



Translation Strategies in In-game Texts of The Sims 2 from English to Thai

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Abstract

Due to the popularity of game playing, all over the world, many gaming companies considered releasing games to other countries, which normally required translation. However, game translation involved issues of language and cultural differences. The smallest part of translation like non-equivalence, at the word level, was a challenge to overcome for translators. Therefore, this study aimed to develop an understanding of employing translation strategies of non-equivalence at the word level, in the life-simulating video game, named The Sims 2 as a case study here. The sampling of this study was 30 dialogue boxes of in-game texts, with 35 non-equivalent words in the game, which were chosen by using purposive sampling. Eight translation strategies of non-equivalence, proposed by Mona Baker (1992) were selected as the framework of this study. The results revealed that 4 strategies were used to translate the game. The most frequently found strategy was translation using a loan word, and loan word plus explanation. Translation by cultural substitution and translation, by paraphrase using an unrelated word, were the second and equal, frequently found strategies. The least frequently found strategy was translation by omission. Overall, the use of translation strategies in each non-equivalence, was based on concepts of words and suitability.

Keywords: *Non-equivalence at the word level, Video game translation, Translation strategies*

1. Introduction

Game is one of entertaining media for people at different ages such as children, teenagers, and adults to develop strategic thinking skills, enjoy free time, and to kill time. In Thailand, game playing is also a popular activity, which can be found in conversation from social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. Regarding social media, Thailand was also in the fourth in the world, in term of a number of gaming conversations on Twitter in 2019 (Bangkok Post, 2020). It is possible that the popularity of games in Thailand will grow over the years as well as in other countries. Due to popularity of the game along with technological advancement, many new games with different genres, are released in different platforms such as consoles, PCs, handheld consoles and mobile phones (Bernal-Merino, 2015). However, releasing games to other countries, requires game translation, which involves issues of language and cultural differences. Translators have to adapt to culture of a target country, as a part of game translation in order to go beyond the source version, based on the skopos of game translation, which points at preserving the 'look and feel' of a source version (Munday, 2016). Initially, games are not developed or translated for other countries, until games are popular enough in the original country (Mangiron, 2016). Therefore, game translation is a challenge, because translators have to understand the culture of a target country.

Even the smallest part of game translation like the word level, is also a challenge, like other types of translation. As previously mentioned, game translation requires knowledge and adaptation of the target culture; therefore, some words have to be adapted to be suitable for the target culture. Mostly, a word that requires adaptation of the target culture is non-equivalence at the word level. According to Baker (1992), non-equivalence at the word level, is defined as a target-language word, without direct equivalent for a source-language word. Non-equivalence at the word level always involves issues about cultural-specific matters, and differences between the source language, and the target language (Baker, 1992). These issues also involve game translation, because non-equivalence at the word level is also the part of adapting to the culture of a target country. If a non-equivalent word in a game is ineffectively translated, game players may lose enjoyment in a game. In order to deal with this problem, Baker (1992) suggested 8 translation strategies, to handle non-equivalence in the professional level, which consist of translation by using a more general word, translation by a more neutral/less expressive word, translation by cultural substitution, translation using a



loan word or loan word plus explanation, translation by paraphrase using a related word, translation by paraphrase using an unrelated word, translation by omission, and lastly translation by illustration.

From the reviewing of translation strategies of non-equivalence, proposed by Baker (1992), these strategies were used as the framework of this study. Therefore, this study aimed at analyzing translation strategies of non-equivalence at the word level in a game, by focusing on an in-game text, in order to develop an understanding of employing translation strategies of non-equivalence, at the word level for game translation. The researcher focused on analyzing a single game as a case study. In this paper, the researcher preferred using the word 'game translation' over 'game localization', because this study focused on in-game texts only, and other game assets fell outside this study.

