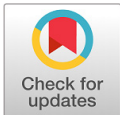


Charting Virtual Worlds: Training in Game Translation and Localization at a Brazilian University



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Abstract

The escalating global prominence of the game industry underscores the critical need for specialized translation and localization expertise. This article presents a case study of the Undergraduate Program in Translation at Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, a Brazilian public university that has been providing dedicated training in game localization for the last 15 years. The core of the Universidade Federal de Uberlândia's offering is a 60-hour course, that spans foundational localization concepts like transcreation and culturalization, as well as advanced technical skills, including computer-assisted translation, machine translation, and generative artificial intelligence. Its pedagogical approach integrates theoretical knowledge with practical application through lectures, workshops, and game localization projects, frequently leveraging open-source resources. Students gain experience by collaborating in teams, and emulating professional workflows. Further enhancing the training, students complete a senior thesis, often focusing on game localization, where they detail their experiences in technically adapting games. This research draws upon existing literature and employs an autoethnographic approach, critically reflecting on our experiences as trainers and thesis supervisors through personal archives, didactic materials, and learning tasks. Complementarily, a bibliometric and content analysis of past senior theses provides empirical data. A notable challenge addressed is the scarcity of game localization-specific teaching materials, prompting the program's proactive development of resources tailored to the Brazilian market. This study thus aims to contribute to a specialized localization training.

Keywords: autoethnographic approach, game industry, game localization, translator training



Una cartografía de mundos virtuales: formación en traducción y localización de videojuegos en una universidad de Brasil

Resumen

La creciente importancia de la industria de los videojuegos a nivel global destaca la necesidad de contar con conocimientos especializados en traducción y localización. Este artículo presenta un estudio de caso del programa de pregrado en Traducción de la Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, una universidad pública de Brasil que lleva 15 años impartiendo formación en localización de videojuegos. La Universidade Federal de Uberlândia ofrece un curso de 60 horas que abarca conceptos fundamentales de la localización, como la transcreación y la culturalización, así como habilidades técnicas avanzadas, entre las que se incluyen la traducción asistida por computador, la traducción automática y la inteligencia artificial generativa. Su enfoque pedagógico integra los conocimientos teóricos con la aplicación práctica por medio de clases magistrales, talleres y proyectos de localización de videojuegos, aprovechando recursos de código abierto. Los estudiantes adquieren experiencia trabajando en equipo y emulando flujos de trabajo de nivel profesional. Para reforzar aún más la formación, los estudiantes realizan un trabajo de grado, a menudo centrado en la localización de videojuegos, en el que detallan su experiencia en la adaptación técnica de los juegos. Esta investigación se basa en la bibliografía existente y emplea un enfoque autoetnográfico, reflexionando críticamente sobre nuestras experiencias como formadores y asesores de tesis a través de archivos personales, materiales didácticos y tareas de aprendizaje. Además, un análisis bibliométrico y de contenido de los trabajos de grado anteriores aporta datos empíricos. Uno de los principales retos abordados es la escasez de materiales didácticos específicos para la localización de videojuegos, lo que ha llevado al programa a desarrollar de forma proactiva recursos adaptados al mercado brasileño. Así, este artículo propone un derrotero para la formación especializada en localización.

Palabras clave: enfoque autoetnográfico, industria de videojuegos, localización de videojuegos, formación de traductores

Une cartographie des mondes virtuels : une formation à la traduction et à la localisation de jeux vidéo dans une université brésilienne

Résumé

L'importance croissante de l'industrie de jeux vidéo à l'échelle mondiale met en évidence le besoin de compétences spécialisées en traduction et en localisation. Cet article présente une étude de cas du programme de licence en traduction de l'Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, une université publique brésilienne qui enseigne la localisation de jeux vidéo depuis 15 ans. Le programme proposé par l'Universidade Federal de Uberlândia s'articule autour d'un cours de 60 heures qui aborde les concepts fondamentaux de la localisation, tels que la transcréation et culturalisation, ainsi que des compétences techniques avancées, notamment la traduction assistée par ordinateur, la traduction automatique et l'intelligence artificielle générative. Son approche pédagogique associe des connaissances théoriques avec de la mise en pratique à travers des cours magistraux, des ateliers et des projets de localisation de jeux vidéo, en utilisant des ressources open source. Les étudiants acquièrent de l'expérience en travaillant en équipe et en reproduisant des flux de travail de niveau professionnel. Pour renforcer encore davantage leur formation, les étudiants réalisent un mémoire, souvent lié à la localisation de jeux vidéo, dans lequel ils détaillent leur expérience en matière d'adaptation technique des jeux. Ce travail de recherche s'appuie sur la littérature existante et adopte une approche auto-ethnographique, réfléchissant de manière critique à notre expérience en qualité de formateurs et

de conseillers de mémoire à travers des archives personnelles, de matériel pédagogique et des travaux d'apprentissage. De plus, une analyse bibliométrique et de contenu des mémoires antérieurs apporte des données empiriques. L'un des principaux défis abordés est la rareté des outils pédagogiques spécifiques à la localisation de jeux vidéo, ce qui a conduit le programme à développer de manière proactive des ressources adaptées au marché brésilien. Cet article a donc pour objectif de contribuer à une formation spécialisée en localisation.

Mots clés : approche auto-ethnographique, industrie de jeux vidéo, localisation de jeux vidéo, formation de traducteurs

Mapeamento de mundos virtuais: formação em tradução e localização de videogames em uma universidade brasileira

Resumo

A crescente proeminência global da indústria de videogames ressalta a necessidade crítica de conhecimentos especializados em tradução e localização. Este artigo apresenta um estudo de caso do Curso de Graduação em Tradução da Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, uma universidade pública brasileira que vem oferecendo formação específica em localização de videogames há 15 anos. O núcleo da oferta da Universidade Federal de Uberlândia é um curso de 60 horas, que abrange conceitos fundamentais de localização, como transcrição e culturalização, bem como habilidades técnicas avançadas, incluindo tradução assistida por computador, tradução automática e inteligência artificial generativa. Sua abordagem pedagógica integra conhecimento teórico à aplicação prática por meio de aulas, workshops e projetos de localização de jogos, frequentemente utilizando recursos de código aberto. Os alunos ganham experiência colaborando em equipes e simulando fluxos de trabalho profissionais. Para aprimorar ainda mais a formação, os alunos elaboram uma monografia de conclusão de curso, frequentemente com foco na localização de jogos, na qual detalham suas experiências na adaptação técnica de jogos. Esta pesquisa baseia-se na literatura existente e emprega uma abordagem autoetnográfica, refletindo criticamente sobre nossas experiências como formadores e orientadores de monografia por meio de arquivos pessoais, materiais didáticos e tarefas de aprendizagem. Complementarmente, uma análise bibliométrica e de conteúdo de monografias anteriores fornece dados empíricos. Um desafio notável abordado é a escassez de materiais didáticos específicos para a localização de jogos, o que levou o programa a desenvolver proativamente recursos adaptados ao mercado brasileiro. Assim, este estudo visa contribuir para uma formação especializada em localização.

Palavras chave: abordagem autoetnográfica, indústria de videogames, localização de videogames, formação de tradutores

Introduction

Since the early 2000s, scholars in translation studies—particularly those focusing on localization and its relationship with globalization—have argued that universities are adapting their curricula to meet new industry demands (Cronin, 2013; Gambier, 2009; Jiménez-Crespo, 2013; Kelly, 2005; Pym, 2010). According to these scholars, current translation practices call for a classroom environment in which teachers and students engage with a range of several unimodal and multimodal text types across different formats.

O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013) also argue that localization requires new approaches to teaching and learning in translation programs, as a way to facilitate the globalization of products and services by addressing linguistic and cultural barriers faced by target audiences who do not share the same linguistic and cultural backgrounds as the source producers. Mainly referring to game localization, they suggest that this sector “is critically anchored in industry practices and no game localization program can ignore the industrial settings under which both the key concept and the practice have evolved” (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013, p. 273).

