Board Game Translation: A Study of Translation Processes at Dutch Board Game Publishers

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Abstract

This thesis aims to provide a survey of the translation processes and practices followed at five board game publishers located in the Netherlands. While translation processes in other areas of translation, ranging from news translation, to audiovisual translation, to computer game translation, have drawn increasing attention from researchers in translation studies, the processes followed in board game translation have hardly been researched. The data for the study was gathered by online and in-person interviews containing questions regarding the general translation process, revision and implementation. The data were analyzed using content and thematic analysis. The findings highlight that, while some parts of the processes are similar among all participants, the size of the publisher and their financial position are factors that strongly influence the form the process takes.

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Term list

AAA game: A term from the video game industry. An informal classification for video games that are produced and distributed by relatively large studios. These games tend to have a very high budget for both game production and marketing. Video games published by studios such as Nintendo and Sony fall in this category.

Asset: A term from the video game industry. Assets are visual parts of which video games consist, such as characters, objects, fonts, symbols and backgrounds.

Component: Any items included in a game that are used to play the game with. This includes items such as cards, dice, figurines, tokens and storybooks, but generally excludes the rulebook.

Post-gold model: A model in which a product is first distributed to customers and retailers in its original form and language. The translations are distributed at a later point in time. The opposite of the sim-ship model.

Sim-ship model: Abbreviation for simultaneous shipment model. A model in which products in different languages are distributed to customers and retailers at the same time as the product in its original form and language. The opposite of the post-gold model.

Token: Components that represent a resource (such as coins, food or animals) that can or must be collected during a game.

Win conditions: Conditions that need to be met during or after the game in order to win the game, as stated in the accompanying rulebook.

1. Introduction

Board games are more popular than ever. In 2022, the global board game market had an estimated value between 11 and 13.4 billion USD dollars and was projected to grow by 7 to 11 percent within the next five years (Peiser 2022). While classic board games, such as *Monopoly* (Darrow & Magie 1935) or *Risk* (Lamorisse & Levin 1935), are still available, many new games and new genres have entered the market in recent years. From complex strategic games such as *Scythe* (Stegmaier 2016), *Root* (Wehrle 2018) or *Terraforming Mars* (Fryxelius 2016) to story-based RPG-style games such as *Gloomhaven* (Childres 2017) or *Sleeping Gods* (Laukat 2021): there is a game for anyone in today's market.

The Dutch board game market is no exception to the growth. In 2020, NOS stated that Dutch board game publishers reported a sales growth of between sixty and eighty percent, citing the COVID-crisis as one of the reasons for this massive growth (Klein 2020). This growth continued in 2021, with a reported growth of another twenty-one percent on average, excluding December in which the majority of games is sold (Verbrugge 2022).

Working in a board game specialty store and being a student of translation studies, the translation of board games fascinates me. The majority of the catalog of two major publishers of Dutch games in the Netherlands, 999 Games and White Goblin Games, consists of translated games. Asmodee The Netherlands, part of the international Asmodee Group, offers both original and translated versions of board games, including their popular top-seller *Ticket to Ride*. It is logical to assume that the growth of the market has also led to an increase in translated games. This is partially evidenced in the recent Dutch publications of the relatively new Keep Exploring Games, which includes the text-heavy *Sleeping Gods*. Not only was this the first time a game of this genre was translated, the first print run sold out completely within a few months (Keep Exploring Games 2022).

The translation of board games into Dutch is a debated subject, however. Many hobby board gamers buy games in English, for a variety of reasons. A commonly cited issue with translated games is the translation quality of games translated into Dutch, as evidenced in the following posts in a forum topic on Budgetspelen.nl (Budgetspelen.nl 2019) (see Figure 1 to 4).

Figure 1: Comment regarding translation by Budgetspelen.nl user Stef.

[To me it doesn't matter whether the games are in Dutch or in English. I tend to play them with the same group and they generally speak English pretty well.

Sometimes the Dutch translations are translated in a weird way, or they use weird terms.

In hindsight I hoped that a few games would be translated into Dutch, such as *Stuffed Fables*. But that's because I had hoped to be able to play such a game with our daughter.]

Figure 2: Comment regarding translation by Budgetspelen.nl user Flapperbol.

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[I always try to buy my games in English, even if they cost more.

I loathe Dutch in board/video games, they often use uncommon Dutch words and bad translations occur frequently (like *Fields of Arle*, which comes with a sticker to correct, *Machi Koro* where cards were translated wrong and *Hanabi*, where you, if you follow the Dutch rules exactly, do not draw a card when you place a correct one.)

No, the translation business in the Netherlands is not developed enough to me to be taken seriously. I prefer to spend my money on the English versions.]

Door ● **Robbus** (145 reacties) op 11-01-2019 11:00   (PM)

Ik sluit me aan bij Flapperbol. Ik koop grote spellen, zoals die van Uwe, alleen nog maar in het Engels. Vaak is die vertaling toch net iets beter, maar nog veel belangrijker zijn de uitbreidingen die mogelijk komen. Ik heb te veel slechte ervaringen gehad met uitbreidingen van Nederlandstalige spellen die ik daarna in het Engels moet kopen, omdat ze gewoon niet in het Nederlands komen (Friesche Velden, Odin). Een andere kleine irritatie is dat ze de Nederlandse soms enorm laat zijn (Imperial Settlers).
Voor kleinere of taalonafhankelijke spellen maakt het mij niet uit, al heb ik wel liever alles wel in dezelfde taal. Dat voelt gewoon net ietsjes netter.

Figure 3: Comment regarding translation by Budgetspelen.nl user Robbus.

[I agree with Flapperbol. I buy large games, like Uwe's, solely in English. Usually the translation is a little better, but the expansions are even more important to me. I've had too many bad experiences with the expansions to Dutch games that I eventually have to buy in English, simply because they are not published in Dutch (*Fields of Arle, A Feast for Odin*). Another small annoyance is that the Dutch versions are super late sometimes (*Imperial Settlers*).

I don't care which language I buy for smaller or language independent games, even though I prefer to get everything in the same language. That just feels neater.]

Door ● **Poison_Ivy** (6 reacties) op 13-01-2019 02:01   (PM)

Ik koop meestal alles in het Engels. Ik ben geboren in de jaren '80, dus animatieseries en games waren altijd in het Engels. Aangezien ik graag fantasy-games speel, kan ik gewoon niet tegen Nederlandstalige vertalingen. Een goblin dat een aardmannetje wordt genoemd of queeste, dat klinkt gewoon niet natuurlijk voor mij. Helaas is het enige nadeel dat boardgames in het Engels altijd fors duurder of duur blijven. NL-talige games worden eerder afgeprijsd heb ik het idee.

Figure 4: Comment regarding translation by Budgetspelen.nl user Poison_Ivy.

[I usually buy everything in English. I was born in the Eighties, so cartoons and games have always been in English. I prefer to play fantasy games, so I just cannot deal with Dutch translations. A goblin that's referred to as an *aardmannetje* or the word *queeste*, that just doesn't sound natural to me. Unfortunately the only downside to this is that the English games are much more expensive, and they stay expensive. Dutch games are discounted more often, I think.]

These comments are only a small sample regarding the perception of board game translations, but this sentiment is also noticeable among customers of the store I work in, where we often stock both the English and Dutch version if possible. This piqued my interest in the process behind the translations: who do publishers employ to do the translations, and what certifications or skills do they have? What choices are made in regards to the text when translating? Do the translators of these games actually receive feedback on their translations, and do they actively work on improving these? Are bad translations actually such a big deal as they are made out to be by Dutch board game enthusiasts? In this thesis, I therefore intend to give an overview of the translation processes that occur at board game publishers in the Netherlands.

Chapter 2 contains the theoretical framework, in which important terminology and topics regarding board games and translation are defined. Additionally, this chapter includes an examination of previous research on the topic of board game translation, as well as an examination of previous research in the related areas of video game localization and audiovisual translation. Chapter 3 contains the methodology, in which the method of data collection is described and motivated. Chapter 4 contains the results from the analysis of the interview data, as well as a discussion of the findings against the background of the existing research presented in Chapter 2. Finally, Chapter 5 contains the overall conclusion to this research.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

In Section 2.2 and 2.3, I first define the term *board games* in general, and then outline the categorization of board games. In Section 2.4, I examine and define the key concepts that are of importance to this research, including translation and localization, direct and indirect translation, and summarize previous research on board games and board game translation. In Section 2.5, I examine and summarize previous research in the related research areas of video game localization and audiovisual translation, and explore its similarities to board game translation. Finally, in Section 2.6, I clarify the aim of this study and its contribution to translation research.

2.2 Board games: A definition

First, it is important to define the term *board game*. Merriam-Webster defines board games as 'a game (such as checkers, chess, or backgammon) played by placing or moving pieces on a board' (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Cambridge Dictionary gives two definitions: 'any of many games, for example chess, in which small pieces are moved around on a board with a pattern on it' (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d., definition 1), and 'any game in which pieces are moved in particular ways on a board marked with a pattern' (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d., definition 2). These are fairly concise and correct definitions of the term *board game*.

