

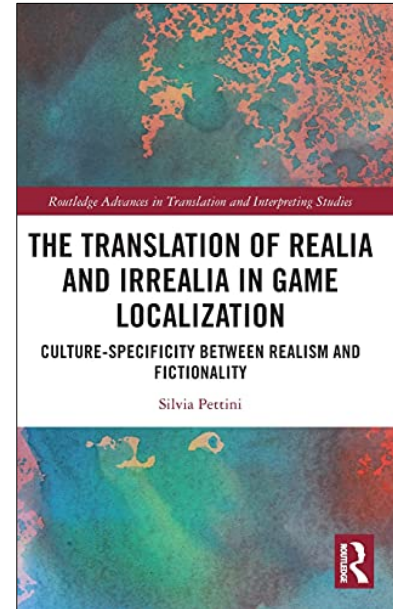
Silvia Pettini, **The Translation of Realia and Irrealia in Game Localization: Culture-Specificity Between Realism and Fictionality**, New York, NY: Routledge, 2022, 231 pp., \$160.00 (hardback), \$48.95 (eBook).

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Research on game localization and translation has gained momentum in recent years. As video games “create alternate worlds whose relationship to the real world can range from extreme realism to utter fantasy” (Dietz, 2006, p. 122), the interlinguistic and intercultural transfer of the real and fictional contents of games brings new challenges for translators, which has not yet been discussed thoroughly. Thus, Silvia Pettini’s pioneering work, ***The Translation of Realia and Irrealia in Game Localization: Culture-Specificity Between Realism and Fictionality***, focuses on video games’ degree of reality or fictionality, aiming to examine how it affects the nature of game texts and, therefore, their localization and translation.

The volume comprises six chapters, including an introduction and conclusion. Chapter 1 presents the commercial and cultural status of video games, highlighting the role localization and translation play in games’ international distribution, with special attention to Italy and Spain as the target locales. Chapter 2 elaborates on the theoretical and practical background of this book’s study. Outlining fundamental concepts of game localization and translation, the author describes the key features of game translation (i.e., space constraints, platform-specific terminology, interactivity and ludonarrative, textual nonlinearity, multitextuality, and playability). Then, regarding video games as the carrier of culture, she interprets the notion of game culturalization and depicts the interaction between the culture in game worlds and the real world. For example, there would be potential cultural issues when the cultural content in games conflicted with that in actual society.

The third chapter is the core of the book. Chapter 3 expounds on the methodological stand of this study, which draws upon video game research and descriptive translation studies. To obtain the textual material for the realism-fictionality corpus, Pettini purposefully selects three English-language games with their Italian and Spanish localized versions, namely, *Medal of Honor Warfighter* (Electronic Arts, 2012), *Battlefield 4* (Electronic Arts, 2013), and *Mass Effect 3* (Electronic Arts, 2012). The three games are homogeneous in terms of genre, main theme, target audience, and audience reception, while varied in the degree of realism or fictionality (i.e., either based on actual events or entirely fictitious). Assuming video games can be storytelling media, this research focuses on game dialogs due to their narrative role in story-driven games. However, the corpus only involves 40% of three walkthroughs, one per game, recorded by individual players. Therefore, I would question the corpus size and whether the collected textual data is comprehensive.



Then, chapter 3 clarifies the definition of *realia* and *irrealia* in this study, which mean “all references to real entities related to real cultures of the real world” and “all references to fictional entities related to the fictional cultures of the game world” (p. 90). Relying on the notion of “cultural context” in game worlds (Rollings & Adams, 2003, pp. 60–80), Pettini proposes a working taxonomy of *realia* and *irrealia* (p. 93), which covers individual and collective references, intratextual and intertextual references, and geographical, ethnic, sociopolitical, and artifactual references. Correspondingly, adapting Pedersen’s (2011) classification, she builds the taxonomy of translation strategies for *realia* and *irrealia* (p. 94), ranging from the most foreignizing approach (retention) to more domesticating techniques (transcreation or even omission).

Chapter 4 discusses the linguistic representations and translation phenomena of *realia* and *irrealia*, examining how the degree of realism and fictionality of game contents influences games’ textual material and their translation. Based on the taxonomies established in chapter 3, Pettini illustrates the ways *realia* and *irrealia* manifest themselves in the original English dialogs of the three selected games. Meanwhile, she qualitatively and quantitatively analyzes the translation strategies for different categories of *realia* and *irrealia* in Italian and Spanish localized versions. The findings demonstrate that the textual material of video games depends on the extent to which a game world interacts with the real world, which consequently influences translators’ decision-making process in game localization. According to the analysis, translators tend to need more specialized knowledge when translating the verisimilar content in games, while they need more creativity to deal with the fictional content, which embodies the views of Dietz (2006, pp. 123–124) and Bernal-Merino (2007, p. 3). They would also adopt particular translation methods to convey the implicit meaning or recreate rhetoric and pragmatic effects of the original.

Chapter 5 gives special attention to the transfer of military English in the three selected war-themed shooting games. Pettini explores the highly technical and complex nature of military language, from official terminology to informal military slang, and discusses the original and translated expression of military language in the corpus on the dimension of *realia*, including military titles, clock code, phonetic alphabet, radio communication, and abbreviations. It is found that the translation of this specialized language significantly emphasizes professional knowledge concerning the reality of wars in both the source and target culture, which requires translators’ ability to search for information, use dictionaries, and manage terminology. Moreover, this chapter reveals the role English plays in international military communication as the lingua franca. Notably, both analyses in chapters 4 and 5 indicate that perceptions of the same original textual content might differ between Italian and Spanish players, highlighting the linguistic, cultural, and cognitive differences among target markets.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusion of this study and remarks on future research directions. Briefly, this study confirms that the degree of realism or fictionality of game contents influences the linguistic and translational phenomena in video games. It serves as a starting point for subsequent investigations. In future studies, we should pursue larger-scale linguistic data to expand the corpus and pay attention to game text types other than narrative dialogs and game genres other than military shooters. Furthermore, Pettini points out that nonverbal aspects of the *realia* and *irrealia* are worthy of further discussion. Since video games are “multimodal and multimedia audiovisual products” (p. 178), the game world and the real world can interact through any meaning-making contents besides language information, such as the physical design of game characters, music, and other visual and acoustic references.

The two greatest advantages of this book are its novelty and interdisciplinarity. Pettini's study focuses on the translation issue posed by varying degrees of realism or fictionality across video games, providing new perspectives for game localization and translation studies. Also, it innovatively employs hybrid methods drawing on video game research and descriptive translation studies, shedding light on new approaches for linguistic and translational analysis of video games. Another contribution is that the volume displays the working taxonomy of realia and irrealia based on the cultural setting of game worlds (Rollings & Adams, 2003, pp. 60–80), helping define the role that culture-related references play in game texts. Thus, it is inspirational for research on the culture in video games and game culturalization.

Admittedly, Pettini's work has limitations, mainly in its experimental approach. First, as noted before, the size and nature of the corpus might affect the analysis results. Second, I think there was a lack of detail on the corpus construction in this study. For example, the collection and process of the language material to be analyzed have not been interpreted. Compiling a game corpus can be challenging, owing to the textual nonlinearity and complicated storylines of video games. In the future, the corpus-assisted approach applied in video game research and game translation studies should be further developed.

Overall, *The Translation of Realia and Irrealia in Game Localization* is an enlightening read with a well-motivated focus and novel ideas. It takes an in-depth look at the reality and fictionality of game contents from linguistic and cultural angles, with an interdisciplinary methodology. I believe this book can benefit numerous readers interested in game localization, audiovisual translation, and video game research.

References

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