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Training game localisers online: teaching methods, translation competence and curricular design

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Video games have become one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the modern digital society. The global success of the game industry has fostered the development of the game localisation industry, as developers and publishers strive to sell their games in different languages and territories in order to maximise their return on investment. This, in turn, has been reflected in the increasing demand for trained game localisers who can cope with the different challenges posed by this emerging type of translation and meet the industry needs. Based on the long-standing experience of the MA in Audiovisual Translation at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, this paper focus on pedagogical issues concerning the training of game translators and, more specifically, training them online, taking into consideration the specificities of distance teaching and learning. After briefly presenting an overview of this MA and its online modality, the paper shifts to the teaching of game localisation, focusing on translation competence and curricular design, describing the tasks that students are asked to do for each unit. Special emphasis is placed on the teaching resources and tools used to provide a collaborative and engaging learning experience to distance education students that prepares them to embark on a career in this fast-paced and technologically-driven industry.

Keywords: game localisation, online teaching, distance learning, translation competence, curricular design, teaching methods, Moodle

1. Introduction

Video games have become one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the modern digital society. The great array of game genres and platforms where they can be played has contributed to the success of the game industry, which in turn has fostered the growth of the game localisation industry. Developers and publishers strive to sell their games in different languages and territories in order to maximise their return on investment and this means that their games need to be localised to reach the widest possible audience (O'Hagan and Mangiron, 2013; Bernal-Merino, 2014). As a result, there has been an increasing demand for trained game localisers who can cope with the different challenges posed by this emerging type of translation and meet the specific needs of this industry. Since the early 2000s several universities, particularly in Spain and the United Kingdom, have gradually started to include game localisation as a subject in specialised postgraduate courses in audiovisual translation (AVT), multimedia translation, localisation or translation technologies. However, to date, research focused on the didactics of game localisation has been relatively scarce, notable exceptions being the contributions of Bernal-Merino (2008, 2014), Granell (2011), Vela-Valido (2011) and O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013).

Bernal-Merino (2008) makes several suggestions for the introduction of game localisation courses at tertiary education and provides examples of the different types of activities that could be exploited. In a later work, Bernal-Merino (2015) explores professional and higher education training and compares their relative strengths and weaknesses, offering ideas about possible activities and projects to do in the classroom. Granell (2011) focuses mainly on teaching objectives, learning outcomes, methodology and materials, while Vela-Valido (2011) presents an overview of the history of game localisation teaching in Spain and makes two didactic proposals, both at undergraduate

and postgraduate levels. O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013) discuss the various pedagogical issues related to the training of game translators, focusing on translation competence, course design, assessment practices and resources. They provide an example of a possible game localisation course, including learning outcomes, indicative content and assessment. They also enter into the debate between vocational versus academic training approaches and advocate a model that combines theory and practice and nurtures a reflective practitioner. However, no researcher has yet addressed the topic of training game translators online, despite the increasing prominence of this teaching modality in recent years.

Based on the experience of the MA in Audiovisual Translation at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), which is offered both face-to-face and online, this paper focuses on the pedagogical issues concerning the training of game translators, taking into consideration the specificities of distance teaching and learning. After briefly presenting an overview of the MA, the methods, tools and resources used in the online edition will be presented, as well as the challenges of delivering the same course face-to-face and online. The focus of the paper shifts then to the teaching of game localisation and, more specifically, translation competence, curricular design and teaching materials. Finally, the syllabus of the online course is also presented, with examples of tasks from one of the units.

2. Overview of the MA in Audiovisual Translation at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

The MA in AVT at UAB started as a postgraduate course in 2001. It was the first one of its kind to be offered in Spain and it proved to be very successful, becoming an MA in 2004. In the same year, an online MA was launched to cater for the demand from students who due to geographical, professional or personal reasons could not attend

lectures in person. Both MAs ran in parallel for twelve years, until they became a single MA with the same curriculum and two delivery modes, i.e. face-to-face and online, in the academic year 2016-2017. The objectives, competences, learning outcomes and assessment for both modalities are the same, the only difference being the delivery mode.

2.1 Course description

The MA in AVT is a 60 ECTS (European Credit and Accumulation Transfer System) master's degree designed to be taken in one year, although it can also be done part-time over two years. All modules are compulsory and cover the main AVT modes, such as dubbing, subtitling, voice-over, audio description, subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing and respeaking, as well as multimedia and game localisation. The course is offered with the language combinations English-to-Spanish or English-to-Catalan and it is addressed to native or quasi-native speakers of the target languages. There are 50 available places every year, 30 for the face-to-face edition and 20 for the online version.