However, in the modern age of board gaming, this definition may be too concise, as board games tend to consist of more components than playing pieces and a board. Many modern board games make use of cards, dice, several types of pieces or tokens, or even miniature figures. A board game does not need a board to be referred to as such: the term *board game* tends to be used as an umbrella term covering more specific terms for games that make use of certain components, such as card games and dice games. An example can be found in the name of one of the largest board gaming communities on the internet: Board

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Game Geek (further: BGG). BGG hosts an online forum and a large and varied game database, which consists not only of "traditional" board games (as defined by Merriam-Webster or Cambridge Dictionary). They are included, but the database includes all types of games and is not limited to games requiring a board to play. Steward Woods, who is best known for his work *Eurogames: The Design, Culture and Play of Modern European Board Games* (Woods 2012), defines the term *board games* as 'any game that requires a tabletop for play', therefore also defining the term as an umbrella term for all types of games (Woods 2012, 5). In this thesis, I will be using Woods' definition. The term *board game* will be used as an umbrella term, interchangeable with the general term *game*.

2.3 On categorizing games

Given the complexity of board games already suggested in Section 2.2, the categorization of board games is an important topic, as well as a topic of debate. Before 2012, the typical academic approach was to define game types by either the central mechanics of play or by the game goals (Woods 2012, 16). This changed with the publication of Woods' *Eurogames: The Design, Culture and Play of Modern European Board Games*. In this work, Woods proposes a broad genre approach to categorizing board games. He uses three categories: classical games, mass-market games and hobby games. Woods describes classical games as games to which no author is attributed and of which no company or organization claims ownership. These games usually have no or very little theming and are generally passed down from antiquity, with multiple iterative changes over time (Woods 2012, 17-18). A good example of this is chess. Mass-market games are described as commercial titles that are produced and sold in large numbers. They are often found on shelves of large (toy) retailers and often define the common perception of a board game among the general public (Woods 2012, 18). A classic example of this is *Monopoly,* though more modern board games such as *Wingspan* (Hargrave 2019) can also be considered a mass-market game. Finally, hobby games are

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defined as games which are not marketed to a general audience. Instead, these games are marketed towards increasingly specific audiences consisting of board game hobbyists (Woods 2012, 18-19). These games are often much more complex than mass-marketed games and may have themes that do not appeal to the general public. The most (in)famous example of this is *Gloomhaven* (Childes 2017). Using Woods' definitions, modern board games can be categorized as either mass-market or hobby games.

Woods' three distinct categories are useful and provide a solid framework for the categorization of board games, but outside of the academic world, board games tend to be categorized into multiple categories at once. To demonstrate, the board game *Gloomhaven* may be categorized as a heavy strategic cooperative campaign and legacy hobby game, in which *heavy* refers to the weight or complexity of the game, *strategic* refers to the type of game, *cooperative* refers to the way in which players interact, and *campaign* and *legacy* refer to certain important mechanisms in the game (campaign games are played over multiple sessions, whereas legacy games require players to alter components which may render the game unsuitable for multiple plays. *Gloomhaven* is a *hobby*-category game, due to its (extreme) complexity. In the next paragraphs, I will further examine the other types of categorization applied to board games.

An important categorization of board games is by the way players interact with each other during the game. There are three main ways of categorizing games in this way: as competitive games, cooperative games and collaborative games. In a competitive game, players compete against each other to meet certain win conditions so that they emerge as the sole winner. In cooperative or collaborative games, players must work together to meet certain win conditions. However, in a cooperative game, players or teams may still be working towards their own goals, which are not shared with the entire group of players. In

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these games, there are still winners and losers. In a collaborative game, all players will work together to achieve the same goal: either all players win, or all of them lose.

The weight or complexity of a game reflects how difficult a game is perceived to be by the players of that specific game. On BGG, this is expressed through a 5-point weight scale, which ranges from 1 to 5, with 1 being Light and 5 being Heavy. The numbers 2, 3 and 4 correspond to Medium Light, Medium and Medium Heavy, respectively. The complexity is based on a number of factors, of which BGG lists the following: number of rules, gameplay length, amount of luck involved, technical skill required, number of choices available, amount of bookkeeping involved and the level of difficulty[1] (*Weight: Wiki*, n.d.). The weight of a game usually corresponds to the target audience: mass-market games tend to have a complexity below 3, due to their appeal to a varied and large audience, whereas hobby games often tend to be rated on the higher end of the scale.

Board games may also be categorized based on mechanics. Mechanics (or mechanisms) refer to the way in which players attempt to meet the proposed win conditions. This is a very broad category, which is most often used to refer to either the components used most in the game (such as dice, pen-and-paper, or miniatures), or to refer to certain types or interactions between players (such as auctioning, deduction, trading or voting). Generally, this category refers to the most important mechanics used to meet the proposed win conditions of the game. For example, in the game *The Werewolves of Miller's Hollow* (des Paillères and Marly 2001), the players are divided into two main groups: villagers or werewolves. The villagers' goal is to deduce which players are secretly werewolves and eliminate all of them through a general vote held every round. The werewolves' goal is to bluff and survive these general voting rounds and eliminate all villagers through a secret vote held every round.

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[1] Though BGG does not further define this last criterium, I assume they mean the difficulty as perceived and noted by the original designer(s) or publisher(s) of the board game.

Therefore, this game can be categorized as a bluffing, deduction and voting game, as these mechanics are used to meet the proposed win conditions.

The categorization of board games is important when it comes to board game research, as different categories of board games require different translation approaches. The category of a board game may even influence whether the game will be translated at all: for example, many games that fall in the weight category Heavy, such as Spirit Island, are never translated into Dutch.

2.4 Board game translation

2.4.1 Translation and localization

First, it is important to define the concept of translation. Cambridge Dictionary lists several definitions for the term *translation*: 'something that is translated, or the process of translating something, from one language to another' (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d., definition 1); 'the activity or process of changing the words of one language into the words in another language that have the same meaning' (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d., definition 2); 'a piece of writing or speech in one language that has been changed into another language' (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d., definition 3). Generally, definition 2 fits the process of board game translation best.

A term similar to translation, yet different in meaning, is the term *localization*. In the field of board game translation, both *translation* and *localization* are used to refer to the process of translating board games, sometimes interchangeably. However, the definition of the term *localization* is a topic of debate. Localization as we know it today can be traced back to the late 1970s and early 1980s, which was an important time in the computer industry. With the spread of personal computing and the development of an international market for computing, the demand for localized software grew (Jiménez-Crespo 2013, 7-9). Nowadays, localization applies not only to software, but also to websites, video games, apps and other digital content. In the *Handbook of Translation Studies* (Gambier & van Doorslaer 2010),

Reinhard Schäler defines localization as 'the linguistic and cultural adaptation of digital content to the requirements and the locale of a foreign market' (Schäler 2010, 209). Schäler argues that localization activities include more than just translation: it also includes analysis, preparation, engineering and testing, and reviewing.[2] Further, Schäler notes that localization often deals with the translation of multimodal content, such as text, graphics, audio or video (Schäler 2010, 209-213). To summarize, the main conditions for a translation to be considered a localization are the inclusion of digital content, and adaptation tailored to the local market.

Taking these definitions into consideration, the term *localization* would not be applicable to the translation of board games, as the translation of board games (generally) does not apply to digital content. There are two exceptions to this: some board games are adapted into a digital form, normally either a video game or an app, therefore becoming digital content. These digital versions are sometimes translated, and those translations can then be considered localizations. However, most board games are never adapted into digital versions; this is usually reserved for very popular games. The other exception is board games that have integrated the use of an app, such as *Mansions of Madness: Second Edition* (Valens 2016). In these games, the digital app should be considered a component of the actual game, as the app usually guides players through the game itself. Translations of these games can then be defined as localizations, as the digital component is part of the very core of the game. Nonetheless, the majority of board games do not integrate the use of an app, meaning the term localization would still only refer to a very specific niche in the domain of board games.

To summarize: generally, the term localization does not apply to board game translation, mainly due to the lack of digital content in board games. Even though board

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[2] I do not agree with the proposed notion that a thorough translation process with multiple steps is exclusive to localization. Analysis, preparation and reviewing should be part of any translation process. Ideally, when translating board games, translated games should be tested before final review. Therefore, I do not consider this notion to be a defining trait of localization specifically: it is (or should be) part of all sorts of translation processes.

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games with digital support exist, the majority have no digital content. Thus, I will not be using the term *localization* to refer to the translation of board games in this thesis.