Addressing the field of translation studies, Bernal-Merino (2015) argues that

There can be little doubt that localisation is a prominent and growing new professional practice for translators, and that there is a role for Translation Studies and universities in terms of the training required for this new skill as well as the research into a professional activity which, in certain aspects, may challenge to traditional theoretical models in translation because of the implications of their interactivity and the international simultaneous shipment model the game industry employs. (Bernal-Merino, 2015, p. 22)

Years later, Yuste Frías and Ferreiro-Vázquez (2024) continue to highlight that the enormous

amount of paratextual information surrounding digital content requires a specialized approach. In this scenario, the translator's work involves more than just the words on a page. It is also about understanding the context of a text's existence in the digital age. According to the authors:

The extraordinary amount of paratextual elements circulating on and off screens creates an urgent need to practice correct paratranslation of the exuberant paratextual multimodality in strategic sectors of translation that are as important as, for example, the video game industry. (Yuste Frías & Ferreiro-Vázquez, 2024, p. 182)

It is becoming increasingly clear to us, as teachers, that global demands for game localization and its specificities need to be incorporated into translator training. Against that backdrop, this article explores the key pedagogical challenges and opportunities involved in teaching game localization to university students.

In view of the above, and recognizing the relevance of game localization, for both academia and industry, the Undergraduate Program in Translation at Universidade Federal de Uberlândia (UFU) has been offering training in game translation and localization for 15 years. The program offers a 60-hour course that covers a range of topics on localization. It starts with notions of software and website localization and the main tools attached to these fields, such as computer-assisted-translation (CAT) tools, machine translation (MT), and generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). The course uses a Moodle platform to make class material available to students and includes mandatory readings on localization (Dunne, 2020), transcreation (Jiménez-Crespo, 2024), and culturalization (Edwards, 2011; O'Hagan, 2022), to support the practical activities of translating and localizing games.

Based on a socioconstructivist and humanist approach (Kiraly, 2000; O'Hagan &

Mangiron, 2013), UFU's teaching methodology integrates both theory and practice through lectures, workshops, and game translation and localization activities, often using open-source materials. In addition to this specific course on game localization, the program also requires the defense of a senior thesis on any translation-related topic, with several students choosing game localization as we will show in section 2. They usually report on their choices and experiences in translating and localizing a game that they manipulated at both technical and content levels.

Thus, this article consists of a (pedagogical) case study that explores the implementation of this training and its challenges. After drawing from our own experiences in the training of game localization within the 60-hour course (section 1), we analyze the senior theses defended by our students on the topic, performing a brief bibliometric and content analysis (section 2). Additionally, we explore our experiences through an autoethnography viewpoint, seeking to outline some of the challenges we face (section 3), and, ultimately, how our methods evolved.

In view of the above, we seek to demonstrate the effectiveness of combining autoethnographic trainer reflection with student-led senior theses to prepare future translators for the technical and creative demands of game localization. The term "pedagogical case study" (above) fits this paper because it aligns with the authors' explicit description of the work as a "case study of the Undergraduate Program in Translation at a Brazilian public university." The research is fundamentally pedagogical in nature, centering on a 60-hour course's "pedagogical approach" and the subsequent analysis of student learning outcomes. Furthermore, the paper provides empirical evidence to support this case by blending qualitative reflection through the autoethnographic lens with quantitative data derived from a bibliometric analysis of the senior theses, creating a

comprehensive look at the academic and professional development of future translators in our university.

1. Balancing Academic and Industry Demands

Navigating the complexities of game localization requires a comprehensive and dynamic pedagogical approach. Drawing on Esqueda and Silva (2016, 2018), this section outlines a 60-hour course designed to equip aspiring translators with the theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary to excel in this rapidly expanding industry. The course emphasizes an integrated theory-and-practice methodology, hands-on experience with open-source materials, and the strategic use of advanced technological tools, including GenAI. The course is organized into three modules, two of them on utilitarian software localization and website localization, intentionally providing students with basic aspects of the rise of the GILT processes, in reference to globalization, internationalization, localization and translation processes (O'Hagan, 2022). After this introductory content, game localization is approached, integrating a module with more than 20 hours (four per week).

Once students are familiar with the concept of localization, we begin with a brief history of video games, some market trends, industry statistics, and legal and ethical considerations (copyright, intellectual property) (Newzoo, 2026). Following this introduction, we discuss the levels of game localization, including the different text types found in games, such as those in box and docs, and in-game text in menus and dialogs, showing students the role of the translator in the localization pipeline.

To provide a more rigorous structure to this section, we have subdivided our "teaching choices" by creating dedicated subsections for each classroom activity. This approach allows for a clearer overview of our findings, specifically

highlighting the linguistic problems identified, the learning outcomes achieved, and the pedagogical strategies promoted in each instance. By analyzing these activities individually, we can better illustrate the practical application of our methodology at UFU.

1.1 Translation Proposal of Some Box-and-Doc Texts

One of the activities we start with is the translation proposal of some box and docs texts of a game. While the physical texts are growing scarce as companies move documentation online, it is essential for students to work with this type of content. Analyzing these materials, even if they are now digital, it helps them understand the specialized language and structure of game-related documentation (Newzoo, 2026).

For the translation activity, we chose *The Last of Us* primarily because of its recent and popular adaptation as a TV series (Mazin & Druckmann, 2023). This allows us to demonstrate the growing trend of adapting content

for different platforms and new markets, and the ever-growing necessity to keep on tracking the terminology surrounding multimodal materials.

Figure 1 shows the front and back cover art of the video game *The Last of Us*, for PlayStation 3 (Naughty Dog, 2013). On the right, the back cover features a collage of characters, with the central focus being on the two main protagonists, Joel and Ellie. The text on the left describes the game's premise, mentioning how the two are brought together for a journey across a dangerous, post-pandemic United States. It also includes various technical details and ratings information, such as the ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board) rating of "M" for Mature, with descriptors like "Blood and Gore" and "Intense Violence."

This activity aims at presenting students with the importance of the text "Joel and Ellie, brought together by harsh circumstances, must survive a brutal journey across the US in a dangerous post-pandemic world" to be

Figure 1. Front and Back Cover Art of *The Last of Us* (2013)



Source: Naughty Dogs (2013).

translated into PT-BR as the first contact the player will have with the product. The translation of the phrases “harsh circumstances” into “circunstâncias cruéis,” and “brutal journey” into “jornada brutal” can serve as the first immersion of the player into the game.

These specific pairs are ideal for discussion because they highlight the shift from semantic accuracy to stylistic immersion. While “harsh” could be translated literally as “severas” or “difíceis,” choosing “cruéis” (cruel) immediately establishes the hostile, unforgiving tone of the game’s universe. Similarly, maintaining “jornada brutal” serves as a prime example of using cognates to refer to the aggressive phonetics of the original text, ensuring the Brazilian player feels the weight of danger as the English-speaking audience.