The MA consists of six taught modules and a final dissertation, as illustrated in Table 1, where the number of ECTS credits and the teaching terms are also included. As indicated in their title, most modules combine different subjects:

Table 1. Structure of the MA in AVT at UAB

FIRST TERM	**SECOND TERM**
Module 1. Theory of AVT – 6 ECTS	Module 5. Voice-over and Respeaking – 6 ECTS
Module 2. Dubbing and Subtitling – 9 ECTS	Module 6. Tools and Methodology applied to AVT – 9 ECTS
Module 3. Audio description and Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing – 9 ECTS	Module 7. Dissertation – 15 ECTS
Module 4 Multimedia and Game Localisation – 6 ECTS	

The teaching and learning at the MA follows a socio-constructivist approach, as proposed by Kiraly (2000), which is student centred, promotes independent and collaborative learning, uses an array of practical exercises simulating real tasks and projects, and works with authentic tools and materials. The course design also takes into account different learning methods, as proposed by Laurillard (2012: 96): through acquisition, inquiry, practice, production, discussion and collaboration. The course favours ample translation practice in order to prepare students for the marketplace and to equip them with the knowledge and specialised skills that they will need to work in the AVT industry. Yet, this practice-oriented approach is also combined with a solid theoretical background aimed at training reflective practitioners (Schön, 1987; O'Hagan and Mangiron, 2013). Students can use this wealth of knowledge to make informed decisions and stand over their work and discuss it, when necessary, with clients, who are not always translation experts and may not understand the reasons behind a given translation solution.

2.2. Challenges of teaching the same course face-to-face and online

One of the biggest challenges of delivering the same MA face-to-face and online resides in making sure that students of both modalities achieve the same competences and knowledge. In the face-to-face scenario, learners spend some lecture time translating in class, followed by a joint review and correction activities, where students and lecturer compare the merits, or otherwise, of the various solutions proposed. In the online edition this is not possible and, therefore, other tasks must be exploited, such as shorter activities for which students provide their translations in the forums and different options are discussed by the participants. Other possibilities include the tutor correcting a given number of individual activities every week, in a way that all students have the

same number of exercises reviewed in the module. The corrections can then be displayed anonymously, so that all students can compare their work with the corrected ones, see what they did well, what could be improved and ask the lecturer about any doubts they may have. Another option is to provide a key, either the official version or a translation made by the lecturer, so that students can compare against their own work. This can be fruitful in the case of exercises dealing with variables or terminological searches but it is not advisable with tasks that require creativity, as students tend to assume that the official translation or the one provided by the lecturer is the best one, which is not necessarily the case. If a corrected sample is provided, it is very important to emphasise that it is only one of many possible versions.

3. Teaching online at the MA in AVT at UAB: methods and tools

The online modality allows students to complete the Master remotely and is designed for those who, for some reason, be it geographical distance or personal or professional situation, cannot do the degree in the face-to-face modality. The educational platform used at UAB is the open access platform Moodle, as it offers tools for (a) content distribution; (b) synchronous and asynchronous communication and collaboration; and (c) monitoring and evaluating students' progress (Díaz Becerro, 2009; Sánchez Rodríguez, 2009).

Each module consists of two or more topics or units. For example, the Multimedia and Game Localisation module is made up of two units – multimedia localisation and game localisation –, which are assessed independently. The final mark is the average of the results obtained in each of the topics. Units have their own Moodle classroom and contain introductory videos about the module, the lecturers and the content of the units. A dedicated forum allows students to introduce themselves,

preferably by means of a short video, so that they can put faces to names and describe their translation experience and motivation to enrol in the course.

Instructions about the unit, the theoretical materials it hosts, the activities to be carried out and the synchronic chat sessions are given at the start of the unit as a way to present students with the learning objectives and to give them the opportunity to adapt their learning pace. Additionally, the fact that the materials are permanently available gives students the possibility to review them at any time and as frequently as necessary.