2.4.2 Direct and indirect translation

The translation of board games (like many other translations) can occur either directly from one language to another, or via a third language. This distinction is reflected in the terms *direct* and *indirect* translation. Direct translation is a translation made directly from the source text, without the usage of a mediating text. Indirect translation (also termed intermediate, mediated, mixed, pivot, relay(ed) or second (third, etc.)-hand translation) is a translation made from a translated version or versions of the source text. For example, a text written in German may first be translated into English, and the English version may then be translated into Dutch. Indirect translation often occurs when there are few compatible translators due to uncommon language pairs (e.g. Danish > Catalan), in which case it is often easier to make use of a lingua franca as intermediate language (*About indirect translation*, n.d.). Indirect translation is not limited to certain regions or countries and it is used with both minority languages and majority languages, where the minority languages generally function as the ultimate source and/or target languages (Pięta et al. 2022: 2.1.1).

Indirect translation is an old practice which traditionally has been applied to many different types of texts, and it has allowed people access to many literary, philosophical, religious or sacred and scientific texts. Nowadays, indirect translation is also commonly used in the domain of audiovisual translation, but other domains include news texts, video game localization and interpreting (Pięta et al. 2022: 2.1.1). Whether this is also used in board game translation is still unclear, as no previous research on this topic has been done.

Indirect translation has advantages and disadvantages. An important advantage is that using indirect translation may allow for easier transmission between cultures which normally do not

(or barely) interact. For minority languages, indirect translation is fundamental for the transfer of content between these languages, as transfer would otherwise be complicated, due to the low availability of translators between the language pairs, and/or due to the costs involved (Pięta et al. 2022: 2.1.1). An important disadvantage of indirect translation is that there is a significant risk of misinterpretation and mistranslation. Any errors found in the translation into the pivot language will almost certainly be taken over into the next translation(s). Alongside this, translating a text multiple times will lead to degrading of meaning, as sharpness and detail found in the source text will inevitably be lost (Landers 2001: 131).

2.4.3 Previous research on board game translation

While some research on board game translation has been done, this is very limited. Linda Verhoeven has conducted research on the translation of rules of play in her 2018 MA thesis *The Translation of Board Games' Rules of Play*, in which she examined and compared the rules of play for four games translated into Dutch, and four English language games. Verhoeven's study is very practical in nature, as the purpose of this study is to formulate translation strategies specifically for use when translating rules of play. Similarly, Matokh Olga has conducted a study on the translation of board game rules from German into Russian for their bachelor studies (Olga 2018). This thesis contains a case study on 22 German-language rules of play and their corresponding Russian translations, from which grammatical and lexical features have been extracted in order to propose some new translation strategies. In her master's thesis (Tomková 2014), Gabriela Tomková examines the translation of board game rules and culture-specific items, as well as general translation theory and translation issues in board games. Tomková's work includes a case study on the party game *Apples to Apples* (Kirby and Osterhaus 1999), a popular party game from the United States which has many references to North American culture.

These works are all theses, and the only work on board game translation written by an established researcher in translation studies is Jonathan Evans' article "Translating board games: Multimodality and play" (Evans 2013). In this article, Evans examines the effect of the multimodal nature of board games on their translations. Evans makes an important point on the connection between the rules of play and in-game text: in many games, the in-game text expands on the rules of play, for example by describing an action on a card. Therefore, in-game text and the rulebook together must be seen as constitutive of the game (Evans 2013, 18-19).

This raises the question of multimodality, which is a key feature of board games already alluded to. Multimodality in found in board games in several ways. Perhaps the most overt multimodality is found in the rulebook itself: many rulebooks make use of descriptions or pictures of components to aid players in identifying components, and many rulebooks will reference the (list of) components in the setup-section. Evans notes that, even if the rules do not contain images of the setup or components, the text still carries multimodality, because the text references concepts or components outside of the rulebook. The rulebook therefore also serves as a term list, in which terms used in the game are established (Evans 2013, 19-20). Some rulebooks (especially for complex games) may even contain a separate term list, as shown in Figure 5 and 6.
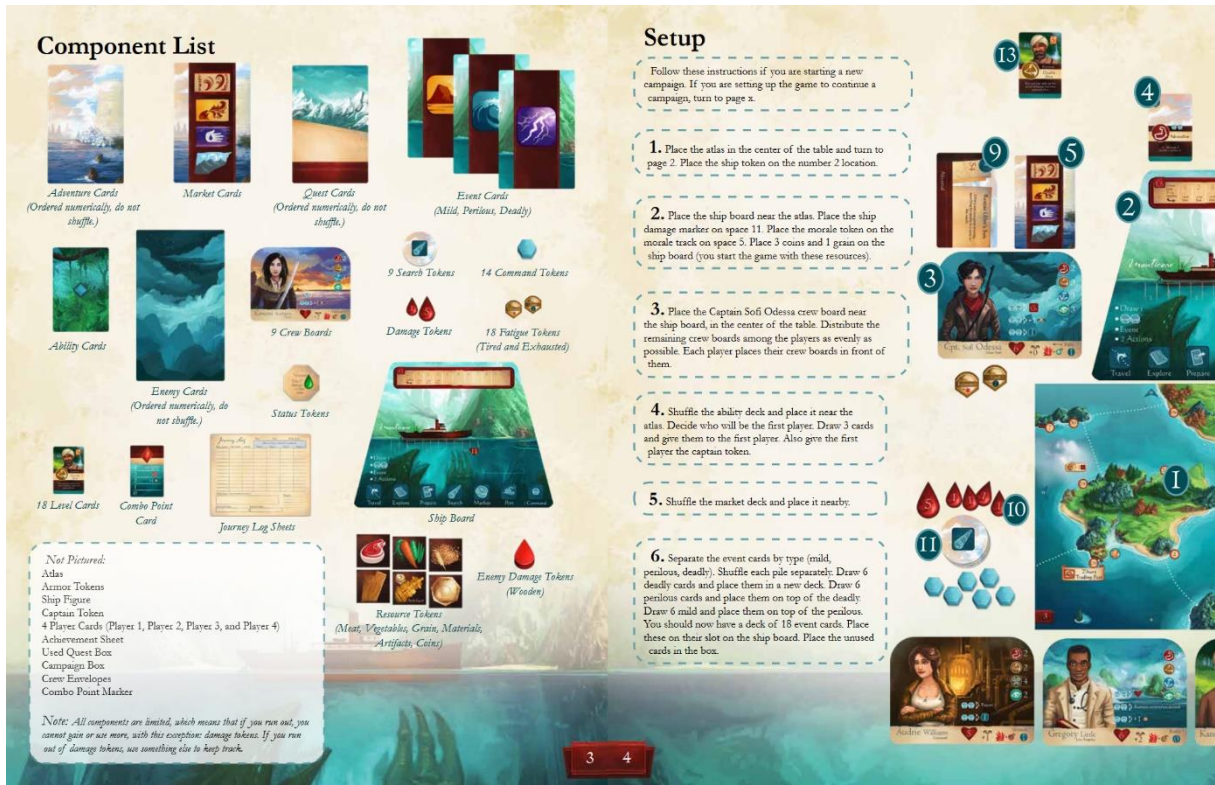
Figure 5: Examples of a component list and setup reference from Sleeping Gods *(Laukat 2021). Adapted from* Sleeping Gods English Kickstarter Rules V1.0 *by R. Laukat, 2021, pp. 3-4.*

Figure 6: Examples of a term list from Sleeping Gods *(Laukat 2021). Adapted from* Sleeping Gods English Kickstarter Rules V1.0 *by R. Laukat, 2021, pp. 6-7.*

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Another multimodal aspect of the game rules is found in the section on how to play the game. These sections serve as a manual for the players, in which the author defines what actions are possible and what a round and/or moves entail. Most board game rulebooks contain examples of legal and illegal moves, often accompanied by figures or illustrations. Aside from the words and imagery, typography is also an important aspect of multimodality, as certain typographical choices (such as using different fonts, or bold type and italics) add to the clarity of the rulebook. Therefore, the combination of words, imagery and typography are what makes board game rules of play multimodal (Evans 2013, 20-21).

Evans also notes this is where board game translation often differs from video game translation: text in video games must generally be entertaining to read, whereas text in board games should first and foremost be clear. I do not fully agree with Evans' statement here. Video games may also contain instructional text, whereas board games may also contain entertaining text. Though Evans correctly states that text in video games is often translated so that it is entertaining to read, most video games do contain instructional text, usually found in the tutorial. Evans' comparison is not completely accurate, because the tutorial text serves a similar purpose to board game rules of play, and therefore, those texts also warrant clarity.

However, it must be noted that video games work differently in regard to rules of play, mainly due to the fact that players are constrained by the software itself. A video game player should be unable to carry out illegal moves, as the software should have certain restraints in place to withhold players from doing so. This is different in board games: a board game player is not physically constrained from making illegal moves; it is up to the player(s) themselves to enforce the rules as proposed.

