Chapter 9

Cultural Transduction and Intertextuality in Video Games: An Analysis of Three International Case Studies

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses the relationship that exists between intertextuality and cultural transduction in video game localization. Whereas the former refers to the dual relationship established between texts and previous texts available to the potential readers and the bridges that are consciously or unconsciously established between them, cultural transduction refers to the conscious process of transforming audio-visual content to suit the interests of a given cultural market. Three case studies are presented to explore the relationship that exists between the place of production, the internal cultural references to other texts within the games and the intended market where the video game is distributed: Finally, the importance of intertextuality as part of the cultural transduction process is highlighted.

INTRODUCTION: THE LOCALIZATION OF VIDEO GAMES

Video games have quickly become the ‘new’ media of interest in terms of their economic worth and impact upon users/players. Economic prospects for video games at large are very high. They are one of the fastest growing areas in the creative industries discourse, and as part of the new media concept, they have shown an international growth of 60% in exports world-wide between 2002 and 2008, largely thanks to developing economies such as China and Mexico (UNCTAD & UNDP, 2010, p. 160).

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This growth applies two pressures directly onto video game creators from the whole globe. On the one hand, they have to generate products that can be easily consumed in the growing market, sometimes including localization processes aimed at making a product understandable within specific markets to ensure that cultural barriers are overcome (Consalvo, 2006). On the other hand, there is internal pressure for video games to develop from local successful media products and cultural capital to ensure internal consumption, or to draw from seemingly universal tropes or successful transnational products, to insert themselves within larger global markets (Yoon & Cheon, 2013).

Though it is not difficult to understand why localization is carried out by all media production companies, we are still unclear of how this localization takes place (Waisbord & Jalfin, 2009). The analysis of the Kingdom Rush series, El Chavo Kart and South Park: The Stick of Truth presented here tries to address this question by engaging with both the ludic and the narrative elements of the products, their relationship with previous media texts and infer the particular cultural capital required by those on the receiving end of the communication process – the players. Furthermore, this chapter endeavors to work towards understanding the decision-making process that is evidenced by the specific uses of intertextual references within these products, following Consalvo’s (2006, p. 134) advice that “only by examining both culture and its production can we better understand the world of culture and its ever-shifting configurations”. Through this analysis we hope to exemplify some of the lessons that can be inferred through close examination of current examples of video games flow and counter flows between various audiovisual markets. The idea is that in the future the conclusions of this analysis added to those of further explorations may yield a set of tools, based on empirical experiences that can be used to better comprehend and develop the industrial practices surrounding the insertion and exchange of audiovisual products. These tools might prove useful to content producers and other professionals involved in content trade, adaptation and production, as well as academics that wish to explore these areas.

LOCALIZATION AND CULTURAL TRANSDUCTION

The concept of localization is used here in its “broader sense, which encapsulates any of a wide range of activities designed to adapt products to the perceived differences between local markets” (Carlson & Corliss, 2011, p. 65). Localization goes beyond translation (Bernal Merino, 2006) and aims at making a media product accepted and understood within specific cultural markets. From this perspective, localization is almost coterminous to cultural transduction.

Uribe-Jongbloed and Espinosa-Medina (2014) developed the concept of cultural transduction to provide a framework to the flow of cultural products that transcend national borders. The framework looks at a variety of elements that interplay in the design and distribution of a product from the onset in a methodical procedure with four aspects:

- **Markets:** Looking at the cultural proximity or distance between the market of the original product –or where it was created – and the insertion markets (see Bicket, 2005);
- **Product:** Analyzing conditions of the product, which may explain its appeal, or lack thereof, when crossing over cultural borders;
- **People:** Studying the people involved in the process of recognizing, trading and modifying a product to suit specific cultural markets;
- **Process:** Classifying the mechanism through which the transduction is carried out.