Furthermore, in every Moodle classroom there is a forum for general questions and queries relating to any of the units making up the module. Students are encouraged to contact lecturers if they have any doubts, via the Moodle messaging function or via e-mail. If necessary, a phone call or video conference can be scheduled. Lecturers are advised to answer to students as soon as possible, as otherwise they may feel being left on their own. A maximum of 24 hours is considered a reasonable timeframe within which to reply, unless the lecturer has scheduled given days of the week to do so, in which case students will know when to expect a reply.

The theoretical materials are provided in textual and audiovisual form. The Book function of Moodle is used to create a multi-page resource with a book-like format, allowing the units to be structured with different chapters and subchapters. It also permits the embedding of images, videos, and links, and it is visually more attractive and easier to read than a pdf file.

With respect to group activities, students' participation is essential to promote a collaborative learning experience, even though they are not physically together in a classroom. Lack of participation in collaborative activities, such as fora and chats, will impact negatively on the course dynamics and it is therefore crucial that lecturers lead the learning process in the virtual classroom by proposing between two and four forum

activities for every unit, so that students get engaged and work collaboratively. For example, the forum is used to propose critical readings, ask students to watch a video and give their opinion, provide short translation exercises and discuss proposed topics. Students share their thoughts, answer questions posed by the lecturer and classmates, and raise new questions, leading the learning process in a direction that interests them.

Students should feel that the lecturer is present in the virtual classroom, and that s/he is reading their contributions, answering queries, highlighting interesting or controversial points that may have arisen and encouraging other students to comment on them. It is also essential not to provide the answer or the lecturers' opinion in the first instance, for while some students may contribute at the start of the week others will do so towards the end of the week, and the latter should still be able to contribute with their opinion and solutions before the lecturer steps in with their comments or proposals. If students who are first to participate have covered a topic from all angles and there is little left to say, the lecturer can introduce new related questions and exercises to keep the discussion going and making sure all students can contribute. Participation in forums is essential to mimic a classroom atmosphere for the online learners and therefore it carries important weighting in terms of assessment: between 15% and 20% in all the modules of the master's programme.

Another tool to promote collaborative learning are synchronous live-group chats, that can be used to solve doubts, discuss issues and answer questions live. They take place at a time agreed by lecturers and students and, although chats are key to the learning process and attendance is advisable, they are not compulsory, as students may be working or living in different time zones and therefore not able to attend at the designated time. In an attempt to facilitate the participation of students, lecturers may propose to have two shorter chats at different times, on the assumption that there are

enough students available for each slot. Chats can be text-based, using the Moodle platform, or using video conferencing tools, such as Skype, and they usually last between forty minutes and an hour. Both types of chats are recorded and made available in the Moodle platform, so that students who have not been able to attend a session can consult the recording later. Chats are usually scheduled towards the end of the unit and before the submission of activities that will be graded, so that students can use the opportunity to discuss any questions they may have regarding the assignment with other students and with the lecturer.

Apart from taking part in fora and chats, students must submit individual or group assignments to the lecturer, who provides feedback and grades them. In some of the units, students are also requested to upload their student portfolio, including all the work they have carried out for that specific subject and a reflective piece on their learning process and progress.

As regards specific software that may be needed in the different modules, freeware, such as Subtitle Workshop, and demo versions or free educational versions are used if available. When access is required to a licensed application, students are given temporary credentials. Teaching how to use specialist tools can be challenging in online environments and in the MA at UAB is done by providing video tutorials of the lecturer using the software and explaining all the steps that need to be followed. If students have any technical difficulties or queries, they are advised to post them in the forums, so that other students can benefit from the answers. If doubts persist, a synchronic chat session can be organised, either individually, when the issue only affects a person, or with the whole class.

4. Training game localisers at UAB: translation competence, subject-specific knowledge and teaching materials

In this section, the unit on Game Localisation, one of the two making up the Multimedia and Game Localisation module (6 ECTS), is described. Each unit accounts for 3 ECTS, which is equivalent to 75 study hours. In the face-to-face version this corresponds to 18 contact hours in the classroom and 57 independent study hours, while the online course spreads over 6 weeks (1 ECTS is taught over a two-week period and is worth 25 study hours). Due to the small amount of credits and the short period of time the unit lasts, the objective is to present an introduction to game localisation. Therefore, the course is designed to provide participants with the essential knowledge, competences, and resources to be able to start working in this field and then continue their ongoing learning and training experience on the job. In this section, the general objectives, competences and subject-specific knowledge of the Game Localisation unit are described.

