

## CREATIVITY AND READABILITY IN GAME LOCALISATION A Case Study on *Ni No Kuni*

PIETRO LUIGI IAIA  
UNIVERSITÀ DEL SALENTO

**Abstract** – This paper analyses the Italian transcreation strategies for the subtitles of the video game *Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch*, to detail how the diatopic/diastratic variety of *Romanesco* (typical of Rome and its area) is adopted for the characterisation of Mr Drippy, in order to prompt a humorous effect due to the cognitive contrast (Attardo 2001) triggered by the counterfactual creature speaking an actual linguistic variety. The Italian script will also be examined from the pragmatic and technical perspectives, showing that the transcreative retextualisations are tailored to younger receivers, since explanations and alternative utterances are added to render the speakers' intentionality more explicit, and noticing that the distribution of the longer target script in two- and three-line subtitles may arouse concerns in terms of readability (Perego, Taylor 2012). An alternative Italian translation strategy is then presented, where creativity and the respect for the source-text multimodal dimension are balanced to provide an equivalent characterisation for Raj, a man speaking with an Indian accent. Finally, the receivers' perception of the conventional Italian transcreation strategies of humorous discourse in video games will be explored, by considering the players' opinions and comments in dedicated websites.

**Keywords:** Audiovisual translation; game localisation; transcreation; subtitling; adaptation of humorous discourse; subtitles.

### 1. Introduction

The notion of transcreation is commonly adopted to define a process that is presented as “more than translation” (Pedersen 2014, p. 62), and which is characterised by the greater freedom that translators are given while adapting source texts. This paper enquires into the Italian transcreative script of the Japanese video game *Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Which* (*Ni No Kuni – La minaccia della Strega Cinerea*, Bandai Namco, 2012), focusing in particular on how the lexical, syntactic and technical features of the English version are transformed by resorting to the diatopic/diastratic variety of *Romanesco* (from Rome and its area), as well as on how alternative utterances are produced, which make the speakers' intentionality more explicit, and decrease the dramatic tone of some cues.

This paper is meant to contribute to the research on transcreative strategies in game localisation by defining the theoretical grounds of transcreation, in order to prove that such approach is actually affected by the conventional strategies for the audiovisual translation of humour; by analysing the functional and technical dimensions of the modifications to source texts; and by proposing alternative approaches to game localisation, according to the view of translation as a communicative process between the source and target linguacultural backgrounds, in opposition to the transcreation tendency to prefer target-culture-bound retextualisations.

At first, transcreation will be presented from its linguistic and functional features, reviewing its description in literature and dealing with its adoption in the Italian localisation of video games. Then, the adaptation of the humorous discourse of *Ni No Kuni*

will be explored, underscoring the application of the conventional theories of humour construction to the possible worlds of video games. The analysis will exemplify the extent to which the transcreative script conveys a different shade to the original humorous effect, preserving the cognitive contrasts of a “possible/impossible” kind, but rendering the Italian utterances suitable for younger receivers. Finally, an alternative translation strategy for the character of Raj (who speaks with an Indian accent) is provided, to exemplify a different approach to game localisation, where the search for an entertained response from the receivers does not lead to misinterpretations or modifications of the source-text denotative-semantic and connotative-pragmatic dimensions, but accounts for the original audiovisual and linguistic construction in the production of target versions.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1. *Transcreation in Game Localisation*

Transcreation is a novel notion in translation studies, which is enquired into from various perspectives, from the identification of its domains of application, to the description of the characteristics of the process and the proposal of a definition. Even though it is applied to different cultures and text types, from the translation of sacred texts (Di Giovanni 2008), to the adaptation of video games (Bernal Merino 2006) and advertisements (Pedersen 2014), transcreation has gained the status of a concept *per se* (Pedersen 2014, p. 69), being considered something more than translation (Pedersen 2014, p. 62). Yet, a common and shared definition has still to be identified, and the process actually seems described from a merely “practical point of view” (Pedersen 2014, p. 59) which lacks an accurate analysis of the theoretical and cognitive dimensions of the activities related to this type of translation.

