references, puns, as well as jokes that would not work in the target language" (Mangiron and O'Hagan, 2006:15). Game translation often involves incorporating new cultural references, jokes, or any other element to produce fresh translations, which are considered crucial in preserving the gameplay experience. Thus, game translators are often granted a high degree of freedom, because choices must be made on the linguistic aspect of the game with reference to the source text, the target culture, and the gameplay experience. However, game translation is still restricted by space limitation in the game (Mangiron and O'Hagan, 2006), and constrained by the other published sources.

2.2   Cultural Specific References

Cultural specific reference is one of the major consideration in game localization. The difficulty in defining which elements in the text can be categorized as cultural specific arise from the fact that almost everything in the text, including the language and its usage, conveys cultural specific traits. Mailhac (1996) defines cultural specific reference as "any reference to a cultural entity, which due to its distance from the target culture, is characterized by a sufficient degree of opacity for the target reader to constitute a problem". The interpretation of cultural references is subjected to the distance between the source culture and target culture, therefore the degree of difficulty in communicating cultural specific references vary between different source and target cultures.

Another challenge when localizing cultural specific reference is that the relationship between two cultures changes over time (Aixelá, 1996:57), hence the cultural distance may grow closer over time in the increasingly connected world. The localization approach adopted a few years ago may not be appropriate today, as implied by the dynamic nature of the relationship between two cultures. Cultural specific references, in the source culture, may also pose minor cultural shocks to translators who has difficulty in finding an equivalent in the target culture in a phenomenon termed 'culture bumps' (Leppihalme, 1997), which will require the use of a range of translation strategies. The category of culture bumps includes joke, puns, poetry, allusions, and so on, occurring in the source culture, where there is often no official equivalent in the target culture. When faced with culture bumps translators often have to decide on the most appropriate translation strategy, to transfer the cultural reference to the receiving culture. When a culture bump is not successfully transferred to the target culture, the players of the localized version will develop a sense of disconnectedness, where they cannot associate the cultural element with their own.

Cultural specific references are classified by Ranzato (2015:64) in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Classification of Cultural Specific References

Real World References	Source culture references
	Intercultural references
	Third culture references
	Target culture references
Intertextual References	Overt intertextual references
	Covert intertextual references
	Intertextual macro allusions

2.2.1 Real World References

Source culture references belong to the source culture, regardless of whether they are recognized beyond the source culture. In most cases, source culture references are in the form of things, places, and food, which are only known to the locals. These also includes references which are historical, socially or politically embedded. Though some source culture references are mono-cultural, some cultural elements may also transcend cultural borders and become widely known by the people within the target culture (Pedersen, 2005).

Target culture references are those which originate from the target culture, and may sometimes be used in the source culture to represent something obscure, but are commonly known in the target culture. When a target culture reference is used in the source culture with the intention of representing something not familiar in the source culture, the translation approach would often be substitution of the target culture reference with something not familiar with the target culture, which can be a third culture reference or using a source culture reference that is not widely recognized in the target culture, to achieve the same effect.

The category of intercultural references is one where the original source culture references have been absorbed into the target culture and takes on associations of their own. These are often mono-cultural references which have been originally transferred into the target culture. Over time, these are absorbed into the target culture in varying degrees, with some source culture references fully absorbed into the target culture, thus becoming a familiar cultural reference in both source and target culture, which makes them intercultural references.

A third culture reference refers to cultural elements which originate neither from the source nor the target culture. The interpretation of the third culture reference by the source culture may be different from the target culture because of varying degrees of familiarity with

both source and target culture with the third culture. Depending on the intention of introducing a third culture reference, the translator would have to take reference of this third culture with respect to the target culture and substitute the third culture reference with one that will convey similar degree of familiarity or unfamiliarity in the target culture.

The increasingly widespread use of the internet has resulted in an upsurge of another form of culture-specific reference known as neologisms. This category consists of not only newly-coined words and phrases, but also new meanings of existing words and phrases. These neologisms are often terms used in relation to technological advancements, terms used by the media on current social and political developments, and terms coming from other cultures or sub-cultures (Newmark, 1988).

2.2.2 Intertextual References

Overt intertextual allusions refer to cultural elements which have established intertextual connections with elements in fictional texts and works. In this case, study, when explicit references are made to the Chinese literary classics *Journey to the West* and *Romance of The Three Kingdoms*, or famous Chinese classics such as *The Thirty-Six Strategies* and *Sun Zi Art of War*, these are considered overt intertextual allusions. There are various overt intertextual allusions in the dialogues of these characters in the game. The references are made to the special skills, weapons, and animals in the literary classics.

As opposed to overt allusions, covert allusions are allusions by extension of indirect references. Since covert allusions are often indirect or implied, they sometimes remain undetected in the source text because they are too obscure to be picked up by the translator. Intertextual macro allusion is where an entire body of texts is an allusion to another body of text at a macro level, which can only be fully understood in the wider context of the entire

text. It is important to note that macro allusion is not merely a combination of overt and covert allusions, but works as a general overarching concept on the whole game.

2.3   Cross-Cultural Communication in Translation

Definitions and views of what culture means can vary. For this paper, culture is viewed as a common anthropological concept. In the realm of video games, culture would represent content in the game that players see or hear and the context in the environment the content was created, written and presented in the game.

Figure 1: Layers of Localization (Chroust, 2008:830)

Cultural Layer
Social and Communication Layer
Business Conventions and Practices Layer
Graphic and Iconic Representation Layer
Semantic Layer
Grammatical Layer
Technological Infrastructure
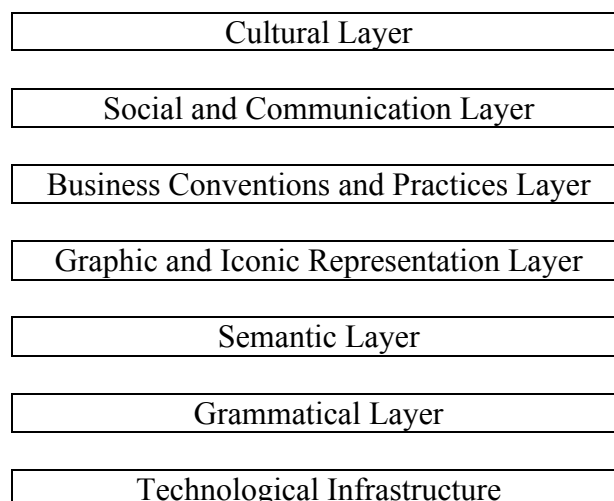
According to Chroust's (2008) definition, there are different layers of localization, with the higher levels usually built upon the lower levels of localization, as shown in Figure 1. Culture is reflected as the top layer, with specific challenges, e.g. taboos, metaphors, puns, jargon, and humor. Chroust lists the future dimensions of localization namely: the subcultures of a region, religious differences, and sociological strata, which will take on increasing importance with globalization.