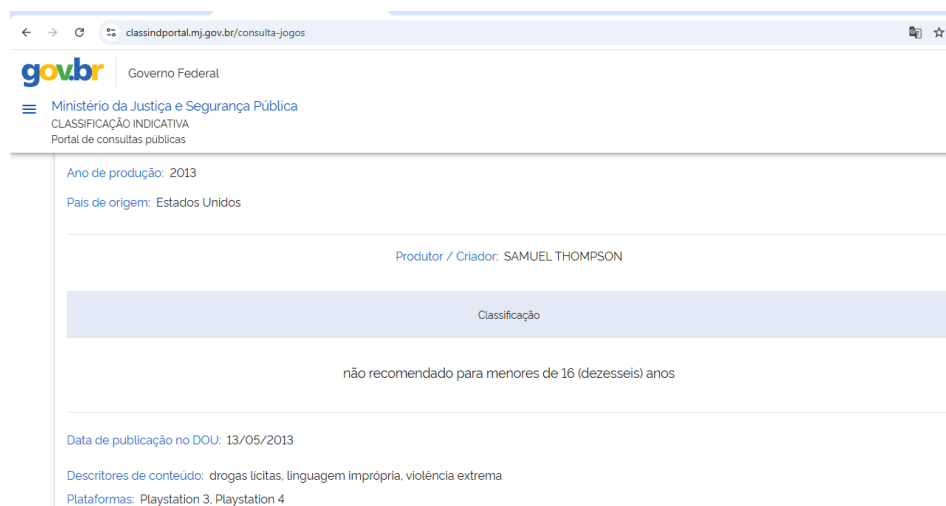
Regarding the “Warning” stripe (in red in Figure 1), which reads “Warning / If you have a history of epilepsy or seizures, consult a doctor before use. Certain patterns may trigger seizures with no prior history, before using and for more details see instructions for this product,” it is possible to highlight the necessity that students convert “epilepsy,” “seizures,” “consult

a doctor” into comprehensible terms in Brazilian Portuguese, “epilepsia,” “convulsões,” and “consulte seu médico.” Even though many other equivalents could be adopted by students, the purpose of translating this stripe is to refer to the warning imperative for players. The responsibility of the translators in this case revolves around the players’ health and security.

Regarding the box “Mature 17+ / Blood and Gore / Intense Violence / Sexual Themes / Strong Language,” students are advised to verify the Brazilian official website of the Ministry of Justice and Public Security (Brazil, Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública, n. d.), where there is a content rating expressing the legal and official correspondence of the content of the game into PT-BR. “Não recomendado para menores de 16 anos / Violência Extrema/Drogas Lícitas/Linguagem imprópria” (“Not recommended for children under 16 / extreme violence / legal drugs / inappropriate language”) will be standardly rated for *The Last of Us* in Brazil, as shown in Figure 2.

After completing these activities in class, students are prompted to reflect and discuss them. The goal is not to evaluate the “perfect

Figure 2. Content Rating of *The Last of Us* in Brazil



Source: Brazil, Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública (n. d.).

translation” but rather to determine the students’ awareness of the choices they made. We reflect on how the textual genre and the function of the translation defined their choices, while addressing the various challenges encountered during each stage (finding a creative translation for the synopsis, maintaining clarity in the warning, or finding the correct terminology for the content rating).

To sum up, these examples demonstrate that game localization involves not merely stylistic adaptation, but it is also a strictly regulated technical task. By aligning terminological choices with the official legal frameworks of the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, students learn to navigate the intersection of industry standards and national safety protocols. This practice underscores the ethical responsibility of the translator: ensuring that critical information regarding health and age-appropriateness is not only linguistically accurate but also legally compliant within the Brazilian territory.

1.2 Localizing In-Game Texts

One second activity involves a partial localization approach of in-game texts. The goal was to manage terminology, seeking to instill the importance of assuring quality and consistency throughout a game. Students learn to manage a small-scale localization file, sent to them in an Excel spreadsheet (prepared by the instructor), emulating the industry approach. This file can be subsequently opened in a CAT tool.

In the context of game localization, terminology refers to the specialized vocabulary that defines a game’s universe, including character names, fictional locations, unique inventory items, and recurring user interface (UI) commands. Unlike general translation, game terminology functions as a “glossary” that must remain consistent across thousands of lines of dialog and menu text in order to prevent confusion among players.

The selection of these terms is typically based on frequency (words that appear repeatedly across different game files); world-building (terms unique to the game’s lore that require creative adaptation (transcreation) rather than literal translation; technical constraints (functional terms that must match specific buttons or platform. By managing these in a spreadsheet or CAT tool, students learn that localization is as much about database management and logic as it is about linguistic flair.

The exercise approaches the *Call of Duty* franchise (Infinity Ward, 2003). It is a long-running series of first-person shooter video games published by Activision. It is well-known for its fast-paced gameplay, and it has explored various historical and futuristic settings, including World War II, the Cold War, and modern-day combat. The series is particularly popular for its robust multiplayer modes and, in many titles, a dedicated “zombies” cooperative mode. The most recent main entry is *Call of Duty: Black Ops 7*, which was released in 2025.

Figure 3 shows a screenshot of an Excel spreadsheet containing a list of menu options based on the *Call of Duty* game. Column A contains the source text, while the remaining columns are blank, for students to insert their translations and provide general comments about the terms. The items listed include standard game menu options such as “Yes,” “Multiplayer,” “Quit,” “Options,” “Save/Load Game,” “New Game,” “Training,” “Resume Game,” and “Back to Game.” There is also a section showing the difficulty levels, with options like “Greenhorn,” “Regular,” “Hardened,” and “Veteran.”

While it is possible to translate these menu items literally, opting for more creative and immersive choices can significantly enhance the player’s experience. Brazilian Portuguese terms like “Nova Jornada” (“New Journey”), instead of simply “Novo Jogo” (“New Game”) (cell A6), immediately set a more adventurous tone, while “Continuar Campanha” (“Continue

Figure 3. List of Menu Options Based on the *Call of Duty* Game

	A	B	C	D
17	1	Yes		
18	2	Multiplayer		
19	3	Quit		
20	4	Options		
21	5	Save/Load Game		
22	6	New Game		
23	7	Training		
24	8	Resume Game		
25	9	Back to Game		
26	10	You are currently in a game		
27	11	Do you wish to continue?		
28	12	Choose Your Skill Level		
29	13	Greenhorn		
30	14	Regular		
31	15	Hardened		
32	16	Veteran		
33	17	Back		
34		Dialogue		
35		Creatively translate the following dialogue between two characters into something that is linguistically and culturally appropriate for the target language while preserving the feel of the source text.		
36	18	All right guys, get set to move, on my command!		
37	19	Let's not let's not!		

Campaign”) (cell A8) makes players feel as though they are resuming a grand quest rather than simply choosing “Resumir Jogo” (resume or save a file). By localizing not just the words but the overall feeling, the translation helps to draw players deeper into the game’s world and narrative from the very first menu.

Even though the source text often employs functional, industry-standard terms such as “New Game” or “Resume,” localization into Brazilian Portuguese may turn to transcreation to bridge a perceived cultural and emotional distance. The motivation for choosing more evocative terms like “Nova Jornada” (“New Journey”) or “Continuar Campanha” (“Continue Campaign”) is to elevate the linguistic register, ensuring that the target audience perceives the epic scale of the narrative from their very first interaction with the interface. In English, technical terms like “New Game” are deeply consolidated in the global gaming culture and may not require stylistic enhancements to signify immersion; however, in a localized context, these creative shifts serve to compensate for the loss of idiomatic resonance, effectively “drawing” the player into the game’s world through a more narrative-driven vocabulary.

Terms related to difficulty levels are equally an excellent opportunity to show students how

creative localization can better reach a Portuguese-speaking audience. By translating a term like “Greenhorn” into “Recruta” (“Recruit”), or “Veteran” into “Lenda” (“Legend”), we move beyond a simple word-for-word substitution. Additionally, in a military or combat context, “Casca Grossa” is an excellent and highly idiomatic translation for “Veteran”. While “Lenda” (“Legend”) works well, “Casca Grossa” (literally “thick-skinned” or “tough”) is a very common expression in Brazilian Portuguese to describe someone who is highly skilled, experienced, and resilient, which perfectly refers to a seasoned combatant. The effectiveness of these choices is measured through the lens of user experience (UX). Rather than focusing on literal equivalence, the success of a term like “Casca Grossa” is validated by its ability to trigger the cultural schema in the target audience—evoking a sense of grit and resilience that a neutral, dictionary translation would lack.

In a professional setting, this impact is typically assessed during linguistic quality assurance (LQA) phases, where testers evaluate whether the illocutionary force (the intended emotional impact) of the source text has been referred to. By shifting the metric from “word-for-word” correctness to tonal consistency and player resonance, we provide a clear pedagogical basis

for why idiomatic transcreation is superior to literal substitution in game environments.