As for video games, transcreation is studied within the research area of game localisation, which deals with its technical, economic and cultural issues (Bernal Merino 2006; Mangiron, O’Hagan 2006; Mangiron 2007; Mangiron 2010; Chandler, Deming 2011). The literature on game localisation acknowledges that greater levels of freedom and creativity are given (Mangiron, O’Hagan 2006) for the production of transcreative scripts that tilt “the balance towards the target audience, [... while claiming] to be the same product” (Bernal Merino 2006, p. 34). Yet, such studies do not always integrate the above aspects with a linguistic analysis in order to provide process-based, cognitive enquiries, and at the same time, the text types are not investigated by means of a multimodal approach. This suggests that both the linguistic and extralinguistic features of texts need to be examined so as to enquire into the conveyance of the semantic and communicative dimensions (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006; Kress 2009). It thus follows that a more detailed theoretical ground is needed, and indeed Pedersen (2014, p. 69) claims that “there are other concepts with a much richer [theoretical] description that seem to be able to embrace transcreation”.

The main aspects of the process will be now analysed, in order to show that there are indeed notions from translation studies that could improve the available descriptions. At first, transcreation could be defined as “a translation strategy mainly based on the translator’s *top-down cognitive processes*” (Iaia 2014, p. 517), entailing that the modifications to the source-script linguistic and functional characteristics result from the translators’ interpretations of the authors’ intentionality, or illocutionary dimensions (Austin 1962). Secondly, the inclination towards the target culture is common to other approaches to translation, such as domestication, according to which the culture-bound

references and notions are adapted, changed, or even omitted for target audiences. Finally, also the attention to prompting equivalent effects in target receivers would bring transcreation closer to the Functional approach to translation studies (Reiss, Veermer 1984; Nord 1991), even though transcreation does not opt for that balance between the source and target linguacultural backgrounds which would coincide with the identification of translation as a process of cross-cultural communication and interpretation (Guido 2012; Iaiá 2015).

Another notion that the literature on transcreation does not define properly is that of “experience”. The latter, in fact, is presented as one of the targets of the process, which has to facilitate the “gamers’ immersion in order to enhance the players’ experience” (Bernal Merino 2006, p. 32), but it is not clear how such “experience” has to be intended. Actually, it seems that the noun does not refer to the influence of the translators’ and players’ background knowledge (thus seeing “experience” from a cognitive perspective), but that it entails the audiences’ entertained reaction, therefore having functional connotations (Nielsen *et al.* 2008). However, it is here argued that the notion of “experience” should be redefined so as to signify the reproduction of the illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions by respecting the source-text lexical, structural and functional features, as well as by aiming at an equivalent multimodal cohesion. Such re-definition is meant to provide cognitive, process-based grounds to the study and application of transcreation, which originate from considering translation as a process of cross-cultural communication and interpretation, and which involve definite practical and functional implications. As for the former, a balance should be pursued between the translators’ top-down, creative contributions and the attention to the original lexico-semantic and syntactic features; as for the latter, the search for a pragmalinguistic type of equivalence is meant to attain an integration between the source and target cultures, rather than an imposition of the latter in the script retextualisations.

## **2.2. Transcreation in Italy**

Due to the connection between the cognitive and linguacultural dimensions, transcreation strategies are seen as stemming from the translators’ interpretations of the source-script lexical, structural and functional characteristics. If the interpretations are tailored to the target culture only, though, specific aspects of the original denotative-semantic and connotative-pragmatic levels may be altered at several degrees, even including their omission, in order to adjust their versions for the implied audience. Indeed, to imply a specific type of audience is a cognitive process itself, which is affected by the translators’ familiarity with the text types they face, and by their perception of video games and their receivers. Hence, target scripts seem to be constructed according to such cognitive constructs, and this view is confirmed by the two main approaches to game localisation in Italy, which depend on the connections between the video-game genres and their intended receivers.