Culture is a crucial factor in game localization because intercultural issues can affect

player experience or even censorship in the region where a game is released. Content carries culture. The culture in which a game was originally created will be reflected in the game, and this will induce responses from the target cultures where it will be released (Edwards, 2014). Further complications arise from the fact that games are seldom written by only one author, instead, they are based on "shared authorship" (Bernal-Merino, 2006:28). Texts are intertwined with the cultural system within which they are written and read. If each author infuses his or her own culture in the game during content creation, there may be more than one source culture in the game co-authored by a team. Nuances and shades of meanings in the game, especially from colloquial expressions, will pose even greater challenges for the translator. Hence, game translators are often faced with a complex web of intercultural challenges in game localization.

Localization is identified as one of the three phases of game culturalization (Edwards, 2012). Culturalization takes a step beyond localization, where the assumptions and creative choices in a game are examined and assessed against international markets and specific cultures. Games, especially console games with complex storylines or plots, are designed for deeper levels of user engagement and generally come with more cultural-embedded elements (Edwards 2012). In comparison to localization, culturalization allows player engagement at a deeper and a more meaningful level in the target culture, hence sustaining longer player interest in the game. Edwards identifies history, religion, ethnic conflict and geopolitical friction as the top four cultural variables for consideration in content creation (Edwards, 2014). Similar cultural awareness should exist in both content creators and translators. General assumptions made during content creation might not be valid across all cultures, hence translators should still exercise caution during localization and adapt the translation for specific cultural references.

Cross-cultural challenges are not necessary static between different language pairs. There is a perceived notion in the industry of greater 'cultural distance' when a 'non-friendly localization language' is involved in the localization process. Greater 'cultural distance' requires greater effort in adapting a game from the source culture to an acceptable and appropriate product in the receiving culture. An example of a language pair with greater 'cultural distance' is Japanese and English (Di Marco, 2007).

Chinese is widely considered a 'non-friendly' localization language, demanding extensive experience and in-depth understanding of the culture to ensure the accuracy of the translation. Chinese to English translation is also recognized as a language pair with greater 'cultural distance'. Given that players in the West are not exposed to Chinese culture, it is more difficult for them to conceptualize certain cultural specific references, especially mono-cultural elements which exist only in the Chinese culture (Yu, 2015). Furthermore, some words in the source culture contain more than one meaning, some of which do not have a lexical equivalent in the target culture.

From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, the encyclopedic meaning is linked to the linguistic meaning and culture is part of the conceptualization of meaning. Therefore, the integration of linguistic and culture aspects is inevitable, and in turn, contributes to the unification of linguistic and cultural approaches to translation (Rojo, 2013). This demonstrates that different cultural views of the same concept in the source and target culture can lead to different interpretations of meaning, which manifest itself in the translation.

Cross-cultural communication involves a complex web of elements. Therefore, it necessitates a high degree of effort in reduction of complexity in the communicative act (Pym, 2004). Translation is a mode of mediated cross-cultural communication, where it aims to reduce the complexity and reduce the communication barrier. In translation studies, there is an increasing focus on the importance of the role of translation in cross-cultural

communicative action, which signifies a departure from an equivalence-based linguistic-focus towards a target-oriented functionalist approach.

Cross-cultural communication is characterized by narrow success conditions, which are not defined as success criteria, but rather as failure-avoidance conditions, and these conditions are further bounded by constraints on the communication act (Pym, 2004:4). This is evident in games localization where industry practitioners establish guidelines on the cultural elements which are crucial for the game to be successfully localized. The aim of defining a set of criteria where 'pitfalls' are highlighted, is to establish the safe zone for cultural acceptance for localization practitioners. However, the notion of what constitute unacceptable cultural elements in the target culture are often stereotypical assumptions by the localization industry, with no assurance of definite success on the reception of the game in the target market.

The culturalization of games and cultural awareness at both content creation and translation stages were discussed earlier in this section. Game developers often try to generate game contents which will appeal to the widest possible group of consumers. They tend to avoid cultural specific references which only a small demographic group can relate to (Carlson and Corliss, 2010). The objective is to develop assets which are flexible and can be easily localized for each target culture.

In games localization, companies typically define their target markets in the form of locales, which serves to differentiate regional differences in a language. The categorization of locales often uses national borders or geographical regions as the parameter, which makes it convenient to define markets and to dissolve all the linguistic variants and cultural diversity into a homogeneous zone. An example will be Spanish, which is differentiated as Spanish used in Spain and Latin American Spanish, which includes Spanish spoken in countries to the south of the United States. Though the differences between the two Spanish locales

mentioned above, the nuances and subtle differences between, for example, Chilean and Colombian Spanish is assumed to be negligible such that they can be considered under the locale of Latin American Spanish. The concept of locale helps to separate regional or national sub-groups in a language group, it also serves as a classification system for social and cultural norms.

Similarly, this deeply-rooted categorization of locales where cultural acceptance or non-acceptance is generalized within the borders of nation-states is followed by the localization practices in the industry. Consequently, when decisions are made in the use of certain translation approach in rendering culturally specific elements, the localization team or translator(s) have assumed the role of a cultural mediator in deciding what is culturally appropriate for the target audience in the target market, which is presumed to be a culturally homogenous population within defined national borders. In this way, the audience does not have a choice in what they desire to see in terms of cultural adaptation of a game from the source language into their own language. They can only accept the final product which has been adapted into their culture, under the assumption of cultural appropriateness for their locale.

There is an increasing awareness that the contexts and consequences of such localization practices should be examined. Game developers are turning towards focus testing to gain a deeper understanding or user perception of gameplay and design. There are a few studies conducted on players' perception of the localization quality of a game (O'Hagan, 2009; Fernández Costales, 2016). However, the studies do not include the players' reception on the cultural adaptation of a localized game. If the localization industry continues to abide by the guidelines on cultural appropriateness, without supporting evidence from players in the target culture, the industry will continue to apply the same set of filters across their game localization, complete with stereotypes, assumption and sweeping statements on cultural

appropriateness.

Given the relationship between translation and cross-cultural communication, game translators often "take part in the creation of values and the circulation of certain aesthetic and intellectual options" (Gambier, 1995). The localization industry practitioners control the transcultural movement of games from the source culture to various target cultures, and in the process of doing so, they impose their notions of what constitute acceptable cultural elements in the target cultures in their decision-making processes, sometimes further perpetuating cultural stereotypes.

