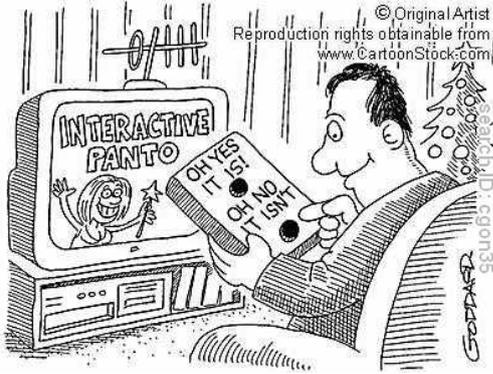## Video Games and Para-Translation

I include myself among those who consider that computing science, based on the users' interaction with technology, must have been conceived by people who were bored to death with

being mere TV spectators. In effect, it was this lack of interactivity that propelled the development of digital technology. Since games require participants and not spectators, «Video Games» radically differ from videos' analogical nature, where no interactivity takes place. In this process from the analogical to the digital era, screen translations have not remained the same. In fact, as a result of digital technology's revolution, translators' relation to the image has dramatically changed. These changes, I want to argue, should find their own space within the field of *Translation Studies*.

Digital technology has radically and definitely changed the working conditions of translators, causing new audiovisual productions to appear on the screen. Reflecting digital technology's multilayered nature, the verbal face of the text appears accompanied, surrounded, wrapped, prolonged, introduced and presented by a whole range of paratextual productions. As we know, the audiovisual and multimedia text is built upon codes of signification that go beyond the verbal text. Sounds, music, melodies together with the different configurations of the image (colours, symbols, trademarks, signals, pictures, icons, pictograms, landscapes and so on) constitute paratextual elements that are as important as the purely linguistic units, or even more. Reading, interpreting and translating for dubbing and subtitling largely depends on the translator's understanding of the dense nets of meaning woven by the combination of textual and para-textual elements.

Just like any other kind of text, the audiovisual and multimedia text exists thanks to the para-texts by which it is accompanied, surrounded, wrapped, prolonged, introduced and presented on the screen and beyond. Translating for the screen should never be restricted to dubbing or subtitling verbal texts, since other intersemiotic and multisemiotic meanings become implicit in the translation of the many paratexts that are seen and watched, listened to and heard, not just within the screen (peritexts) but beyond too (epitexts).

PARATEXTS AND THE SCREEN
A set of paratextual elements (verbal units, aural and icono-textual contents or simple material items) that accompany, surround, wrap, prolong, introduce and present the audiovisual and multimedia text in two different spaces; within and beyond the image on the screen.

PERITEXTS are paratextual elements that accompany, surround and wrap the audiovisual and multimedia text **ON THE SCREEN** and, thus, are only available when the user interacts with the product.	**EPITEXTS** are paratextual elements that prolong, introduce and present the audiovisual and multimedia text **BEYOND THE SCREEN** and, thus, are available with no need of interaction between the user and the product.

In *Palimpsestes*, first published in 1982, Gérard Genette introduces a very concise but enlightening definition of «paratext». In *Seuils* (1987), Genette himself returns to his study of paratext, dealing with this topic in great detail. Calling attention to the need of further research on this subject, Genette eventually admits that *ceci n'est vraiment qu'une introduction, et une exhortation à l'ètude du paratexte* (Genette, 1987:407). In my research group, TRANSLATION & PARATRANSLATION, we have accepted the academic challenge once posed by Genette. At the University of Vigo, we aim to conduct a study of those linguistic and non-linguistic elements that are not generally considered the object of translation, though they actually add meaning to the translated text itself. In other words, our objective is to catalogue and examine those *texts* which accompany, surround, wrap, prolong, introduce and present the translated text; that is, the paratexts.

As I have explained, our research revolves round the reception and interpretation of paratextual elements within the translated text. In this sense, our study not only includes considerations about the status of the text as a translation, but also tackles other issues that relate to ideology, politics, the world economy, linguistics and literature (Even-Zohar, 1979, 1990 and 1997). More importantly, our study goes beyond the traditional focus on the literary text, just to promote research on the aesthetic, political, ideological, cultural and social implications of paratextual elements in any text, both on paper or the screen.