For example, when video games are directed at young players and are meant to trigger humorous responses, transcreation draws upon the conventional strategies of domestication of humour in Italian dubbing translations, replacing the “broken” (Mangiron 2007) forms of language and producing stereotypical characterisations by means of the inclusion of diatopic/diastratic varieties (Consigli 1988; Rappoport 2005), thus modifying the type of humorous discourse. On the other hand, when it is inferred that video games are for adult receivers, the original language variations and features are identified and rendered in target scripts, indeed trying to respect the author’s

intentionality. Such relations between the video-game genre, the intended audiences and transcreative strategies seem to depend on the audiovisual features of the source video games as well, since the retextualisations or inclusions of diatopic/diastratic varieties decrease when more realistic forms of visual representations are displayed. Examples in this sense are the Italian translations of those series for adult players, such as *Mass Effect 2* and *Mass Effect 3* (for the character of Mordin Solus), or *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (in the chief of the Riekling tribe), where broken forms of Italian are included, whereas *Romanesco*, *Siciliano* (Sicilian) and *Sardo* (Sardinian) are used in the target versions of *Final Fantasy IX*, *Dragon Quest IV* and *Dragon Quest V*, *Super Paper Mario* or *Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story* (Iaia 2014, 2015), which are characterised by a different visual style, closer to that of cartoons.

To propose an alternative path to this association between video-game genres and translation strategies, this study introduces a sort of “third way” in the construction of the target version of an extract from *Ni No Kuni*, whose original script is first analysed in order to get appropriate interpretations of how the original illocutionary dimensions are actualised by means of the integration between the linguistic and extralinguistic features. After such analysis, the creative contributions, retextualisations, or modifications to the source texts are not omitted, but welcomed insofar as they help to reach a balance between the respect for the author's intentionality, the achievement of equivalent perlocutionary levels, the analysis of the “fixed frame” (Guido 2012) represented by the source-text audiovisual features.

### 3. Transcreation in *Ni No Kuni*

The humorous discourse of *Ni No Kuni* can be described as an implementation of the conventional theories of humour construction to the fantasy worlds in which the video game is set. In particular, a specific application of the conventional cognitive mechanisms identified by Raskin (1985) and developed by Attardo (2001) to Hintikka's (1989) possible-world semantics is identified.

The plot of *Ni No Kuni* in fact develops in two worlds, one representing the place where human beings live, and one being a parallel world inhabited by counterfactual characters such as fairies, talking animals, or human-like creatures. The combination between factual and counterfactual dimensions is typical of Japanese Role-Playing Video Games, the genres of *Ni No Kuni*, and in the latter it is exemplified by Mr Drippy, the fairy who accompanies the child Oliver, the human protagonist. Drippy, on whom this paper mainly focuses, actualises the mixture between the conventional and possible worlds. At first, there is a gender-based cognitive clash since despite being a fairy, he is indicated as a male character. A paradox that triggers an “expected-unexpected” cognitive clash, whose resolution aims at prompting the humorous reaction, and which is increased by mixing some features from the “conventional world” in his characterisation, such as the actual language varieties he employs. Drippy in fact speaks the Osaka dialect in the Japanese versions, which is “assigned to money-oriented, funny” (Hiramoto 2010, p. 237), chatty, food-loving, unsophisticated characters (Carroll 2013); the Welsh accent in the English one, preserving his role of comic relief; and *Romanesco* for the Italian players. The latter transcreative strategy reproduces Drippy's characterisation based on using actual language varieties, but also conveys different traits to the fairy, who is more inclined towards the clumsy and loutish features.

*Romanesco* is only one of the transcreative means that affect the lexical and structural characteristics of the video-game dialogues. In fact, more explanations and creative contributions are included, with both communicative and technical consequences. As for the former, the Italian script seems to be tailored to younger receivers by means of clarifications that resort to popular sayings and additions to describe what the speakers mean. As for the technical characteristics of the subtitles, the increased length of the script has to cope with the temporal and spatial constraints, in *Ni No Kuni* mainly represented by the original score. The Japanese and Welsh dubbers in fact speak fast, and if the spatial constraint is eluded to by including three-line subtitles, sometimes the latter are superimposed for a period of time that could be perceived short depending on the receivers' reading abilities. What is more, the three-line subtitles also entail an amateurish level of translating, because they are associated to the most recent realisations of subtitles, such as the fansubs, a new form made "by fans for fans [...], less dogmatic and more creative" (Díaz Cintas 2005, p. 16).