Game localization allows for a high degree of customization in the localized versions because localization goes beyond ordinary translation. Besides dialogue and in-game texts, some translators also suggest changes in other aspects of the game, e.g. visual elements, gameplay, and so on, which was the 'deep localization' approach discussed in section 1.1. It is important to understand cross-cultural communication in game localization because most issues encountered are either culture or country specific. Though cross-cultural issues have been widely researched in translation studies, especially on literary translation, game localization has raised more cross-cultural issues to be explored in translation studies.

2.4   Constraints Imposed by Published Sources

When a game is developed based on a published source, for example, a literary work, the translation will be constrained by the original source because the players will expect a certain degree of loyalty to the original work. This constraint imposed by the other published sources the game is based on was mentioned in previous studies (Bernal-Merino, 2009; Fernández Costales, 2014). In his paper on constrained translation, Mayoral mentions that "we cannot translate the text without understanding how the other communicative elements add to or modify the meaning: and, on the other hand, the non-linguistic elements of the

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message not only constitute part of the meaning but also, on occasions, impose their own laws and conditions on the text" (Mayoral et al, 1988).

Translators working on a game which is based on other published sources such as books (*Harry Potter*), anime (*Sword Art Online*), movies (*Star Wars*), or a combination of published sources (*Lord of The Rings*), must be familiar with the published sources other than the game, to ensure that the localized game fit into the artistic universe of the franchise. There might be negative reactions from players if translators do not maintain a certain loyalty to the source and deviate too far from the intended design of the franchise in the localization process. An example would be a Chinese game adapted from a Chinese literary classic, and there exists a translated English version of the literary classic, the localization of the game would be constrained to a certain extent by the English translation of the literary work.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Method

This case study uses a qualitative approach to performing textual analysis of the texts from the game *Strike of Kings*.

There were several considerations in selecting this particular game. The game should be developed in Chinese and localized into English, because as discussed in section 1.2, no studies have been conducted on the cross-cultural challenges of this language pair. It should contain abundant cultural specific references from the source culture so that a study on the translation approaches in different contextual situations can be explored. The game selected should be localized by localization professionals working in close partnership with the game developer or the game publisher, with access to the localization decision making process. This is to ensure that the localized contents used in the study are recognized by the game developer or the game publisher as the accepted localized version. A game localized by fans or community translators is not suitable for this study because the game developer or publisher is not involved in the translation approach of fan-translated contents. Furthermore, fans may not be professionally trained translators, so there is low credibility on the translation quality or adoption of translation strategies.

Software products are considered multi-textual because they contain different types of texts. Common text types in software are the technical, instructive, and specific text for the application. Therefore, software localization must take into considerations different textual categories during localization process, where certain category of texts may require more in-depth localization to cater for consumers in target markets.

Video games are made up of a series of assets, namely, in-game text assets, art assets, audio assets, cinematic assets and printed materials (Chandler 2005: 51). The development and the release of video games involve various assets which need to be translated or localized

from the start of development to the launch of the game. As mentioned before, games are multidimensional and multimodal products, so the assets are of different textual categories, each of which has its own characteristics and serves different purposes.

The different textual categories as mentioned in Bernal-Merino (2007: 4) are manual packaging, readme file, official website, dialogue for dubbing, dialogue for subtitling, user interface, graphic art with words. Other textual materials include trailers, social media platforms, marketing texts, app store texts, release notes for content update, user generated contents (UGC), etc.

Different assets may require different translation strategies, hence, different teams of translators, with strengths in translating different textual categories, are often engaged in the localization of video games and the translatable assets. Some text types in games such as UI texts, error messages, and terminologies are not included in this study because these texts are less or non-culturally laden, and their translations are often based on pre-defined guidelines for system texts.

It is also important to note that dialogue lines also face time restriction. In cases where the character is shown on-screen when the dialogue is spoken, time constraints are imposed on the dialogue lines. The duration of the localized dialogue must be approximately the same as the time duration of the dialogue in the original language. This is similar to the time restriction in audiovisual translation. If the lines spoken are for narration, the time restriction is less constrained, but the narration in the localized version must end when the scene ends. These time restrictions imply that translators must observe the constraint imposed on the translation for dialogue lines, making sure that the number of syllabus in the target language does not exceed that in the source language significantly. The localization of dialogue lines has been taken a step further with advancement in technology, incorporating facial motion

capture with audio script localization.[1] Translators must consider the lip movement of the

spoken dialog in the source language when they are translating the audio script. The aim is to

achieve similar lip movement for spoken dialogue in the target language.

A game contains several translatable assets; the average character count in a game is

approximately 100,000 characters. Therefore, it is important to limit the scope of this study to

only one textual type, so that an in-depth analysis can be carried out on this textual type. The

second step in this study involves identifying suitable translatable assets in the game which

are most likely to contain cultural specific references and further narrow down to the cultural

references to those of the source culture.

After identifying the suitable assets for this case study, the third step in this study is to

categorize the cultural specific references into real world references and intertextual

references. Each category of cultural specific references in the source language and the

corresponding translations in the target language is analyzed using the translation strategies

commonly adopted in game localization and the effectiveness of these strategies in cross-

cultural transfer of these source cultural elements into the target culture is discussed in the

last step.

It is important to note that games are multi-dimensional entertainment products, hence

the localization of games can involve changes in the art assets to a form that will be more

appropriate in the target culture, changes to the music or songs in the game to those which

will be familiar in the other culture, and even changes to the gameplay design to increase

player engagement in the target market. This case study is limited to the textual analysis and

linguistic considerations in cross-cultural communications in game texts; it will not take into

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[1] Faceware Tech Partners with Binari Sonori to Offer New Video-Based Localization Service. (n.d.). Retrieved February 12, 2017, from http://facewaretech.com/faceware-tech-partners-binari-sonori-offer-new-video-based-localization-service/

consideration changes made in the gameplay, art assets or music because these are beyond the scope of translation studies.

3.2   Data Selection Procedures

The assets in Strike of Kings which contain cultural specific references in a game are the diegetic texts, which includes the descriptive, narrative and dialogue texts. In this case study, only diegetic text in the form of dialogue lines is considered. These texts are found in the audio script and contain the lines spoken by the characters in the game. (Refer to Appendix 1.) The dialogue lines contain cultural characteristics in terms of speech patterns and cultural references, which are representative of the characters in the game, and require greater creativity and cultural awareness on the part of the translator in the localization process. Non-diegetic texts such as system messages and UI texts are excluded from this study because they contain little to no cultural specific elements which will be of interest in this study.

The game contains characters inspired by Chinese classics, only the dialogue lines spoken by these characters are selected for in-depth analysis. The source cultural specific references in these dialogue lines are identified and categorized into: character names, real world references, intertextual references, Chinese idioms, and neologisms.

