A Translation Study on Game Localization from the Perspective of Transcreation: Taking League of Legends as an Example

Ruoshuang YIN, Zhenli YANG
Zhengzhou University of Science and Technology

Abstract: Game localization is a hot word in recent years, which not only studies the game text, but also studies the cultural background, life thinking logic, language expression and emotional resonance of the target language players. In order to make the game software meet the needs of the target market, satisfy the consumer psychology of players and promote cultural communication, it is necessary to make a deeper discussion on the translation strategies of game localization. Transcreation, as the name implies, is to create on the basis of translation, which can make up for the shortcomings of traditional translation method by using imagination and creativity, enable the game players integrate into the game atmosphere quickly and naturally, and help them experience the target language culture while obtaining entertainment. Therefore, this paper is to analyze the localization strategy of League of Legends, a famous international game software from the perspective of transcreation, so as to bring new enlightenment to the study of game localization and further enrich the research results of it.

Keywords: Transcreation; Game localization; League of Legends; Translation strategy

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Since 2015, China has surpassed the United States to become the largest country in the global game market. According to statistics, in the first half of 2020, the number of domestic game users reached 530 million. In terms of both the market size and the number of users, China has become the leader in the world game industry. In recent years, the network game prevails and its contribution to China’s economic development is obvious. With the rapid development of China’s overall economic level and game industry, game makers around the world gradually pay more attention to Chinese market, thus produces a large number of localization demands.

1. Game Localization

Localization refers to the behavior of organizations/individuals to adjust products/services to different places/markets. In Chinese circles, it roughly means
“chinesization”. Therefore, game localization is the adjustment of game content to make it adapt to the environment of the target language.

In China, game localization started relatively late, and up to now academe has not proposed systematic and targeted translation strategies. At present, the localization of game is more market-oriented under the action of economic efficiency and only uses single translation strategy, whose purpose is very obvious, that is to improve its economic value, but the game usually not only provides entertainment, but also has cultural transmission. On the basis of meeting the demand of entertainment, game localization should also integrate of local culture, thus this passage will take *League of Legend* as an example, studying localization strategies of game software so as to completely convey both cultural differences and diversity in games.

2. Game Localization and Transcreation

Localization is not the same as the translation. As for game, translation is the process of translating the text into different languages, which focuses on the basic language processing, but localization not only needs translating language but also pays attention to the cultural background. In dealing with the differences in culture, consciousness and audience’s understanding ability, localization can make more flexible strategies and methods, that is also the core of transcreation.

*(1) An Introduction to Transcreation*

General cognition of transcreation is a creation on the basis of translation, and there has versions origin. The first thing of transcreation was learned from an article written by Wang Xiangyuan (Wang Xiangyuan, 2015). The word “transcreation” appeared earlier in a passage by Li Zhizao, a translator in the late Ming Dynasty. Wang Xiangyuan has a high evaluation of transcreation. He believes that transcreation, that is creative translation, especially plays an important role in literary translation. The very beginning, because of the flexibility of transcreation methods, translators who are not good at foreign languages usually undermine fidelity to the original text, but these translators can make up for the deficiency in the transmission of the original text with their own imagination and creativity because of their profound literary foundation. But there is also a part of translators destroy the original expression too much. We can define them as the category of “destructive treason”. What’s more, Chu Lingyun believed that transcreation should be originated from video game translation in 1980s, because there are too many culture differences, language differences, habit and custom differences between the game world created by game developers and the real world, which made it difficult to translate games with regular methods (Chu Lingyun, 2016). Due to many untranslatability in game translation, the most common way to deal with it is zero
translation or simply omitting, but this practice has completely changed the cultural origins of original story, which leads to a significant reduction of player’s purchase desire. The emergence of transcreation basically solves this problem, and translators can use their imagination and creativity, or integrate into the local culture to form a translation with local characteristics to make up for the shortcomings. It can be said that transcreation appeared at the beginning of translation, but there was no specific concept at that time. Now, after hundreds of years’ circulation, transcreation is applied in various fields once again.

