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Languaging and Translating Personality in Video Games: A Lexical Approach to *The Sims 4* Psychological Simulation

Abstract

From the perspective of Game Localization (Bernal-Merino 2015, O’Hagan and Mangiron 2013), this paper presents a descriptive corpus-assisted study on the language of personality in *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts 2014), as the psychological dimension of this real-life simulation game represents its distinctive feature (Franklin 2014, Electronic Arts 2014a). The elaborate nature of *The Sims 4* personality trait system has received academic attention, since its mechanics seem to be based on trait theory (Sloan 2015, 209), “a major approach to the study [and assessment] of human personality” in psychology (Villanueva 2010, vii). Accordingly, this paper analyzes how psychological simulation is worded in game texts and examines the features of *The Sims 4* cross-linguistic personality lexicon. The original English trait system is thus compared with the Italian translation in order to explore the linguistic challenges and issues psychological customization poses to localization professionals.

1. Introduction

With many people globally at home and unable to work due to the Covid-19 pandemic, gaming, particularly online gaming, has recorded a massive increase in engagement and revenues during lockdown, as video games have become an invaluable way to safely connect while staying apart (Romano 2020). In order to encourage people to entertain themselves while practicing physical distancing, as Snider (2020) reports, many game companies launched an initiative titled #PlayApartTogether, which was even praised and supported by the World Health Organization.

As psychology professor at Stetson University Chris Ferguson explains (cit. in Stieg 2020), there are psychological reasons, besides the entertainment

factor, why people have drawn their interest to video games in the pandemic: given the difficulty in meeting certain needs in real life, people turn to virtual worlds, and life simulation games like *The Sims* series (Electronic Arts 2000 - Present) prove to be extremely therapeutic. According to Ferguson (Ibid.), these games help people to feel in control over their decisions and goals, they keep people social, since not only players can communicate with other fictional characters within the game world, but they can also connect to other players online. Thus, these simulation games represent a form of escapism, based on the very ordinary lives people can play in the fictional world, which offer them a sense of normality in a real world turned upside down (Ibid.).

As argued by Jane McGonigal (cit. in Owens 2020, online), director of game research and development at the Institute for the Future, “gaming is an incredible act of self-care” because games give players “a sense of agency at a time when most people don’t have any”, they represent “a safe space” because “for many people now, the fantasy is just ordinary life”.

Consequently, it comes as no surprise to learn that the latest episode of the franchise, *The Sims 4* (Electronic Arts, 2014) “has had its biggest year since launch in terms of revenue and engagement,” according to the game’s publisher (cit. in Wilson 2020, online). Moreover, as Wilson relates (Ibid.), some players in *The Sims* YouTube community have started to share gameplay videos reflecting the new reality of the pandemic: they have roleplayed out the pandemic, with Sims following the medical advice of health authorities around the world, being socially distant, wearing masks and undergoing quarantine. After all, comedy and laughter are a great form of stress relief, and that is no joke.

The increase in player engagement recorded by *The Sims 4*, which testifies to the cultural relevance of life simulation in the present day, is not the only achievement to be celebrated in the year of the pandemic. Indeed, 2020 also represents the 20th anniversary of *The Sims* franchise.¹ More relevantly for the purposes of this paper, these games have been distributed in dozens of countries worldwide and translated into just as many languages.² The process

1 Since its launch in 2000, this franchise has sold around 200 million copies globally, generated more than 5 billion US dollars in revenue, and a total population of over 1.6 billion Sims has been created (see Bhavani 2020, Roberts 2020). As regards *The Sims 4*, this episode alone has recorded more than US\$1 billion in revenue and has recently passed 20 million players around the world (Ibid.).

2 *The Sims 4*, for example, is available in 18 different languages.

of game localization, of which translation is a fundamental phase (see Maxwell-Chandler and O'Malley-Deming 2012), has played a major role in the cultural and commercial success of *The Sims* series at global level.

Based on these premises, this paper aims to present the first results of a research project on the localization challenges of life simulation from the perspective of Game Localization.³ However, given the complexity of this franchise, this paper is based on a descriptive corpus-assisted study which focuses on some of the linguistic and translational aspects of *The Sims 4* personality customization, because the psychological dimension of simulation represents the special characteristic of this episode (Franklin 2014, Electronic Arts 2014a).

Section 2 presents *The Sims 4*, with special attention to its complex personality customization system. Section 3 contains background information regarding the psycholexical approach in personality psychology (Ashton 2018, 124-126), which represents a relevant developmental perspective into the language of personality.⁴

Section 4 describes how the personality trait system is worded in game texts and explores the linguistic features of *The Sims 4* personality lexicon in the English source language. Section 5 examines the transfer of personality trait names from English into Italian, offers an overview of the lexical phenomena and challenges they present, and discusses some semantic features of the solutions provided by Italian localization professionals. Finally, some conclusions are drawn in Section 6, while offering potential avenues for further research.

3 In Game Localization scientific literature, little attention has been paid to this franchise. To my knowledge, except for some references in handbooks (Bernal-Merino 2015, O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013) and papers (Fernández-Costales 2011) and a few unpublished theses at university level (Davidson 2011, Dodaro 2014, Eerio 2014), no studies on *The Sims* have been published so far.