It can be a great example of the notions of how terminology affects a localized game. As Bernal-Merino (2015) puts it, the lack of consistent terminology can break player immersion and disrupt the overall gaming experience. In his work, Bernal-Merino highlights the crucial role of glossaries and style guides in maintaining linguistic cohesion across all in-game texts, from menus to character dialog. The author claims that:

Video game texts are rich in terminology, an element which needs to be dealt with rigorously, not only because it is an essential part of the platform compliance process, but also because it is technically relevant for the execution of the game; it is legally binding, in terms of trademarks and copyright and essential for creating and maintaining the immersion of the player in the virtual world created by the game experience. (Bernal-Merino, 2015, p. 156)

The same premises seem to be true when it comes to dialogs. Figure 4 contains a list of military-themed dialog lines from *Call of Duty*. Column A contains the original English-language text. Dialogs include urgent, command-style phrases typical of a combat scenario, such as “All right guys, get set to move, on my command!,” “Let’s go! Let’s go!,” “MG42s! Hit the dirt!,” “Get suppressing fire on those ‘42s!,” “Get suppressing fire on those ‘42s!,”

“Mortars!,” “Keep your heads down!,” “Incoming!,” “Down, dammit! Stay down!,” “Everybody move! Come on!” The header of the spreadsheet’s second row contains a prompt that reads: “Creatively translate the following dialog between two characters into something that is linguistically and culturally appropriate for the target language.”

When translating dialogs that refer to specific weapons, especially in a military context, precision is essential. Students need to understand not only the literal meaning but also the context and nuances of the source language. In the provided dialog, the lines “MG42s! Hit the dirt!” and “Get suppressing fire on those ‘42s!” illustrate this: An MG42s is a German machine gun from World War II, so simply translating it as “metralhadoras” (“machine guns”) would compromise the historical and thematic specificity of the game. An appropriate translation would refer to this detail while adapting it to the target language. For instance, a Brazilian Portuguese translation could be “MG42s! No chão!” (“MG42s! To the ground!”) or “Fogo de cobertura naquelas 42s!” (“Suppressing fire on those 42s!”). As Bernal-Merino claims, “it is clear that terminology plays an essential part in historical games” (2015, p. 156).

Translating these linguistic assets is a crucial—though not the sole—component of localization. It calls for a professional who is capable of

Figure 4. List of Dialog Options Based on *Call of Duty* Game

	A	B	C	D	E
30	Regular				
31	Hardened				
32	Veteran				
33	Back				
34					
35					
36	Creatively translate the following dialog between two characters into something that is linguistically and culturally appropriate for the target language.				
37	All right guys, get set to move, on my command!				
38	Let's go! Let's go!				
39	MG42s! Hit the dirt!				
40	Get suppressing fire on those '42s!				
41	Mortars!				
42	Keep your heads down!				
43	Incoming!				
44	Down, dammit! Stay down!				
45	Everybody move! Come on!				
46					
47	Creatively translate the following soldier names into something that is linguistically and culturally appropriate for the target language.				
48	Soldier				

balancing strict terminological precision with the subtle, creative nuances of in-game dialog. In that sense, this localization approach is not just about rendering a message into another language; it is about adapting the content to fit the cultural context and expectations of the target audience. By using terms that align with a military theme, we immerse the player more deeply into the game's world and narrative, making the experience feel more authentic and tailored to them.

In this phase of the course, students are instructed to use CAT tools. They may convert their Excel spreadsheets into translation memory files or term base files, which gives them the chance to resort to them in the future. It is not just a mere storage of their files, but also their translation decisions while they were learning and reading the featured literature on the topic. They are also advised to use MT to compare their terminological options to Google Translate, DeepL or other engines' outputs. They may realize that these engines are one-to-one equivalence or mathematical formulations, that is, decontextualized statistical probabilities. It is crucial to assess whether machine-translated terms actually improve playability and immersion, given that these elements are fundamental to game design strategy.

Additionally, the use of GenAI is recommended to better translate and localize games. We advise students to produce a few-shot prompt (Paes et al., 2024) in order to ask GenAI engines to help them anticipate a localization problem. According to Paes et al. (2024, p. 393), a prompt is a text in natural language (as opposed to programming language) that specifies an instruction on what to be done. A prompt can be formulated as a question, a remark, a questioning, or even a specific task, for example, classifying texts. Prompts can have a free format, but language models are very sensitive to their textual content. After all, models like GPT are completing a text (in this case, the prompt), conditional on what is in text. To

refer to different configurations of prompts, i.e. zero-shot, oneshot or few-shot prompts, please see Paes et al. (2024, pp. 365–412).

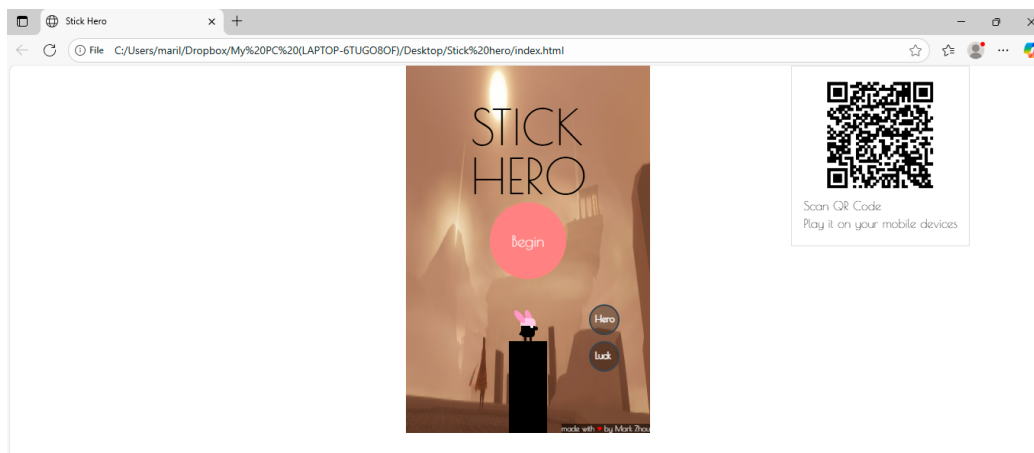
The prompt could be similar to this:

Act as a game localization expert, consult the literature on the topic, as well as CAT tools manuals and users' guides, or possibly related documentation, to anticipate terminological problems related to the translation and localization into PT-BR of a historical game such as *Call of Duty*.

Using Gemini 2.5, Google GenAI, as an example, we got:

The localization of a historical game like *Call of Duty* into PT-BR requires meticulous attention to terminology. Here are some of the key problems to anticipate: Military Jargon and Ranks; Historical and Weaponry Terminology; Slang, Idioms, and Profanity; CAT Tool Limitations; Context; Placeholders and Variables; Terminology Management. (Gemini, 2025)

The pedagogical approach explained so far is characterized by active learning, student-centered activities, and a constant feedback loop. In this sense, we agree with Schurster and Ferreiro-Vázquez (2025) about the impossibility of GenAI, and other machine translation engines, and their algorithms, to create experiences. By this, we mean that while GenAI can simulate linguistic patterns, it lacks the lived experience and intentionality required to craft the specific emotional and aesthetic “journey” intended for the player. It is crucial to assess whether machine-translated terms actually improve playability and immersion, given that these elements are fundamental to game design strategy. We can only resort to them for help. In Schurster and Ferreiro-Vázquez's words: “While artificial intelligence tools can replicate tasks effectively, they are unable to fully capture the depth and nuances of human experiences” (2025, p. 18, our translation). MT and GenAI can help us to statistically anticipate problems,

Figure 5. Start Screen of *Stick Hero*

Source: Ketchapp (2014)

while we, as translators, provide other humans (players) meaningful experiences.