For these reasons, it is argued that common standards should be identified and pursued also in video-game subtitling, in order to support the players' entertainment and immersion, in opposition to the current situation, where almost any video games seem to select and follow rules of their own in terms of subtitle length and font size.

## 4. Analysis

A corpus of four extracts from *Ni No Kuni* will be analysed in order to detail the lexical and syntactic modifications to the English script, and their consequences in terms of subtitle length and readability (extracts 1-3). Finally, the character of Raj will be introduced, when an alternative translation of one of his cues is provided. Extract 4 will exemplify the adoption of a strategy that accounts for the source linguistic and communicative dimensions and resorts to creative additions in order to replace the Standard Italian adopted in the official translation as well as to prompt equivalent responses from target receivers.<sup>1</sup>

### 4.1. Analysis of Extract 1: Drippy and Swaine in Castaway Cove

During their journey to save Oliver's mother, the child and the fairy reach Castaway Cove, where they meet Swaine, who joins the group. In the following dialogue, the man warns Oliver and Drippy about the dangers of confronting Shadar, the main enemy:

	ENGLISH SCRIPT	ITALIAN SCRIPT	BACKTRANSLATION
DRIPPY:	"And we reckon this Great Sage might have some proper powerful magic, en't it? Ollie boy here's going to need it."	"Noi pensiamo che quer Grande Saggio potrebbe 'nsegnacce quarche magia gajarda. Oliveruccio quarche	"We think that Great Sage might teach us some cool magic. Ollie boy would need some new spell, actually..."

<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented during the Conference "Fun 4 All: II International Conference of Translation and Accessibility in Video Games and Virtual Worlds", organised by the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* (March 13-14, 2014). Though the selected extracts can also be found in Iaia (2015), complementary considerations and information are here provided.

		'ncantesimo novo je farebbe proprio comodo..."	
SWAINE:	"You realize nobody stands up to Shadar and survives, don't you?"	"Vi rendete conto che mettersi contro Shadar equivale a scavarsi la fossa con le proprie mani? Nessuno può batterlo."	"Do you realize that to turn against Shadar is like digging your own grave? Nobody can beat him."

At first, the transcreative modifications are meant to display the phonological features of *Romanesco*, such as the aphaeresis of the vowel "i" in *potrebbe [i]nsegnacce* ('[Swaine] could teach us') and *quarache [i]ncantesimo* ('some spell'), along with the substitution of 'l' with 'r' in *quarache* (instead of *qualche*, 'some'), or *quer* instead of *quel* ('that'). Secondly, the Italian script is longer than the English one because Swaine's cues are retextualised in order to render their connotative meaning more explicit. This decision may be influenced by considering *Ni No Kuni* as a video game suitable for younger receivers because of its cartoon style. In fact, even though both scripts preserve the illocutionary dimension, namely to warn against Shadar, the transcreative utterances resort to an Italian saying that conveys the same message with a less dramatic tone, while simplifying the communication of the speaker's will, by means of a less bitter rendering.

If on the one hand the explanation of Swaine's intent may avoid misinterpretations, on the other, the process arouses concerns in terms of readability. Since the Italian subtitles have to follow the English or Japanese soundtracks (according to what the players select), the actors' fast way of speaking leads to superimposition times that may have to be short due to the amount of script to be included in the subtitles, thus affecting the receivers' "experience" (intended here as "entertainment") and missing one of transcreation's targets, since some parts of the story may not be grasped, unless the players know English or Japanese.

#### 4.2. Analysis of Extract 2: Drippy in Al Mamoon

Al Mamoon is a town in the desert that is famous for its milk-pouring fountains and for its hallmark fruits, the "babanas". Oliver does not know the fruit, so Drippy introduces the qualities of babanas, whose aroma fascinates the child:

ENGLISH SCRIPT	ITALIAN SCRIPT	BACKTRANSLATION
DRIPPY: "That's the babana, en't it? Babanas are what Al Mamoon's famous for, see? You've never eaten a fruit like it. Gorgeous, they are."	"Dev'esse' l'aroma delle babane. 'E babane so' er vanto de Muccakesh. So' sicuro che nunn'hai mai mangiato 'n frutto bono come 'na babana... Quando l'addenti 'e papille gustative sparano i fochi d'artificio."	"It must be babanas. Babanas are the source of Al Mamoon's pride. I'm sure you've never eaten a fruit as tasty as a babana... When you try them, your taste buds explode."