The other element not mentioned by Evans is that many board games contain text meant to be entertaining. Some board game rules contain so-called *flavor text*. TV Tropes defines *flavor text* as '… any text in a game that is completely unrelated to actual rules or

gameplay, and is included merely for effect.' (*Flavor text*, n.d.). In board games, this usually serves as an introduction into the setting of the board game. Additionally, in recent times many story-based board games have entered the market, of which the aforementioned *Sleeping Gods* is an important example. *Sleeping Gods* contains two books: the rules and the storybook (see Figure 7). When players choose to carry out the Explore-action, players search for the paragraph corresponding to the number of the location they are located, and read the text aloud. Often, players are presented with a choice, but they may also enter a battle, or receive items and rewards. As evidenced in the example shown below, this text is neither a literary story, nor strictly instructional. Instead, it combines two text types. The first is short sections of fantasy literature that, similar to video games, are meant to invoke the world the game is set in. These serve both an entertainment and an instructional purpose. Second, there are instructional segments that are very straightforward: they directly instruct the player(s) to take certain actions, as an extension to the rules.

Figure 7: Example of a paragraph from Sleeping Gods*' Storybook (Laukat 2021). Adapted from* Sleeping Gods English Storybook *by R. Laukat, M. Laukat and B. Asplund, 2021, p. 132.*

These storybook-texts then add to the multimodality of board games: the rules of the game apply to the storybook texts and determines which actions players are able to take, and the storybook directly references and influences actions and components players can or must take by following the text of the book. The storybook, rule book and components function in

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synergy and form the core of the game. There is a simple explanation for Evans omitting this type of multimodality: most of these story-based games were published between 2015 and 2022, meaning Evans did not yet have access to this type of game.

The multimodal nature of board games inherently affects the categorization of board games, as discussed in Section 2.2. Especially the perceived weight of games is directly connected to its level of modality: with more rules, more components and possibly more storytelling come more intricate modes of modality.

Due to the limited research on board game translation, information on translation processes can also be gathered from related fields of study. In the next section, I examine the translation and localization processes, occurrence of indirect translation and multimodality of video game localization and audiovisual localization. Video game localization is the closest area of research related to board game translation and highly multimodal in nature. Additionally, as mentioned in Section 2.4.3, the text types encountered during board game translation are very similar to those encountered during video game translation, meaning the translation processes will likely share similarities. Finally, both video games and board games share a ludic intention, where players must engage with the material in play. Audiovisual translation is interesting: not only is it highly multimodal in nature, but indirect translation is commonly used in the translation process. By examining the information on processes in these related fields, it is possible to speculate on processes and developments in the field of board game translation itself.

2.5 Previous research in related disciplines

2.5.1 Video game localization

Video games are inherently multimodal: video games combine television and computing technologies, alongside a ludic intention in a virtual environment. Therefore, similarly to

board games, the essence and experience of the gameplay is what needs to be reproduced in the translated version. Video game localization is directly connected to audiovisual translation: both dubbing and subtitling are important parts of the multimodal dimension of video game translation. The multimodal content of video game translation therefore consists of expression on a verbal (including written and spoken content) and a nonverbal (including sound effects, visual icons, symbols, colors, etc.) level (Mejías-Climent 2021: 3-4). This corresponds to Evans' research on multimodality on board games, where the rulebook functions as the main verbal expression, which cooperates with the nonverbal expressions that are expressed through components, illustrations, and so on. Another important aspect of the multimodality of video games is the role of the player: the semiotic construct here is bidirectional, meaning that transmission of meaning takes place from the game to the player, but also from the player to the game (Mejías-Climent 2021: 7). Mejías-Climent summarizes this phenomenon as follows: 'The game sends signs to the player through the visual and acoustic channels as well as through the tactile channel if vibrating controllers are used. The player, in turn, sends signs back to the game through kinesic (visual channel) or haptic codes (tactile channel) whose particular meaning is determined by the rules of the game' (Mejías-Climent 2021: 8). This phenomenon is connected to the ludic nature of video games, and due to its similarly ludic nature, this occurs in board gaming as well: the game sends signs to players through the visual and auditory channels, and the player responds to those in the proper way as described in the rules of the game. For example, a player may play a card that describes an action that must be taken by another player (visual channel), to which the other player responds by moving or taking the required components, which are established in either the rules or on the card itself. This bidirectionality is what sets both video game localization and board game translation apart and is something that must be taken into consideration during the localization or translation process.

Minako O'Hagan has written a great number of articles on video game localization. O'Hagan first wrote an article on video games as a new domain of translation research in 2007 (O'Hagan 2007), in which she briefly examines the multimodality of video games and its effect on localization processes. Like Evans, O'Hagan notes that text in video games must be translated with more than just functionality in mind, which makes video game localization very different from other forms of software localization.

In 2013, Minako O'Hagan and Carmen Mangiron published *Game localization: Translating for the global digital entertainment industry* (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013), a full book on the history, processes of, and approaches to video game localization. In this book, O'Hagan and Mangiron give a full overview of the video game industry itself, which is an important aspect in the process of video game localization, and an important aspect not yet addressed in studies of board game translation. O'Hagan and Mangiron summarize the product chain of the video game industry as shown in Figure 8.
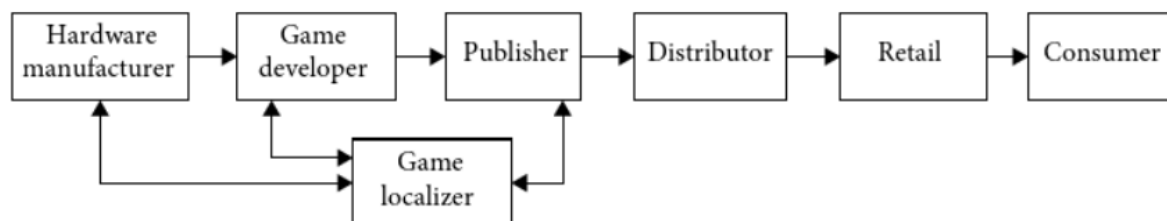
Figure 8: The game industry product chain with localization as presented by O'Hagan and Mangiron. Adapted from O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013, 78.

The most important element in Figure 8 is the location of the game localizer in the chain. Game localizers do not become part of the chain once the game has been developed in the source language: they are often part of the development process itself, usually at a very early stage of game development. This is called *internationalization* or *localization-friendly game development*.

Before 2000, localization was a process considered completely separate from the rest of the development process. This changed along with new technical advances, such as the

possibility to re-voice recorded voice audio and advances in 3D-modelling techniques, influencing the amount of in-game text. In the current localization phase of internationalization, many games are published using a simultaneous shipment model (or *sim-ship* model, the opposite of which is called the *post-gold* model), where the localized versions are made available at the same time as the original. This requires game localizers to be involved much earlier in the production process, which means the localization process has made a shift from being at the end of the production chain, to being part of the development process itself (O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013: 55-61).

A major advantage of internationalization is that it saves time and money, because many already developed assets will not have to be altered. Having to re-develop text boxes due to a difference in character constraints between Japanese and English, for instance, would be costly regarding both time and money. With internationalization, problems like these can be largely avoided. However, internationalization can also directly affect cultural references in games, which may now be generalized to avoid localization issues, which can be detrimental to preserving cultural difference in computer games. It may also be detrimental to unique characteristics in certain games, as the cultural message behind them will be lost by adapting to localized audiences in an early stage of development (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013, 89-91). Additionally, localization is now intertwined with the development process itself, which means that game localizers are no longer working with a polished, finished product that they can play. Combined with the ever-increasing complexity of the vast and intricate game worlds found in many game titles today, this makes game localization a challenging process and prone to localization errors (O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013, 60-61). In the sim-ship model, localizers tend to make use of direct translation. Indirect translation would take much longer.

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Still, indirect translation is an important process in video game translation. While it is often seen as a "lesser" form of translation, reflected in the poor perception of games translated using indirect translation (O'Hagan 2022, 1), it is the default form of translation when localizing video games originally in languages other than English (LOTE games), as evidenced in LocalizeDirect's *Game Localization Report* (LocalizeDirect 2021, 15). Especially in the case of the localization of Japanese games, publishers tend to make use of indirect translation, in which the Japanese original is first localized for the US English market. The US English localization is then often used as the source text for localizations for the European market. Another option is the US English localization being adapted into a UK/IR English locale. In both cases, the US English localization acts as the pivot language (O'Hagan 2022, 444-445).

It is likely that processes similar to the post-gold and sim-ship models of video game localization occur in the production of board games. Nowadays, many small(er) games are funded either through Kickstarter or Gamefound, crowdfunding websites where users can back projects. Projects that reach their goal are then considered funded and eventually published. In these cases, a post-gold model is usually employed: the game is generally released in English (though exceptions apply) and when it is deemed popular or successful enough, the rights to translate and publish the game may be bought by an international publisher. In contrast, for some board games, especially considering expansions to widely popular games, it is pre-determined they will be translated. A recent example of this is the long-expected *Wingspan: Asia* (Hargrave 2022), both a standalone game and an expansion to the acclaimed *Wingspan*, of which fourteen different translations have been released in the same short timeframe. It is to be expected that board game translators experience similar problems, such as having to work with unfinished material, leading to a lack of context.

However, this is only based on very limited personal experience with the board game industry, as no existing research on this process in board game translation exists.