Ultimately, the primary learning outcome of this activity is to enable students to move beyond linguistic substitution and embrace their role as “experience architects.” By comparing their own creative choices against the standardized outputs of MT and GenAI, students are expected to develop the critical knowledge necessary to identify where an algorithm fails to sustain player immersion. In this sub-section, therefore, we intend to demonstrate how students learn to leverage technology as a diagnostic tool while retaining the final agency over the emotional and aesthetic resonance of the localized product.

1.3 Localizing a Casual Mobile Game to Practice Transcreation

Given the global dominance of mobile platforms (Newzoo, 2026), the next class activity focused on localizing casual and social games. These titles present unique constraints, such as limited screen and the need for immediate player engagement. Thus, Figure 5 displays a web browser window showing the start screen of a game called *Stick Hero*. It is a popular, simple, and addictive mobile game created by

Ketchapp (2014)¹. The core gameplay loop involves stretching a stick to bridge the gaps between platforms. The game’s minimalist design and simple mechanics contribute to its appeal.

For this specific translation and localization activity, it was possible to download the game and its source code, developed with web technologies (HTML and JavaScript), when it was temporarily freely delivered by the developers in the GitHub Repository (<https://github.com/jhathaway/python-graph-data>). By downloading all of its files, it was possible to use it in class and manage its linguistic assets (text files).

Commonly associated with game localization, we provided students with the concept of transcreation. Although this term is currently used in the language services industry to describe highly creative localization, its origins in translation theory date back to the 1960s, coined by Brazilian poet and scholar Haroldo de Campos (2006). For Campos, transcreation (or “transcrição”) refers to a “creative translation” where the form and aesthetic project of the source text are re-imagined in the target language, a concept originally applied to the translation of complex literary works.

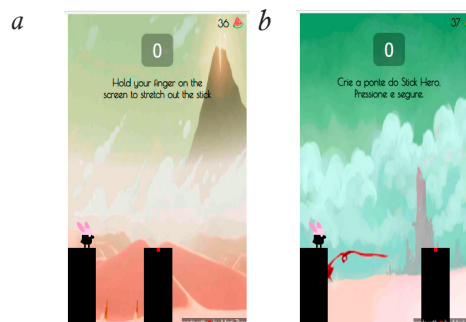
¹ Ketchapp was acquired by Ubisoft in 2016.

Transcreation is defined here as a specialized translation process that prioritizes the maintenance of the source text's intent, tone, and emotional impact over literal word-for-word equivalence. Unlike standard translation, it grants translators the creative agency to significantly alter the form of the message to ensure it resonates with the cultural and linguistic expectations of the target audience. In mobile gaming, this is particularly vital for overcoming technical constraints (such as limited character counts) while referring to the “playability” and “fun factor” that define the UX.

According to Jiménez-Crespo (2024), even though transcreation is under the umbrella of translation, it encompasses a service that emerged under the “added value” industry-based discourse. No matter how profitable the service is to industry, the case is that it can be used by translators (and teachers) in class. In Jiménez-Crespo's words (2024), the purpose is “to highlight how transcreation, or creativity, appears as a unique feature that requires expert human intervention (both in the production and reception) at the intersection of human cognition and AI advances” (p. 4).

Instead of translating “Hold your finger on the screen to stretch out the stick.” by “Segure o dedo na tela para esticar o bastão,” we advise students to find a more immersive experience for players, such as “Crie a ponte do Stick Hero. Pressione e segure” (“Create Stick Hero's bridge. Press and hold”). This version uses the game's name to give context to the action. It explains what the player is doing (creating a bridge) and to whom the action belongs (to the hero). Although it is a bit longer, it connects the game's mechanics with its narrative. Not only may this option “add value” to the product (from industry's perspective), but it also reveals the intentional human intervention introduced by translators (Alves & Silva, 2024; Silva, 2019). Figure 6 shows the game's start screen in English (left), and its localization into Brazilian Portuguese as an example.

Figure 6. Start Screens of *Stick Hero's* in English and Brazilian Portuguese



In essence, this exercise encourages students to transition from passive linguistic decoders to active narrative contributors. By prioritizing the internal logic of the game over literal instruction, the pedagogical focus shifts toward developing strategic knowledge. This allows students to understand that their role is not merely to facilitate comprehension, but to deliberately engineer the player's immersion through informed, creative agency.

1.4 Localizing a PC Racing Game to Practice Culturalization

Another important notion with which we work with our students is culturalization. As advanced by Kate Edwards (2011, p. 1), it is a process that goes “a step further beyond localization and transcreation.” It is not merely a production step occurring late in the development cycle, but “a holistic *modus operandi* for global game design, development and distribution that starts at the beginning of the project” (p. 1). Edwards argues that culturalization involves taking “a deeper look into a game's fundamental assumptions and content choices, and then gauges their viability in both the broad, multicultural marketplace as well as in specific geographic locales” (p. 2).

Both Edwards (2011) and O'Hagan (2022) explain that during localization a set of adjustments related to broad cultural factors is made, which includes strategies that some authors call

transcreation in reference to the creative deviation from the source. These adjustments may collectively be regarded as “culturalization,” which contributes to a game’s feasibility in terms of fundamental assumptions and content choices designed for gamers to engage with the game’s content at a much deeper, more meaningful level, rather than merely helping them comprehend the content of the game.

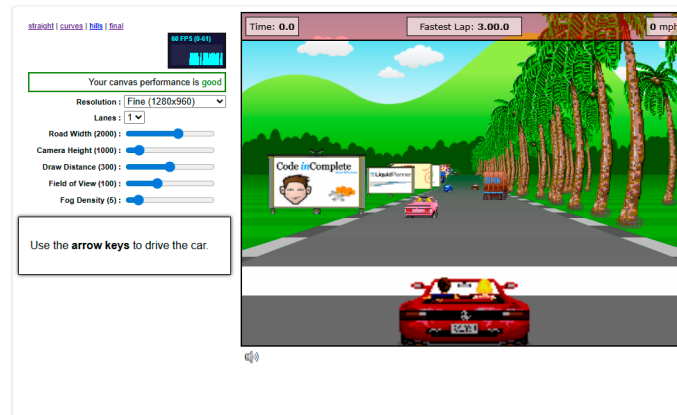
To illustrate the concept of culturalization, we use as an example the racing game called *Javascript Racer* (Gordon, 2025) that can be played in a web browser. Also available as an open-source game at GitHub Repository (<https://github.com/jhathaway/python-graph-data>), the game has a first-person perspective from inside a red convertible car. The player’s car is on a road flanked by palm trees and mountains in the background. The user interface on the left includes several sliders to adjust game settings like “Resolution,” “Lanes,” “Road Width,” and “Fog Density.” Below the settings, a pop-up box provides instructions: “Use the arrow keys to drive the car.” At the top, a dashboard shows “Time,” “Fastest Lap,” and current speed in mph, as shown in Figure 7.

While racing is universal, certain car brands, racing circuits, car modifications, and the language surrounding them are culturally significant. If we use the culturalization concept up

to its extremes (also called extreme culturalization), we could produce a politically inadequate version of the game, also inciting some inappropriate behavior, particularly if we think of a juvenile audience. For example, if we translate the sentence “Use the arrow keys to drive the car.” into “Use as setas do teclado para começar o racha” (“Use the arrow keys on the keyboard to get the street race started”), likely à la *Fast and Furious*, we will add a layer of violence to the product.

The distinction here lies in the clandestine and illegal nature associated with the term “racha” in the Brazilian cultural context. While “começar a corrida” (“start the race”) is a neutral instruction, “começar o racha” specifically invokes the subculture of unauthorized, high-speed street racing on public roads—an activity that is a criminal offense under the Brazilian traffic code. By opting for “racha,” the localization moves from a sporting competition to an endorsement of transgressive behavior. For a juvenile audience, this choice does not merely “translate” a game mechanic; it recontextualizes the gameplay within a framework of lawlessness and physical risk. Therefore, the “violence” mentioned is not inherent to the act of driving, but to the social imagery of peril and illegality that the specific term “racha” triggers in the target culture.

