

A Study on Game Localization Translation from the Perspective of Communicative Translation Theory: A Case Study of *Black Myth: Wukong*

Ye Wang¹

¹ Tianjin University of Science and Technology, Tianjin, China

Correspondence: Ye Wang, Tianjin University of Science and Technology, Tianjin, China.

doi:10.56397/JLCS.2025.04.07

Abstract

With China's increasing cultural influence in the global market, video game localization has become essential in ensuring accessibility and cultural authenticity. As China's first AAA single-player game, *Black Myth: Wukong* presents unique localization challenges due to its rich cultural and narrative elements. This study applies Communicative Translation Theory (CTT) to analyze its English localization, focusing on translating character names, in-game achievements, and dialogues. Using qualitative textual analysis, the research evaluates strategies such as adaptation, simplification, and idiomatic rendering. Findings reveal both effective localization techniques and areas to be improved, offering insights for refining Chinese video game localization strategies.

Keywords: communicative translation theory, game localization, *Black Myth: Wukong*

1. Introduction

In recent years, China has strengthened its global cultural presence, striving hard to develop various forms of media — including film, literature, and animation — to enhance its soft power. Among these, video games have emerged as an influential medium, introducing Chinese cultures and traditions to the rest of the world. As these games reach global audiences, localization becomes crucial in ensuring accessibility and cultural authenticity. One notable example is *Black Myth: Wukong*, developed by Game Science, representing a landmark in China's gaming industry as its first AAA single-player game. Its localization effectively integrates text, visuals, and interactivity, allowing global players to enjoy the

game while gaining insight into classical Chinese mythology and literary traditions. This study explores how *Black Myth: Wukong*'s English localization adapts its rich cultural and narrative elements, shedding light on strategies for enhancing the global reach of Chinese games.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Localization and Game Localization

O'Hagan & Ashworth (2002, p. 15) defined localization as "the process of adapting a product or service to a specific linguistic and cultural context, ensuring it exhibits the expressive characteristics of that context." According to ISO/TC37, localization involves making a product linguistically and culturally

appropriate for use and sale in the target locale (country/region and language). What's more, localization requires adherence to legal, technical, and professional norms to ensure both accuracy and cultural appropriateness (Wang & Lu, 2015).

Game localization involves translating diverse components such as pop-up windows, tooltips, system messages, and in-game text, with particular attention to preserving narrative and imaginative content (Yan, 2009). The dual objectives of it are to ensure players understand gameplay mechanics accurately and maintain the immersive atmosphere and emotional resonance of the original text.

In the aspect of linguistics and translation, previous studies have explored deeply from many angles, emphasizing the importance of culturally appropriate translation strategies and multimodal integration to enhance player engagement. Bai & Yuan (2023) analyzed common translation strategies in English-to-Chinese game localization, highlighting the necessity of cultural adaptation while noting a lack of industry-wide representation and practical implementation. Similarly, Chen (2021), using multimodal discourse analysis, examines *Genshin Impact* and emphasizes the integration of text, visuals, and audio to maintain narrative coherence and player immersion. Some scholars applied translation aesthetics, demonstrating that transliteration and free translation effectively preserve linguistic nuances while enhancing emotional resonance through poetic expressions (Hao, 2022). Sun (2024) employed ecological translation theory in *Honkai: Star Rail*, advocating a “three-dimensional transformation” approach that balances linguistic, cultural, and communicative adaptation.

While these studies provide valuable perspectives, they often focus on specific cases without establishing a systematic framework for strategy selection. Additionally, few studies have comprehensively addressed how multimodal elements interact in localization, highlighting the need for a more holistic and adaptable localization approach.

2.2 Communicative Translation Theory

Peter Newmark first introduced Communicative Translation Theory (CTT) in *Approaches to Translation* in 1981 and later refined it in *A*

Textbook of Translation (1988), where he clarified the differences between communicative translation and semantic translation. Communicative translation aims to produce an effect on the target audience that is as close as possible to that of the original audience, focusing on readability and natural expression. In contrast, semantic translation strives for linguistic accuracy, maintaining the original text's structure and meaning as precisely as possible.