The source cultural specific references in Chinese and the corresponding English translations are analyzed for the translation strategies adopted in each case, as well as the effectiveness of cross-cultural transfer of the cultural elements. These are discussed with additional references to the factors which could have influenced the translation approach, such as time constraint on dialogue lines, absence of equivalent terms in target language, and constraints imposed by other published sources, and so on.

4. Findings

4.1 Characters inspired by Chinese Classics

The texts selected for this study pose cross-cultural challenges in several areas, one of which is the characters adapted from literary classics. This game includes the characters '牛魔王' and '孙悟空' adapted from the Chinese literary classic *Journey to the West*[2] (西游记). They are commonly referred to as 'Bull Demon King' and 'Monkey' respectively in the English translation of this literary work (translated by Jenner, W.F.J.). The other characters are adapted from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*[3] (三国演义), which includes '赵云' (transliterated as 'Zhao Yun'), '貂蝉' (transliterated as 'Diaochan'), '吕布' (transliterated as 'Lü Bu') and '赤兔' (translated as 'Red Hare'). Awareness of the personalities of these characters and the relationship between the characters is essential for a translator to effectively translate or localize the character names. Furthermore, these classics have been translated into more than one English version, and have been adapted into movies and television series multiple times for the Chinese-speaking markets, and subtitled in English. Reference must be made to these sources and the most appropriate strategy for must be selected when localizing these character names into English.

4.2 Intertextual References in the Dialogue

Another challenge for translators is the imitation of the speech patterns unique to each character adapted from the literary classics. These classics are so strongly embedded in the Chinese culture that people familiar with the cultural references will immediately associate a term or a phrase with a character in game. This is often the case for dialogue lines with intertextual references to the literature.

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[2] Jenner, W. J. F. (1993). trans. Journey to the West. By Wu Cheng'en.
[3] Brewitt-Taylor, C. H. (1925). Romance of the Three Kingdoms (2 vols.).

Table 2: Examples of Intertextual References

No.	Source Text	Target Text	Intertextual Allusions
1	看看俺的…	Look at my...	'孙悟空' (Monkey)
2	老牛在此	Old Bull is here	'牛魔王' (Bull Demon King)
3	方天无极	There are no limits to my power	'吕布' (Lü Bu)

Intertextual references to literary classics are illustrated in the above examples. The word '俺' is used by the character 'Monkey' to refer to himself and is widely recognized as his unique speech pattern. Similarly, '老牛' (literally translated as 'Old Bull') is often used by the 'Bull Demon King' in reference to himself. It is common for the characters in Chinese literary classics to speak of themselves in the third person. Furthermore, these speech patterns are commonly reproduced in adaptations of *Journey to the West* into movies and television series. These unique speech patterns should be emulated by the translator in the target language dialogues.

4.3   Real World References in the Dialogue

In the analysis of the selected dialogue lines, the usage of cultural specific real world references is observed to be a common occurrence. References are often made to concepts in religion and philosophy which are rooted in Chinese culture. Though these concepts may be documented in books and translated into English, the elements are mostly monocultural references in the Chinese culture which are not as widely understood in the Western culture.

Table 3: Examples of Real World References

No.	Source Text	Target Text	Reference
1	三界	Three Realms	Buddhism
2	五行	Five Elements	Chinese philosophy

The 'Three Realms' in Buddhism are namely: the world of desire, the world of form and the world of formlessness, while 'the 'Five Elements' in Chinese philosophy are: wood, fire, earth, metal, water. These are source culture elements which are not commonly known in the target culture unless the player happened to be well-read in Chinese philosophy and Buddhism. The translator is usually limited to the use of conventional English names of these references in the localized game. These terms will be deemed exotic by English-speaking players or will cause them to feel disconnected from the game, because of their unfamiliarity with Chinese culture. Real world references in the form of Chinese idioms or idiomatic expressions are also used frequently in the dialogue lines. One of the common issue encountered by Chinese-to-English translators is the difference in the length of the Chinese idiom and the English translation. The meaning or the allusion of a Chinese idiom consisting of four Chinese characters, may not be easily explained in a short phrase in English. In the absence of equivalent idiom in the target language, translators have to adopt other translation strategies in the translation of idioms and idiomatic expressions. This will be further discussed in section 5.3.

4.4   Neologisms in the Dialogue

As mentioned in section 2.2.1, the use of the internet has resulted in creation of neologisms. The usage and meaning of neologisms pose challenges for translators because there are no formal definitions in dictionaries or explanations provided by academia on the lexical meaning of these terms. Some of these words or phrases have existing meanings in the source language, but they have taken on new meanings as a result of social or political developments, or they have been imported from other cultures through popular media.

An example of a neologism is the term '卧槽' (*wo cao* in Hanyu Pinyin), which is an internet slang. Depending on how this term is pronounced, it can express different moods:

anger (wô cào), surprise (wò cào), contempt (wō cāo), doubt (wô cáo), and so on. Therefore, the translator must not only be aware of this neologism, he must know the context in which this term is used so that he can choose the most appropriate translation in the target language.

Due to the cultural differences between English and Chinese cultures, as well as complex contextual meanings of the neologisms, the equivalent lexical for Chinese neologisms often do not exist in English. Furthermore, neologisms often arise due to social or political changes, so the rate of assimilation of neologisms in the source culture may be faster than in the target culture unless the target culture is undergoing similar social or political change. Hence, the conceptual meaning of a neologism may take time to be understood in the target culture and for an equivalent term to be concocted and widely used in the target language.

5.   Discussion

5.1   Translation of Character Names

In section 4.1, six characters in the game which were adapted from Chinese literary classics were discussed. The translation strategies applied on the character names localization is different. Table 4 below summarizes the Chinese names and the localized English names of some of the characters, as well as their localized names in English translations of the literary classics.

Table 4: Examples of Localized Character Names

No.	Source Text	Target Text	Other References in Literature
1	孙悟空	Sun Wukong	Monkey, Monkey King
2	牛魔王	Toro	Bull Demon King
3	赵云	Zhao Yun	Zhao Zilong
4	貂蝉	Diaochan	Diao Chan
5	吕布	Lu Bu	Lü Bu
6	赤兔	Red Hare	Red Horse

The character '孙悟空' is commonly referred to as 'Monkey' or 'Monkey King' in the translated English versions of *Journey to the West*. Instead of using the commonly known names mentioned above, his name in this game is transliterated to 'Sun Wukong'. On the other hand, the name '牛魔王' was transcreated to 'Toro' instead of using the name 'Bull Demon King' from the English translation *Journey to the West* (translated by Jenner, W.F.J.). The term 'Toro' means bull in Spanish, which has the same meaning as the Chinese and English names for this character. An overt intertextual allusion, as discussed in section 2.2.2, in the source culture reference being adapted into a third culture reference for a target culture is illustrated in this example.