O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013, 79) note that game publishers play a pivotal role in the game industry, and thus in the localization process, as it is publishers who finance the localization of games in the first place. Localization can be done in-house, but publishers may also outsource the localization to specialized game localization vendors or translation agencies. I expect a similar approach in board game translation. Based on personal observation, it is evident that larger companies, such as Ravensburger, are able to employ in-house translators, partially due to the large guaranteed volume of work they receive. Smaller companies may choose to employ freelancers or approach specialized vendors (such as Board Game Circus) or translation agencies.

2.5.2 Audiovisual translation

As already mentioned, audiovisual translation (or AVT) is another highly multimodal area of translation. Christopher Taylor examines the influence of multimodality on audiovisual translation in his article "The multimodal approach in audiovisual translation" (Taylor 2018). Taylor cites two definitions of multimodality: 'the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event' (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001, 20) and 'texts which combine and integrate the meaning-making resources of more than one semiotic modality – for example, language, gesture, movement, visual images, sound and so on – in order to produce a text-specific meaning' (Thibault 2000, 311). These definitions are applicable to board games as well. For example, Evans states in his article that modern board games consist of text, images and pieces, which means they also contain written, visual and plastic modes (Evans 2013, 16).

Furthermore, Taylor proposes four notions which must be considered while analyzing multimodal texts: narrative considerations, linguistic considerations, semiotic considerations

and cultural considerations. While these are based on his experience with audiovisual translation, these are important for board game translation as well.

The narrative consideration works differently in board game translation compared to audiovisual translation, as most board games do not follow a (linear) story. However, as noted in Section 2.4.3, many board games include pieces of so-called flavor text. In addition, story-based games are gaining popularity. Taylor notes that the audiovisual translator must account for not only the spoken words, but also the body language and facial expressions (Taylor 2018, 42). While this specifically is not applicable to board games, board game translators must also consider and express the narrative style used in the source text by the original author, while also considering accompanying illustrations or other elements connected to the story.

On the topic of linguistic considerations, Taylor notes that the important concepts of coherence and cohesion are crucial to the understanding of multimodal texts: if the multimodal cohesion is disturbed, the comprehension will also be affected (Taylor 2018, 42-43). Taylor illustrates this by means of an example from a television series, but there is an excellent example to demonstrate this through a board game. The Harry Potter-themed board game *Stupefy!* (Maublanc 2022) contains cards stating the word *misspell!*, which indicate that a spell is misfired and thus does not hit any other player. In the Dutch translation, the text on these cards reads *spelfout!*, which means "spelling mistake". Here, the cohesion is disturbed as there now is a connection to "spelling" rather than "spells", which also affects comprehension, as the text now seems out of place.

In discussing semiotic considerations, Taylor mainly focuses on the expression of emotions, which usually complements or emphasizes a verbal message. Here he mentions an interesting quote by Yves Gambier, who refers to this as the 'interplay between what is said and what is shown', which the translator needs to fully understand to decide on what

strategies will be best (Taylor 2018, 43). Though board game translation generally does not deal with verbal messages, semiotics are an important part of board games, especially when it comes to the rules. Many rulebooks contain the technical rules of the game, but also images of the contents of the box to help players identify pieces, and illustrations or flavor text which aim to strengthen the connection of the technical aspects with the theme of the game.

Lastly, cultural considerations are an unavoidable part of any translation process. Aside from the ever-existing cultural differences between the source and target audience, many board games have a cultural theme, which may have to be adapted to the target audience. Some of these themes may even cause conflict in certain audiences, such as the party game *Secret Hitler* (Boxleiter, Maranges and Temkin 2016) which is loosely based on the events of World War II and has players play as either liberals or fascists.

The domain of audiovisual translation is also relevant to board game translation due to its widely known usage of indirect translation, especially considering the practice of using template files. Generally, template files are subtitle files containing spotted subtitles. These template files are often referred to as *first translations* or *pivot translations*, which are usually produced in a target language and subsequently broadcast in the target language territory. The first or pivot translation may then be used as the new source text to produce translations into different languages for different language territories (Nikolić 2015, 192-193). There are certain advantages to the usage of template files for indirect translation. Both time and money can be saved by employing template files for indirect translation. Translating in a pre-spotted file is easier and faster for the translator. Alongside this, normally, it is cheaper to produce a template in a lingua franca (usually English) to be translated into a desired target language. In the current digital age, subtitling companies are presented with high volumes of subtitles, which means using template translation is widely used (Nikolić 2015, 196-198).

However, these advantages do come with a cost. The usage of templates has caused the rates for subtitlers to be reduced. Additionally, template files tend to dictate specific or strategic translation choices, which leads to subtitlers utilizing the template files as source material, rather than the original source. Subtitling conventions may also differ greatly between countries, which may lengthen and complicate the process rather than simplifying it. Lastly, template files can differ in quality. Subtitlers using template files of dubious quality may (unintentionally) copy mistakes, such as misspellings of proper names or the inclusion of false friends, leading to translations of poor quality (Nikolić 2015, 198-201).

Unfortunately, there is little information on similar practices in board game translation, but it is logical to assume indirect translation may play a role in this industry as well, especially considering that a number of German publishers (such as Kosmos and Schmidt Spiele) publish the majority of their titles in both German and English.[3] These titles are usually not released simultaneously, with the English translation often published later. However, translations into other languages by other publishers are regularly announced and published after the English version has been published, meaning it is likely that indirect translation plays a role here, especially in areas where it is cheaper or easier to employ a translator to translate from English instead of from German.

2.6 Aim of this study

As evidenced in the previous sections, board game translation remains a relatively underexplored field of study. Board game translation seems to be in the same position as video game translation in 2007: very little research is done on board game translation, yet the board game industry has been growing for years. The quality of board game translations tends to be variable and could be improved greatly. Many aspects from video game localization that now have been researched are of interest for improving board game translation, such as

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[3] English translations by Kosmos are published under the Thames & Kosmos brand.

indirect translation, general translation processes and internationalization. O'Hagan and Mangiron's book on video game localization is a possible glimpse into the future of research in board game translation.

In the Netherlands, many games are published in Dutch to reach a wider audience of casual players. With this research, I aim to gather information on board game translation processes in the Netherlands, therewith hopefully opening the doors to further opportunities to examine board game translation processes worldwide.

3. Method

3.1 Introduction: Overview of the method

With this research, I intend to give a comprehensive overview of translation processes at board game publishers in the Netherlands. In order to best answer this question, data was collected through the qualitative method of interviews. An important benefit of using interviews to collect data is their personal nature: it is possible to meet directly with the participants and explain the intent of the research personally. Another benefit is that interviews provide the option to add explanatory comments and ask additional questions (Jain 2021, 544).

For this research, an interview schedule was used rather than a questionnaire. Surveys as a data collection tool are especially useful for larger groups of participants, and they take less time than interviews to be analyzed. Due to the limited size of the population, the group of participants was not expected to be large enough to warrant the need for a survey. Surveys are a useful format to gather standardized and relatively structured data. However, an important disadvantage of surveys is that they are relatively complicated to design and administer, and they leave little room for explanations and notes. This can be improved by following up on a survey with an in-person interview. However, this means both a survey and an interview must be designed, which would take more time and effort for similar results, especially since the size of the population is limited for this research (Saldanha & O'Brien 2014, 152). Finally, response rates may be poor due to the overabundance of surveys, meaning a survey would likely be ignored easier compared to an invitation to participate in an interview (Adams et al. 2007, 128).

Interviews are generally more suited to gain a broader understanding of how and why something happens (Jain 2021, 541). The main advantage of using a structured interview is that it ensures that the same topics are covered in every instance. Additionally, it is possible to

support facts with quantification, and it is easier to compare responses between participants. However, structured interviews have relatively strict boundaries. A fully structured interview would not work as well for this research, mainly due to the difference in size between the participating companies. Due to this, insights and answers could differ between participants, and the opportunity to express these insights would be limited by adhering to a strict structured interview.

In contrast, fully unstructured interviews are useful for gaining insight into the perspective of the participants, but analysis is more complex and time-consuming due to their unstructured nature. Additionally, it is more difficult to quantify the data collected through an unstructured interview (Saldanha & O'Brien 2014, 172).

For these reasons, the choice was made to collect data through a semi-structured interview. An advantage of this is that it offers the same certainty of covering all topics as with a structured interview, which is not guaranteed with an unstructured interview, while it allows more freedom for participants to express (new) insights at the same time (Saldanha & O'Brien 2014, 173). As many of the topics brought up to the participants were connected, participants did not have to be interrupted when describing connected parts of the process. By extension, the semi-structured nature of the interview meant it was possible to go into details on particular topics, especially as the size of the companies did influence the answers and reasoning given to certain questions, which were then often more relevant depending on the size of the company.