Newmark categorized texts into different types, each aligning with a specific translation strategy. Expressive texts, such as literature and poetry, require semantic translation to preserve artistic and stylistic nuances. In contrast, communicative translation is more effective for informative and vocative texts, such as advertisements, public notices, and video games, where conveying intent and audience engagement is more significant. As video games function as multimodal texts that integrate narrative, interaction, and audiovisual elements, their localization necessitates a communicative approach to ensure a seamless and culturally resonant player experience. Therefore, communicative translation is the preferred strategy in game localization. For instance, in the study of Wang (2023), the scholar studied the localization of *Detroit: Become Human*, showing that communicative translation enables concise, idiomatic expressions that preserve meaning and cultural nuances, especially effective for narrative-driven games.

Recent studies on *Black Myth: Wukong* have explored various localization strategies but have yet to fully apply communicative translation theory. Ma (2024) analyzed the game through ecological translation theory, focusing on cultural adaptation and emotional resonance. Lu (2024) examined the translation of culturally loaded terms, advocating strategies such as transliteration and creative translation to retain cultural depth. The study pointed out that by prioritizing functional equivalence to achieve audience engagement, the localization not only preserves cultural authenticity but also enhances player immersion.

3. Research Design

This study examines the localization of *Black Myth: Wukong* and examines how communicative translation theory can improve the English translation of key in-game elements.

The following three questions are to be addressed:

- 1) What are the key elements in the localization process of *Black Myth: Wukong* and what strategies are employed for those key game elements?
- 2) How can CTT be used to assess the effectiveness of these strategies, identifying successful practices and areas for further refinement?
- 3) What insights can the localization of *Black Myth: Wukong* offer for the localization of similar video games?

To address these questions, this study adopts a qualitative approach, combining textual analysis and case studies. It examines selected character names, in-game achievements, and dialogues to evaluate their English translations in terms of cultural fidelity, readability, and player engagement. The study compares the original Chinese text with its English localization, assessing the effectiveness of communicative translation strategies such as adaptation, simplification, and idiomatic rendering. By applying Communicative Translation Theory, this research aims to develop localization strategies that balance cultural authenticity with accessibility, offering insights for more effective game localization practices.

4. Research Findings

4.1 Character Names

In the game localization, translating character names is a critical task that goes beyond merely conveying physical traits and personality. It not only involves accurately conveying the physical traits and characteristics of characters but also preserving the cultural nuances inherent in the original language. A well-executed translation not only prevents cultural misunderstandings but also enhances player immersion and comprehension. The translations of character names in *Black Myth: Wu Kong* offer insightful examples.

Example 1:

Source Text: 黑熊精 (Black Bear Monster)

Target Text: Black Bear Guai

In translating 黑熊精, the translator employs a strategy that combines literal translation with transliteration. "Black Bear" directly reflects the physical appearance of the character, allowing the target audience to easily understand its

animalistic nature. Instead of translating "精" as "monster," which often conveys a frightening or destructive connotation in Western cultures, the translator chooses to use "Guai," a transliteration that preserves the cultural significance of "妖怪" (Guai) in Chinese folklore. In this context, such creatures are often depicted as mysterious, shape-shifting entities that can be both beautiful and grotesque. By opting for "Guai," the translation retains the cultural context and avoids misinterpretation among English-speaking players. This choice enables players to appreciate the concept of "妖怪" within its cultural framework.

From the perspective of communicative translation theory, this approach achieves cultural equivalence by maintaining the original connotations in the target language. It also ensures functional equivalence, allowing players to grasp the name's literal meaning while preserving its symbolic depth. Through transliteration, the translator effectively communicates the cultural symbol of "妖怪," allowing players worldwide to engage with the character's complexity and mystique.

Example 2:

Source Text: 亢金龙 (Exalted Golden Dragon)

Target Text: Kang-jin Loong

The translation of 亢金龙 follows a similar pattern of combining literal translation and transliteration. "Kang-jin" directly translates "亢金," preserving the celestial and astrological references inherent in the original name. For "龙" (dragon), the translator chooses "Loong" instead of the commonly used "Dragon," a deliberate choice that acknowledges the profound cultural differences in dragon symbolism between Chinese and Western traditions. In Chinese culture, dragons symbolize auspiciousness, authority, and nobility, while in Western cultures, they are often associated with evil and destruction. By using "Loong," retains the dragon's positive connotations in Chinese culture, helping international players correctly interpret its role and symbolic value in Chinese mythology.

This translation method effectively achieves cultural equivalence, ensuring the name is both authentic and accessible to the target audience. The use of "Loong" enhances functional equivalence by conveying the dragon's unique cultural significance, enriching the global gaming experience and fostering a deeper

understanding of Chinese mythological elements.