It is observed in the comparison of these two characters, Sun Wukong is more widely known in different media and forms in popular culture. The original Japanese manga and

anime series, *Dragon Ball*, includes a character Son Goku[4] (孫悟空 in Japanese), which is loosely based on Sun Wukong from *Journey to the West*. The *Dragon Ball* series was later localized in English and became popular in Western markets. In contrast, 'Bull Demon King' is lesser known in Western culture, so the translator has the freedom to transcreate the name as Toro. Different approaches to localization of character names within the same game are observed even when the two characters were adapted from the same classic. Sun Wukong is now associated with the source culture, while Toro is associated with a third culture, they are now bring set up as rival factions.

The English names for Zhao Yun, Diaochan and Lu Bu are all transliterated from the respective Chinese names. This is because they are lesser known characters, who are not commonly occurring in other published sources, therefore their names do not have an equivalence in the target culture. The Hanyu Pinyin name for '吕布' should be Lü Bu, but the accent is removed from 'Lü' and the English name is simplified to Lu Bu. This is a similar approach taken by another game *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, where Lu Bu[5] is used instead of Lü Bu. The name for Lu Bu's horse is literally translated as 'Red Hare'. The change in translation strategy from transliteration to literal translation can be explained by the fact that the localized English name contains the word 'Hare' which is indicative of the speed of the horse as depicted in the literary classic. Furthermore, the localized English name of the horse in popular media uses the same strategy.

5.2   Translation of Intertextual References

Intertextual references were discussed in sections 2.2.2 and 4.2. The adaptation of characters from Chinese literary classics implied that many of the personalities, physical

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[4] Goku. (n.d.). Retrieved February 12, 2017, from http://dragonball.wikia.com/wiki/Goku
[5] Lu Bu. (n.d.). Retrieved February 12, 2017, from http://koei.wikia.com/wiki/Lu_Bu

attributes, skills, weapons, and items associated with the characters are also adapted into the game. Table 5 below lists some of the physical attributes, skills, weapons and items associated with Sun Wukong.

Table 5: Intertextual References to *Journey to the West*

No.	Source Text	Target Text	Other References in Literature
1	筋斗云	Flying Nimbus	somersault cloud
2	如意金箍棒	Wishing Staff	As-You-Will gold-banded cudgel
3	七十二变	Seventy-two transformations	seventy-two transformation
4	火眼金睛	eagle-eyed	fiery eyes with their golden pupils

Of the four terms associated with Sun Wukong and mentioned in the dialogue lines, only the term 'seventy-two transformation' is the same in the English localized game and in the translated literature. The term '筋斗云' in English is not translated the same way as the translated literature, rather it is translated as the same term as the localized English version in another manga and anime series, *Dragon Ball*. The 'somersault cloud' in *Dragon Ball* is known as Kinto'un (筋斗雲 in Japanese) and is translated as 'Flying Nimbus'[6] in the English version of that series. Since this series is popular in the Western market, the consumers in the Western market are more likely to be familiar with the term 'Flying Nimbus' than 'somersault cloud', and hence a higher possibility that the former will resonate with the players. The constraints imposed on game localization from other published sources was discussed in section 2.4. The phenomenon observed in this example is an entertainment product adapted from a literary classic becoming more popular than the original literary classic. In such cases, the English localized terms of the entertainment product supersede the English localization of the literary classic.

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[6] Flying Nimbus. (n.d.). Retrieved February 12, 2017, from http://dragonball.wikia.com/wiki/Flying_Nimbus

On the other hand, a new term 'Wishing Staff' for '如意金箍棒' was transcreated by the translator. The English term from the translated literary version of *Journey to the West* is not adopted for use in the game because it is too lengthy to pronounce the term 'As-You-Will gold-banded cudgel' in a fast-paced game. This weapon is known as Nyoi-bō (如意棒 in Japanese) in *Dragon Ball* and translated as 'Power Pole'[7] in the English version of that series. However, the intended image of the weapon cannot be properly conveyed by the term 'Power Pole'. Therefore, deviation from the English translation of other references is observed in this example and a new term 'Wishing Staff' is introduced in this game. This freedom granted to translator to create fresh translations was discussed earlier in section 2.1. This is a conscious localization decision where past translations of a literary work were deemed ineffective in cross-cultural transfer of cultural elements, and new translations are produced for a new product based on the same literary work.

Sun Wukong in *Journey to the West* is blessed with a pair of '火眼金睛', which endowed him with the ability to differentiate demons from humans, even when demons take on the form of humans. In the game, this is only translated as 'eagle-eyed', which does not fully convey the actual prowess of his eyes. This can be explained by the fact that this term is mentioned in a dialogue line, which will be recorded with time restriction. If the literal English translation of 'fire eyes with their golden pupils' is used in the game, the time taken to say this phrase will be twice that of the four Chinese characters. Moreover, this is a physical attribute of Sun Wukong, which will be frequently mentioned in the game. Therefore, this term must be shortened even if the resulting translation does not convey an equivalent 'feel' in the English version. When time constraint is imposed on localization of dialogue lines in game, the constraint overrides the most suitable translation strategy.

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[7] Power Pole. (n.d.). Retrieved February 12, 2017, from http://dragonball.wikia.com/wiki/Power_Pole

Table 6: Intertextual References to *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*

No.	Source Text	Target Text
1	马中赤兔，人中吕布！	Amongst horses there is Red Hare, amongst men there is Lu Bu!
2	方天在手，天下我有！	There is nothing that can stop me!
3	只要是男人，都会拜倒在我的美人计下。	All men fall before my charms.

Some of the intertextual references to *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is shown in Table 6. The phrase '马中赤兔，人中吕布' is an idiomatic expression which can be roughly translated explained as 'someone who stands out amongst his fellow men' to describe Lu Bu and Red Hare's exceptional prowess on the battlefield. This is an example of source culture reference, as discussed in section 2.2.1, with no equivalent reference in the target culture. Hence, the translation strategy used is the calque where the whole Chinese expression was adapted into English. The effect of time constraint on translation of dialogue lines was discussed earlier, especially if the term is used frequently in the game. In this case, the length of the English translation is significantly longer than the Chinese source text, but since it is an idiomatic expression which occurs only once in the dialogue lines, the long English translation is accepted.

The term '方天' is the abbreviated form for '方天画戟' (*fangtian huaji* in Hanyu Pinyin), the weapon carried by Lu Bu. The halberd used by the Swiss armies in the fourteenth to early fifteenth century is the closest equivalent to this Chinese historical weapon. Rather than translating the weapon name, it is omitted in the English dialogue. The choice of omission as a translation strategy is based on the skopos of this dialogue line. The message which needs to be conveyed is that Lu Bu is all powerful, and the halberd need not be mentioned in the target text.