3.2 Participants

The population for this study is board game publishers in the Netherlands. There are several reasons for narrowing down the population in this way, the most important being that these publishers are the easiest to reach (both digitally and physically) due to being located in the Netherlands. Another reason for contacting a limited number of companies and not

expanding to companies in other countries (e.g. Belgium) is due to time constraints. The full list of board game publishers in the Netherlands can be found in Appendix A.

Potential participants for this study were selected based on several criteria. First, the publisher had to publish translated board games. Second, the publisher had to have a catalog of at least three translated games in order to be considered, as it is more likely for a publisher to formulate their translation process when they have multiple translated games in their catalog. The reasons for choosing a minimum of three games is that a higher number would mean there would be a very limited pool of participants, which would limit the research too much. Third, the publisher had to publish both multilingual and monolingual translated games, as it is likely there is a different process for both types of translation. If the publisher has experience with both types of processes, they can be compared.

Based on these criteria, eight publishers were contacted: 999 Games, Asmodee The Netherlands, Gam'inBIZ, H.O.T. Games, Jolly Dutch, Keep Exploring Games, Ravensburger and White Goblin Games. This sample of eight companies represents a range of sizes. Asmodee The Netherlands and Ravensburger are part of a large international group, which means they are to be considered large companies with a large influence on the international board game market. 999 Games and White Goblin Games are large and influential companies within the Netherlands, but their contribution to the international board game market is limited to the few original games they publish as a multilingual (or in very rare cases monolingual) edition. These can be considered medium size companies. The remaining companies, including Gam'inBIZ and H.O.T. Games, operate on a much smaller scale, with publications mainly targeted towards the Dutch market. This discrepancy in size has a direct influence on translation processes, especially in regards to funding.

Publishers were contacted either through e-mail or through a contact form on their website. Five out of eight publishers were willing to participate, which is a response rate of

62,5 percent. The sample is thus a non-probability sample, based on accessibility of participants. The publishers interviewed were 999 Games, Asmodee The Netherlands, Gam'inBIZ, H.O.T. Games and Ravensburger. Four out of the five publishers provided one participant, with H.O.T. Games providing two, meaning there were six participants in total.

Four out of six participants were translators themselves at the publisher they work for. The remaining two participants worked in different roles, but both functioned as a translation manager. Five out of six participants were men, the remaining participant being a woman. No other demographic information was provided, which would have been useful in hindsight: especially age and years of experience in the industry would have been useful data.

3.3 Data collection

The data was collected through a semi-structured interview, either via Microsoft Teams or in person. The interviews via Microsoft Teams were recorded with the recording tool built into the software, and were subsequently transcribed. The in-person interview was recorded through minutes taken during the meeting, due to the participant having to perform other duties during the time scheduled for the interview. The interviews through Teams were each with one participant, while the interview in person had two participants. Interviews lasted between half an hour and an hour each. The interviews took place over a span of four weeks.

Prior to the interviews, participants were sent an informed consent form and an information letter. Participants were asked to specify whether they consented to being recorded, with the recordings being transcribed and deleted after transcribing. Participants were also asked to specify whether or not any references to data collected should be pseudonymized. Participants were also given a short introduction before the interview itself, in which they were reminded of the purpose of the interview and research. During this introduction, participants were also asked to confirm their choices regarding confidentiality and to confirm their informed consent. Participants were also informed of the predicted length

of the interview and given a chance to ask questions themselves (Saldanha & O'Brien 2014, 184).

3.3.1 Interview schedule

Participants were asked to answer questions divided into four categories: general questions, questions about the translation process, questions about the revision process and questions about the implementation of the translations. The interview schedule consisted of the following questions:

Algemene vragen [General questions]

1. Uit welke taal/talen vertaalt het bedrijf spellen? [Which languages are translated into Dutch within the company?]

2. Wie doet de vertaling?

    a. Maakt het bedrijf gebruik van freelancers, in-house vertalers of beide? (Outsourcing vs. in-house) [Who does the translating? Does the company employ freelancers, in-house translators or both?]

    b. Als freelancers: worden deze ingehuurd via vertaalbureaus, of worden freelancers direct benaderd? [If freelancers: are these employed through translation agencies, or are they contacted directly by the company?]

3. Wat zijn de criteria op basis waarvan de vertalers geselecteerd worden? Wat zoekt het bedrijf in een bordspelvertaler?

    a. Wat zijn de eisen? [What are the criteria based on which the translators are selected? What does the company seek in a board game translator? What are the requirements?]

    b. Heeft dit effect op het vertaalproces? [Does this affect the translation process?]

4. Worden dezelfde vertalers ingehuurd voor spellen in een serie of uitbreidingen? [Does the company hire the same translators for games in a series or expansions?]

5. Hoe veel vertalers werken op het moment bij het bedrijf? [How many translators work for the company at the moment?]

6. Wat is de verdeling per taal? [What is the division per language pair?]

7. Wordt de vertaalde versie over het algemeen tegelijk met de originele versie uitgebracht (*sim-ship*), of zit er veel tijd tussen (*post-gold*)? [Is the translated version generally published at the same time as the original (*sim-ship*) or with time between releases (*post-gold*)?]

    a. Merkt het bedrijf dat dit invloed heeft op de vertaalkeuzes? [Does the company notice that this affects choices regarding the translations?]

8. Maakt het bedrijf gebruik van tussenvertaling(en)? [Does the company use indirect translation?]

    a. Als ja: tussen welke talen en met behulp van welke taal? [If yes: between which languages, and which language functions as a lingua franca?]

    b. Is dit verbonden aan bepaalde genres van spellen? [Is this connected to specific genres?]

    c. Heeft het gebruik ervan effect op de vertaalkwaliteit? [Does this affect translation quality?]

Vertaalproces [Translation process]

9. Korte beschrijving van het vertaalproces binnen het bedrijf? [Short overview of the translation process within the company?]

10. Wat voor informatie ontvangen de vertalers aanvankelijk over het project? [What information do translators initially receive about the project?]

11. Hebben vertalers de mogelijkheid om het spel zelf te spelen voor het vertalen? [Are translators able to play the game before translating?]

12. Ontvangen vertalers extra referentiemateriaal (meer afbeeldingen, woordenlijsten, etc.)? [Do translators receive extra reference material (more images, term lists, etc.)?]

13. Wordt er verwacht dat vertalers met een vertaalprogramma (bijv. SDL Trados, memoQ, Memsource etc.) werken? [Are translators expected to work with translation software (such as SDL Trados, memoQ, Memsource etc.)?]

    a. Wordt dit vanuit het bedrijf aangeboden? [Does the company offer this possibility?]

14. In welke vorm wordt een vertaling aangeleverd (puur tekst vs. tekst en beeld)? [In what form (text only, text and images) is the translation sent back?]

    a. Heeft dit invloed op vertaalkwaliteit? [Does this influence translation quality?]

15. Is er regelmatig contact tussen het bedrijf en de vertaler tijdens het vertaalproces? Worden er vragen gesteld, etc.? [Is there any contact between the company and the translator during the translation process, to ask questions etc.?]

16. In welke vorm komt de vertaling terug bij het bedrijf? [In what form does the translation reach the company?]

Revisie [Revision]

17. Worden vertalingen gereviseerd? [Are translations revised?]

18. Werkt het proces goed? [Does the process work well?]

19. Door wie wordt de vertaling gereviseerd (projectmanager, vertaler zelf, andere vertaler, etc.)? [Who does the revision for the translation (project manager, translator themselves, other translator(s), etc.)?]

Implementatie [Implementation]

20. Waar komt de vertaling terecht na revisie? [Where does the translation go after it is revised?]

21. Wie zorgt ervoor dat de vertaling geïmplementeerd wordt en grafisch in orde is om te drukken? [Who implements the translation and readies it for publication?]

22. Wordt het vertaalde spel getest voordat deze officieel uitgegeven wordt? [Is the translated game tested before being officially published?]

23. Ontvangt het bedrijf regelmatig feedback over de spellen? [Does the company receive feedback on its games on a regular basis?]

    a. Worden klanten hierover benaderd of ontvangen ze hier zelf bericht van? [Does the company actively contact customers for feedback, or are they contacted by the customer?]

    b. Wordt deze feedback meegenomen in het volgende vertaalproces? [Is this feedback applied in the future translation process?]

24. Ervaren ze problemen door lengterestricties? [Do any problems due to length restrictions occur?]

3.3.2 Transcription

The interviews were transcribed more denaturalized, meaning idiosyncratic elements such as stutters, pauses and non-vocal language were not included in the final transcriptions (Azevedo et al. 2017, 161). As this research is focused on the direct information provided by the participants, it was unnecessary to include any idiosyncratic elements.