Here today, my intention is to provide a theoretical framework for the translation of Video Games in order to facilitate translation methods that would account for the paratextual elements on the screen and beyond. Considering the concept of «paratranslation» developed at the University of Vigo, the task of Video Game translators should not be restricted to the aural (dubbing) and written (subtitling) text. In fact, translators should also decide on the final version of all the paratexts that will accompany, surround, wrap, prolong, introduce and present the Video Game inside and outside the image on the screen.
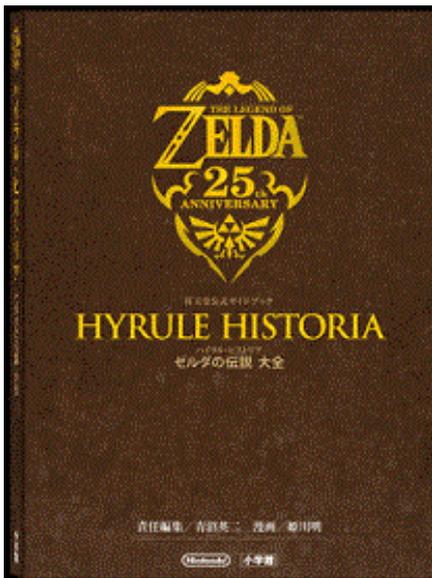
As is the case with most edited products, how we interpret a Video Game largely depends on the arrangement of its paratextual space. In the same sense that a book cannot be considered a finished product until it is not read, in our research group we contend that the Video Game has to be "experienced" beforehand for us to discover its intricacies and the myriad forms in which the

product is presented. This includes, of course, the ways in which the Video Game can be played, the impressions that the images cause on us and, also, how we read and observe what is on the screen. Equally important is to analyze the paratexts that introduce the product into the market and promote a specific image about the Video Game itself.

The edition of Video Games is always indicative of how societies conceive and regulate the function and status of these products. However, it is true to say that these conceptions may vary from one culture to another and, thus, from one language to a different one. In this respect, the study of the paratextual space can provide valuable clues about the process of (para)translation. Within its physical space, the Video Game produces a number of verbal and non-verbal paratexts (iconic, aural and even tactile) that are projected on the screen (PERItexts). Outside its material reality, the Video Game is introduced and presented by other paratexts that will prolong its life into its external world (EPItexts).
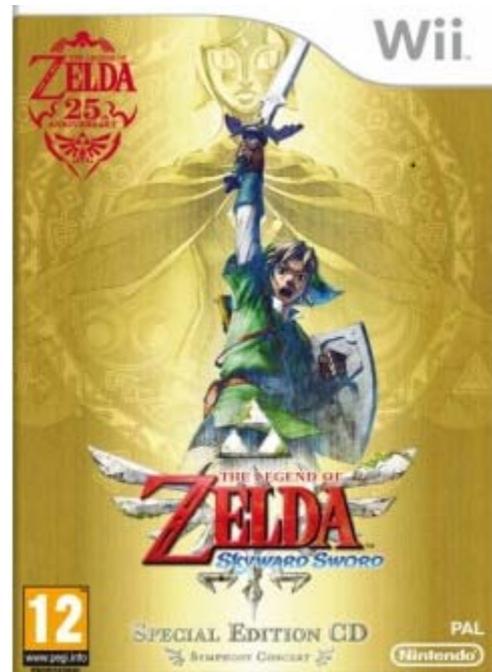
Images in Translation

Contrary to the traditional hegemony of the *word*, the concept of paratranslation that I present here gives primacy to those visual elements, paratexts, which can modify the meaning of the translated words. In order to lead a successful path into our digital era, editors and translators should be careful about the edition of images both on paper and the screen, be it the design of a book cover (peritext) or a Video Game sleeve (epitext). The paratextual space would also include other material epitexts, such as posters, bookmarks, stickers and adverts that publicize the translation as a cultural product to be sold in bookshops and Video Game stores. In this sense, as Genette had announced in *Seuils*, paratranslations often become the translated product's advertising image; *L'image semble s'imposer à quiconque a affaire au paratexte* (1987: 8). However, if a translation is not attractive to potential readers, viewers or gamers, it will certainly have a short span of life since it will not sell well.

The communicative potential of the image is so prominent that visual patterns are taken into consideration in the translation of texts with no pictures at all. Surprising as it may seem, a text with no pictures is a visual product nonetheless. Translators should bear in mind, for instance, the source text's font size and style in order to discover in which ways the typographic conventions of both cultures differ, which will also be determinant for the digital edition of the translated text. In short, the image as a paratext conceals specific messages and meanings that need to be deciphered before

they are translated. Furthermore, let us not forget that, in our digital era, images, not words, provoke the first impact on us. Universities should, in this respect, train future translators into the art of reading and interpreting the image.