4 In this regard, it is worth underlining that this paper does not aim to examine the verisimilitude of personality psychology in the game mechanics or of personality traits in *The Sims 4* system. For these purposes, collaboration with psychology experts is necessary, but beyond the scope of this pilot research. Nevertheless, as will emerge in Sections 4 and 5, given the possibility of making parallels between the 'lexical approach' used in psychology and the lexical approach adopted as a working methodology in this paper, Section 3 aims to provide the reader with a general summary of the context in which trait theory has developed, which draws on the most relevant works on the topic. Indeed, the emphasis placed by psychologists on natural languages and dictionaries in developing personality traits prompted the researcher to analyze data from a lexical and metalexigraphic perspective.

2. *The Sims 4* personality system

The Sims series, originally created by designer and auteur Will Wright, is an extremely popular game franchise which, over its four main titles and numerous expansions and spin-offs, has become a cultural phenomenon by simply replacing monsters with plain humans and proving that ‘real’ life can be simulated by interactive entertainment (Chan 2003, Frasca 2001, Sihvonen 2011). In this sense, *The Sims* is considered as “a landmark in videogame history” (Frasca 2001, online), since it has “proven that the mainstream game market could enthusiastically embrace a game based on the simulation of emotions and people over guns and fighting” (Chan 2003, 1). In other words, millions of players worldwide have fun by creating and managing the everyday lives of simulated people known as Sims and, given the series’ open-endedness, the gaming experiences players co-author may be uniquely personal.

The Sims 4 is the fourth major title in *The Sims* series. It was published by Electronic Arts (EA hereafter) in 2014 and developed by Maxis together with EA in-house *The Sims* Studio as a multiplatform title.⁵ The game has the same fun factor as its predecessors: players create and interact with a series of characters in order to simulate everyday life experiences (Bittanti and Flanagan 2003). Indeed, as Nutt and Railton (2003) remark, this franchise has established real life as a game genre, in the sense that players understand and enjoy the game through their notion of real life, and on this basis they can use the game as a sort of life laboratory to play “with ‘like real life’ narratives” in either realistic or very creative ways (Ibid., 589). In the words of writer Liv Siddall (2019, online), *The Sims* games’ “appeal lies in its close-to-real-life-ness. You pay bills. You load the dishwasher. You make beds. You clean stuff”. The healthier and happier the Sims become, the more enjoyable the game, but players “cannot ‘win’ – there is no credit roll. Your Sims might reach the top of their career ladders, retire with a healthy pension, and die, but the game goes on” (Ibid.).

As already mentioned, the added value of this fourth episode is the psychological dimension of life simulation. As the game’s executive producer Rachel Franklin (2014) explains, while in previous games you controlled the

⁵ *The Sims 4* was initially released for PC and Mac, later including versions for consoles. Since its launch, dozens of expansions and additional downloadable content have been released, but this paper focuses on the base game for PC.

mind and body of your Sims, in *The Sims 4*, for the first time, you “control their hearts”, you decide “who they are. You define your Sim personality” and “this is when the power of our simulation comes into play: personality drives behavior, creating richer stories and the possibilities when you play with life are simply endless”. This is also the main theme of *The Sims 4* player’s guide (Electronic Arts 2014a, 1, emphasis in the original):

The Sims 4 is all about the big personalities and individuality of every Sim [...]. Who they are and how they behave changes the way you play, and changes the lives of your Sims [...]. In *The Sims 4*, it’s not just about WHAT your Sims look like, it’s about WHO they are on the inside that really counts. And all of it is in your hands.

Moreover, Electronic Arts (2014b) offers players the possibility of taking a personality diagnostic to discover which personality matches them best in *The Sims 4*.

In-game, this dimension of personality customization is translated into new options within the ‘Create a Sim’ mechanic: players co-design their Sims by choosing a number of attributes, such as name, gender, age, physical appearance and clothes, voice, walkstyles, etc., and, as regards personality, one aspiration and three traits.

Aspirations are lifelong goals for the Sims and there are ten broad aspiration tracks, namely Athletic, Creativity, Deviance, Family, Food, Fortune, Knowledge, Love, Nature, and Popularity, each branching into further categories. For example, by selecting Creativity as his/her aspiration, the player may be a ‘painter extraordinaire’, a ‘musical genius’ or a ‘bestselling author’. More importantly, personality traits give Sims unique interactions and preferences throughout their life because they define their actions, desires, whims, and emotions. They represent a personality system including 101 traits which, in the mechanics of the game, are divided into three types: customizable traits proper (39), bonus traits (10), and reward traits (52), whose difference lies in the way they can be acquired.

Customizable traits are the traits players can choose from when creating their avatars in order to define what their Sims do or do not enjoy doing, like ‘foodie’, ‘lazy’ and ‘geek’, or how they interact with each other, thus influencing the way they create and maintain social interactions and relationships, like ‘bro’, ‘evil’, and ‘loner’.