Before examining the lexical and syntactic features of Drippy's cues, let us consider the Italian rendering of "Al Mamoon". Transcreation in *Ni No Kuni* is also in the reformulations of people's, towns', and spells' names. For example, Al Mamoon becomes Muccakesh, a term that modifies the surface dimension, but which conveys the connotative dimensions of the English script nonetheless. That is to say, its ending in "akesh" is reminiscent of Marrakesh, a name of another city in the desert, whereas the presence of "*Mucca*" ('cow') preserves the connection to the milk coming out from the fountains. Such dimensions are also conveyed by the English name, where "Al" may remind one of an Arabian city, or a city in the desert, and "Mamoon" brings to mind cows, by means of a cognitive and onomatopoeic association to sound they make.

With regards to the Italian subtitles, their greater length is again determined by the differences in Drippy's utterances. In particular, the transcreative script makes the fairy's intentionality more accessible to the players by means of the Italian saying *essere il vanto di...* ('to be the source of pride'). What is more, "*Quando l'addenti...*" adds an explanation move that is not present in the English versions, but which fits Drippy's characterisation as a clumsy character, due to his speaking *Romanesco*. The syntactic and phonological properties of the language variety are however reproduced: consider, for example, *So'* and *nunn'hai*, respectively modifying the verb *sono* ('they are') and the sentence *non hai* ('you have not'). At the same time, the extract above exemplifies that transcreation may also consist in reformulating the original structural characteristics, for the question tags are omitted and replaced by declarative sentences.

Finally, the reformulations and inclusions entail technical consequences as well, for three-line subtitles are displayed, leading to concerns in terms of readability because of the temporal constraints represented by the original soundtrack, and further exemplifying the lack of standard rules in video-game subtitling.

### 4.3. Analysis of Extract 3: Drippy's Comment to Errand #047

Errands in *Ni No Kuni* are side missions that players can activate and accomplish in order to level up, or to gain rewards that could help them. In errand #047, Drippy and Oliver have to persuade some talking birds to go back to their master. After the last group of birds is convinced, the fairy comments on their success:

	ENGLISH SCRIPT	ITALIAN SCRIPT	BACKTRANSLATION
DRIPPY:	"Tidy! Let's go back and see Pidgeon boy then, shall we? I bet he'll have a nice thank-you for us."	"Gajardo! Tornamo dar piccionaro, daje! Scommetto che ce ringrazierà co' tutto 'er cooore. Wah ah ah! Bona, questa, eh?"	"Great! Let's go back to the <i>piccionaro</i> , come on! I bet he'll thank us with all his heart. Wah ah ah! Great joke, isn't it?"

The different length of the target version does not affect readability, since the extract above does not come from a non-interactive clip, but from one of the in-game dialogues whose turns can be scrolled by players when they push a button on the controller. Yet, its analysis still helps to outline how source versions are only seen in transcreation as a sort of initial basis to be modified and adapted according to the translators' top-down interpretations. In particular, extract 3 confirms that the transcreative script resorts to the stereotypical connection of *Romanesco* in the Italian translation of humorous discourse to

clumsy, loutish people who may also mock other speakers. Drippy, in fact, exemplifies such features, which are shared by other characterisations in films and sitcoms with comparable types of humorous discourse, and even in video games with a similar cartoon style, like O'Chunks, the Monty Moles, or Quina, from the *Super Mario* and *Final Fantasy* series (Iaia 2015).