4.1 Objectives and competences

The general objectives of the game localisation unit are the following:

1. Become familiarised with the game industry: markets, producers, platforms, game genres, gaming cultures.
2. Become familiarised with the localisation of video games: process, models, agents, tools, technical aspects, assets, text types, special features, priorities and constraints.
3. Develop different competences and skills required to work in this field.
4. Put knowledge acquired into practice by translating videogames.
5. Develop awareness of theoretical issues and research avenues in this field.

In order to achieve these objectives, several general as well as specific competences and transferable skills are developed during the course. The general competences are:

1. Knowledge of the source and the target language
2. Writing skills
3. Intercultural awareness
4. Documentation skills

These general competences are linked to the following domain-specific competences:

1. Identify different assets and text types in video games and their features.
2. Identify and be able to deal with technical features of game localisation.
3. Produce gender-inclusive translations.
4. Master strategies for the correction and linguistic revision of video games.
5. Recognise translation problems in game localisation and use the knowledge acquired to solve them.
6. Develop the skills needed to translate a video game without access to the original game.

In relation to transferable skills, creativity, problem-solving, communication, computer literacy and time management are crucial for a game translator. In what follows, five competences and skills that longstanding teaching experience has revealed to be of particular significance when training translators to become game localisers are discussed, namely, (a) ability to translate blindfolded, without access to the original game; (b) ability to cope with severe space restrictions; (c) ability to deal with tags, control codes and variables; (d) ability to produce gender-inclusive translations, and (e) creativity.

Ability to translate blindfolded

The concept of *blind localisation* was coined by Dietz (2006) to refer to the working conditions of game translators, who often do not have access to the original game because of confidentiality issues, especially when not working in-house. Despite the fact that the situation has improved over the years and now many developers provide screenshots of the game to facilitate the translators' work, these do not necessarily cover the full game and, more often than not, translators have little or no context to guide their choices. Furthermore, game localisation is becoming more and more fragmented, as, in order to achieve a faster turnaround, the different assets to be translated are divided and assigned to different translators. Localisers are thus not likely to see the full game and must work with text strings, either in an Excel file or a translation memory, which do not necessarily follow a logical order or sequence. The lack of context makes it difficult to translate certain strings particularly if no additional information is provided by the developer. For example, the English string *Burst*, when translated into Spanish, can either be an infinitive, that could be a button or command, an imperative, that is, an order to the player, or a noun. Probably the first translations in Spanish for *burst* to come to a translator's mind would be *reventar* (used for a balloon or a water pipe, for example), or *estallar, explotar* (used for fireworks or a projectile). However, in the context of an action or a shooter game, *burst* tends to be a noun that refers to machine gun fire and would be translated as *ráfaga*. Students who are gamers or familiar with games are likely to know the right term outright, but others may not, and will have to be able to conduct appropriate documentation to find the right term. Yet, whether game translators need to be gamers themselves is debatable and although being a gamer can certainly be an advantage when translating blindfolded, non-gamers can also become good game translators if they are trained properly and develop the required competences.

Ability to cope with space restrictions

Space limitations are one of the main constraints game translators need to face, as game screens can be very busy. Character limitations are normally enforced when dealing with text that populates the user interface, such as menu options, lists of weapons, abilities and commands, to name but a few, and can be more severe in games for handheld consoles, mobiles and tablets. As Romance languages such as Spanish usually require more space than English, translators have to strive to be concise while being creative and producing texts that are attractive to target players. As an example, in the game *Final Fantasy X*, when characters fight, they issue one-line barks to their enemies which can have a maximum length of 35 characters. In the case of Yuna, one of the protagonists, who resorts to magic during the battles, the messages in English are written in older, formal English, with a great dose of poetry and rhyme as in the original string "Armour of light, halt physical might!". These features must be translated into the target text, while keeping the reference to the spell that is present in the original text and abiding by the 35 character limitation.

Ability to deal with tags, control codes and variables

Another competence of paramount importance when working in the localisation sector is the ability to work with text containing tags and control codes, which are elements of code used to give instructions to the game engine, usually about format and layout, such as changing lines, introducing an option for the player or highlighting text in colour. Computer assisted translation (CAT) tools usually hide tags and control codes, but some developers, especially Japanese and independent ones, often prefer working with Excel files which contain part of the code, and while some rely on xml language, others prefer their own system. For this reason, it is important that students are trained to recognise

tags and control codes so that they do not translate them as, otherwise, the code is likely to break.