Therefore, in *Black Myth: Wukong*, translators often employ a “literal translation + transliteration” strategy to convey both the literal and cultural meanings of character names. This approach minimizes cultural misunderstandings and aligns with the target language’s expression habits, enhancing acceptance and appreciation of the target culture. By retaining original cultural connotations through transliteration, the translation creates a more immersive gameplay experience, allowing global audiences to better understand and enjoy the rich cultural backgrounds embedded in the game.

4.2 Game Achievements

Achievements in games refer to in-game rewards or titles that players earn upon completing specific tasks or reaching certain goals within the game. These achievements are often named using concise, impactful four-character phrases that encapsulate deep symbolic and cultural significance. They reflect the game’s storyline and atmosphere but also enhance players’ sense of accomplishment and emotional connection. The achievement names in *Black Myth: Wu Kong* utilize distinct four-character structures, effectively conveying rich cultural meanings through careful translation.

Example 3: Cultural Adaptation by Citing Classics

Source Text: 下降尘凡第一难 (The First Trial of Descending into the Mortal World)

Target Text: Home is Behind

The translation “Home is Behind” draws upon a line from *The Lord of the Rings*: “Home is behind, the world ahead.” By referencing this well-known Western literary classic, the translator not only enriches the cultural depth of the achievement but also enhances its relatability for players familiar with the source material. “下降尘凡第一难” conveys the notion of leaving one’s homeland and confronting life’s challenges. The reference to *The Lord of the Rings* allows Western players to easily grasp the emotional and symbolic meaning of the achievement, as the poem is widely recognized and symbolically rich. This method exemplifies cultural adaptation within communicative translation, effectively leveraging Western

literary symbols to enhance emotional resonance and acceptance among the target audience.

Example 4: Maintaining Rhythm and Rhyme

Source Text: 龟蛇盘结二十八难 (The Twenty-Eighth Trial of Tortoise and Snake Entwined)

Target Text: Shell and Scales

Source Text: 熟门熟路七十难 (The Seventieth Trial of Familiar Paths)

Target Text: Treaded Tracks

Both translations retain the concise, impactful structure of the original four-character achievement names, preserving their rhythmic quality. The translated achievement names are enhanced with alliteration and sound repetition, improving their memorability and ease of pronunciation.

In the case of “龟蛇盘结二十八难” translated as “Shell and Scales”, which preserves the symbolic imagery of the tortoise and snake while fitting smoothly into English. The repetition of the “s” sound also enhances the rhythmic flow of the phrase. This approach demonstrates phonetic equivalence within communicative translation, allowing the achievement name to be both symbolic and easy to recall.

For “熟门熟路七十难”, the translation “Treaded Tracks” uses “trod” (meaning well-worn or familiar) and “tracks” (representing paths) together to reinforce the notion of expertise and repetition. Additionally, the alliteration of the “t” sound strengthens the rhythm, making the translation more memorable. This translation successfully preserves the sense of familiarity and expertise from the original, while adhering to English linguistic conventions, thus enhancing pragmatic equivalence.

In summary, when translating four-character achievement names through the lens of communicative translation theory, translators must prioritize cultural adaptation. This can be achieved by incorporating familiar allusions or expressions from the target culture to foster cultural recognition. Additionally, employing phonetic techniques such as alliteration and sound repetition can improve the rhythmic and memorable quality of translations, effectively conveying the emotions and imagery of the original text. Moreover, translators should ensure semantic equivalence by carefully selecting vocabulary that captures the subtle nuances of the source material. These strategies

ensure that the translation is faithful to the original while aligning with the linguistic and cultural preferences of the target audience.

4.3 Character Dialogues

In the process of localizing a game, the translation of character dialogues is crucial, as it directly influences players' understanding of the characters and their emotional connection to the game. By applying communicative translation theory, translators can retain the essence of the original dialogue while seamlessly adapting it to the cultural and linguistic nuances of the target language. This helps players better immerse themselves in the game world and enhances the overall gaming experience.

Example 5:

Source Text: 又有一赤脸神仙冷笑道:“他们哪里是冲着蟠桃来,多是想来拜拜玉帝三清,见见西天佛老,难得找个由头上来走动走动。”

Target Text: A red-faced immortal sneered, “It’s not the peaches they seek, but rather to bow before the Jade Emperor and the Three Supremes, and worship the Buddhas of the West. Such assemblies are scarce pretexts for them to curry favor and bask in the company of the divine.”