(2) The Core Content of Transcreation

In fact, transcreation still focuses on translation. Translation is the premise of transcreation, and creation is the core content of it. While, this kind of creativity is not just for test, but also for the untranslatable factors, such as cross-cultural elements, religious belief, local customs and so on. In dealing with these inescapable factors, transcreation has a right to speak, because it is a content recreation or adaptation for a specific target audience, rather than just translating existing materials. Transcreation usually refers to conducting translation with some kinds of creativities so as to reach the equivalence on function and effect between SL and TL, but not constrained by the meaning and pronunciation of SL. However, transcreation is not a sheer or fantastical work. Based on the source language, it makes appropriate extensions on translators to have enriched knowledge, bold imagination and extensive creative thinking so that translators could dig out the hidden connotation beyond superficial denotation and add their bold creativity.

In other words, the effects of transcreation depend on the translator’s imagination and creativity, as well as the translator’s own interpretation of the relationship between transcreation and original text. Transcreation is oriented towards the target language, with the purpose of better conforming to the language habits and expressions of target language, improving the expression of original text with target language, and conveying the content of original text in a natural and fluent way, while at the same time its flexibility allows the translator to add factors other than the original, making the translation more vivid. That is to say, it is easy for the target audience to understand the content to be conveyed, so as to resonate. Therefore, transcreation is not necessarily faithful to the original text. Its main purpose is to meet the needs of the target audience. On the basis of clearly conveying the meaning of the original text, any cultural or other factors that meet the target audience can be added to make the translation meet the target market.

(3) The Function of Transcreation in Game Localization

The game industry not only belongs to the economic category, but also contains a large number of cross-cultural elements. In order to make players resonate with the game, simple text translation is not feasible. Transcreation seems
to be born for the localization of games since its flexible characteristics can just meet the untranslatable factors in the localization of games. The creation of stories in the game can better meet the needs of the target language market. What’s more, it can also properly add various elements of the target language market on the basis of original products, and deepen the resonance and sense of belonging between the players and the game. This sense of belonging is the mainstay of the development of game industry. In addition, transcreation has played a great role in improving the quality of game localization. The result of transcreation is the combination of originality and innovation consciousness of numerous local translators and writers. Only after repeated deliberation and polishing can the quality of game localization be guaranteed. If every work can be translated and polished by transcreation, game localization will get a qualitative leap.

3. Case Analysis

League of Legends is a multiplayer online competitive game developed by the American Fist Company, which is operated by Tencent company in mainland China. It has been growing for 10 years in China and its localization work has been quite mature. There are many amazing and fantastic translations in it. In addition, Tencent company committed to promoting the development of global e-sports, and hosted all kinds of large-scale events, which are loved by millions of players and formed its own unique E-sports culture. Therefore, this paper will take League of Legends as the research object to analyze the application of transcreation in this game, which mainly includes three aspects: game characters, lines of characters and hero skills.

(1) Transcreation of Game Characters in League of Legends

Among hundreds of characters in League of Legends, the names of many heroes are translated by using transcreation because all these names are created with deep connotations, and only using transliteration or literal translation cannot represent the deep meaning of these characters. For example:

Case 1 Kindred

In League of Legends, Kindred, who is defined as the “God of Death” by the developer and its basic image is wolf soul and sheep soul, has been translated as “千珏” in Chinese.

In the game, the original meaning of kindred is similar and consanguineous. Here it means that both sheep and wolves are “Gods of Death”, and they are advancing and retreating together. It’s not appropriate to translate it simply and literally into “金德里德 (a name in Chinese)” or “家族 (a word means family...
in Chinese), because only using transliteration or literal translation cannot show the characteristics of the role. The reason why Kindred has been translated into “千珏” in League of Legends by using transcreation is because the Chinese character “珏” means two jade are consistent in the dictionary, just in line with the coenosarc image of wolf and sheep, and Chinese character “千” refers to the sheep, since Chinese character “羊” is written by “千” in ancient Chinese character, representing the sheep soul as the main body. Therefore, on the basis of transliteration, using the transcreation theory to translate Kindred’s name can make the game character more vivid and in accordance with its game image, leaving players an imagination when they first see the name.