Figure 7. Screenshot of *Javascript Racer* Racing Game (English language)



Source: Gordon (2025).

As Edwards (2011) puts it, such strategies can, in some cases, disengage the player, once they touch very sensitive themes, such as religion, violence, sex, nudity, and disputed geopolitical issues, among others. On the contrary, students are advised to engage the player in a non-violent narrative. It is in such cases when extreme culturalization touches ethical considerations.

An alternative localized text could be: “Para dirigir, use as setas do teclado. Depois, sintonize a Rádio Folia, prepare o chapéu de sol e curta a festa na estrada,” as shown in Figure 8. This translation transforms the narrative from a coastal trip into a festive one. “Rádio Folia” (“Festival Radio”), and “festa na Estrada” (“party on the road”) are direct cultural references to Brazil’s famous festivals and carnivals. The phrase “prepare o chapéu de sol” (“prepare your sun hat”) adds a playful and familiar element, creating an immersive experience for players who associate road trips with lively celebrations rather than just a coastal drive.

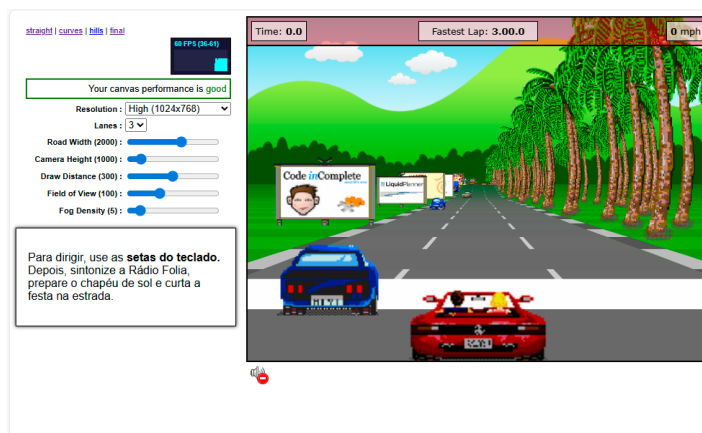
Instead of just giving simple instructions to players, the culturalization approach briefly illustrated in Figure 8 evokes a specific, nostalgic feeling of a leisurely coastal drive. This is a common experience in Brazil, especially in the state of São Paulo, where the road to the coast is a popular destination. By adding this rich, culturally specific text, *Javascript Racer* feels less

like a generic racing game in one extreme, or a hostile game in the other (with extreme culturalization), and more like a game made for a Brazilian audience. Although simple, this example can illustrate how localization can enhance a player’s experience by making the content feel more familiar, relevant, and ethical.

At its core, these classroom activities serve as a bridge between the rigorous analytical demands of academia and the pragmatic, fast-paced requirements of the localization industry. By engaging with high-stakes choices—such as the ethical implications of culturalization in *Javascript Racer*—students learn that professional localization is rarely a matter of simple linguistic substitution. Instead, they develop the ability to balance the “academic” need for critical reflection with the “industrial” necessity of player immersion and market relevance. This pedagogical approach ensures that students do not just enter the market as technicians, but as critical thinkers capable of navigating the complex socio-technical landscapes of modern gaming.

Having explored these foundational classroom choices, the following section provides a bibliometric and content analysis of how these pedagogical interventions translate into independent research. Specifically, we analyze a subset of senior theses specifically focused

Figure 8. Screenshot of *Javascript Racer* Racing Game (Portuguese Language)



on game localization to map how students synthesize these skills into their final academic contributions.

2. Synthesizing Knowledge and Skill in Senior Theses

At UFU, the guidelines for the senior thesis are in a document for both students and faculty (2022). This document outlines the requirements for students earning their undergraduate degree in Translation. To complete the senior thesis, students must take two courses, “Projeto de Monografia” (senior thesis project), and “Monografia” (senior thesis), which total 240 hours.

The senior project is a 120-hour course offered during the sixth academic semester of the program, comprising 60 theoretical and 60 practical hours. This stage involves weekly meetings with a dedicated supervisor to develop the project, which must include an introduction, objectives, rationale, theoretical framework, problems and hypotheses, methodology, and a minimum of five references.

Following the successful completion of the project, the next course is offered during the seventh and last semester of the program, consisting of 120 hours. Students must have, if possible, the same supervisor from the project phase, and this stage focuses on the full development of the senior thesis, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, writing, revision, and defense. Theses must adhere to the Associação Brasileira de Normas Técnicas (Brazilian Association of Technical Standards) rules, have a minimum of thirty pages, and be provisionally submitted to a defense committee. The defense is a public session lasting between 20-30 minutes for the students' presentations, followed by a debate by the committee members. As mentioned earlier in the Introduction of this article, for this senior thesis, many students choose game localization as a research topic. As the title of

this section states, these students produce a senior thesis that reports their interests, choices, and experiences in translating and localizing a game they choose to study or manipulate at both technical and content levels.

In this section, we provide a brief bibliometric and content analysis of the subset of senior theses specifically focused on game localization. While bibliometric studies conventionally manage large volumes of publications to measure and statistically evaluate the accumulation of the studies in a field (Franco Aixelá, 2024; Olalla-Soler, Franco Aixelá, & Rovira-Esteva, 2020), we apply some of its techniques in this section in order to reveal some research tendencies in our corpus of 18 senior theses produced in our program within the last 15 years. We hope these studies will accumulate over time.

The database chosen is the academic repository of our university. The Repositório Institucional da Universidade Federal de Uberlândia aims to store, preserve, and disseminate institutional memory, to contribute to open access legislation, and to provide greater visibility to the university's scientific, technical, cultural, artistic, administrative, and technological productions. There, it is possible to find senior theses, Masters' theses, and PhD dissertations on its website. They are published in a PDF file and available for download (UFU, 2025).

When searching in the repository of the senior theses of our program with more than 100 entries (at least to date), the most researched topic is literary translation, with 32 theses. These works cover a wide range of subjects, from the translation of classic literature by authors like Oscar Wilde and Jane Austen to contemporary fiction and poetry. This topic has a little less than twice the number of theses compared to game localization (18). Given its clear and consistent presence in the program, game localization appears to be a significant and established research topic. It is an important

and growing area of research, ranking as the second most studied topic on the list, after literary translation (32 theses) and ahead of audiovisual translation (15 theses).

A common limitation of bibliometric studies is that they can only analyze data that is officially registered in a database. For instance, some theses from the early years of our university's program, around 2010, may not have been retrieved from the database. This means our bibliometric analysis does not include them.

After downloading the 18 game-localization senior theses, we compiled the PDF files in the Mendeley's reference management software

(Elsevier, 2024). From there, it is possible to save their metadata (name of the students, title and year of the senior theses, abstract, and keywords) in .RIS file format (in reference to Research Information System File Format) that can be opened and analyzed by means of bibliometric mapping software, such as vosviewer (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

Table 1 lists the titles of senior theses on game localization in Brazilian Portuguese and in English, year of defense, and number of pages. The content of the theses is particularly focused on game localization and translation from English into Brazilian Portuguese. The topics include the translation of profanities,

Table 1. Localization-Related Senior Theses Defended in the Undergraduate Translation Program

