We are interested in gamers and how they organize and go about translating games, because we know little about this specific community and their language-related practices in informal settings (Peterson, 2013). Previous studies have covered the more technical aspects of breaking into a game and extracting and manipulating the text therein, also known as hacking or romhacking (Muñoz Sánchez, 2007, 2009; O’Hagan, 2009). But we intend to look into this practice from a more ecological and sociocultural stance. In order to do so, we draw on the theoretical tenets of New Literacy Studies (Barton, 2007; Barton & Lee, 2013) and the methods and techniques from virtual ethnography (Hine, 2015), such as online observation, screenshots, screencast videos.

Our first study focuses on Selo, a 30-year-old gamer who translates games from English into Spanish (Vazquez-Calvo, 2018). He showcases the epitome of a passionate fan of games, having spent large amounts of time playing games during his life. But now, he translates games more than he plays them. We reconstruct the ecology of literacy practices Selo conducts, his process for translating games and how he translates specific language chunks and discuss translation solutions online with fellow gamers from the fandom. Additionally, we are investigating how a recently created group of Catalan-speaking amateur translators conceive and negotiate roles and functions of group members, the objectives and scope of the group, how they can attract or test new members, and how they translate and solve problems like humor in their texts. We will elucidate practical examples from both studies.

Overall, results indicate that gamers develop a very sophisticated set of literacy practices covering digital, language and sociocultural skills motivated by their allegiance to gaming. The translation process they conduct resembles that of professional settings, and surpasses the hacking of the games. They undertake the task of curating their products by making translations public on online forums and responding to other fans’ comments, repairing any translation mistake or negotiating meaning when necessary. This leads to situated and meaningful language learning discussions online. Translation strategies and problems are treated differently according to the respective specificities and objectives of each gamer or community of gamers. Selo, our Spanish-speaking gamer, conducts a more literal translation, because he is concerned with rapidly increasing the number of translations available online in Spanish. However, the Catalan-speaking group of translators care for a more idiomatic and normative rendering in Catalan. Here there is the underlying idea that identity plays a role in how gamers conceive language, language form and usage, particularly when their aim is to promote not only gaming but also language rights.

Contrary to stereotypical portrayals of gamers as solitary and asocial individuals (Milner, 2013), gamers are socially engaged, information-driven individuals committed to contributing to their fandoms through language practices. These practices and the socialization they imply may provide a source of inspiration for language teachers, for instance, in light of recent attempts to debunk misconceptions around translation as a valid pedagogical tool in the language classroom (Council of Europe, 2018).

References