Trainees should also be made aware of the importance of the string identification (ID), which is a unique label for each piece of text or message that makes up the game and may contain useful information about its function. In the string “Start”, for instance, the ID “str_quest_button” indicates that it is a “button” that initiates a quest and, therefore, should be translated into Spanish using the infinitive form of the verb “Empezar”.

Variables pose a harder challenge, as they replace certain text, which will have to fit into a sentence and be combined with other elements, meaning that the translator usually can only guess the possible combinations (O'Hagan and Mangiron, 2013; Muñoz Sánchez, 2017). When localising from Japanese and English into Romance languages, the issue of gender and number agreement is likely to pose a problem when translating variables, as, for example, in a string such as “You obtained a valuable <item>”, the item could be a sword or a knife, which have different genders in Spanish, and *valuable* would also have to agree with the noun. Nowadays, developers who are localisation-aware and have good internationalisation practices may provide several variables, such as “Why, hello there <IF_MALE>handsome boy<ELSE>pretty girl<ENDIF>!” (Honeywood and Fung, 2012), although this is still not common practice. Students should be trained to recognise variables, think of the text they may contain and translate the sentence in which they appear so that it will be correct, regardless of the text that will replace the variable, which may involve changing the variable position to follow the grammar rules of the target language.

When translating the example above, “You obtained a valuable <item>.”, into Spanish, it would be advisable to place the variable <item> before the adjective

"valuable" and rearrange the sentence so that it is grammatically correct. In order to avoid the agreement of the indefinite article in Spanish with the noun, "a" has been substituted by a colon, which is a common strategy in video games, and the adjective "valuable" [valioso/valiosa] has been translated with the invariable construction "de valor", also to avoid agreement issues. The resulting target sentence is: "Has recibido: <item> de valor." [You have received: <item> of value.], which, although not the most natural construction in Spanish, it is grammatically correct. Students need to learn that in game localisation the best possible translation in terms of style is often not possible because of such technical restrictions.

Ability to produce gender-inclusive translations

Related to the topic of variables and the lack of context is the issue of gender-inclusive language, which also needs to be considered when translating games. Firstly, certain texts in a game, such as *barks*, short one-line messages spoken by non-playable characters, and battle messages, uttered to an enemy during combat, are likely to appear randomly, and the addressee may be male or female, which means that a gender-inclusive or neutral translation is bound to work in all cases. A message like "You are toast!", addressed to an enemy who is about to lose a battle, should not be translated in Spanish as "¡Estás perdido!" [¡You (informal, singular) are finished (masculine)!], as this message is going to appear randomly in different battles and the opponent may be male or female, an individual or a group, thus calling for different solutions in Spanish. A gender and number neutral translation that fulfils the same function as the original should be given priority, such as "¡Se acerca el fin!" [¡The end is approaching!], which would work in all possible scenarios.

The other reason that highlights the importance of using gender neutral language is that games and their paratexts, such as marketing messages, often address players,

who these days split quite evenly between male and female. Indeed, according to surveys carried out in 2019, 46% of all players are female in the United States (ESA, 2019) and Europe (ISFE, 2019). Adopting gender inclusive solutions is paramount not to alienate female players and to foster their gaming immersion. Once again, terms that are gender marked in Spanish ("child" = "niño/niña") should be avoided whenever possible and alternative invariable options such as "cariño" [darling] or "criatura" [child] should be used instead.

Creativity

Many games require translators to be creative to deal with names of weapons, missions, achievements, fighting techniques, monsters and creatures as well as with puns and plays on words that often appear in certain genres, such as adventure games and role playing games (RPG), while other types may rely on rhymes, such as *Child of Light*. Whether creativity is an inborn trait or a talent that can be acquired is a moot point (O'Hagan and Mangiron, 2013), and even though some students may come up with ingenious solutions more readily than others, creativity is a skill that can be developed with practice. At the beginning, students may be cautious with the creative freedom often granted to game translators, as undergraduate degrees tend to focus on literary and specialised translation, such as technical or legal, where it is imperative to follow the original quite closely. As a type of user-centred translation (O'Hagan and Mangiron, 2013), game localisation gives priority to reproducing the gameplay experience of the original (Mangiron and O'Hagan, 2006; Fernández Costales, 2012; Bernal-Merino, 2014), thus enhancing creativity. Translators are entitled to depart from the original text as long as the function is preserved and a similar effect is likely to be achieved on the target players. A good illustration of a game that requires a significant creative effort is the online card game *Hearthstone*, rich in jokes, puns and intertextual references that

usually cannot be translated literally. A case in point is the name of the card “fan of knives”, which comes accompanied by an image showing several knives in the shape of a manual fan, i.e. a device that is held in the hand and moved back and forth to cool a person. The descriptive text, “I wouldn't say I LOVE knives, but I'm definitely a fan”, playing with the two meanings of the word fan, i.e. the device and an enthusiastic devotee, calls for a creative solution that is ingenious and preserves the humour.