2. Objectives

- 1) To classify the translation of in-game texts from the life-simulating video game named The Sims 2, based on translation strategies of non-equivalence, at the word level.
- 2) To identify the use of translation strategies of non-equivalence, at the word level in the game from English to Thai.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Material

As a case study, the researcher selected The Sims 2 to do the analysis for this study. The Sims 2 was the strategic life-simulating video game, which was developed by Maxis in 2004, and translated into Thai by Electronic Arts Inc. In addition, The Sims 2 was also the sequential game of The Sims. After releasing the base game in 2004, 8 expansion packs and 9 stuff packs were released, in order to support the base game and increase gaming enjoyment (Boland, 2010). Its gameplay focused on creating and controlling a virtual human, called Sim in simulated lives. The Sims 2 was chosen as a case study, because the game was the best-selling in 2004, which was sold millions of copies (Boland, 2010). In addition, the game also received very good criticism from aggregators Metacritic and GameRanking (Ibid.). At present, The Sims 2 is still the very popular game of The Sims series among Thai players, even though the two newest games of The Sims series, like The Sims 3 and The Sims 4 were already released.

3.2 Sampling

The samplings of this study were selected by using purposive sampling. Thirty dialogue boxes with English and Thai in-game texts from The Sims 2 as the samplings must have at least 1 or more non-equivalent words.

3.3 Method

(i) The meanings of English and Thai words were derived from online dictionaries, such as Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Royal Society, etc., as per the data. In addition, other online sources were also included to derive meanings of some words.

(ii) The data was compared and analyzed in order to conform to Baker's eight translation strategies of non-equivalence, before identifying.

(iii) The frequency of translation strategies was counted and calculated. Then, the results of the study would be summarized and presented, as explanations of each strategy, that were found in in-game texts with some examples.

(iv) The entire study would be discussed, and the coherence between translation strategies of non-equivalence, at the word level employed in the game, and the Skopos theory about video game translation were also part of the discussion.



4. Results and Discussion

The results and discussion of this study were based on the objectives: to analyze translation strategies of non-equivalence at the word level, that appeared in in-game texts, from the life-simulating video game named The Sims 2, and to identify the use of translation strategies of non-equivalence, at the word level, in the game from English to Thai. The results and discussion of this study was presented as follows:

The first objective focused on analyzing translation strategies of non-equivalence, at the word level, in in-game texts from The Sims, the second objective is the Thirty dialogues boxes, with in-game texts and non-equivalent words, were analyzed based on translation strategies of non-equivalence, at the word level, by Baker (1992), along with using meanings of each word from dictionaries.

Table 1 The frequency of translation strategies at non-equivalence at the word level in The Sims 2

Translation Strategies of Non-Equivalence	Number	Percentage
1. Translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation	27	77.1%
2. Translation by cultural substitution	3	8.6%
3. Translation by paraphrase using an unrelated word	3	8.6%
4. Translation by omission	2	5.7%
Total	35	100%

According to the data in Table 1, there were 4 translation strategies of non-equivalence at the word level, applied to translate the game: translation by cultural substitution, translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation, translation by paraphrase using an unrelated word, and translation by omission. The most frequently found strategy, was translation using a loan word, or loan word plus explanation at 27 times (77.1%). The second and equal frequently found strategies were translation by cultural substitution, and translation by paraphrase, using an unrelated word at 3 times (8.6%). The least frequently found strategies was translation, by omission at 2 times (5.7%). On the other hand, other 4 translation strategies were not found in translation of The Sims 2.

The second objective focused on identifying the use of translation strategies of non-equivalence at the word level, in the game from English to Thai. All of non-equivalent words would be explained about the use of translation strategies, based on the principle of Baker's translation strategies of non-equivalence, at the word level. The analysis of translation strategies usage showed that 4 translation strategies of non-equivalence were applied, in order to convey meanings for the Thai players in different approaches as follows:

Translation using a loan word, or loan word plus explanation was unremarkably used to cope with culture-specific items, modern concepts, and buzzwords (Baker, 1992). In game translation of The Sims 2, this strategy was the most frequently found strategy, which was used to translate proper nouns, borrowed words from non-English language, culture-specific words, in-game words, and other words that had complicated meanings. Using a loan word or loan word, plus explanation was better to preserve forms of source-language words.