Bonus traits are associated with aspirations, meaning that players are assigned bonus traits to fulfil aspiration goals more easily. For example, if the player selects ‘bodybuilder’ as his/her Athletic aspiration, s/he will acquire ‘high metabolism’ as a bonus trait.

Lastly, reward traits can be either acquired by completing aspirations or purchased with satisfaction points. The latter can be earned by either fulfilling whims or achieving aspirations’ single milestones. Examples of reward traits include ‘long-lived’ or ‘gym rat’ for the Athletic aspiration, ‘speed reader’ for Knowledge, ‘great kisser’ for Love, and ‘super green thumb’ for Nature, among many others.

The complex nature of *The Sims 4* personality system has attracted academic attention. As Game Art and Design scholar Robin Sloan (2015, 209) explains, although “the simulation of human personalities is arguably the most interesting quality of the characters” in the whole series, in the sense that all games “have an explicit focus on character behaviors and personalities” (Ibid., 208), *The Sims 4* “introduced the most advanced set of behavioral variables to date” which allow players to design “a complex personality for their characters” (Ibid., 209).

According to Sloan (Ibid.), “we can recognize personality theories” in the customization system of *The Sims 4*, which seems to be informed on those psychological principles of personality which make game characters more realistic and believable, so that players can relate to, empathize and identify with them more easily (Ibid., 81). Sloan refers to personality psychology and trait theory, a very large area within the science of psychology, aimed at investigating such a complex psychological entity like personality on the basis of traits. The latter are “consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, or actions” which, “*by definition*, describe how we differ from one another, and the sum of these differences define our uniqueness” (Johnson 1997, 87, emphasis in the original). In other words, traits “can be defined as habitual patterns of behavior, thought, and emotion”, which “are relatively stable over time, differ among individuals, and influence behavior” (Villanueva 2010, vii).

3. The psycholexical approach to personality

According to Matthews *et al.* (2009, 3) “the idea of personality traits may be as old as human language itself” and “the language of personality description permeates our everyday conversation and discourse”, which explains why “contemporary

English is replete with terms used to describe personal qualities”. As Goldie (2004, 1-2) puts it, “we call people kindhearted, generous, fair-minded, witty, flaky, charming, mean-spirited, [...]. Aspects of personality such as these,” also known as traits, “are constantly being appealed to in our everyday descriptions of ourselves and of others”. “Personality discourse is everywhere”, that is wherever people think, talk, and write about themselves or other people (Ibid., 1).

In the field of psychology, “trait theory is a major approach to the study [and assessment] of human personality” (Villanueva 2010, vii). For these purposes, as Ashton (2018, 111-148) explains, psychologists used a methodology which has presumably been a source of inspiration for *The Sims 4* game designers and which serves as the background for the analysis presented in Section 5. Indeed, in order to classify traits, psychologists adopted the so-called “lexical approach” (Ashton 2018, 124-126): they compiled full lists of personality-descriptive attributes that can be found in the dictionaries of a language and created “a language’s personality lexicon”. “The psycholexical approach is typically associated historically with Allport and Odbert (1936), Cattell (1943), and Goldberg (1981). Characteristic of that approach is the systematic use of tangible repositories of the lexicon of a language”, most often dictionaries, “in order to arrive at full and comprehensive tabulations of all lingual expressions that can be used to describe personality” (De Raad and Mlačić 2017, 162).

As regards the linguistic nature of traits, as Saucier and Goldberg (1996, 30) seminaly explained, personality description in language translates into adjectival concepts and works “primarily through the adjective function”, which “in some languages, [...] is carried out entirely through adjectives, whereas in others, the function may be carried out mostly through nouns or verbs”. In particular, “English, like other Indo-European languages, appears to fall between these extremes; it has a very large adjective class, but the adjective function is sometimes carried out through nouns or verbs” (Ibid.).

The foundation or rationale of this approach is the “lexical hypothesis” (Goldberg 1981), in turn based on two assumptions: first, all attributes worth selecting for psychologists are encoded in everyday words, representing the wisdom of natural languages;⁶ second, the degree of crosslinguistic lexical rep-

6 Indeed, the “plausibility” of the lexical hypothesis (Allport and Odbert 1936) implies that traits or individual differences found important by people must be or will be represented in language and, thus, will be recorded in dictionaries.

resentation of an attribute indicates its importance. “Thus, the most important personality attributes should have a corresponding term in virtually every language” (Saucier and Goldberg 1996, 26) because, as De Raad and Mlačić argue (2017, 162), “individual differences observed in a culture are studied bottom-up by exploiting the lexicon of the language of that culture and by organizing the culture-specific language of personality in a comprehensive way”. Since its development, “the psycholexical approach has been applied in many languages, each [...] resulting in a trait structure that is assumed to capture the most important trait dimensions of that language” (De Raad and Mlačić 2017, 163). These dimensions took the shape of the “Five-Factor Model of Personality”, also known as the “Big Five”, formulated by Costa and McCrae (1992) and based on five factors (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Intellect or Openness to Experience),⁷ which are “hypothesized to cover the most important semantics of individual differences across languages” (De Raad and Mlačić 2017, 163).