The term '美人计' loosely translated as 'The Beauty Trap' (my translation) is one of

the stratagems listed in the Chinese classics *The Thirty-Six Strategies* (Verstappen, 2013)[8].

This stratagem involves the use of a beautiful woman in sexual entrapment or to cause

discord within the enemy camp. However, this cultural specific reference does not have an

equivalent in the target culture, in which this concept can be captured succinctly. The

translation strategy used is to have the meaning in the source culture adapted as the phrase 'to

fall before my charms' in the target culture. The intertextual allusion may not be conveyed in

the source language, but it is the most appropriate strategy given the time constraint on the

dialogue lines. Although the translation strategy of contextualization by addition may be

more effective in the transfer of this intertextual allusion, the length of the localized English

text will likely exceed the length of the Chinese text significantly.

5.3 Translation of Real World References

One of the main challenges in the translation of real world references is the change in

relationship between source and target cultures over time. A monocultural reference can be

absorbed into a target culture as a transcultural reference if these two cultures are in close

contact and are socially and politically intertwined to some degree. Translation strategies

which may have been applied in the past may not be the most appropriate as the cultural

specific references cross cultural borders. Table 7 below contains examples of real world

references in the dialogue lines.

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[8] Verstappen, S. H. (2013). *The Thirty-Six Strategies of Ancient China*. Woodbridge Press.

Table 7: Examples of Real World References

No.	Source Text	Target Text
1	结拜兄弟	sworn brother
2	嘿嘿，雕虫小技！	Heehee, mere tricks!
3	哪来的小妖精，敢在你孙爷爷头上撒野。	What kind of gremlin dares to act so wildly on my head?
4	知己知彼，方能百战百胜！	Know thyself and you will be ever-victorious!
5	你们知道什么是怜香惜玉吗？	Do you know what chivalry is?
6	自古红颜多薄命……	Many with a rosy countenance have been ill-fated...

The term '结拜' which is a source culture specific reference of a ritual where close friends take an oath to be 'sworn'[9] brothers in faith that this relationship will be longer-lasting than their friendship (Jordan, 1985). The word 'sworn' is more often used in English as 'to take an oath' so that one is obligated to act based on the oath taken, and less commonly used to denote 'sworn brotherhood'. This is an intercultural reference, as discussed in section 2.2.1, where the term 'sworn' can be understood in the target culture to denote this kinship, but it might not be associated with the same notion of what 'sworn brotherhood' entails in the source culture.

The idiomatic expression '在…头上撒野' can be loosely explained as 'causing trouble on [someone's] territory' (my translation). In the absence of an equivalent in the target culture, the translation strategy of the calque is adopted, where the entire expression is borrowed from the source culture, the phrase is literally translated as 'to act so wildly on my head' in English. A very vivid image is presented in the target culture, of a person deliberately causing trouble in someone else's territory and being intentionally adversarial. The provocative action in this dialogue line is effectively conveyed in the target culture.

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[9] Jordan, D. K. (1985). Sworn brothers: a study in Chinese ritual kinship. *The Chinese family and its ritual behavior*, 232-262.

The Chinese idiom '雕虫小技' means 'a skill which is of little value' (my translation). An equivalent idiomatic expression in English does not exist in English. This phrase is translated as 'mere tricks', thus a different degree of denigration is conveyed in the spoken English. In this case, the meaning of this phrase is transferred across from the source to target culture, but not the nuance of the spoken dialogue.

Dialogue number 4 in Table 7 is adapted from *The Art of War* by Sun Zi. The original phrase in the book is "知己知彼者，百战不殆", which is translated as "He who knows the other side (the enemy) and knows himself will not be defeated in a hundred battles"[10] (Sun, 2003). The translation strategy in adopted is the calque, where the whole phrase is borrowed from the source text and translated into the target text. However, given that the English dialogue is bounded by the same time constraint as the Chinese dialogue, the number of syllabus in the English translation cannot exceed the ten Chinese characters in the source text significantly. Therefore, 'to know the enemy' was omitted from the English translation, and only the part 'to know oneself' was retained in the target text. A combination of translation strategies in the localization of one dialogue line is illustrated in this example, where translation observed to be more than a single-step process.

The idiom '怜香惜玉' in dialogue number 5, is a Chinese idiomatic expression loosely explained as 'a man should show consideration for a woman (my translation). Adaptation is chosen as the translation strategy, so this idiom is translated as 'chivalry' in English, which is similar in meaning of a man showing gentlemanliness towards a woman. The inclusion of an idiom in the Chinese dialogue enable the spoken line to exude elegance. The same effect cannot be reproduced in the English dialogue since the translation is now

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[10] Sun, Z. (2003). *Sun Zi Art of War: an illustrated translation with Asian perspectives and insights*. Translated by Wee, C. H., Pearson Prentice Hall.

reduced to a single noun. A 'loss' during localization is observed in this example, where the meaning is transferred across cultures but the subtle nuance is lost in the process.

The phrase '自古红颜多薄命' is an old Chinese saying which can be expressed as 'a beautiful woman is usually ill-fated and will die young' (my translation). In the absence of an equivalent saying in the target culture, the calque translation strategy is used, where the entire expression is borrowed from the source culture, and literally translated into English.

5.4   Translation of Neologisms

Neologisms are observed to be used quite frequently in the source text, which impact of the latest usage of words on the internet, in the media and on entertainment products such as games. Table 8 below contains some examples of neologisms in the dialogue lines.

Table 8: Examples of Neologisms

No.	Source Text	Target Text
1	牛气冲天，666！	This is awesome, woohoo!
2	卧槽，挠出血了！	Oh no, I'm bleeding!
3	天生就是做炮灰的命。	It's your destiny to be cannon fodder.

The term '牛气冲天' in the first dialogue is a neologism which can be loosely explained as unsurpassed or extraordinary (my translation). It was concocted from the Chinese idiom '怒气冲天', which means 'towering rage' in English. The phrase '666' (*liu liu liu* in Hanyu Pinyin) is another neologism commonly used by gamers to represent the Chinese phrase '溜溜溜' because of the similarity in pronunciation. The phrase '溜溜溜' is used to described someone who is 'very powerful and impressive' (my translation). Since there is no equivalent set phrase in English, combining the meanings of the Chinese neologisms, this dialogue line is simply adapted as "This is awesome" in English, followed

by the interjection 'woohoo!'. It is also important to note that '666' has a negative connotation in Western culture and carries with it Satanic associations. Thus, the translator must have the cultural awareness not to directly transfer the '666' in the Chinese source text into the English target text.