4.2 Subject-specific knowledge

During the course, students become familiar with the game and the game localisation industries, covering topics such as game platforms, genres, game mechanics, gameplay experience and immersion. They are also exposed to the localisation process and models, the various stakeholders, the terminology specific to each platform, technical issues, such as variables, tags, and control codes, and the tools most commonly used in the industry, mainly CAT tools such as SDL Trados, memoQ and Memsource, but also proprietary tools, such as applications that check the number of characters in a line and conversation previewers that allow to visualise a message and the various possible answers.

Students also learn about the different assets that make up a game, particularly the translatable ones – in-game text, art assets, audio and cinematic assets, packaging (if available) and accompanying documentation (Chandler, 2005) –, as well as the different text types present in a game, with special emphasis on textual graphics, instructions and tutorials, help messages, menus, items, buttons and commands, battle messages, descriptive and narrative passages and text-based dialogue. Dubbing and subtitling practices are also discussed so as to highlight the fact that the conventions applied in the localisation of games can be rather eclectic due to the lack of standardisation in the

industry. Students also learn about the market, types of jobs available, working conditions and ongoing rates.

4.3 Teaching materials

As discussed by O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013) and Bernal-Merino (2014), one of the hurdles is the difficulty in obtaining real materials for teaching, due to the strict confidentiality policies at play in the gaming industry. Lecturers who are, or have been, professionals in the field have access to original games, from which they may use small excerpts, always taking into account copyright issues and the fair use policy for educational purposes. Establishing cooperation agreements with game developers and publishers can also help ensure the use of real games, whether fully or partially. Table 2 offers a list of sites where to find games for teaching purposes: freeware, open source games, *abandonware*, which are no longer supported by the developer or copyright holder, as well as games of the editions of the LocJam Game Translation competition that took place from 2014 to 2017:

Table 2. Sites where to find video games

freeware games	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_freeware_video_games
open source games	https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_open-source_video_games www.slant.co/topics/1933/~best-open-source-games
abandonware games	www.myabandonware.com https://abandonwaregames.net www.xtcabandonware.com
LocJam	https://github.com/IGDA-LocSIG

Lecturers can also manually transcribe a fragment of a game from gameplay found in video play-throughs in YouTube or specialised gaming websites, such as Game Anyone?, where gamers record themselves playing the different levels of a game. The drawback in this case is that the text will not contain any variables or tags, unless they

are added by the tutor, but it is still a good way to work on specific skills or textual features.

5. Curricular design of the online version: content, tasks and assessment

In this section, the general structure and content of the online video game localisation unit is described, followed by an account of the tasks and the assessment.

5.1. Structure and content

The Game Localisation unit is made up of four topics, as shown in Table 3, stretches over a period of six weeks and accounts for 3 ECTS, i.e. a total of 75 study hours:

Table 3. Topics covered in the Game Localisation unit of the MA in AVT at UAB

Topic	Title	Content	Duration
1	Introduction to game industry and localisation	Industry: what is a video game, history of games, industry dynamics, game platforms, genres. Localisation: what is game localisation, models, translator profile, priorities and constraints.	10 days
2	Localisation process and translatable assets	Different stages of the localisation process, agents involved, the localisation of in-game text (user interface, in-game dialogue, descriptive and narrative passages), textual graphics, battle messages, script for dubbing and/or subtitling.	10 days
3	Postlocalisation	Translation review and editing, quality assessment and testing (what is a bug, types of bugs, debugging process), the translation of associated materials (instruction manuals, marketing materials, legal and health and safety texts, strategy guide).	1 week
4	Technical aspects	Overview of programming languages used in the game industry, types of files, variables, tags and control codes, character restrictions, working with CAT tools.	2 weeks

The topics last a week, ten days or two weeks, depending on the amount of work required from students. The didactic materials are provided in book format, which may contain text, images and embedded videos, as well as video tutorials made by the lecturers. One tutor is in charge of the first three topics and the final one is taught by another trainer. This works well because they have dissimilar professional profiles, i.e. one is an in-house translator and the other one a freelancer, which exposes students to different but complementary views.