Source Language: Jumbok

Target Language: จัมบอ

From the example, the word 'Jumbok' was an in-game divine figure, that appeared in Bon Voyage expansion pack. The translator used a loan word to translate 'Jumbok' into 'จัมบอ', because Jumbok was the name of the in-game divine figure. As a proper noun, using a loan word to translate the word 'Jumbok' into 'จัมบอ' was a proper choice.

Besides using a loan word solely, an additional explanation after a loan word, might be used in a target-language word in order to make a source-language word more evident. The explanation would be retrieved from the meaning of a source-language word.



Source Language: Gyro

Target Language: ซีโรซึ่งเป็นแซนวิชตำรับกรีก

From the example, the word 'gyro' was a Greek-style sandwich (Lexico, n.d.). The translator used a loan word to translate 'gyro' into 'ซีโร', because a gyro was the name of the Greek-style sandwich. As a proper noun and a borrowed word from non-English language, using a loan word to translate the word 'gyro' into 'ซีโร' was a proper choice. Moreover, the translator added an explanation of the word 'gyro,' based on its meaning as 'ซึ่งเป็นแซนวิชตำรับกรีก', which could be back-translated into 'which is a Greek sandwich', after the loan word 'ซีโร'. Therefore, the target-language word of 'gyro' in the game was 'ซีโรซึ่งเป็นแซนวิชตำรับกรีก'.

Translation by cultural substitution was used to substitute with a target-language cultural word, that had a similar impact as a source-language cultural word (Baker, 1992). This strategy was the second frequently found strategy. Some words that were from foreign culture might not be familiar to Thai people. Therefore, the translator used cultural substitution, to replace foreign content, with Thai content in order to make target-language words, more familiar to Thai players.

Source Language: Succubus

Target Language: พราย

From the example, the word 'succubus' referred to a female evil spirit that had sex with sleeping men in Western folklore (Oxford Learner's dictionaries, n.d.). The translator used cultural substitution to replace the word 'succubus' with the word 'พราย'. According to the dictionary of the Royal Society (n.d.), 'พราย' referred to a female spirit of a pregnant woman who was deceased. Although, the word 'succubus' and 'พราย' had different meanings, these words were similar in terms of being a female spirit. However, 'พราย' was more familiar to Thai people, because it came from a Thai belief, while a succubus is originated from Western folklore.

Translation by paraphrase using unrelated words was used to place an unrelated word as a target-language word, for a complex source-language word, with an unpacked meaning, or a modified superordinate (Baker, 1992). This was another second frequently found strategy. In this game, this was applied when source-language words had complicated or ambiguous meanings, that were difficult to lexicalize into target-language words. Therefore, target-language words were different from source-language words, for conveying meanings.

Source Language: Je ne sais quoi

Target Language:เสน่ห์เร้นลับ

From the example, the word 'Je ne sais quoi' referred to 'a good quality that was not easy to depict' (Oxford Learner's dictionaries, n.d.). Based on its meaning, the word 'Je ne sais quoi' was ambiguous. Therefore, instead of unpacking its meaning from the dictionary, or modifying a superordinate as an unrelated word, the translator used an unrelated word, by using the in-game description of the word 'Je ne sais quoi,' as the temporary meaning as follows:

Give your Sim that something extra special, so other Sims will notice! Romantic pursuits should be easier with this benefit.

มอบบางสิ่งพิเศษให้แก่ซิมส์ของคุณ จนซิมส์อื่น ๆ ต้องจ้องมองกันใหญ่! แต่การจะไปก็ง่ายขึ้นแล้ว

The translator modified the in-game description of the word, 'Je ne sais quoi' into the word 'เสน่ห์เร้นลับ', which could be directly back-translated into 'mysterious charm'.