It is also important to remember here that images are symbols and not signs. At first glance, it may seem obvious to think of images as if they were signs, but such train of thought would only hinder our understanding of the complex relations between image and text. If the image is to be studied as a sign and not as a symbol, we would neglect the different layers of meaning and subjectivities inherent to the image. The excessive focus of the occidental academia on the word has relegated the image to a subservient position. In fact, throughout the analogical era, the categorization of images as signs has contributed to the biased idea that the image is inferior to the word. Far from true! To regard images as signs is simply inaccurate; it would not account for the intersemiotic nature of the image.

Images are iconic symbols, so the translator is compelled to approach the image as an essential element of the text that completes its meaning. As a paratext, the spatial dimension of the image invites the translator to dive into the "world" that the visual product has created, thus inhabiting the image. When translators fail to do so, the translation of a Video Game, where the image is paramount, becomes utterly unsuccessful. In our digital era, reading and interpreting the image requires the full attention of translators, as images establish different relations with viewers depending on their social and cultural context.

It should also be said that images are cultural products whose meaning changes depending on time and space. To understand the image, translators should first comprehend the semiotic and cultural codes of its original audience. This implies that translators need to be informed of social values and historic aspects of the societies where the image has been created. On the contrary, the translation for a new audience risks to being inaccurate, provoking the misinterpretation of the image.

Bearing in mind that images have multiple readings, translators ought to interpret the image as an artifact to be adapted to the society they translate for, which requires wide knowledge of its cultural values. Therefore, as trans-cultural agents, translators have a primordial role to fulfill in the transformation of the image from one culture to another. The imagery of visual products is thus examined by the attentive gaze of the translator, who has to be aware of the implicit and explicit messages that the image projects.

«Within» and «before» the image

Since the invention of the easel in painting, most occidental societies have for long considered that the only possible way to relate to the image is to keep distance from it, hence remaining *before* the image. However, as regards Video Games, we need to immerse ourselves *within* the image in order to produce successful translations. For this reason, *Translation Studies* should break through the barrier of considering images as mere «representations». Instead, images should be studied as complex symbolic structures. As a digital product, Video Games' interactive graphics help design a

virtual space to be explored real-time thanks to the simultaneous display of tridimensional images where gamers devise different possibilities for action. Furthermore, images in a Video Game have not the only purpose of signification, but they also construct together an imaginary space that is composed of myriads of symbols that the Video Game player learns to read and interpret. In fact, virtual reality makes it possible for humans to place themselves within the image, which may explain the immense popularity of Video Games.

What I have now explained may seem too obvious, but it is of utmost importance for the translation of Video Games. Too often, we have encountered inaccurate and even incorrect translations into Spanish, where the translators have failed to transmit the Video Game's imagery into the culture they translate for. A case in point relates to the wrong translation of the names of characters, which usually comes as a result of the translator's failure to capture the symbolic function of the character within the game.

That is certainly the case of the Spanish translation of the proper name of one the main characters of the well-known Video Game, *The Legend of Zelda. Skyward Sword*. The character's original name is **ロフトバード** (*Rofutobādo*), written in Katakana. Katakana is a Japanese syllabary that is principally used for the transcription of onomatopoeias and foreign words (in recent times, mainly from English). In the Japanese version, the name Rofutobado is an Anglicism that faithfully translates the trans-cultural imaginary that is created by the use of the English words, *Loft* (Rofuto) and *Bird* (Baado). In the Spanish edition of the Video Game, this character's name, *Pelícaro*, is not representative of the spirit of this big bird with its prominent wings riding on the wind. In the Latin American translation, *Neburis,* they have at least preserved the imagery of flying high in the sky. However, *Pelícaro* is such an incongruous translation that many gamers in Spain have reasoned that the name was a play on words on the part of the translators, who would be thus complaining about the high price of the Video Game for the Wii Nintendo- *Pelícaro*, "un pelín caro", a little bit expensive. Do we really expect Nintendo to be making fun of its own pricing policy in the Spanish edition of *The Legend of Zelda. Skyward Sword*? Or would it be an attempt to grant gamers a special status as the victims of high prices? Both assumptions seem rather improbable.
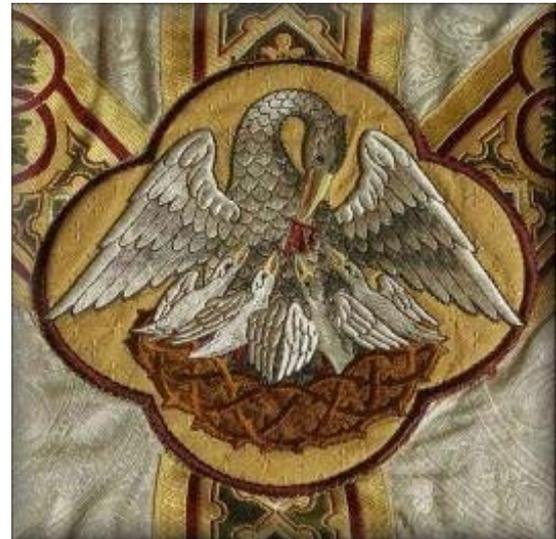
Remaining before the image and not within can mislead us into thinking that the most important feature of the *Loftwing* or *Pelícaro* is its beak and not its wings. In this Video Game, which is full of action and adventures, it is the wings of the bird that stand out, and not its beak, no matter how much it resembles the beak of the shoebill- a grey bird from Tropical and Oriental Africa. This possible fixation on the beak of the animal might have been the reason why translators came up with the name *Pelícaro*. Curiously enough, *Pelícaro* may be associated with another bird with great presence in Christian symbolism because of what it does with its beak; the pelican, *pelícano* in Spanish. In fact, the beak of the pelican has been a source of wonder in the Christian tradition. The adult pelican carries fish within its throat pouch and inclines its beak towards its young to feed them, which has led to the mythical belief that the bird tears open its own breast to feed its young with its own blood. For that reason, the pelican was turned into a symbol of Christ's redeeming sacrifice and resurrection (like the Phoenix), as well as a symbol of paternal love and self-sacrifice. Another significant link with the pelican is that, in Spanish, *pelícano* and *Pelícaro* sound almost the same, with the only difference of one consonant.