Trainees are expected to read and study the materials and complete weekly tasks, contributing to the discussion forums and/or carrying out individual assignments, as further discussed in the next section.

5.2. Tasks and assessment

Assessment for the Game Localisation unit entails forum participation (15%), three individual assignments (75%) and a student's portfolio (10%), which provides students with ample translation practice and feedback. The first two translation assignments are short, focus on text types common in games and explore challenges such as humour, rhymes and space restrictions. In what follows, the different tasks are described and information about the assessment is also provided.

5.2.1. Tasks for topic 1

In the introduction to the unit, students get familiarised with the subject matter and no individual assignments are envisaged. Chats are only used to solve doubts and address any general questions they may have. During the first 10 days, the emphasis is on forum activities as displayed in Table 4:

Table 4. Topic 1 – Forum tasks

Tasks	Description

1 (compulsory)	Students discuss the main factors behind the success of the video game industry and whether they think it is a type of entertainment that appeals more to men than to women. They also debate whether video games encourage violence in society.
2 (compulsory)	Students reflect on how to translate the name of a Japanese video game character, which could raise copyright issues in Europe and the United States, and propose possible alternatives.
3 (compulsory)	Students need to come up with a different name for a character of a Japanese game because the original name, in the Japanese syllabary *katakana*, is too long when transcribed using Roman alphabet characters. They have to propose names which reflect a physical or a personality trait of the character.
4 (compulsory)	Students translate blind-folded a number of text strings from a game and try to find out what genre and game they belong too.
5 (compulsory)	Students are asked to read an article about the main features of game localisation and provide their opinion.

5.2.2. Tasks for topic 2

This topic focuses on the localisation process, paying special attention to the various translatable assets and types of texts. There are four compulsory and one optional forum activities, as illustrated in Table 5:

Table 5. Topic 2 – Forum tasks

Tasks	**Description**
1 (compulsory)	Students discuss the main similarities and differences between software localisation and AVT and game localisation
2 (compulsory)	Students debate whether acronyms and abbreviations used in games should be translated or kept in English, and why. They propose solutions and discuss them amongst themselves.
3 (compulsory)	Students consider how to translate the pronoun “you” in barks and battle messages and think of solutions that could work in all possible scenarios, whether there is one or more enemies, they are male or female, in formal or informal exchanges.
4 (compulsory)	Students watch two short clips of game footage in which the characters are strongly defined by linguistic variation in the original. They then discuss how

	to portray them in the localised version, taking into consideration whether the game will be dubbed or subtitled.
5 (optional)	Students have to read an article about subtitling in game localisation and provide their opinion.

Additionally, participants take part in a chat and are required to submit an individual task at the end of the 10 days, which consists of three brief translation assignments, as described in Table 6:

Table 6. Topic 2 – Individual translation task

Task	Description
1. Battle message translation	Students translate several battle messages containing idioms, rhymes and plays on words, considering gender issues.
2. Translation of weapon names	Students have to translate the names of different weapons evocatively and creatively.
3. Translation of a fragment of the bestiary of an RPG	Students are asked to translate creatively the name of several monsters and their descriptions, which are written in a formal but humoristic tone in the original.

To carry out these activities, students are given instructions on text limitations, such as maximum number of characters per line, since one of the objectives is to develop their creativity while coping with technical constraints. They are also encouraged to include comments when appropriate, so as to develop critical reflection when justifying their solutions. The corrected version of each of the assignments is returned to students before their next submission, as the feedback will be instrumental for the next assignment.

5.2.3. Tasks for topic 3

The third topic centres on the postlocalisation process, including translation review and editing, quality assessment as well as the translation of associated materials, such as

manuals, strategy guides and marketing documentation. During this week, three forum tasks are arranged, as shown in Table 7:

Table 7. Topic 3 – Forum tasks

Tasks	Description
1 (compulsory)	Students need to look for games with errors in Spanish and discuss them in the forum, reflecting on their nature and possible origin and proposing alternative solutions.
2 (compulsory)	Students identify research topics related to game localisation and, in particular, to localisation quality.
3 (compulsory)	Students are asked to read an article about the localisation of mobile games, which pays special emphasis to quality assessment, and highlight the aspects they find more interesting. They have to point out the similarities and differences they find between localisation for console and for mobile games and are encouraged to reflect on the different types of quality assessment processes broached in the article.