A more in-depth discussion about this reference model of personality assessment, and of its development due to the intense debate surrounding it (see Widiger 2017), is beyond the scope of this paper, whose objective is to explore the linguistic and translational challenges of personality customization in *The Sims 4* and not to evaluate whether and how the game’s personality traits correspond to real personality traits. However, in this regard, it is worth specifying that the notion of a crosscultural or universal nature of personality characteristics and descriptors heavily relied on the practice of translation, aimed at replicating the English Big Five model, and subsequent versions, in each and every language and culture of the world.⁸

4. Languaging personality traits

The psychological dimension of simulation in *The Sims 4* English original texts is worded in a contemporary and playful set of personality lexicon. In the game’s

⁷ An introduction to the Big Five constructs is provided by De Raad and Perugini (2002).

⁸ Church (2017) has edited a comprehensive three-volume work concerning the language of personality across cultures. As regards the use of the psycholexical approach in the Italian language, see Caprara and Perugini (1991, 1994), Di Blas and Perugini (2002), Ubbiali *et al.* (2013), among others.

glossary,⁹ it means 101 trait names which, from the linguistic point of view, in line with the lexical approach used in psychology, are encoded into a variety of single and multi-word expressions with an attributive and descriptive function.

As regards this point, although word class assignment is quite difficult out of context and context, and although the phenomenon of conversion or zero derivation allows words to serve different word classes in English, on the basis of dictionary definitions (Oxford Dictionary of English, online), as Figure 4.1 illustrates, traits are mostly adjectives (54%) and nouns (44%), in turn subdivided into simple or derived adjectives (42%) and compound adjectives (12%), i.e. an adjective plus a noun or an adverb, and simple or derived nouns (12%), compound nouns (16%) and agent nouns (16%), but there are also two instances of descriptive subjectless clauses (2%) in the source text, namely ‘hates children’ and ‘loves outdoors’.

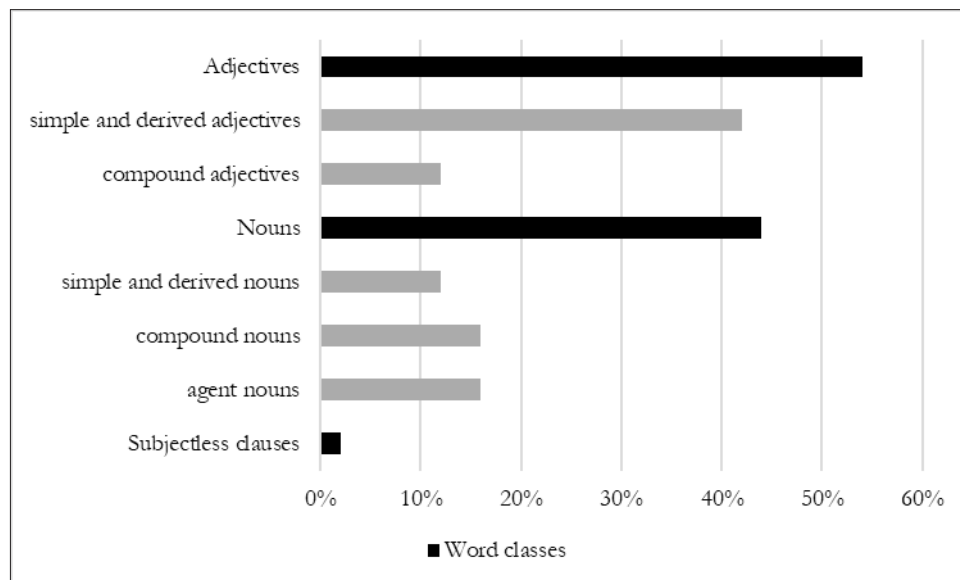


Figure 4.1 Word classes of *The Sims 4* English personality traits

For example, adjectives include trait names worded in either simple and derived forms like ‘active’, ‘dastardly’, ‘independent’ and ‘noncommittal’, and compound attributes like ‘family-oriented’, ‘hardly hungry’ and ‘never weary’. Examples of

⁹ The glossary of a video game or of a game franchise is an official terminology database which contains the body of terms belonging to the game world in different languages. Compiled and updated by localization professionals, it represents an invaluable reference material for translators for the purposes of terminological consistency (see Pettini 2016).

nouns used to name personality traits comprise simple and derived forms like ‘companion’, ‘foodie’ and ‘genius’, compound nouns like ‘bookworm’ and ‘mastermind’, and also agent nouns like ‘appraiser’ or ‘tormentor’, sometimes in combination with other adjectives or nouns, as in ‘great kisser’ and ‘music lover’.