The transcription process consisted of the following steps, based on Azevedo et al. 2017). First, the interviews were prepared for transcription. The interviews were saved in the cloud through Microsoft Teams. In order to mitigate the risk of losing the recordings, they were temporarily saved on the personal computer on which they were transcribed. The file name of each transcription followed the same formula: Interview [participant name] [company name] [date]. The transcription was done by hand in Microsoft Word in a linear transcription scheme, meaning that questions were positioned directly above the answers. The

interviews were first transcribed as a rough draft, meaning mistakes in or missing punctuation and uppercase or lower case letters were included. Spelling mistakes were also not immediately corrected. Silences and pauses were still included. The aforementioned errors were fixed in the following step, the editing phase. Additionally, oral mistakes (e.g. unfinished sentences, incorrect word order, mispronunciations) were corrected. The transcriptions were then compared to the recordings and checked. Finally, the recordings were deleted from both Microsoft Teams and the personal computer. Though transcription software is available, transcribing the interviews by hand was preferable, especially due to the inclusion of domain-specific terms and names. Correcting the errors that would likely occur by transcribing through software would be time-consuming.

3.3.3 Interviewer's bias

A common and acknowledged issue with interviews is the interviewer's bias. As Saldanha and O'Brien state, 'all research is influenced by the values and ideology of the researcher, which drive topic selection and focus. Researchers ought to be aware of their own bias and should explicitly interrogate their own motivations' (Saldanha & O'Brien 2014, 41-42). This can lead to participants not feeling comfortable giving answers that correspond to their true feelings, ideas or experiences, which affects the validity of the research. In order to negate this bias, questions were formulated in a neutral tone, and an effort was made to ensure none of the options regarding answers given to the participants had a negative connotation.

3.4 Data analysis

Data analysis was done through thematic analysis, in which the raw data consisted of sentences or paragraphs given as a response to the questions asked. The answers given to the questions were often long and elaborate, meaning that they often touched upon different subjects or ideas, to which different codes were assigned (Saldanha & O'Brien 2014, 190). The codes used to assign to the data were based on the categories and questions as proposed

in the interview schedule (see Section 3.3.1). An answer on the usage of indirect translation would for example be coded with *general questions*, *indirect translation* and *translation quality*.

An important step to avoid bias in interpreting data was to also register themes that were absent from answers from the participants. This was especially important in analyzing this data, due to the differences between publishers.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Introduction

Findings will be reported in four main sections: general questions, translation process, revision and implementation. These correspond to the categories proposed in the original interview schedule. Each section is divided into smaller subsections, which correspond to themes identified in the analysis. These sections will consist of reported findings and discussion on the answers provided by the participants.

4.2 General questions

4.2.1 Translated languages

All participants noted that they translated from English into Dutch. Five out of six participants noted that they also translate from German, and four participants noted they regularly translate from French. Four out of six publishers mainly translate English-Dutch, whereas the remaining two publishers consider German-Dutch their main language pair.

4.2.2 Indirect translation

Five out of six respondents noted the occurrence of indirect translation. In these cases, the game is originally produced in language A (local language). Language A is then translated into language B (a lingua franca, generally English) and finally, language B is translated into language C (a different local language). Two of the respondents noted that they regularly translate games that have been translated into English from French, after which they use the English translation as the source text for the final Dutch translation.

However, another interesting development occurs. Two publishers note that sometimes games are produced in language X (lingua franca), which is non-native to the area where it is first produced and published. At the same time, a version in language Y (local language) is produced, which is a pseudo-translation of the version in language X. The

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"original" game in language X is then used for translation into language Z (another local language). The participant from Gam'inBIZ stated the following on this subject:

> Ik heb bijvoorbeeld van CuBirds, …, dat is een Frans spel, de Engelse spelregels vertaald. Die zijn opgesteld door de Fransen en door een native speaker waarschijnlijk overgelezen, maar je ziet gewoon dat daar Franse cultuur in is geslopen, en hun slechte of beperkt Engels. Als ik dan weer letterlijk ga vertalen, wordt het iets heel slechts.
>
> [For example, I translated the English rulebook for CuBirds, a French game. They were written by the French and probably checked by a native speaker, but you can see that they were influenced by French culture, and their bad or limited English. If I translate that literally, it will look very bad.]

The participant also noted that this is due to the fact that many publishers from countries or areas where English is not a main language compose the rules in English due to the international nature of the board gaming community. However, as these rules are often not composed by native speakers of English, the rules may be unclear at times and unintended influence from the mother language of the original authors is very common. Three participants noted that they regularly consult the rulebooks in the original language alongside the English version when this occurs.

The three aforementioned participants stated that by consulting the rulebook in the main language of the publisher, certain ambiguities and influences from the main language can be filtered out of the English translation, and by extension from the Dutch translation, improving the quality of the Dutch translation. This is evidenced in the following quote of the participant of Gam'inBIZ:

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Het Engels geldt als een lingua franca, dus wat ook bij het ontwikkelen van eigen spellen veel gebeurt, bij mij, maar ook bij Duitse uitgevers zie ik dat wel, is dat de spelregels om te beginnen al in het Engels worden opgesteld. Dan wordt er vaak een vertaling van het Engels naar het, in mijn geval Nederlands, gedaan. Ik gok dat het in het Frans zo geweest is. Dus er is een discussie over wat de brontaal is, maar ik merk wel, zij zijn natuurlijk *native* Frans. Dus als ik de Franse tekst erbij pak, dan kan ik wel zien hoe ze bepaalde dingen in het Engels bedoeld hebben, want daar zit toch vaak ook wel wat interpretatieruimte. Je bent allemaal niet *native*, er is wel een soort jargon, maar ook weer niet helemaal vastgezet, dus… Ja, ik heb bij CuBirds ook de Franse tekst er wel naast gehouden, gewoon om te zien of er dingen anders waren, of hoe ze bepaalde termen bedacht hebben.

[English can be considered a lingua franca, so what happens when developing new games, I see it in my company but also with German publishers, is that the rulebook is immediately written in English. Then, a translation from English is made, in my case into Dutch. I believe this happened for the French. So, if I examine the French text, I can see how they meant to say certain things in English, because there is often room for alternative interpretations. None of us are native speakers, there is a sort of terminology, but not really, so… Yes, for CuBirds I examined the French text alongside the Dutch, just to see if things were any different, or what certain terms meant.]

The participant correctly refers to English as a lingua franca in this situation (ELF). ELF is to be considered a type of communication in which untrained multilinguals use linguistic resources to overcome challenges of linguacultural differences. Translation (and interpreting) is another type of communication that faces the same linguacultural differences, but translators are generally considered professionally trained multilinguals with native or native-like linguistic competence (Albl-Mikasa 2018, 369). Interestingly, the effects of English as a

lingua franca on non-English texts, meaning Anglophone text conventions influencing Dutch texts (Baumgarten, House & Probst 2004: 83-84), seem to also occur on other levels within board game translation: one participant mentioned that certain English terminology, such as the terms *token* and *marker*, are becoming more acceptable in Dutch due to English influence. Another participant stated that such Anglophone conventions affected their translations in a negative way, as the reviewer for one of the clients they work for regularly imposes the English grammatical rule where compounds are written as two separate words on their Dutch translation, despite this being incorrect in Dutch.

All respondents stated that they preferred working with a game in its original language, rather than a rulebook resulting from indirect translation, due to the aforementioned complications that arise. The participant from 999 Games stated the following on the subject:

> De oorspronkelijke spelregels, de allereerste versie, die wil ik vertalen. Geen vertaalde versies. … Het wil wel eens voorkomen dat de oorspronkelijke versie niet beschikbaar is, omdat we een licentie hebben van een bedrijf wat de spelregels al heeft vertaald. Maar, dat heeft niet mijn voorkeur. Meestal komen er dan meer fouten in, want bij iedere vertaling is er weer een kans op fouten, die je dan weer kan overnemen. Bij *Dominion* hebben we dat een paar keer gehad, en dat wil ik eigenlijk voorkomen door altijd de oorspronkelijke taal te gebruiken.
>
> [The original rules, the very first version, that's what I want to translate. Not already translated versions. … Sometimes the original version is unavailable, because we have a license from a company that already translated the rules of play. But, I do not like that. Usually it leads to more mistakes, because the risk of mistakes increases with every translation, which can be taken over again. It happened a few times translating *Dominion*, and I want to avoid that by using the original rules.]

In Chapter 2, it was noted that indirect translation may allow for easier transmission between cultures that do not normally interact. This was only briefly mentioned by one participant, who stated that his own games are sometimes translated into Baltic languages or Russian from English rather than Dutch. However, the known and expected disadvantages of indirect translation in board game translation were more commonly cited, especially the risk of errors that are carried over between translations.

The employment of English as a pivot language in board game translation is very similar to the usage of English as a pivot language in video game localization. Similar to video game translation, indirect translation is also seen as a lesser form of translation, in this game also by the translators themselves. It is also likely that the negative perception of indirect translation and the still relatively widespread usage of it in board game translation has in part caused the negative attitude towards Dutch board game translations in general.