No.	Portuguese Title	English Title	Year	Pages
1	For new game standards: a localização de games no Brasil sob a perspectiva do analista e do usuário	For new game standards: game localization in Brazil from the perspective of the analyst and the user	2015	97
2	O inexplorado em <i>Uncharted 3</i> : normas de expectativa x normas profissionais para games traduzidos	The unexplored in <i>Uncharted 3</i> : expectations versus professional standards for translated games	2016	148
3	A tradução para a língua portuguesa de turpilóquios em <i>Far Cry 4</i> : questões sobre localização e tradução de games e a ótica de seus agentes	The translation of profanity into Portuguese in <i>Far Cry 4</i> : issues regarding game translation and localization and the perspective of its agents	2016	76
4	<i>Stick Hero</i> em PT-BR: explorando tradução, localização e emulação de games para smartphones	<i>Stick Hero</i> in PT-BR: exploring translation, localization, and emulation of smartphone games	2017	48
5	Bipe ou p!@\$%!?: as falas de Kled, de <i>League of Legends</i> , traduzidas para o português do Brasil	Beep or f!@\$%!?: Kled's speeches, from <i>League of Legends</i> , translated into Brazilian Portuguese	2017	58
6	Explorando a adaptação do videogame <i>Metro 2033</i> : de histórias a experiências	Exploring the <i>Metro 2033</i> Video Game Adaptation: From Stories to Experiences	2019	47
7	Gênero das palavras na tradução do jogo eletrônico <i>Monster Prom</i> : uma breve problematização	Word gender in the translation of the video game <i>Monster Prom</i> : a brief discussion	2019	53
8	<i>Spelunky Classic HD</i> em PT-BR: desafios da tradução e localização de jogos eletrônicos	<i>Spelunky Classic HD</i> in PT-BR: challenges of translating and localizing video games	2021	59
9	<i>Our Life</i> : Beginnings and Always & "Nossa Vida: Começos e Sempre": experiências tradutórias em localização de jogos de uma tradutora em formação	<i>Our Life</i> : Beginnings and Always & "Nossa Vida: Começos e Sempre": translation experiences in game localization by a trainee translator	2022	73

Table 1. Localization-Related Senior Theses Defended in the Undergraduate Translation Program (continued)

No.	Portuguese Title	English Title	Year	Pages
10	<i>West of Loathing</i> : tradução e localização comentadas de um RPG de faroeste	<i>West of Loathing</i> : commentary on the translation and localization of a Western-themed RPG	2023	43
11	Análise do processo tradutório dos socioletos fictícios do jogo <i>NEO</i> : the world ends with you	Analysis of the translation process of fictional sociolects in the game <i>NEO</i> : the world ends with you	2023	55
12	O jogo digital <i>Ann</i> em PT-BR: para além dos processos de tradução e localização	The digital game <i>Ann</i> in PT-BR: beyond translation and localization processes	2023	129
13	Tradução e Localização do menu do jogo <i>Call of Duty - Modern Warfare 2</i> (2009): Uma proposta de tradução comentada	Translation and Localization of the <i>Call of Duty - Modern Warfare 2</i> (2009) game menu: A commented translation proposal	2024	45
14	Aglutinação e justaposição como recursos tradutórios no jogo <i>Pokémon Platinum</i>	Agglutination and juxtaposition as translation resources in the game <i>Pokémon Platinum</i>	2024	54
15	As CAT tools e outros recursos no processo de localização de jogos digitais: O caso de <i>Little Goody Two Shoes</i>	CAT tools and other resources in the digital game localization process: The case of <i>Little Goody Two Shoes</i>	2025	43
16	O Jogador Como Personagem: Imersão na Narrativa Interativa do Jogo Digital <i>Little Goody Two Shoes</i> por meio da tradução e localização em PT-BR	The Player as Character: Immersion in the Interactive Narrative of the Digital Game <i>Little Goody Two Shoes</i> through Translation and Localization into PT-BR	2025	48
17	A tradução de expressões idiomáticas em games: explorando o jogo <i>Call of Duty: Black Ops 6</i>	Translating idiomatic expressions in games: exploring <i>Call of Duty: Black Ops 6</i>	2025	43
18	Tradução e localização do jogo digital <i>Little Goody Two Shoes</i> : Por uma gestão terminológica para o PT-BR	Translation and localization of the digital game <i>Little Goody Two Shoes</i> : Terminology management for PT-BR	2025	56

sociolects, and idiomatic expressions, as well as the use of professional tools (CAT tools), and the challenges of adapting various game genres.

The median number of pages is 54.5. In this case, it means half of the senior theses were 54.5 pages or shorter, and half were 54.5 pages or longer. This median was not affected by outliers (like the 148-page and 129-page senior theses). Table 1 shows a strong and growing academic interest in this field, with the number of theses appearing to increase in recent years. The most prominent year for the publication of the senior theses is 2025, with four

senior theses defended. This is followed by 2023, with three theses.

The theses cover a wide range of genres, from popular first-person shooter (FPS) and multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) games to narrative-driven role-playing games (RPGs), and visual novels. Table 2 provides a list of games studied by the students with their respective genres.

Based on Table 1 and Table 2, the genres studied in class reflect the diversity of the video game industry. However, there is a notable

Table 2. Games Studied with their Respective Genres

Games Studied	Game Genre
<i>Assassin's Creed</i> (2007) (and similar titles)	Action role-playing game
<i>Uncharted 3</i>	Action-adventure, cinematic third-person shooter
<i>Far Cry 4</i>	First-person shooter
<i>Stick Hero</i>	Casual mobile game
<i>League of Legends</i>	Multiplayer online battle arena
<i>Metro 2033</i>	First-person shooter, survival horror
<i>Monster Prom</i>	Dating simulator, visual novel
<i>Spelunky Classic HD</i>	Roguelike platformer
<i>Our Life: Beginnings and Always</i>	Visual novel
<i>West of Loathing</i>	Role-playing game, comedy
<i>NEO: The World Ends with You</i>	Action role-playing game
<i>Ann</i>	Adventure horror game
<i>Call of Duty - Modern Warfare 2</i> (2009)	First-person shooter
<i>Pokémon Platinum</i>	Role-playing game
<i>Little Goody Two Shoes</i> (3 theses)	Role-playing game
<i>Call of Duty: Black Ops 6</i>	First-person shooter

preference for RPGs (role-playing games) and narrative-driven titles.

Nine theses focused on RPGs: (1) *Assassin's Creed*, (2) *Our Life: Beginnings and Always*, (3) *West of Loathing*, (4) *NEO: The World Ends with You*, (5) *Monster Prom*, (6) *Pokémon Platinum*, (7) *Little Goody Two Shoes* (studied in three separate theses). In the case of *Little Goody Two Shoes*, all three students studied different themes following a collaborative approach. One of them investigated the engines and CAT tools to manipulate its linguistic strings, another student approached its narratives and their relation to playability, and another student created a glossary of its terms.

The genre first-person shooter (FPS) was covered in five theses: (1) *Uncharted 3*, (2) *Far Cry 4*, (3) *Metro 2033*, (4) *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, (5) *Call of Duty: Black Ops 6*.

The casual, MOBA, roguelike platformer, and adventure horror genres were addressed in four theses, focusing on the games *Stick Hero*,

League of Legends, *Spelunky Classic HD*, and *Ann*, respectively. These numbers show that students are drawn to games with rich narratives, complex dialog, and extensive lore, as these elements present significant challenges and opportunities for translation and localization studies.

It is worth noting that ten of the games studied lack an official PT-BR localization, leading students to propose their own translations: *Stick Hero*, *Metro 2033*, *Monster Prom*, *Spelunky Classic HD*, *Our Life: Beginnings and Always*, *West of Loathing*, *NEO: The World Ends with You*, *Ann*, *Pokémon Platinum*, *Little Goody Two Shoes*. That is probably why, when inserting the metadata of the theses into vosviewer, there is a prominence of the keyword “commented translation” in the corpus of 18 theses, based on the abstracts and keywords registered by the students.