As for the cues above, the influence of the target linguacultural background in the production of the transcreative script is reflected by replacing lexical and syntactical equivalents with diatopically- and diastratically- marked exclamations, such as *Gajardo*, and nouns, like *piccionaro*, as well as by including creative contributions that insist on a socio-cultural construction of humorous discourse. In the English version, humour is in a fairy being concerned about getting gifts; in the transcreative script, even though this basic semantic dimension is preserved, it is enhanced by the inclusion of *cooo* in *cooore*, a creative inclusion that suits Drippy's Italian characterisation, for he resorts to the expression that the talking birds adopt in the previous interactions. The birds thus become the butt of one of the fairy's jokes, and the final acknowledging move, which is not present in the English script, confirms the stereotypical representation of a loutish character who is pleased about his sense of humour. This eventually exemplifies that once translators attain their interpretations, the linguistic, pragmatic and structural features of the original utterances are modified to fit the cognitive basis of the transcreative versions.

#### **4.4. Analysis of Extract 4: Raj Mahal**

Raj Mahal is a man found in Al Mamoon, who prepares and sells curry, and whose language is characterised by a typically Indian accent and way of expressing himself. His visual and linguistic characterisations therefore confirm the cognitively-incongruous contrast prompted by characters conforming to "actual" schemata in the possible world of the video game under analysis. Anyway, the linguistic part of the man's characterisation is not rendered in the Italian version, since the adoption of the standard language variety neutralises the presence of the man's accent.

A translation strategy resorting to a different variation of Italian is thus proposed, arguing that it is possible to exploit the creative retextualisations or additions without altering the source illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions. In other words, a balance is advocated between the freedom transcreators have and the search for equivalence – which should be one of the main aims of translation processes – focusing on the respect for the source semantic and functional dimensions. What is more, the alternative translation proposed below results from a multimodal analysis of the English script, since an equivalent characterisation is purportedly attained when the source-text multimodal construction is interpreted and adapted for target receivers, multimodality being considered as an important part of the conveyance of the semantic dimensions of audiovisual texts (Iaia 2015, pp. 174-177). As for extract 4, it is argued that the presence of subtitles only in the Italian version may not allow a correct interpretation of Raj's non-native speaker status, and that therefore the alternative translation should opt for a sort of multimodal compensation for the lack of the target-language acoustic score in order to help those Italian receivers that can only read the man's utterances, and who may not know English or Japanese.

In opposition to the standard variety, a scripted type of Italian lingua-franca variation (ILF) is thus adopted, whose features follow specific linguistic and functional criteria. As for the former, lexical and syntactic deviations are included to characterise the speaker's utterances, such as the omission of subject and articles, or the inclusion of the expression *più eccellente* (which is a marked form in Italian), which interact with the



visual representation of someone from another country:

ENGLISH SCRIPT	ITALIAN SCRIPT	BACKTRANSLATION
<p>RAJ: “According to the recipe, it is a complex and refined curry made with the tenderest and most succulent beef. [...] If you gather the ingredients for me, you will have the honor of being the first to taste the <i>tikka mahala</i> since ancient times! [...] Thank you! You are a most excellent and helpful young fellow!”</p>	<p>“Secondo [la] ricetta, è [un] curry complesso e raffinato fatto con [la] carne più tenera e succulenta. [...] Se trovi [gli] ingredienti, avrai [l’]onore di assaggiare <i>tikka mahala</i> da diverso tempo! [...] Grazie! Tu [sei] un ragazzo più eccellente e volenteroso!”</p>	<p>“According to [the] recipe, [it] is a complex and refined curry made with [the] most tender and succulent beef. [...] If [you] find ingredients, you will have [the] honour to be the first to taste [the] <i>tikka mahala</i> for ages! [...] Thank you! You [are] a most excellent and helpful fellow!”</p>

The selection of the scripted ILF variation is the result of a creative and multimodal type of source-script analysis, according to which the translators’ reception is affected by the linguistic and audiovisual actualisation of the original semantic dimensions. At the same time, the linguistic deviations and the substitution of the standard variety exemplify that the creative contributions are welcomed, insofar as they aim at pragmatolinguistic equivalence between source and target scripts, without increasing the original length or providing different characterisations. This translation strategy originates from a different cognitive construct of receivers, according to which both younger and adult people may play the video game under analysis, whereas not all the players understand English and Japanese, which is needed to get a multilingual interpretation of the original illocutionary level, when the source-language acoustic score and the target-language written translation interact.