The neologism '卧槽' (*wo cao* in Hanyu Pinyin) is a term used popularly in the media, whose meaning has changed with time. Its original meaning can be used to describe 'a person in a dormant state, who continue to prepare oneself for an opportunity in the future' (my translation). This term has evolved to take on several new meanings, one of which in this context means to be 'taken by surprise' (my translation). This term is just simply translated as an interjection 'Oh no' in the target text to show that the character is taken by surprise. However, given this neologism has multiple meanings, it can also be interpreted as a swear word. Hence, it is important for a translator to be provided with contextual information on the dialogue lines so that the most suitable tone is achieved in the English translation.

The other term '炮灰的命' can be literally translated to 'life as a cannon fodder' (my translation). It is often difficult to find equivalent lexical term in English for Chinese neologisms due to cultural differences and complex contextual meanings of the neologisms. In this case, the translation is a calque of the term in the source text, where the whole phrase is borrowed and translated into the target text without expressing the actual meaning. One of the common approaches in the translation of neologisms is the provision of descriptive functional equivalents (Newmark, 1988) so that the translation can deliver the cultural information of the terms in the source language. This term can be expressed in English as 'to play second fiddle (to someone)' or 'to be treated unfairly by others' (my translations). A lack of awareness of this neologism in the source culture may have resulted in the literal translation of the neologism, and the failure to transfer the underlying new meaning of this

phrase into English. The importance of cultural awareness as a key competence in translators is highlighted in this example.

5.5   Section Summary

The analysis of the dialogue lines from *Strike of Kings* yields some important results and observations. It is observed that various translation strategies are being adopted in the localization of a single textual type in a game. Different translation strategies are used in the localization of the character names namely: transcreation, transliteration, and literal translation. The translation strategies applied on the cultural specific references also differs widely across the dialogue lines. There is a conscious effort on the part of the translators to adopt the most appropriate strategy when translating each dialogue line, rather than adopting a unified approach to the whole game.

Omission is one of the common translation strategy used in game localization, though the reasons for omission are different in the examples cited in sections 5.2 and 5.3. Where the source cultural reference does not affect the player progression in the game, omission is sometimes the best approach not to alienate the players with mono-cultural elements from the source culture. By keeping cultural specific references to a minimum may facilitate the translation process, but it may result in products with a 'global sameness' (Pym, 2004:37). In game localization, it is important to note that the removal of certain source culture-specific elements, to allow the game to be more culturally acceptable in other target cultures, could potentially result in a loss of the unique cultural characteristics of original game.

Transcreation as a translation strategy is widely adopted in game localization because games are entertainment products, therefore translators are often given a creative freedom in the localization of game contents, to deliver equivalent player experience in the target culture. However, the examples discussed in this study indicated that despite the degree of freedom

given to game translators, they are constrained by intertextual references in published sources. Many cultural specific references in this game are based on Chinese literary classics and some have been adapted into manga, anime, movies, television series and other games. If the translators do not maintain a certain loyalty to the source and deviate too far from the literary classics, they may risk disengagement and adverse reactions among players who are familiar with the other published.

Another interesting observation made in this case study is the adaptation of *Journey to the West* in manga, anime, and games, which popularize certain overt intertextual allusions to the extent that the literary classic is no longer the key reference. This is especially prominent in the cultural specific references related to Sun Wukong's character. Though there exists English translation of the literary work, the popularity of the English localized version of *Dragon Ball* as a manga, anime, and game, has raised the prominence of the English localized name 'Flying Nimbus' above that of 'somersault cloud' in the translated literary work, among the Western audience. A comparison of cultural specific references and their localized names in literary classics and popular culture (comics, animation, games), to investigate if the popularity of a medium will make the localized names of those cultural specific references in that medium take precedence over the original literary work, would be an interesting area for future study.

Through the examples highlighted in this case study, cultural awareness is identified as a key competence required in game translators. Game localization goes beyond faithful rendition of a game from one language to another, it involves adapting the game from a source culture to entertain players in another culture. When faced with cultural specific references in a source culture, the translators act as cultural mediators, deciding which translation strategy is most appropriate in the translation of every sentence or phrase, to bridge the gap between the source and the target culture. Translators must be able to pick up

specific culture elements, the nuances of the cultural reference in the source culture and choose the appropriate approach in adapting them to the target culture, to mediate across cultures. Translators will have to navigate this complex negotiation between two cultures throughout the localization process, and at the end deliver a game that is coherent and entertaining for players in the target market.

6.   Conclusions

The cross-cultural challenges in game localization are highlighted in this study, through analysis of the dialogue texts in a game. There are different types of cultural specific references observed in a game, and a range of translation strategies is employed in the localization process. In addition, translation is shown not to be a purely linguistic transfer process, rather communication across both languages and cultures is involved.

Some of the prominent cultural specific references are identified in *Strike of Kings* which contains multiple references to Chinese literary classics. The source and target texts are analyzed to understand the translation strategies adopted in the Chinese to English localization of the game. Instead of a unified translation strategy, multiple translation strategies are observed in the localization of this game. The translation strategy adopted for each dialogue line is determined by whether the cultural specific elements can be successfully transferred from the source culture to the target culture, to deliver equivalent gameplay experience to players in both cultures. Furthermore, constraints imposed by other factors such as other published sources and time restrictions also affect the choice of translation strategies adopted.

A qualitative approach to explore cultural specific references in a game and the translation strategies used in each sentence is adopted in this study. Since this case study is based on a specific game in the MOBA genre, the cultural specific references and the translation strategies which are adopted in the translation of this game, may not be applicable to other game genres. More case studies on Chinese to English localized games, across different game genres and containing a range of cultural specific references are necessary to establish a framework for translation strategies in English to Chinese cross-cultural communication, which incorporates different dimensions of game localization. In addition, this study is limited to only the dialogue lines in the game. A more extensive study should be

carried out to include other diegetic texts, such as the narrative texts, which may also contain cultural specific references.

It is important for the localization industry to recognize that game localization must be understood as involving both cultural convergence and cultural differentiation. Though cross-cultural communication poses challenges to the localization process, removal of cultural specific references as a method of addressing cross-cultural issues will render a localized game bland from loss of the unique cultural characteristics, with which it was originally created. The decisions undertaken by those within the localization industry with respect to games will eventually define the relevance of games beyond their own border and consequent global reach of games as cultural products. Therefore, role of translation as mediation in cross-cultural communication in interactive digital entertainment cannot be overlooked.

The decision-making process in translation are dependent on various factors, including the skopos of the translation, the constraints imposed on the textual type, the source cultural specific reference and the existence of an equivalent in the target culture, loyalty to other published sources related to this game, and delivering the equivalent entertainment experience in the target market. Hence, all the above factors must be considered by translators in the game localization so that all the game-specific dimensions are covered in the localization process.

