Serious games localisation. Playability and translation strategies

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Serious Game (SG)

"A mental contest, played with a **computer** in accordance with specific rules that uses **entertainment** to further government or corporate **training**, **education**, **health**, **public policy**, and **strategic communication** objectives." [1]

Screenshot 1: A serious game to improve the implementation of the WHO Surgical Safety Checklist [2]

Playability

Playability is the **properties** and **attributes**, taken as a whole, that define the **experience** of the video game player. Those attributes are **satisfaction, learning, efficacy, immersion, motivation** and **excitement**. [3]

Screenshot 2: GlucoZor a child's serious game in order to understand diabetes [4]

Serious Game Audience

The profile of the user of a serious game is much more defined than that of a video game user.

Checklist audience
✔ Nurse, anaesthetist or surgeon
✔ Does not play for fun, and if the game does not motivate, if it does not present challenges, he or she deems it a waste of time and rejects it.

GlucoZor audience
✔ Child, 8-12 years' old, ill with diabetes
✔ Plays for fun, and if the game is not entertaining, or if he or she does not identify with or understand it, the child will be bored and learning will not take place.

SG Translational Challenges

Videogame [5]
- Interactivity: menus, hyperlink
- Playability
- Culture, image, sound, text cohesion

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Serious game
- Technical terminology
- Written oral register

SG Localisation Strategies

The aim of the serious game is not entertainment but, as with videogames, it has the capacity to lead users, in a way that is fast, concise, efficient and also fun, through a series of predefined actions towards the objective. This capacity to create a convincing personal recreational experience is the playability.

Picture 1: SG localisation problem solving: decision making factors

If "playability is a crucial concept for the translation of a videogame because it affects the players' actual enjoyment of the game experience" [5], it also is for the optimal localization of a serious game. Playability thus becomes a determining factor for the process of problem-solving and of decision-taking [6] of the localization of a serious game.

Motivation and Immersion
In order for there to be motivation and immersion, the player must **identify** with what happens on screen, which is mostly achieved through graphic elements although textual or oral narrative elements also play a part.