## 5. Audience Reception

The analysis of the audience reception of the Italian transcreative script is based on the comments players have posted on *YouTube* while watching some playthrough and walkthrough videos, such as the one from errand #047,<sup>2</sup> and on their discussions on dedicated online forums.<sup>3</sup>

The players’ opinions suggest that two groups could be identified, the first in favour of the inclusion of *Romanesco*, and the second against such transcreation strategy. As for the former, some video-game players say that Drippy’s language makes them die laughing (“*mi fanno morire*”). On the other hand, those who criticise the inclusion of *Romanesco* think that it is an absurd and obscure choice, which spoils the atmosphere (“*mi ha rovinato l’atmosfera*”) and provides stereotypical representations that are not enjoyed

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMqcQHNhYJg>.

<sup>3</sup> Consider the following websites: <http://www.it.namcobandaigames.eu/community/discussioni/perche-tradurre-in-romano-i-dialoghi-di-lucciconio/year/2013/month/01/day/29>; <http://theshelternetwork.com/ni-no-kuni-la-minaccia-de-er-re-de-fate>.

by everyone. In particular, one player wonders whether this translation strategy entails that *Romani* (the people from Rome and its area, who are expected to speak *Romanesco*) are all coarse and loutish (“*significa che tutti i romani sono rozzi, [...] e burini*”) like Drippy, indeed confirming that the inclusion of specific diatopically-/diastratically- marked (mis)representations does not always activate the intended perlocutionary dimensions, even when the linguacultural background is shared. What is more, the analysis of the audience reception also confirms the readability issues highlighted during the analysis, since it is said that it can be too much work (“*diventa macchinoso*”) to read subtitles in *Romanesco*.

It is also important, though, to realise that the video-game audience is experienced and more “active” if compared to the other audiovisual text-types, since they have the possibility of accessing foreign versions of the same titles, thus comparing the various scripts. In this sense, the analysis of the players’ opinions also proves that a part of them is acquainted with the theoretical discussions and practical realisations of game localisation, for it is acknowledged that video games like *Ni No Kuni* are localised, not translated (“[*Ni No Kuni*] è stato localizzato, non tradotto”). At the same time, the video-game audience is also made up of people who know the strategies of construction and translation of the humorous discourse in specific genres: as another of the players who comment on the Italian version of *Ni No Kuni* says, the inclusion of *Romanesco* recalls *Final Fantasy IX* (another video game where several Italian diatopic/diastratic varieties were used – Iaia 2015). This brief investigation shows that video-game receivers are a specific subtype of AVT audience, which presents a mixture of traits that has to be considered when producing target texts, and it is also here argued that the freedom given by transcreation should not be seen as an alibi for arbitrary source-text retextualisations.

## 6. Conclusions

This paper has enquired into the lexical, structural and functional features of the Italian version of the video game *Ni No Kuni*. By focusing on the character of Mr Drippy, the adaptation of a cognitively-incongruous humorous discourse has been examined, detailing the linguistic and technical characteristics of the target script entailed by the inclusion of *Romanesco* and the construct of implied receivers. As for the former, the lexical and structural changes have been identified, as well as the explanations and simplifications of the speakers’ intents; as for the latter, the increase in the target-script length has been questioned, as eventually arousing concerns in terms of readability, due to the clash between the three-line subtitles and short superimposition times. In opposition to the conventional transcreation strategies, a different approach has been proposed for the character of Raj, so as to exemplify that a multimodal analysis of source scripts may support the balance between the creative adaptations aimed at the receivers’ entertainment and the respect for the linguistic and semantic dimensions of source scripts. Finally, the analysis of audience reception has confirmed that a part of the video-game audience is experienced and not always content with the transcreative strategies that alter the source-text characteristics, and instead demand different approaches to game localisation.

Further research may help in this sense, enquiring into the realisations of transcreation in other video games, to identify the common features and approaches to the translation of the text types under analysis and the presence of ideological connections between their genre and the translation strategies; proposing alternative strategies for equivalent source-text retextualisations, in order to support the progress of the scholarly discussion on the state of the art and the possible developments of game localisation; and

investigating the audience's reception on a larger scale, to provide other criteria for a different cognitive representation of implied receivers underlying the production of target versions.