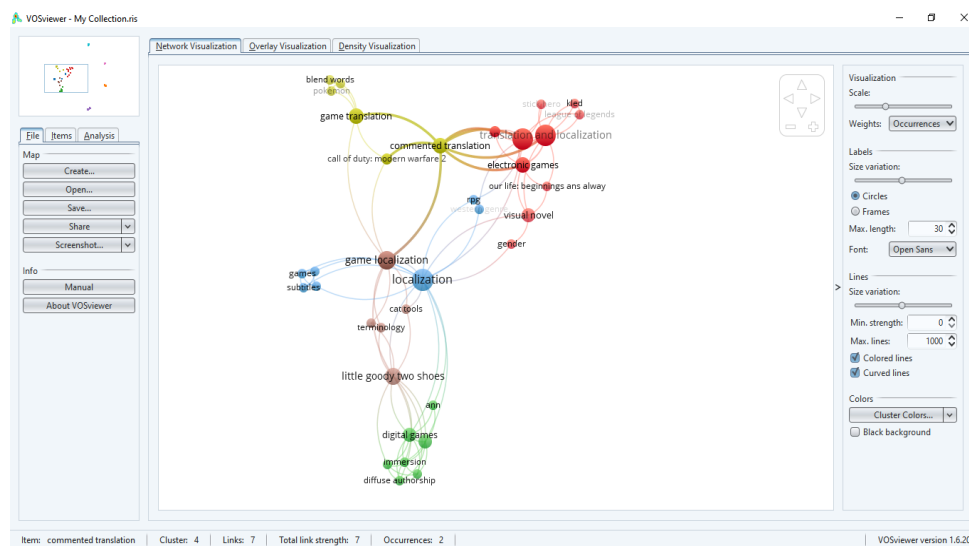
Among the commonly used techniques in bibliometric studies, such as co-citation analysis, co-authorship, bibliographic-coupling, most

connected to the central clusters of “game localization” and “electronic games,” indicating that it is a prominent methodological procedure chosen by students in their theses.

There appears to be a relationship between students' preference for producing commented or annotated translations and the types of games they chose to study. As explained in section 1, our focus was on the process of game localization rather than solely on the final product: students learned to create content and to understand how their decisions shape the outcome. It is difficult to determine whether our approach influenced these preferences, as we did not investigate this question empirically. However, in their senior theses, students seemed to enhance their learning by engaging directly with the products and reflecting on the act of creation through commented or annotated translations. This approach requires them to make deliberate choices and justify them. It is worth noting that supervisors do not assign specific game genres for study and localization; rather, students select them based on their own interests and preferences.

- Finally, from the group of undergraduate students, five have continued their studies in game localization within our Master's Program in

Figure 9. Keyword Network in Theses Abstracts



Linguistics. Of this group, four have already successfully completed their degrees. One of these Master's graduates has since advanced to our PhD program (also in Linguistics), while the remaining student is still in the process of completing their Master's dissertation. Their studies are available at the same repository mentioned earlier.

In conclusion, the pedagogical shift toward process-oriented, student-centered activities—supported by the reflective practice of annotated translations—has proven to be a catalyst for sustained academic engagement. By giving students the agency to select their own corpora and justify their creative decisions, we bridge the gap between classroom practice and advanced research. This progression demonstrates that game localization training at the undergraduate level does more than build technical skills; it fosters a critical, research-driven mindset that prepares students for the complexities of both the professional market and advanced linguistic studies.

Having established the pedagogical framework and its academic outcomes, the following section will provide a reflexive look at our practices through the resource of autoethnography.

3. The Autoethnography Approach

To conclude this case study, we will draw on the concept and resource of autoethnography. Autoethnography is a research method that uses the researcher's personal experience to analyze and understand broader cultural and social phenomena. Evolving from traditional ethnography, this approach places the individual's life—their feelings, relationships, and lived stories—at the center of the study.

Autoethnography aims to connect the personal to the cultural, using the author's narrative as a lens to generate insights about society that extend beyond individual experience. While it is self-focused, it can be conducted by an

individual researcher or as part of a collaborative study. In the field of education, according to Cohen et al. (2018, p. 297), autoethnography has been likened to a form of critical pedagogy in its commitment to transformative and emancipatory processes and to the social construction of knowledge, through questioning *when*, *what*, and *why*.

In this self-reflective narrative section, we aimed to synthesize our experiences in the educational process of teaching game localization. Specifically, we explored the own pedagogical challenges we have encountered in teaching this topic and considered how decisions about *when*, *what*, and *why* we teach can contribute to a more empowering learning experience for students.

In terms of *when* to teach game localization, we argue that students should be introduced to it at a strategic point in the translation program—ideally after they have mastered fundamental translation theories and CAT tools, and just before they begin work on their senior theses, where applicable. A dedicated course positioned between these stages would be most effective, as it enables students to apply their foundational knowledge of terminology, style guides, and cultural adaptation to a specialized context. This sequencing ensures that they possess the necessary skills to address the technical complexities and creative challenges specific to game content, rather than encountering them for the first time.

Based on our experience, restricting game localization to the final years of a translation program has notable drawbacks. Such an approach frames the topic as a late-stage specialization rather than as an integral component of the curriculum. As a result, students miss opportunities for early exposure, which limits sustained practice and in-depth engagement, and may leave them underprepared for the rapidly evolving game localization industry. In this sense, such curricular design risks

reinforcing the compartmentalization of training, a trend already identified by Kelly (2005).

With regard to *what* we teach, we argue that instruction should go beyond mere word transposition. It is essential to address both the technical and cultural dimensions of localization, including character limitations, user interface and user experience considerations, and cultural sensitivities related to humor, symbols, and metaphors. We also contend that students should develop proficiency in specialized tools and acquire an understanding of how to manage a localization project from start to finish. The aim is to prepare them to translate and adapt games for new markets while fostering their creative agency.

Nevertheless, this approach also has potential drawbacks—it may be overwhelming particularly for novice students. A curriculum that attempts to cover too many specialized areas—such as user interface and user experience design, project management, and cultural nuance—may become overly broad (Kelly, 2005; O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013). As a result, students may develop only a superficial understanding, lacking sufficient time to consolidate fundamental translation and linguistic skills before engaging with more complex technical content. Moreover, such an approach may overemphasize the use of tools and specific game characteristics, along with the demands of the gaming audience, while neglecting the actual needs and knowledge gaps of the students. This can result in a curriculum that is not tailored to their needs.

Regarding *why* students should learn about game localization, we could primarily answer that it is due to the rapidly growing and financially lucrative nature of the field. Engaging with this specialized market ensures that students do not limit their professional prospects, providing them with the necessary knowledge to compete in a sector that continues to expand globally (Newzoo, 2026). This specialization

may prepare them for a dynamic industry that demands more than just linguistic skills; it requires technical knowledge and cultural adaptation. By understanding game localization, students can diversify their career options and apply their translation skills to a creative medium, staying competitive in a modern, ever-changing job market (Esqueda & Silva, 2022).

Nonetheless, in our view, these claims, while accurate, present an overly optimistic view of industry. It can mislead students by not mentioning the intense competition for limited positions and the high-pressure work environment, which often involves tight deadlines and “crunch time.” Furthermore, it may set unrealistic expectations about the technical skills a single course can provide, as many tools are learned on the job. This perspective risks downplaying the significant challenges students will face in a demanding and highly specialized market. Hopefully, the senior theses can fill in some gaps.

Final Remarks

We argue that the challenges in teaching game localization stem less from pedagogy than from systemic issues in translation programs in Brazil and around the world, namely a lack of support from both the language industry and society. Even though our program emphasizes professional skill development, it lacks meaningful industry collaboration, as the sector tends to prioritize its own workflows and technological advancements, specially with the rise of generative AI (Esqueda, 2024, 2025). Instead of forming partnerships that support academic teaching, industry prioritizes technology, creating a significant disconnection between what is taught in translation programs and what the globalized market truly requires. This lack of collaboration and limited view of human interference ultimately compromises the ability to effectively prepare students for specialized fields.

Overall, and as the title of this article goes, we will continue charting virtual worlds for the sake of teaching and learning game localization. This pursuit is especially necessary because many of us, as teachers, graduated without experience in training translators for the game industry, as we ourselves lacked such expertise.

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