In Italian, word class assignment is equally complex because many trait names can be interpreted as both adjective and noun out of context. Nevertheless, according to Treccani dictionary definitions (Vocabolario Treccani, online), even if word classes proportions are quite similar to the English ones, with adjectives and nouns representing 51% and 47% of the instances respectively, this does not mean that they necessarily correspond to the same word classes of the source language, because adjectives and nouns are not always translated into equivalent adjectives and nouns. On the contrary, there are 11 instances of nouns in Italian which are adjectives in English, and this mostly depends on the strategy used in translation to deal with compound adjectives, as will be illustrated in Section 5.2. As regards the two instances of subjectless clauses, they are kept unaltered in Italian and translated into calqued subjectless clauses: *odia i bambini* for ‘hates children’ and *ama l’aria aperta* for ‘loves outdoors’.

5. Translating personality traits

The Sims 4 personality trait system presents translators with different challenges to deal with, some of which are specific to game localization, in the sense that they depend on the particular characteristics of this translation realm, while other phenomena depend on the lexical nature of the items in the source language. In detail, gender issues, space constraints and the lack of co-text and context, which clearly exemplify the specificities of game translation, combine with other potential difficulties due to formal and semantic features typical of the English vocabulary expressing adjectival concepts and languaging personality traits.

5.1 Game localization challenges

Given the gender-customizable nature of *The Sims 4*, which allows players to choose their avatar’s gender, and given the types of word classes used to name

traits, mainly adjectives and nouns, the transfer from English into Italian, that is to say translating from a language with a mainly semantic gender system into a Romance language with both a semantic and a grammatical gender system, requires translators to use the so-called “variables” (see Bernal-Merino 2015, 147-152, Díaz-Montón 2007, Heimburg 2006, O’Hagan and Mangiron 2013, 132-133; Pettini 2018). Variables belong to programming metalanguage and include a “set of codes and characters that mark gender-variable strings with tags, generally ‘M’ for male and ‘F’ for female in brackets, serving as computing instructions that allow the game engine to display gender-specific strings correctly” (Pettini 2020, 446), that is according to the gender selected by the player for his/her avatar.

For example, in (1) the reward trait associated to Popularity aspiration ‘perfect host’ becomes either *perfetto padrone di casa*, if male, or *perfetta padrona di casa*, if female, in Italian, because both the noun and the adjective must agree with one another and with the gender of the player’s avatar. As the string below shows, the gender variable part is the one contained within braces and following the variable M or F plus o, which indicates Sim o, the one controlled by the player.

(1)	Perfect host	{Mo.Perfetto padrone}{Fo.Perfetta padrona} di casa
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Even if potentially all traits may be translated into gender-variable equivalents, not all the strings are gender-marked because there may be gender-neutral alternatives, i.e. one single and invariable form for both male and female, such as *collezionista* for ‘collector’, *infantile* for ‘childish’, *snob* for ‘snob’. However, a more in-depth analysis of trait names shows that, unfortunately, gender-biased solutions can be observed in terms of male-specificity only, such as *benvenuto perenne* for ‘always welcome’ and *sim mattiniero* for ‘morning sim’, where *benvenuto* and *mattiniero* might be female-specific as well, by simply changing the word ending letter from ‘o’ into ‘a’. Also the reasons behind the choice of some neutral solutions and therefore the lack of gender-variable tags are not immediately clear, as will emerge in Section 5.2.1.

Since traits belong to the category of in-game or on-screen text and, in particular, they appear in the user interface as isolated and decontextualized linguistic items, they are potentially subject to space limitations. However, as linguistic tester Dodaro (2013, 112) explains, “*The Sims 4* makes large use of tooltips and other flexible windows to show text on screen” and, in more detail, as opposed

to what one might expect, the number of characters allowed per string, which varies depending on the trait type, ranging from twenty for traits proper to thirty for reward traits, proves to be large enough to not constrain translators' decisions.

The lack of co-text and context, which is characteristic to game localization, represents another challenge for *The Sims 4* translators. Except for in-game descriptions to be retrieved in the game database and some pieces of information to be inferred by reading the identifier column of both the glossary and the game database spreadsheets,¹⁰ when translating personality traits, professionals are presented with a mere list of adjectival expressions to be rendered into equivalent personality traits. In this respect, an interesting example is that of 'player', a very common English word whose polysemy might make its translation challenging with little or no co-text and context. In detail, 'player' is a reward trait from completing the Love aspiration category named 'serial romantic'. In-game, this trait is defined as follows: "Players will never cause other Sims to get jealous, no matter what they do". In English, the only meaning relatable to this description is that of 'player' as a US English-specific informal or slang noun referring to "a confident, successful man with many sexual partners" (Oxford Dictionary of English, online) or "a person and especially a man who has many lovers" (Merriam Webster Dictionary of English, online). In this light, two linguistic features emerge: the very informal nature in terms of register and its semantic male-specificity in terms of referent. Equivalent expressions exist in Italian and all revolve around the meaning of player as lady-killer, philanderer, womanizer, skirt-chaser, among others, each presenting different register and semantic nuances. However, it is possible to speculate that in order to comply with the gender-customizable nature of *The Sims 4* and, especially, with its age-rating,¹¹

¹⁰ In game localization, language professionals work on Excel spreadsheets which organize texts in typical table style format, with several columns (usually one per language) and hundreds of thousands of rows or strings. The latter are assigned tags which allow developers to identify strings and integrate translated ones into the game engine files, thus avoiding dangerous cutting and pasting (Maxwell-Chandler and O'Malley-Deming 2012, 200).