A proven motivational factor for graphic elements is realism[7], as with the photographs of the game Checklist.
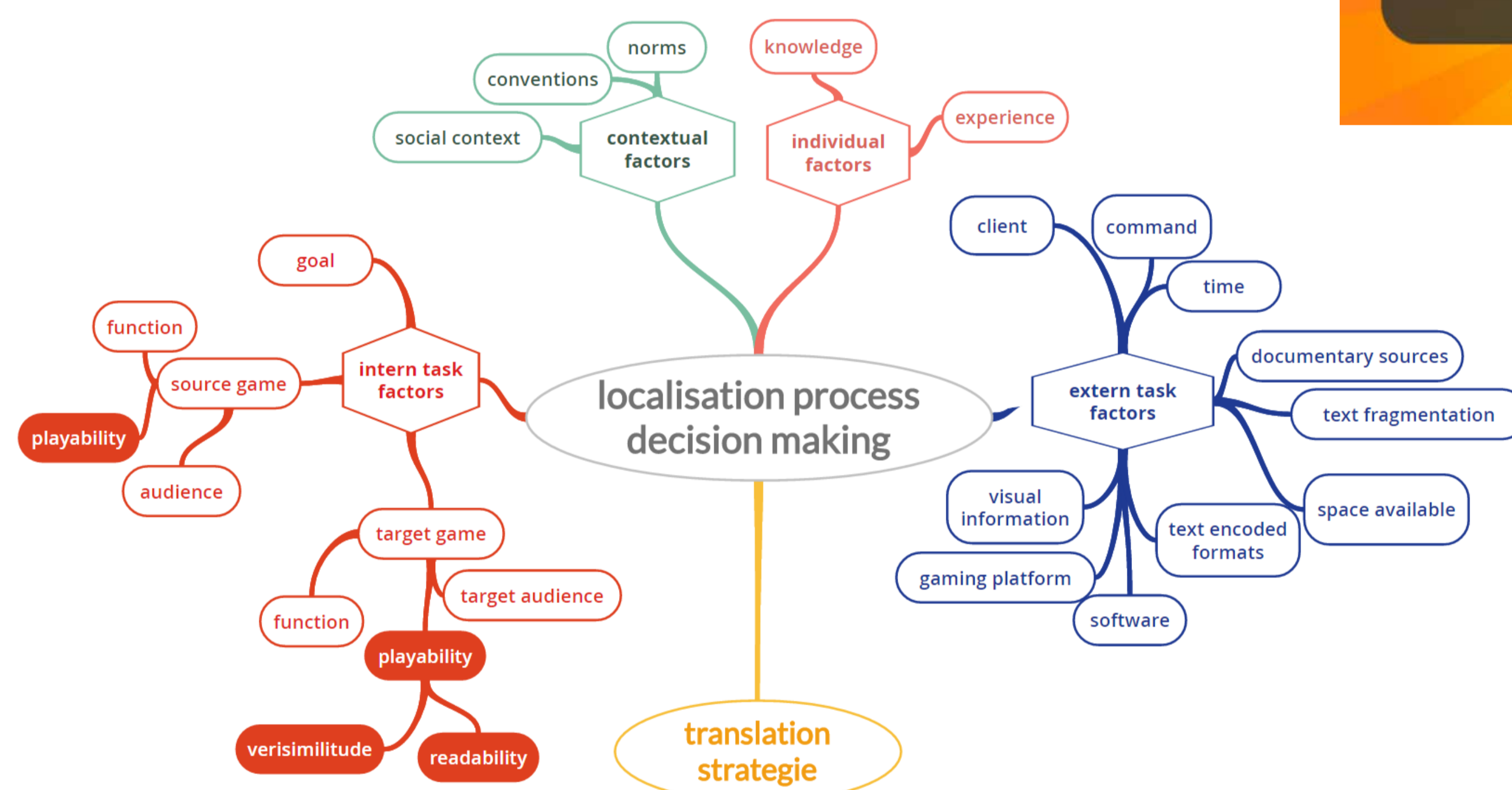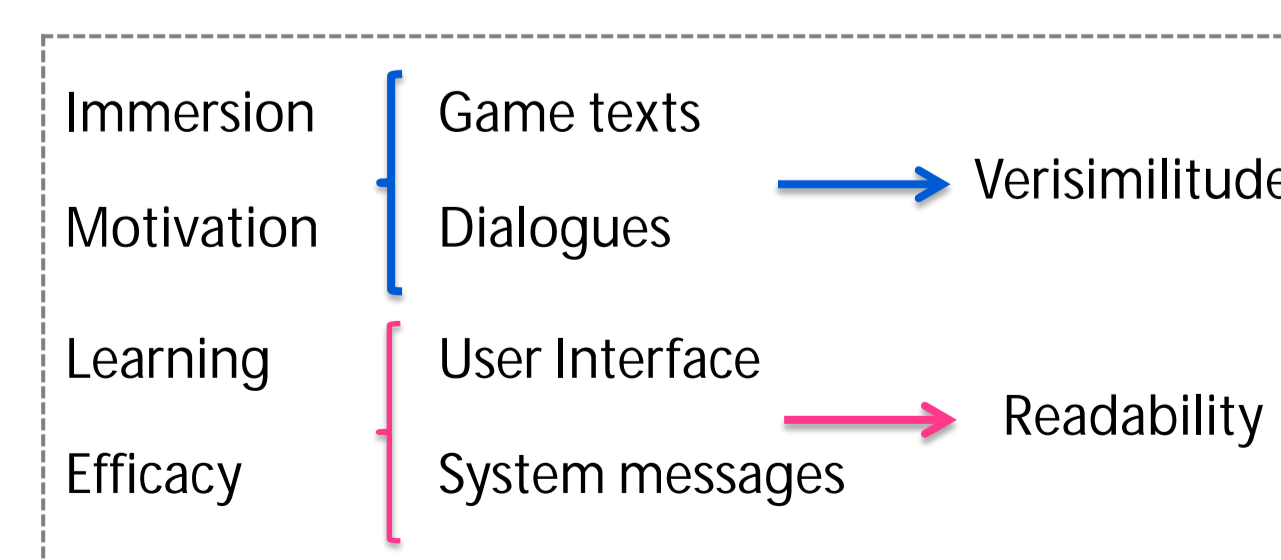

Screenshot 3: Checklist

For a diabetic child to identify with GlucoZor, the animation must act and speak like a child of that age. Therefore the dialogues must be **verisimilar.**

Screenshot 4: GlucoZor

Learning and Efficacy
Interactivity is key in a video game. The player must be able to interact almost intuitively after little training. All the elements of UI (menus, buttons, dialogue boxes), messages and instructions must be clear, concise and **intelligible.**

Immersion	Game texts
Motivation	Dialogues → Verisimilitude
Learning	User Interface
Efficacy	System messages → Readability

Conclusion

The principal objective of a serious game is to learn playing, through imitation or simulation. The user has expectations that do not always coincide with the objectives of the serious game. Thus the elements of the game are designed with the aim of boosting/raising/increasing the commitment and motivation of the user.

The immersion and motivation of the player through identification with what happens on screen is a decisive mechanism for the game experience to be satisfactory and effective. Therefore, playability becomes a crucial variable which will determine the choice of translation strategies.

The translator of a serious game must understand and know the mechanics of the game and its tools in order to have the capacity to select the most appropriate strategies and, therefore, have video game localization skills.

Serious game localization is found in theoretical limbo. It is not specifically specialized translation nor is it purely localization of video games. Localization of serious games, which unites the challenges of video game translation and specialized translation, is a complex process with numerous variables which merit their own part in translation studies.

References

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