Translation by omission was the least frequently found strategy. This was because source-language words were made-up words, in the game that had no meanings. Therefore, these words were omitted in target-language texts.

Source Language: Restagoth

Target Language: (Omitted)

From the example, the word 'Restagoth' did not exist in real life, and could not be found for the meaning in any dictionaries such as Oxford, Cambridge, Lexico and Merriam-Webster. Therefore, the word 'Restagoth' was omitted in target-language texts. However, omitting this word might cause loss in translation, because these words probably had hidden meanings, that could not be found in any dictionaries.

From Table 1 and the analysis, translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation was the most frequently found strategy, because many non-equivalent words in the game consisted of proper nouns from other cultures, and specific words in the game, which had to be maintained forms of source-language words. On the other hand, translation by omission was the least frequently found strategy, because most non-equivalent words, could not be omitted due to the risk of loss in translation. However, omitted words in the game might cause loss in translation in some ways, if those omitted words had hidden meanings. These strategies were formulated to solve translation problems of non-equivalence in the game, such as words from unfamiliar culture, words with complicated and ambiguous meanings, and made-up in-game words without meanings in any dictionaries. Most non-equivalent words were translated, by following Baker's translation strategies. For example, the word 'Succubus' was translated, by using cultural substitution because it is a word of Western folklore, and replaced with the word 'พญายักษ์' from a Thai belief. However, some translated non-equivalent word might not fully follow Baker's translation strategies, but these words were still translated under the concepts of Baker's translation strategies. For example, the word 'Je ne sais quoi' was a loan word from French language, which had the ambiguous meaning, and did not get along with its in-game description. The translator modified the in-game description, as its temporary meaning, instead of the unpacked meaning of 'Je ne sais quoi' in the dictionary, which this approach, it was different from Baker's translation by paraphrase using an unrelated word, but the word was still translated under Baker's concept of using an unrelated word. In translation of in-game texts from English to Thai, the nature of Thai language and structure had important roles to adjust translated words to get along with texts, because game translation required adaptation of the target culture. If translated words did not match Thai language and structure, conveying meanings was unsuccessful, and game players might feel disturbed until enjoyment was ruined. In addition, concerning its contexts of the entire texts, it was also capable of preventing mistranslation and unnatural game translation, because some source-language words might be translated by following the same strategy like the same type of a word, to preserve naturalness of the Thai language. For example, the word 'Restagoth', which was a made-up in-game word, was omitted in translated texts, by using translation by omission. However, most of made-up in-game words, like the word 'Restagoth' were translated, by using translation with a loan word. It was possible that the translator considered the word 'Restagoth,' as a word that caused unnaturalness of translated texts; therefore, the word 'Restagoth' was omitted, even if it was also possible to lead to loss in translation. Overall, the translator prioritized giving proper gaming experience, and making translated texts more familiar, so that it appeals to the Thai game players. According to the results, it is corresponded to maintaining the 'look and feel' of the game, with a feeling of playing the game, in the source version, based on the skopos of game localization.

5. Conclusion

In the study of non-equivalence in game translation, in the game named, The Sims 2, the most frequently found strategy was translation using a loan word, and loan word plus explanation, while the least frequently found strategy was translation by omission. On the other hand, translation by cultural substitution and translation by paraphrase, using an unrelated word, were used based on its contexts and concept of each word in order to produce proper target-language words, and to convey to target players. At any rate, good game translation would help players to enjoy a game without a language barrier, or disruption from bad game



translation. This study was different from Attapumsuwan's study about translation techniques in localized content on websites (2011) and Robrue's study about strategies of language interpretation, in marketing and products (2016), in terms of translation in media and localization, due to focusing on game translation, while two previous studies focused on advertising media beyond the word level. In terms of limitation, this study was a small aspect of game translation, that needed more studies about this field from English to Thai. Therefore, for future studies, it was interesting to study about grammatical level, textual level, and pragmatic level in game translation from English to Thai, or study on the word level, in other game genres might be received more interesting results.

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