¹¹ According to PEGI (Pan European Game Information) age rating system, *The Sims 4* is labelled '12'. Age ratings can vary according to the target locale and are particularly relevant for translation because they outline the prospective target audience, and consequently influence translators' overall approach or single strategies, especially as regards bad language (see Bernal-Merino 2015, 182-187).

translators appropriately provided a gender-variable and neutral solution like *seduttore*, if male, and *seduttrice*, if female [seducer], thus deviating from the original colloquial and androcentric value.

5.2 Language-specific challenges

As previously mentioned, translating *The Sims 4* trait system also means dealing with challenges which are not specific to game localization. Though they are inevitably connected with the constraints discussed so far, they depend on the nature of the original items in terms of the formal, functional, and semantic features that are typical of *The Sims 4* English personality lexicon. Indeed, by focusing on the characteristics of the source text, trait names represent various lexical phenomena with different types and degrees of linguistic complexity and interlinguistic difficulty, which can be broadly grouped into the following working definitions: (a) conciseness and semantic density, (b) cognate words, (c) figurative and idiomatic language, (d) informal language and slang, illustrated in Figure 5.1.

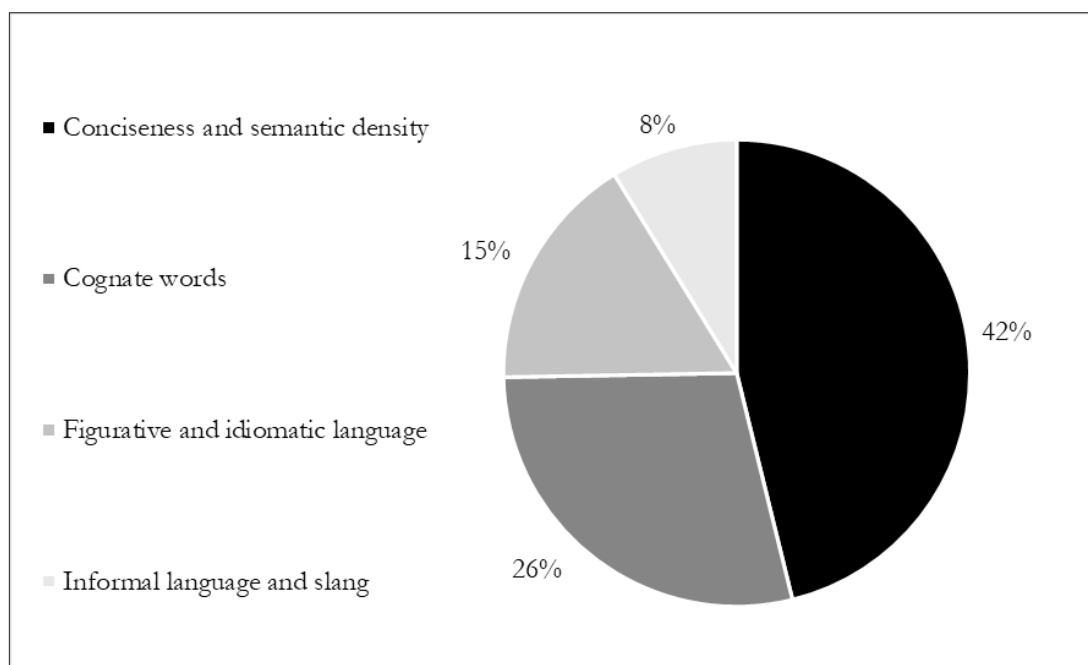


Figure 5.1 Linguistic categories of *The Sims 4* English personality lexicon

5.2.1 Conciseness and semantic density

This working lexical category (42%) refers to the general shortness of English words, when compared to Romance languages like Italian, and the natural ability of English to create meaning-packed constructions or to express a complex meaning with one single word. The difficulty may be also connected to length and to differences in language use as regards some constructions. In linguistic terms, this group includes derived adjectives (15 instances), compound adjectives (12 instances), agent nouns (11 instances) and a few compound nouns (4 instances).

Derived adjectives, which are formed from other word classes by the addition of affixes, are mostly directly translated into one-word or derived equivalent adjectives, like *folle* for ‘insane’, *parsimonioso* or *parsimoniosa* for ‘thrifty’. However, in some cases the semantic value of the original adjective, especially when deriving from a verb, is toned-down. For example, ‘alluring’ is a bonus trait awarded to a Sim for choosing one Love aspiration because, as described in-game, “alluring Sims are more successful at romance than others”, so being alluring help players to achieve their aspiration more easily. In English ‘alluring’ means “powerfully and mysteriously attractive or fascinating; seductive” (Oxford Dictionary of English, online) and in Italian it is translated into the semantically superordinate *attraente* [attractive]. Other translations in the group of derived adjectives include *senza preoccupazioni* [without worries] for ‘carefree’ and *senza vergogna* [without shame] for ‘shameless’, both longer prepositional phrases which might have been rendered into gender-variable adjectives like *spensierato/a* for ‘carefree’ and *spudorato/a, sfacciato/a, svergognato/a, sfrontato/a* for ‘shameless’.