The phrase “拜拜” is differentiated into “bow before” and “worship,” reflecting varying levels of reverence for different deities. The idiomatic expression “难得找个由头上来走动走动” is translated as “scarce pretexts for them to curry favor and bask in the company of the divine,” maintaining the original meaning while emphasizing the social motives of the immortals. This translation employs techniques of dynamic equivalence and domestication, adjusting sentence structures to align with English expressions and amplifying implicit meanings. From a pragmatic equivalence standpoint, the translation effectively conveys the sarcastic tone of the immortal, ensuring English-speaking readers understand the humor. Semantically, “curry favor” accurately captures the underlying intent, avoiding potential cultural misunderstandings.

Example 6:

Source Text: 王母正色道:“蟠桃宴何等重大,今日设宴正是预演,该走的流程,都老老实实走一遍。”

Target Text: The Queen Mother spoke with solemn dignity, “The Peach Banquet is no trivial matter. Our gathering today is but a prelude, a

rehearsal of the rites and rituals that must be executed with exactness and reverence.”

In this translation, “蟠桃宴何等重大” is rendered as “The Peach Banquet is no trivial matter,” emphasizing the importance of the event. “预演” is translated as “prelude, a rehearsal,” reflecting both the preparatory and ritualistic nature of the gathering. The phrase “老老实实” is translated as “with exactness and reverence,” preserving the formality and gravity of the original. The translation employs amplification and structural adjustments to ensure natural English flow while maintaining the solemn tone, thereby effectively conveying the Queen Mother’s authority and the significance of the occasion.

Example 7:

Source Text: 瘦猴道:“晴雨不出门,寒风会伤身。”

Target Text: The monkey replied, “I’m not fond of the sun, rain, or chill wind.”

The translation of “寒风” as “chill wind” adds literary flair while maintaining the original cold connotation. “会伤身” is paraphrased as “I’m not fond of,” softening the directness of the original statement. This translation employs paraphrasing and simplification, rendering the dialogue more conversational and accessible. Functionally, it conveys the monkey’s dislike of the weather without simply describing conditions. Culturally, this approach avoids overly formal or literal translations, making the dialogue more relatable to the target audience.

Example 8:

Source Text: 清虚巷东头的小道观里,住着个道士。他自称得了海上仙方,是个妙手回春的道医。却说城中的陈老太爷,富比王侯,如今花甲之年,染了重疾,显出下世的光景来。

Target Text: At the eastern end of Qingxu Alley stood a modest Daoist temple, home to a solitary Daoist. This Daoist professed to have discovered the ancient formula for an immortality pill from the sea, earning him a reputation as a miraculous healer. In the city, there was an old man named Mr. Chen, whose wealth rivaled that of nobility. Now in his sixties, he had fallen gravely ill, showing signs of being near the end of his life.

The term “海上仙方” is translated as “the ancient formula for an immortality pill from the sea,” emphasizing its mystical quality. “富比王侯” is translated as “whose wealth rivaled that of nobility,” adapting it to fit English expression. The phrase “下世的光景” is rendered as

“showing signs of being near the end of his life,” maintaining the literary tone of the original while providing clarity. The translation uses amplification and structural adjustments to ensure natural flow in English, enhancing narrative immersion and ensuring the cultural context is accessible to readers.

Example 9:

Source Text: 生前吃人，死后人吃。

Target Text: Consume those who have consumed.

The verb “consume” is used here with a dual meaning, encompassing both the literal act of eating and a metaphorical sense of devouring, effectively capturing both the literal and philosophical connotations of the original. The phrase “those who had consumed” targets the group that engaged in such acts, structuring the relationship passively for dramatic effect. This translation omits certain elements for conciseness while preserving the original’s philosophical and cautionary implications. The use of “consume” enhances both the literal and literary depth of the translation, fitting naturally within English expression.

Example 10:

Source Text: 葫芦不少，朋友难找。

Target Text: Rare is not the gourd but the friend to drink with.

The word “rare” emphasizes scarcity, while “gourd” retains its cultural symbolism. “Friend to drink with” is an adaptation of the original “知己难求,” conveying the core idea that true friendship is hard to find. The translation uses cultural substitution to maintain key symbols while adjusting for English aesthetic preferences. Through inversion, the translation enhances the poetic quality, preserving the original’s meaning while making it more resonant with English readers. The translation maintains the symbolic value of the gourd while fitting into a poetic structure that enhances understanding.

