

Achievement Unlocked: The Art Of Localizing Minecraft's Advancements

Manon Lejoly

Liège Game Lab – Uliège

Place du 20-Août

4000 Liège Belgique

manonlejoly462@gmail.com

Pierre-Yves Houlmont

IMRG HEAJ – Condorcet | CIRTI and Liège Game Lab – Uliège

Place de l'École des Cadets 4

5000 Namur Belgium

Pierre-yves.houlmont@heaj.be

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

As of today, many papers on game localization focus on the different types of texts that translators have to deal with in their professional capacity. Authors such as Bernal-Merino (2015) have described at length the difficulties and specificities of the different types of text present in video games, but there is one element that has received little attention in Translation Studies despite appearing in most games: achievements. Achievements have been studied from the point of view of their effect on the motivation of players (Cruz et al., 2015; Blair, 2011) or their components (Hamari & Eranti, 2011), but not from the perspective of the way they are localized even though they convey a lot of information in just a few words. This paper will focus on the localization of the names of the 122 achievements of the 1.21 version of Minecraft: Java Edition as they contain references to popular culture or wordplay, while simultaneously conveying essential information about the game system.

In Minecraft: Java Edition, achievements are called “advancements”, which function not only as “secondary quests” (Hamari & Eranti, 2011, p. 3) but also as a structuring device that guides players through the game’s systems. Beyond this functional dimension, Minecraft’s advancements have a distinctive form: their display names frequently draw on popular culture references, wordplays and expressions that maintain a close relationship with the game’s underlying mechanics. Localizing these names requires translators to navigate the challenge of preserving the information load, but also to keep, whenever possible, a culturally meaningful element for the target culture.

As stated by Hamari and Eranti (2011), achievements are composed of two main parts: the signifier, which corresponds to the visible part in the game’s interface, and the completion logic, the invisible part in the game’s code. The signifier is itself composed of several elements, such as its name, description, and associated icon, that differentiate each achievement and guide players. The completion logic comprises the trigger, the conditions and the multiplier, which together define precisely what players have to do to unlock an achievement. A detailed understanding of this completion logic is necessary when analyzing the translation of advancements’

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names, since they are designed to guide players by offering indirect and implicit cues about the underlying requirements.

Localizing display names therefore involves balancing two intertwined goals: maintaining the link with the completion logic and conveying cultural references in the target language. This balance is particularly challenging when cultural references do not have an equivalent in the target language, requiring translators to adapt elements from the target culture without undermining the name's guidance function. Achieving this balance is crucial to ensuring that all players perceive and respond to the game's objectives in a comparable way. For example, the title of one achievement in English is "Country Lode, Take Me Home", which is a reference to the song *Take Me Home, Country Roads* by John Delver. The title has been modified to create a link with the completion logic of the achievement — for this achievement, the player has to use a compass on a lodestone, towards which the compass will then point, which can help the player find their way back. In French, this reference might not have been understood by everyone and the translators decided to adapt the title with "Le Petit Poucet" (Hop-o'-My-Thumb) which recreates the link with the completion logic by using a reference more suitable for the French community.

This paper specifically analyzes the French localization of Minecraft's display names. It explores how translators balanced conveying information about the completion logic and adapting cultural references, idioms, and wordplay, so that French players can still perceive and act upon the underlying game objectives. This paper shows that translators have often found ingenious ways to retain, modify, or recreate the balance between cultural elements and their relationships with the completion logic. They achieved this by drawing on established translation strategies, such as those described by Delisle and Fiola (2013), and adapting them to the unique requirements of interactive media.

Overall, Minecraft's advancements offer a compelling case study for the localization of achievements, which, despite their apparent simplicity, are intricately tied to gameplay and often embed numerous cultural references that require careful adaptation. By analyzing the strategies employed by the translators, this paper highlights how achievements can be effectively localized to preserve both gameplay functionality and cultural meaning, demonstrating why these elements warrant attention in video game localization research.

Keywords

Video game localization, cultural studies, achievements, translation studies

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