Case 2 Rakan and Xayah

Rakan and Xayah are two separate heroic roles in League of Legends, which are analyzed together here, because they are recognized as screen lovers. In China, there has an literary quotation about them, so they were translated into “洛” and “霞” in Chinese.

In the game, Rakan and Xayah belong to the same kind of birds, which is closely related to the later transcreation. In the story, in order to revive her own ethnic group, Rakan entered into the territory of human beings and met Xayah in a small town, so they went on the journey together. In translation, Taiwan servers transliterates the two into “刹雅” and “锐空”. Obviously, this simple transliteration can’t express their essence at all. However, the translators of home servers have translated these two game characters by using transcreation and pointed out that maybe the poets of Tang Dynasty had already figured out the name for them as early as more than a thousand years ago. There is a very famous sentence in Preface of Tengwang Pavillion, which is created by Wang Bo, a very famous poet in Tang Dynasty, that is “A lonely wild duck flies with the sunset clouds; the autumn river mirrors the color of the sky.” and its Chinese is “落霞与孤鹜齐飞，秋水共长天一色”.

The translation not only reflects the image characteristics of Rakan and Xayah, but also reflects the close relationship between them. The original image in the story is transformed into the real image in the target language, which resonates with the players. It is a typical way of transcreation to recreate association on the basis of matching with the prototype, so as to meet the needs of the translated context.

Case 3 Khada Jhin, the Virtuoso

Jhin is a killer who pursues perfection. He regards killing as an art and his fun is to control and tease people’s life and death, so it was translated into “戏命师” in Chinese.
Khada Jhin is its name and the localization staff transliterated it directly to Chinese character “金”，the same pronunciation to the original name, and the later title “Virtuoso” originally meant to be an art expert or artist. However, when the translators learned the background of Jhin’s character story, they found that he was totally different from art, or even a little abnormal. So they launched their imagination and creativity again, on the basis of literal translation and story background, integrated the cultural elements of China to translate it into “戏命师”, which means to control and tease people’s life and death. As we all know, opera is a unique element of our country. Here, it also implies that Jhin takes ending the lives of others as a grand opera to show his own artistic aesthetics. This is also a good presentation of transcreation.

(2) Transcreation of Characters’ Lines in League of Legends

The following is the translation of the hero’s lines. In order to enable the players to integrate into the game characters, the hero’s lines should be translated to combine with the local culture and adapt to the game atmosphere under the guidance of transcreation. For example:

Case 4 Xin Zhao: Here is a tip, and a spear behind it.

Literal translation: 这只是一点小意思，之后还有一把枪。

Transcreation: 一点寒芒先到，然后枪出如龙。

It can be seen that literal translation has no charm at all, and the Xin Zhao is a warrior assassin hero, who holds a long halberd. The heroes often sniffed at him before he was seen in battle. The English word “spear” means “矛 or 枪” in Chinese. On this basis, it is easy for localization personnel to associate with a Chinese legend character, Zhao Zilong, who was a valiant general in Romance of Three Kingdom, whose weapon was spear. Combining with the image of Zhao Zilong, creating such a valiant heroic and domineering role lines makes people have a sense of substitution. It is the transcreation that perfectly explains the characteristics of Assassin heroes, concise and wonderful.

Case 5 Zhao Yun: Press the default.

Literal translation: 按下攻击。

Transcreation: 陷阵之志，有死无生。

Zhao Yun is one of the skin names of Zhao Xin. (Here “skin” means another image of this hero in the game.) The literal translation of this line is very pale and weak. Pressing the attack button is just an action, and when the player does this action, it means that the hero has to release skills or fight. At that time life and death
are left out in the battle, so translators think of a sentence in The Annals of San Guo, that is “陷阵之志，有死无生”, which means the soldiers with an attitude of death in battlefield. Compared with the literal translation, it is obvious that transcreation makes this command have more imposing manners and makes game players with burning blood, so as to gain better game experience.

Case 6 Alistar: You must follow.