Students also take part in one chat and have to complete a second individual assignment, which consists of three short exercises in which they practice with some of the most common text types, including subtitles, as described in Table 8:

Table 8. Topic 3 – Individual translation task

Task	Description
1. Translation of an excerpt of a game for subtitling	Students translate a brief excerpt of a video game for its subtitling in Spanish.
2. Translation of different strings of a card game containing numerous play on words, cultural references and intercultural allusions	Students translate different strings of a card game, including the name of the card and the descriptive text that accompanies it.
3. Translation of an excerpt of a manual	Students translate an excerpt of a manual explaining the mechanics or rules of a game.

5.2.4. Tasks for topic 4

In the last topic, which focuses on technical aspects, there is a forum task and an individual activity. The former is illustrated in Table 9:

Table 9. Topic 4 – Forum task

Task	Description
1 (compulsory)	Students discuss a few strings containing variables and propose solutions that will work in all possible contexts.

For the individual task (Table 10), trainees are required to translate a freeware game of less than a thousand words, which has to contain variables and text embedded in code:

Table 10. Topic 4 – Individual translation task

Task	Description
1. Translation of a game	Students translate a short full freeware game.

After the translation, students have to play the game with an eye on assessing the linguistic and technical quality of their version. Although the task can be challenging for some learners, it is also an enjoyable one, for being able to play the game they have translated undoubtedly adds to their satisfaction.

5.2.5. Student's portfolio

After having handed in their three individual assignments and having received feedback on them, students are requested to submit a portfolio containing all the material previously submitted for assessment and to the forums, indicating the changes that they would incorporate in view of the feedback received and the discussions held in the forums. A reflection on their learning experience must also be included, in which they can add qualitative feedback about the teaching and learning of game localisation, their

likes as well as their dislikes and the elements that could be improved. Their opinion is taken into consideration when incorporating changes for the following year.

6. Conclusion

The global success of the video game industry has brought about the proliferation of localised versions for different territories and, in turn, a growth in the demand for trained game translators who can meet the industry needs. Training in game localisation is gaining traction at postgraduate level but it has, to date, received little academic attention.

This paper has provided a description of the Game Localisation unit, part of the module in Multimedia and Game Localisation, offered by the UAB within their MA in Audiovisual Translation. The challenges of teaching the same course through two delivery modes, i.e. face-to-face and online, have been highlighted, and the strategies deployed to ensure that students acquire the same competences have been outlined, such as the use of shorter exercises in the online mode that can then be discussed in the forums. Other possibilities include the correction and subsequent uploading of an anonymous sample of the weekly activities submitted by students or the provision of a model translation, though the latter is suitable for exercises based on terminological issues but not so for more creative activities where a panoply of solutions may be equally appropriate.

Given the increasing importance of e-learning in the digital society and the dearth of literature on the online training of game localisers, the paper has focused on the online modality. The curriculum design of the Game Localisation unit has been presented, including a description of the syllabus, an outline of the various activities carried out with the students and an overview of the assessment.

In game localisation training it is important to make students understand that the best possible translation in terms of style is often not possible due to the restrictions encountered in this type of translation, which can relate to limited space, use of variables or lack of context. On occasion, localisers have to prioritise solutions that may not be their first choice but are grammatically correct in all eventualities. Hence, it is important for students to be familiar with the medium restrictions and be aware that in game localisation the best possible translation is not necessarily the most idiomatic and stylish, but the one that is more likely to work in all possible contexts.

As the game industry continues to flourish, it is expected that training in game localisation will also feature more prominently in education, be it as part of university undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, in the form of MOOC courses, or as continuing professional development (CPD) courses delivered by translator associations and other professional and educational bodies. Despite the challenges posed by distance education, especially when motivating students and encouraging collaborative learning, its appeal is unquestionable for learners that can take part in the course anytime and anywhere. The possibilities offered by online education are promising and it is up to lecturers, trainers and students to make the most of them.

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Gameography

Child of Light (Ubisoft, 2014)

Final Fantasy X (Square Enix, 2001)

Hearthstone (Blizzard, 2014-to date)

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