More can be done on improving the current industry practices or establishing guidelines for the ever-expanding scope of game localization, which is a domain that academia can potentially contribute. Cross-cultural communication in game localization deserves more attention from by scholars in translation studies, especially on the aspects of game localization and specialized training for game translators with the aim of training professionals to deliver great localized content worldwide. This can be done if universities can recognize game localization as a specialized area of translation. Localization industry

professionals should also play a part in bringing up translator competence, by collaborating with institutions to offer game localization modules which are representative of actual industry conditions, and not purely academic pursuits. The application of translation strategies in and constraints imposed on game localization should be focused on this specialized area of study.

Game localization is significant industry sector, so it is a domain worthy of translation research, with some future areas of interest. A potential line of investigation is cross-cultural issues when using English as a pivot language for translation into other languages. Studies can be conducted on how the 'loss' in localization from the source language to English will have a significant impact on the localization into other languages downstream. Using English as a pivot language also implies that cultural issues filtered by English will not be recovered in localization into other languages unless the translators understand the source language well enough to know the original content the game was developed.

The understanding of players' perceptions when using different approaches in cultural adaptation of games is another area which will benefit the game localization industry. Since games are entertainment products and user experience is one of the critical factors which determine the success of a game in local markets, research into player engagement from linguistic and culturalization aspects, will allow industry practitioner to assess if their localization approach was able to deliver equivalent user experience in the target culture. In turn, this will enable industry practitioners to analyze the effectiveness of the translation strategies and the validity of assumptions made during the localization process.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Dialogues from *Strike of Kings*

Table A1: Dialogue spoken by Toro

Source Text	Target Text
牛气冲天，666！	This is awesome, woohoo!
老牛在此，谁…谁敢放肆？！	Old Bull is here. Who... dares defy me?!
好痒…卧槽，挠出血了！	Ah, it itches... Oh no, I'm bleeding!
能用拳头说的话，尽量不要用嘴。	Why speak with your mouth when your fists can do the talking?
孙悟空可是我的结拜兄弟！	Sun Wukong is my sworn brother!
有我老牛在，大家是不是很有安全感？	Now that I'm here, everyone feels much safer right?
凭啥别人都有鞋穿我就只能光着蹄子跑。	How come everyone gets to wear shoes while I'm stuck with hooves?
长了一副坦克的身体，天生就是做炮灰的命。	When you're naturally built like a tank, it's your destiny to be cannon fodder.

Table A2: Dialogue spoken by Sun Wukong

Source Text	Target Text
俺老孙来也！	The Monkey King is here!
看看俺的筋斗云ˇ再看看俺的金箍棒！	Look at my Flying Nimbus and watch my Wishing Staff!
有妖怪？待俺老孙看看！	Any monsters here? Let me take a look!
哪来的小妖精，敢在你孙爷爷头上撒野。	What kind of gremlin dares to act so wildly on my head?
取经路长十万八千里，老孙一个筋斗云就到了！	The journey of a thousand miles, can be taken in a second with my Flying Nimbus!
知道什么是火眼金睛吗？	Do you know what it means to be eagle-eyed?
我若成佛，天下无魔。我若成魔，佛奈我何？	If I become a Buddha, there will be no demons in this world. If I become a demon, what will happen to me?
超出三界外，不在五行中	Leave the Three Realms and the Five Elements.
俺老孙还会回来的……	I will be back...
妖怪，往哪跑？	Where are you running off to demon?
让爷爷教你两招！	Let me show you something!
嘿嘿，雕虫小技！	Heehee, mere tricks!
吃俺老孙一棒！	Taste my staff!
三头六身，换斗移星！	Three heads and six bodies, let the stars battle!
驱神斩妖，七十二变！	Bane of the gods, destroyer of demons! Master of seventy two transformations!

哪来的小妖精，敢在你孙爷爷头上撒野。	What kind of gremlin dares to act so wildly on my head?

Table A3: Dialogue spoken by Zhao Yun

Source Text	Target Text
吾乃常山赵子龙是也！	I am Zhao Zilong!
千军易得，一将难求！	Armies are a dime a dozen, a general is what is needed!
蛟龙舞银枪，一怒斩天罡！	The dragon dance cuts through the skies!
险中求存，败中求胜！	Fight to survive against danger. Fight for victory against defeat!
为将者，当身先士卒！	A general knows when to take the lead!
两军对决，勇者胜！	Only the brave will succeed in a military showdown!
知己知彼，方能百战百胜！	Know thyself and you will be ever-victorious!
冲锋陷阵，我先上！	Charge forward, I'll lead the way!
武将的宿命，不正是战死沙场吗？！	What is the general's fate if not to die on the battlefield?!
势不可挡！	I'm unstoppable!
吃我一枪！	Eat spear!
荡尽天下！	Lay waste to the world!
神龙护体！	Dragon protect me!
浑身是胆！	Remain full of courage!
放马过来吧！	Bring it on!
这点本事，也敢出来叫阵？！	You call yourself a warrior?!

Table A4: Dialogue spoken by Lu Bu

Source Text	Target Text
哈哈哈˜马中赤兔，人中吕布！	Hahaha, amongst horses there is Red Hare, amongst men there is Lu Bu!
方天在手，天下我有！	There is nothing that can stop me!
方天无极，刺！	There are no limits to my power. Take this!
节操是什么？一文不值的东西！	What is moral integrity? Not worth talking about!
大丈夫生居天地间，岂能久居人下？！	A real man is born between heaven and earth. Who can live under a man?!
若有赤兔马，千里崎岖一日达！	There is nowhere that Red Hare can't go!
哈哈哈˜江山多娇，又怎及我貂蝉半分妖娆？！	Hahaha, the beauty of the mountains and rivers doesn't compare to Diao Chan!
快把赤兔马还给我，腿都跑抽筋了。	Give me back Red Hare. My legs are cramping up.
这仇，我一定会报的……	I will seek vengeance for this...

一决胜负！	It's a showdown!
一群鼠辈！	A pack of villains!
找死！	You have a death wish!
对付这群杂碎，我一个人就够了！	I can take care of such pipsqueaks all by myself!

Table A5: Dialogue spoken by Diaochan

Source Text	**Target Text**
奴家的舞姿，您可喜欢？	Do you like my dance?
让奴家为您献上一曲京华梦。	Let me sing a song for you.
英雄一盏酌江月，最难消受美人恩。	A hero's greatest battle is enduring beauty and grace.
只要是男人，都会拜倒在我的美人计下。	All men fall before my charms.
奴家走累了，休息一下嘛！	I'm tired. Let me rest for a minute!
你们知道什么是怜香惜玉吗？	Do you know what chivalry is?
自古红颜多薄命……	Many with a rosy countenance have been ill-fated...