In this sense, the Spanish translation, *Pelícalo*, which carries a wrong symbolism, stands as a clear example of how to «break the wings» (*Broken Wings*) of one of the most emblematic animals in *The Legend of Zelda*. The bird, which is no symbol of sacrifice, is the protagonist's companion when he flies over the clouds from one island to another and from one world to the next one. The Spanish translation of *Loftbird* is, above all, the failure to understand the Video Game's symbolic structure.

Inhabiting the image for its Para-Translation

When the non-initiated experience Video Game playing for the first time, they are often surprised by the ways in which gamers easily manipulate the elements that appear on the screen. In a PC Video Game, for instance, a millimetric movement of the mouse and a click on the screen may instantly transform the images before us; changing the colours, texture and perspective, or even opening up a new scenario as the Video Game character moves to the next stage. The possibilities for the transformation of the image when using a console game controller are even more surprising. All those interactions with the image will prove essential for our involvement with the world that is created by the Video Game. This is why there is no Video Game that will not repeat, once and again, similar icons and images. A popular case in point is *The Legend of Zelda. Skyward Sword* whose statue of the *Loftwing* always indicates the chance of saving the game or returning to Skyloft (Altárea in Spain and Neburía in the Latin American version).

As has been explained, Video Games allow players an agency within a virtual world that they learn to inhabit. At this point, the game experience will prove satisfactory depending on the gamers' interaction and familiarization with such world. The translation of a Video Game entails a close relation of the translator with the image: all images have their own evocative power and constitute open spaces to be explored down to the finest detail. Therefore, the translator should have a say in the configuration of these visual paratexts, whose sense and meaning may change from one language to another and from one imaginary to a different one. As a trans-cultural agent, the translator should be aware of how, for example, colour symbolism is strongly determined by context; that is, language, culture, society, history, language and so on. Every society has its own favourite colours, visual referents and cultural imagery. As we all know, in every culture and historic period, certain colours and images are invested with different meanings and associations. In summary, images should never be studied as signs denoting an objective reality, since they in fact connote complex symbolic structures to be adapted to the culture we translate for.

Concluding Remarks

From the point of view of para-translation, Video Games are much more than a simple and passing social phenomenom, but they are actually an integral part of our digital era, where the image redefines our relation with the text. For a Video Game to achieve success, it must create in the player the extraordinary sensation of being within the image. Video Games need to engage gamers so that they experience a virtual world where they adopt new identities. Such effect can be gone to waste if the translation fails to transmit the spirit of the game. Consequently, Video Game companies ought to pay careful attention to the translation of these multimedia products.

Finally, I would like to underline once again the essential role of the translator in his task of interpreting a Video Game's para-textual content, where image and text are part of the same narrative and influence each other. In this respect, an excellent Video Game translation would facilitate the immersion of the player into the world that is projected on the screen. Is this properly achieved when we translate *Loftwing* into *Pelícaro*?

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