## References

- Attardo S. 2001, *Humorous Text: A Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin/New York.
- Austin J.L. 1962, *How to Do Things with Words*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Bernal Merino M. 2006, *On the Translation of Video Games*, in “The Journal of Specialised Translation” 6, pp. 22-36.
- Carroll T. 2013, *Language Planning and Language Change in Japan: East Asian Perspectives*, Routledge, London.
- Chandler H.M. and O'Malley Deming S. 2011, *The Game Localization Handbook*, Jones and Bartlett Learning, Burlington.
- Consigli P. 1998, *Humour in Italy*, in Ziv A. (ed.), *National Styles of Humour*, Greenwood, New York, pp. 133-156.
- Di Giovanni E. 2008, *Translations, Transcreations and Transrepresentations of India in the Italian Media*, in “Meta: Journal des traducteurs” 53 [1], pp. 26-43.
- Díaz Cintas J. 2005, *Back to the Future in Subtitling*, in Gerzymisch-Arbogast H. and Nauert S. (eds.), *Challenges of Multidimensional Translation: Conference Proceedings*, pp. 16-32. [http://www.euroconferences.info/proceedings/2005\\_Proceedings/2005\\_DiazCintas\\_Jorge.pdf](http://www.euroconferences.info/proceedings/2005_Proceedings/2005_DiazCintas_Jorge.pdf) (1.28.2016).
- Guido M.G. 2012, *The Acting Translator: Embodying Cultures in the Dubbing Translation of American Sitcoms*, Legas Publishing, New York/Ottawa/Toronto.
- Hintikka J. 1989, *Exploring Possible Worlds*, in Allén S. (ed.), *Possible Worlds in Humanities*, de Gruyter, New York/Berlin, pp. 52-81.
- Hiramoto M. 2010, *Anime and Intertextualities: Hegemonic Identities in Cowboy Bebop*, in “Pragmatics and Society” 1 [2], pp. 234-256.
- Iaia P.L. 2014, *Transcreating Humor in Video Games: The Use of Italian Diatopic Varieties and their Effects on Target Audiences*, in De Rosa G.L., Bianchi F., De Laurentiis A. and Perego E. (eds.), *Translating Humour in Audiovisual Texts*, Peter Lang, Bern, pp. 517-533.
- Iaia P.L. 2015, *The Dubbing Translation of Humorous Audiovisual Texts*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne.
- Kress G. 2009, *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*, Routledge, London.
- Kress G. and van Leeuwen T. 2006, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, Routledge, London.
- Mangiron C. 2007, *Video Games Localisation: Posing new Challenges to the Translators*, in “Perspectives: Studies in Translatology” 14 [4], pp. 306-323.
- Mangiron C. 2010, *The Importance of not Being Earnest: Translating Humour in Video Games*, in Chiaro D. (ed.), *Translation, Humour and the Media*, Continuum Publishing Group, London, pp. 89-107.
- Mangiron C. and O'Hagan M. 2006, *Game Localisation: Unleashing Imagination with 'Restricted' Translation*, in “The Journal of Specialized Translation” 6, pp. 10-21.
- Nielsen S.E., Smith J.H. and Tosca S.P. 2008, *Understanding Video Games: The Essential Introduction*, Routledge, London.
- Nord C. 1991, *Text Analysis in Translation. Theory, Methodology and Didactic Applications of a Model of Translation-relevant Text Analysis*, Rodopi, Amsterdam.
- Pedersen D. 2014, *Exploring the Concept of Transcreation – Transcreation as 'more than Translation'?*, in “Cultus” 7, pp. 57-71.
- Perego E. e Taylor C. 2012, *Tradurre l'audiovisivo*, Carocci, Roma.
- Rappoport L. 2005, *Punchlines: The Case for Racial, Ethnic and Gender Humor*, Praeger, Westport.
- Raskin V. 1985, *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*, D. Reidel, Dordrecht.
- Reiss K. and Vermeer H. 1984, *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie*. Niemeyer, Tübingen.