In this part, it is proved that communicative translation theory helps balance pragmatic, functional, and cultural equivalences, ensuring that translations remain faithful to the source material while being culturally appropriate. Precise word choices convey character personalities and tones, while narrative texts benefit from amplification and structural adjustments that improve readability. Cultural

adaptation through symbol replacement and structural reorganization ensures that content remains both culturally relevant and aesthetically appealing. Translations should aim to be concise and impactful, facilitating faster comprehension of the plot and fostering deeper player engagement with the game.

5. Conclusion

This study applied Communicative Translation Theory (CTT) to the localization of *Black Myth: Wukong*, focusing on character names, in-game achievements, and dialogues. The findings indicate that CTT effectively balances cultural authenticity and accessibility, ensuring that translated content remains engaging and meaningful for international players. Character names require a combination of transliteration and adaptation to retain cultural significance. In-game achievements benefit from culturally relevant adaptations that enhance player motivation and recognition. Dialogues require dynamic equivalence to maintain emotional resonance and fluency in the target language. Collectively, these findings bridge theoretical insights with practical strategies, providing valuable guidance for future localization efforts.

However, some translations, despite their cultural adaptation and creativity, fail to fully capture the depth of the original cultural context. For instance, certain dialogues were simplified or omitted to achieve fluency in English, resulting in a loss of cultural nuances. The key challenge lies in balancing the cultural symbols of the source text with the target audience’s understanding. Overemphasizing fluency at times leads to the omission of essential cultural elements. Additionally, some translations struggle to convey the emotional depth and subtleties of the original text, especially when dealing with materials deeply rooted in culture. Achieving true dynamic equivalence in such texts is a complex and challenging process.

To tackle these challenges, similar game localization projects should prioritize cultural adaptability to ensure that the translation preserves the original culture while being comprehensible to the target audience. Flexible translation strategies — such as blending literal translation with cultural substitution — can be effective in conveying both meaning and emotion. Furthermore, localization teams should aim to enhance player engagement by designing

character names, achievements, and dialogues that resonate with the cultural identity of the target audience. As the field of localization continues to evolve, translators must stay abreast of new theories and methods to continually improve their craft.

Nevertheless, this study is limited in scope, as it does not cover all the aspects of game localization and obtain feedback from real players. These require future research to explore further.

References

- BAI Tian-yu, YUAN Ping-hua. (2023). On E-C Translation Strategies for Video Game Localization. *Journal of Hubei University of Education*, 40, 92-96.
- Chandler, H. M. (2011). *The Game Localization Handbook*. Jones & Bartlett Publishers.
- Dunne, K. J. (2006). *Perspectives on Localization*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Hao Yunqi. (2022). Game Localization Translation from the Perspective of Translation Aesthetics — A Case Study of the RPG Game *Wilderness*. *Modern Linguistics (Hans)*, 5.
- Li Guangrong, Ma Xiaolei. (2020). A Review of Researches on Translation and Localization — A Bibliometric Analysis of the Literature Indexed in John Benjamins Translation Studies Bibliography. *Foreign Language Research*, 699-104.
- Li Guangrong. (2012). The Construction of Academic Discourse on “Localization” Translation Studies Abroad. *Shanghai Journal of Translators*, 14-18.
- Lu Feng. (2025). A study on the Translation Strategies of Culture-loaded words in *Black Myth: Wukong*. *Jin Gu Wen Chuang*, 1, 110-112.
- Ma Yirui. (2024). A study on the Translation Strategies of Game Localization from the Perspective of Ecological Translatology — A case study of *Black Myth: Wukong*. *Frontiers of Pedagogy*, 261-65.
- Newmark, P. (1981). *Approaches to translation*. Pergamon Press.
- Newmark, P. (1988). *A textbook of translation*. Prentice Hall.
- O'Hagan, M., Ashworth, D. (2002). *Translation-mediated Communication in a Digital World: Facing the Challenges of Globalization and Localization*. Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters.
- Sun Qi. (2024). Game Localization Translation from the Perspective of Ecological Translatology — taking collapse: *Honkai: Star Rail*. *Jia Ying Wen Xue*, 21, 104-106.
- Wang Chuanying, Lu Rui. (2015). A study on the norms of localized Translation. *Shanghai Journal of Translators*, 63-69.
- Zhao Ke, Hu Hanwen and Dang Qinran. (2024). On the Language Localization in Exporting Chinese Game Culture from the Perspective of Recontextualization Theory — Taking *Arena of Valor* as a Case. *Journal of Jiangsu University (Social Science Edition)*, 26(6th ed.), 36-46.