Literal translation: 你必须跟着我。

Transcreation: 你必须跟着俺。

The image of Alistar is very similar to the image of the Bull Demon King in Chinese traditional culture. Many people may think that this sentence is translated in a common way, but it is not ordinary and the translator should not translate it into “我”, which means you must follow “me” in English, but into “俺” which refers to me with localism. In this point, the localization translator skillfully uses the charm of dialect. Although it’s only a small transcreation measure, it can be seen from here that the translators are meticulous and confident in Chinese culture. They quietly add Chinese elements into it, and give full play to their imagination on the basis of the original text, so as to be more accord with the target market.

(3) Transcreation of Hero Skills in League of Legends

The skill translation of a hero must be in line with the positioning of the hero given by the game developer, reflect the characteristics of the hero, and consider the understanding of the hero in the target language environment. Using the transcreation method, we can find the shadow in the real world according to the things in the virtual world of the game, and then combine the two to create the skill names that conform to the target language expression. For example:

Case 7 The box

Literal translation: 盒子

Transcreation: 幽冥监牢

As we all know, Chinese word “盒子” mainly refers to an object that can be held things, mostly square and covered in Chinese, but in battlefield, such translation is too pale and odd. This skill’s structure is a pentagonal ring, and its effect is to lock the enemy in the wall, so the translator creates it as another Chinese word “监牢”, which means prison in English. In addition, the transcreation “幽冥”, meaning the place where the soul goes after people death in Chinese, is just in line with the image of Thresh, who is a hero with an image of undead in League of Legends. On the basis of literal translation, they add their own imagination to make
the translation more in line with the hero’s role positioning, and at the same time, the players can easily understand the role and ownership of skills, which is also the effect of transcreation.

Case 8 Deadly flourish

Literal translation: 夺命繁荣

Transcreation: 致命华彩

This is one of the skills of Jhin. It is used for long-range shooting. If it hits the enemy who has been injured by the Jhin and friendly forces in the first four seconds, or the enemy is standing on the lotus trap (Jhin’s another skill), it will trigger the effect of imprisonment and provide a movement speed bonus for Jhin. Its translation key is the word “flourish”. The original meaning of this word is prosperity, exuberance and showing-off. The Taiwan serves translate it as “ 致命伏笔 ”, which means a premise that could kill someone in Chinese. It can be seen that the complete dissimilation of flourish is based on the skill function of Jhin. In contrast, the translator of domestic serves thinks that the long-range shooting is like shooting a gorgeous ribbon for Jhin, so they translate it into “ 致命华彩 ”, meaning deadly gorgeous ribbon, which is more fitting for the image of Jhin, and can let the players really integrate into the role of Jhin. So translators created the skill of “ 致命华彩 ”, which not only makes the name of this skill match the hero’s character, but also arouse the player’s emotion.

Through the examples, we can see that the flexibility of transcreation can make the game localization workers give full play to their imagination, make the characters in the game more vivid and specific in front of us, and enable the players to quickly understand the role positioning and skill role of the characters in the game, as well as the lines that can render the atmosphere, and even the novice players can be quickly substituted.

4. Conclusion

This paper makes a deep research on game localization, and takes League of Legends as an example to appreciate the wonderful use of transcreation in game localization. Through these case analysis, we can learn that transcreation can add unique localized cultures to the translation of game characters, not only to spread culture, but also to help people know the characteristics of heroes from their names, character lines and role skills. But there are still some limitations and problems in this study. For example, the flexibility of transcreation is its advantages and also its disadvantages because transcreation is very strict with the cultural background of translators and the scope of their knowledge. Only did the translators know about
different things could they imagine more original and innovative things to make a perfect interpretation. In addition, since each transcreation is the result of repeated deliberation by multiple members of translators, so it takes lot of work, which is not suitable for a wide range of use. What’s more, this article only analyzes one of the large-scale computer games, but there are various types of games, such as single player games, mobile games, web games, fighting games, gunfight games, educational games, leisure games and so on. Each kind of game has its own characteristics, and the aspects that should be paid attention in the localization process are also different. Therefore, there is still a long way for translators to study game localization so as to promote the development of Chinese game industry.

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