Compound adjectives (12 instances) are another group of concise and semantically dense trait names. In the Italian translation, they tend to be either paraphrased into nouns or directly translated into simple or derived adjectives. Paraphrase and nominalization include, for example, *amante della famiglia* [family lover] for ‘family-oriented’, *doti sociali* [social gifts] for ‘socially-gifted’ and *sapienza affaristica* [business wisdom] for ‘business-savvy’. Direct translation is used to render ‘long-lived’ into the gender-variable *longevo/a*, and ‘never weary’ into *instancabile* [indefatigable]. This category also comprises two instances of calque: the gender-variable *poco famelico/a* for ‘hardly hungry’ and the masculine-generic *benvenuto perenne* for ‘always welcome’, although

the selection of adjectives belonging to a more formal register, namely *famelico* [ravenous] instead of *affamato* [hungry] and *perenne* [perennial] instead of the adverb *sempre* [always] has a playful effect. Moreover, the witty nature of *benvenuto perenne* also depends on the violation of selectional restrictions, since *perenne* does not collocate with *benvenuto* in Italian.

Conciseness also relates to agent nouns (11 instances) which may be difficult in translation because in Italian they don't sound natural, since they are rarely, if ever, used. This seems to be the reason why most agent nouns are paraphrased, as in *abile a baciare* [good at kissing] for 'great kisser', *veloce a imparare* [quick at learning] for 'quick learner', and *riflessivo/a* [reflective] for 'muser'. Indeed, the equivalent agent nouns in Italian, namely *baciatore* for 'kisser', or *meditatore* for 'muser' are labelled "rare" in their dictionary entries (Vocabolario Treccani, online). However, some agent nouns are calqued into more common but still unusual solutions like *pulitore* or *pulitrice* veloce for 'speed cleaner', *tormentatore* or *tormentatrice* for 'tormentor', which replicate the derivational pattern by adding the suffixes -tore, if male, and -trice, if female.

5.2.2 Cognate words

The lexical category of cognate words (26%) includes traits which are mostly translated into very straightforward solutions due to the phenomenon of cross-linguistic lexical similarity, meaning the presence of cognate words across the two languages (Pierini 2012, 211-214). This is the case of *ambizioso/a* for 'ambitious', *indipendente* for 'independent', *romantico/a* for 'romantic' and many other traits, like 'active', 'creative', 'materialistic', 'poetic', 'sincere', among others, which, thanks to the common Latin origin, allow professionals to simply use the formally and semantically similar word in their target language.

However, in the relationship between English and Italian, this category also includes a few instances of false or deceptive cognates which are all properly interpreted by translators. For example, 'gregarious' means "(of a person) fond of company; sociable" (Oxford Dictionary of English, online) and is correctly rendered into *socievole* and not into *gregario* which in Italian refers to a private soldier or a subordinate and, by extension, a submissive person (Vocabolario Treccani, online). Another example is 'observant', whose meaning is both (1) "quick to notice or perceive things" and (2) "adhering strictly to the rules of

a particular religion” (Oxford Dictionary of English, online), and is correctly translated into *sguardo acuto* [sharp-eyed] meaning (1) and not *osservante* meaning (2) in Italian. Nevertheless, it must be specified that cognate words may present different degrees of lexical similarity and some asymmetries may emerge with respect to language use in terms of frequency, selectional restrictions, register, etc. For example, in Italian *memorabile* for ‘memorable’ tends to collocate with nouns referring to events, time periods or words worth remembering, and more rarely with words related to people (Vocabolario Treccani, online). Taken in context, based on the in-game description of this reward trait, memorable Sims are those whose “relationships decay more slowly”. This unusual association has a humorous effect which is perfectly in line with the game’s fun factor.

Another interesting example of cognate words used to name personality traits is ‘companion’, a reward trait from completing the Love aspiration category named ‘soulmate’. In-game, the related text string reads as “Relationships take hard work and dedication. With a dash of both of those, and a lot of love, {o.SimFirstName} has achieved {Mo.his}{Fo.her}¹² dream of becoming the perfect spouse! Trait Earned: Companion”. According to reliable dictionary definitions (Oxford Dictionary of English, online), a companion is a person (1) “with whom one spends a lot of time or with whom one travels”, (2) “who shares the experiences of another, especially when these are unpleasant or unwelcome”, (3) “a person’s long-term sexual partner outside marriage”. The Italian cognate word is *compagno*, if male, and *compagna*, if female, which presents two senses (Vocabolario Treccani, online), one of which is equivalent to the English senses (1) and (2) above, while the second sense explicitly refers to a partner in a romantic or sexual relationship and also, in politics, to the way communist and socialist activists usually address each other. This might be the reason why Italian translators felt the need to expand the trait name into *compagno di vita* [lifelong companion], to make it clear the meaning of ‘soulmate’ as one Love aspiration.

¹² As discussed in Section 5.1, the text contained within braces exemplifies the game’s variables and changes depending on the player’s choices: {o.SimFirstName} stands for and displays the name the player has selected for his/her Sim, while either ‘his’ or ‘her’ will be displayed accordingly, depending on the Sim’s gender.

5.2.3 Figurative and idiomatic language

This lexical group (15%) refers to the use of figurative or idiomatic expressions and also of evocative or image-provoking words. The difficulty in translating these traits may depend on the possibility of using equivalent figurative expressions which already exist in the target language or to reproduce the figurative value by using different strategies.

In Italian, equivalent idiomatic expressions which have been directly translated are *topo di biblioteca* for ‘bookworm’, *testa calda* for ‘hot-headed’, *animale notturno* for ‘night owl’ and *pollice verdissimo* for ‘super green thumb’. Other figurative traits are more or less literally calqued into figuratively equivalent expressions such as *vescica d’acciaio* for ‘steel bladder’, *chef della freschezza* for ‘fresh chef’, *tranquillità del pescatore* for ‘angler’s tranquility’ or somehow paraphrased, such as *mania ginnica* [gym mania] for ‘gym rat’.

In terms of creativity and playfulness, another interesting example is ‘antiseptic’, which formally represents a cognate word. ‘Antiseptic’ is a purchasable reward trait implying that “antiseptic Sims’ hygiene need decays much slower”, according to in-game description. In English, ‘antiseptic’ is a medicine-related term which refers to any physical and chemical substances (1) “preventing the growth of disease-causing microorganisms” and, by extension, (2) “scrupulously clean or pure, especially so as to be bland or characterless” (Oxford Dictionary of English, online). In-game, playfulness seems to depend on the mixture of the two senses based on a hyperbole, i.e. the uncontaminated or germ-free quality of a person. In Italian, ‘antiseptic’ is translated into *antisettico/a* which, confined within the medical field and meaning only (1), keeps the bizarre association unaltered, by figuratively using a specialized word to describe a personality trait.

5.2.4 Informal language or slang

This working category, which represents 8% of instances, refers to the use of informal or (US English) slang expressions whose difficulty in translation may depend exactly on their semantic value within a language-specific informal or slang register and, consequently, on the possibility of achieving equivalence at both levels, in terms of meaning and register. Ideally, translators should

offer equivalent informal and semantic values. When it is not possible, one of the two must be sacrificed: they may convey the same or similar degree of informality by generalizing or specifying the meaning or they may tone the register down and opt for a neutral but semantically equivalent solution.

Direct translation includes, for example, *amicone* and *amicona* for ‘bro’¹³ and *scansafatiche professionista* for ‘professional slacker’. *Sciatto/a* exemplifies generalization because it represents a hypernym of ‘slob’, meaning “a person who is lazy and has low standards of cleanliness” (Oxford Dictionary of English, online), since in Italian it usually refers to the physical and style-related characteristics of a person and does not necessarily convey the idea of being dirty (Vocabolario Treccani, online). On the contrary, an example of specification is *smanettone* or *smanettona* for ‘geek’. While the latter means “an unfashionable or socially inept person” and, only with a modifier, “a knowledgeable and obsessive enthusiast” (Oxford Dictionary of English, online), in Italian *smanettone* is an informal word but it only refers to a computer geek, a person who is very knowledgeable about computers and enjoys modifying hardware and software components (Vocabolario Treccani, online). In this light, *smanettone* seems to be a hyponym of ‘geek’.

6. Conclusions and further research

The study presented in this paper, though limited in scope, serves as a starting point for future research on life simulation games, and on *The Sims* franchise in particular, especially with a view to investigating the role localization and translation play in the commercial and cultural success of this subgenre at global level.

However, the game experience players are offered is multilayered as real life itself, since it includes a variety of human and real world-like dimensions and aspects whose analysis requires an interdisciplinary perspective. This is particularly true as regards identity and the projection of personality in simulated worlds, where psychological background is key to understanding the

¹³ As regards ‘bro’, it is worth underlying that the English trait system does not present a feminine form. Conversely, Italian translators provided a gender-variable solution, despite the male-gendered nature of the original term (Oxford Dictionary of English, online).

relationship between personality simulation and its linguistic representation in game texts. In this sense, collaboration with researchers in Personality Psychology is desirable to explore the link, if any, between players' personality in real life and their Sims personality.

As regards *The Sims 4* personality trait system, preliminary findings have provided an overview of the challenges translators are presented with and the resulting skills needed to cope with them. Game localization-specific constraints highlight the importance of specialized training, but the more properly linguistic features of the source text confirm that high proficiency in both the source and the target language is paramount for translation quality. In particular, the linguistic and translational representation of gender in *The Sims 4* offers ample opportunities to comparatively examine how this game localization-specific challenge is dealt with across different languages.

Further research is thus essential in order to provide the full picture of the phenomenon under investigation, and include other personality-related or, more in general, customization-related groups of terms, such as aspiration milestones and walkstyles, and all the terminology concerning physical appearance and clothes. Other research methodologies might be added to the descriptive lexical approach: for example, questionnaires might be submitted to translators and linguistic testers, and reception studies might be performed with a sample of players.

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