4.2.3 Employment of translators

Two out of the five respondents from publishers stated they mainly work with in-house translators, and that they only employ translators outside the company when the workload is too great or when they are unavailable. The other three respondents stated they work with freelance translators. The sixth respondent is a volunteer translator for two Dutch publishers and a large number of international publishers. One publisher works with two in-house translators. Both in-house translators translate from English and German into Dutch, although each translator has their own preferred language pair. 999 Games has one in-house translator who handles the majority of translation jobs. In his absence, the publisher contacts freelancers whom they have previously selected through a selection process. The publisher Gam'inBIZ is a one-man company, meaning that the owner is also the main (in-house) translator. The participant notes that he prefers to do all translation work himself, which is not always possible due to his regular day job which he combines with running Gam'inBIZ. If he is

unable to do a translation himself, he will ask volunteers. Another publisher works with a pool of three freelance translators. The freelancers are directly employed by the publisher. Similarly, another publisher works with a pool of five volunteer translators. The translators do unpaid work, but they do receive other compensation. Only one of the five publishers noted that they work solely with freelancers. They noted that the freelancers they employ have a formal background in translation and do both translation and marketing jobs. One publisher regularly employs a translation agency, but only when their in-house translators are unavailable.

The majority of participants (four out of six) note that their company regularly employs volunteers. Two of these publishers only employ volunteers. The remaining two publishers have an in-house translator, but they make use of volunteers when the in-house translator is unavailable. Three out of four participants stated that the reason for employing volunteers is strictly financial. The participant from Gam'inBIZ noted that it is simply too expensive to employ professional translators:

> Wat kost een vertaler? 20 cent per woord als je een goeie hebt? Misschien 15? Zoiets
> zal het algauw zijn. Nou, die spelregelboekjes beslaan zomaar 2000 woorden.
> Sommige producties zitten op de 60.000 woorden. Van die escape room-achtige
> spellen, dan zit je zo op de 30.000 woorden. Nou ja, reken maar uit. Een commerciële
> vertaling is dan 6000 euro of zo, we hebben een oplage van 1000 spelletjes, dat
> betekent dat de vertaling alleen al 6 euro kost [per spel]. Dat kan er niet uit, dus dat
> wordt allemaal door amateurs gedaan.
> [What does a translator cost? 20 cents per word? Maybe 15? Probably around that
> number. Well, rules of play easily contain 2000 words. Some productions go up to
> 60.000 words. Escape room type games are easily at 30.000 words. Calculate that. A
> commercial translation would be around 6000 euros, and we've got 1000 printed

copies, that would mean that the translation would be 6 euros [per copy]. We cannot

do that, so we employ volunteers.]

Two out of the six participants stated that it would be near impossible to make a profit on the

products produced if they employed professional paid translators. This is due to a relatively

low margin on board games to begin with, along with the relatively small size of the Dutch

market. Therefore, they make use of volunteer translators.

Volunteer translator communities have existed in various areas of translation.

Volunteer translation is also widespread in the video game industry, both for AAA games and

indie games. Indie game studios tend to struggle with the same issues as the smaller Dutch

board game publishers: compared to bigger studios, they have limited funds and resources.

Indie publishers might therefore also choose to work with volunteer translators (Toftedahl,

Backlund & Engström 2018: 15). It must be noted, however, that voluntary translation in

board game translation is not limited to smaller publishers: two of the major publishers in the

Netherlands also employ volunteers.

Employing volunteers has advantages and disadvantages. As previously mentioned,

using volunteer translators is advantageous from a financial perspective, as they are much

more affordable than professional translators. Volunteer translators generally are very

motivated to provide translations, as they tend to want to support the organization or company

they are translating for (Jiménez-Crespo 2016: 64). This was confirmed by two participants,

who stated that either they themselves or their (other) translators generally translate games

because they enjoy board games, enjoy the act of translating and want board games to be

accessible to others. However, the quality of volunteer or crowdsourced translations does not

always match that of professional translators. Two participants confirmed that this also

happens for board game translation: they noted that the quality of translations from volunteers

differs greatly between translators. One participant stated the following on one of his experiences with crowdsourcing:

> Ik heb dus online op Insta, Facebook en BoardGameGeek mensen om input gevraagd,
> en dan zie je dus dat ook die vrijwillige vertalers eigenlijk met hele *crappy*
> vertaalideeën aan komen. Niet omdat ze het niet willen, maar ik zie gewoon aan wat
> ze bedenken dat dat nooit gaat werken.
> [I asked people for input through Insta[gram], Facebook and BoardGameGeek, and
> then you see that those volunteer translators come up with really crappy translation
> suggestions. Not because they don't want to [translate well], but I just immediately see
> that what they thought of is never going to fly [on the Dutch market.]

Additionally, one of the participants stated that they felt conflicted about doing volunteer translation, as it sometimes feels like maintaining a vicious circle: by offering volunteer translation, volunteer translation is regarded as something acceptable in the industry, meaning there is less initiative to find paid translators.

Reliance on volunteer translators can then be considered controversial. Even among the participants, there is disagreement on how voluntary translators are perceived. The participant from Gam'inBIZ stated the following:

> Het zijn vaak vrijwilligers in Nederland die de vertalingen doen, en die blijven vaak
> heel dicht bij de brontekst. Soms ook met lelijke anglicismen als gevolg, en dat is
> zonde, want je moet het gewoon opnieuw vertellen, dat is eigenlijk waar het op
> neerkomt.
> [In the Netherlands, it is often volunteers who do the translations, and they tend to stay
> very close to the source text. Sometimes, this leads to the inclusion of terribly ugly

anglicisms, which is a shame, because you have to re-write the text, that's what it

comes down to.]

Five out of six participants stated that they tend to employ the same translator for games

published as a series or expansions to games. All five participants stated that employing the

same translator is necessary to ensure consistency. The participant for 999 Games noted that

they may even ask the original publisher to postpone the initial release date of the Dutch

translation if they happen to be unavailable. If the date cannot be postponed, they will work

around their personal plans in order to ensure that the translation can be done by themselves.

One participant stated that they do not employ the same translator for games in a series

or expansions. The participant stated that this is due the large volume of work they receive,

which means jobs generally go to the translator who is available at that time. Two participants

also stated that they do not always translate expansions to games, as this is another financial

risk for the companies.

4.2.4 Selection criteria

Generally, none of the participants truly valued a formal academic background in translation.

Rather, experience and interest in board games, and translation experience were valued most.

Five out of six participants do not currently work with translators who have studied

translation. A few reasons were given for this.

Firstly, they stated that professional translators generally do not have a good

understanding of the translation of board game rules of play. The participant from 999 Games

notes that a translator needs to be both creative and very consistent to translate rules of play.

Additionally, two out of six participants stated that they do not necessarily consider the

process a translation process, but rather a process of rewriting or reformulating the rules in another language. The participant from 999 Games stated the following:

> Als je geen ervaring hebt met spellen, maar wel met het vertalen van boeken bijvoorbeeld, dat zie je direct terug. Mensen die boeken vertalen die schrijven veel creatiever, zijn veel minder bezig met consistentie, dan mensen die echt spelregels vertalen.
>
> [You immediately notice when someone does not have experience with board games, but does, for example, have experience with translating books. People who translate books write in a more creative way, and they are less consistent than people who translate rules of play.]

Board game rules of play are a very specific genre of text, as they are instructive texts which function as the formal system of a game (Salen & Zimmerman 2003, Chapter 11). The entirety of the game is dependent on text: mistakes in the rules and on components can heavily alter or even ruin players' experiences. On the other hand, as mentioned in Section 2.4.3, rules of play often contain flavor text as well. Due to the specific and complicated nature of rules of play, it is then also logical that translators who (mainly) have experience in other areas generally deliver texts of lesser quality.

Building on this, all publishers noted that translation quality tends to be higher when translators have work field experience and knowledge of board games.

Although not completely relevant to the discussion, the participant from Gam'inBIZ also stated the following regarding translations on the Dutch market, referencing the game *Hidden Leaders* (Müller, Müller & Stocker 2022):

Wat ik zag toen bij de Kickstarter-editie was dat twee derde van de mensen uit

Nederland en Vlaanderen kiezen voor de Nederlandse editie, en een derde opteert toch

voor Engels uit een soort van scepsis, omdat bordspelvertalingen slecht zijn, of komt

er wel een uitbreiding in het Nederlands. En dat zie je in het algemeen in

bordspellenland wel, hoe complexer het spel is, echt *expert games* worden zelden tot

nooit vertaald want *who cares?* De markt is te klein. En we zijn allemaal heel erg

argwanend als het gaat om de kwaliteit van de vertaling. Die is gewoon vaak

ondermaats, helaas. … Ik heb het idee dat het de combinatie is van een soort

interessantdoenerij, maar ook wel gewoon zo bekend zijn met Engels dat het prima is.

En scepsis richting de Nederlandse vertalingen, terechte scepsis.

[What I noticed with the Kickstarter edition was that two third of the people from the

Netherlands and Flanders chose the Dutch edition, and a third of the people still

choose the English version due to some form of skepticism, because board game

translations are bad, or because they wonder whether a Dutch expansion will follow.

And that generally happens in the world of board games, the more complicated a

game, real expert level games are rarely translated because who cares? The market is

too narrow. And we're all very suspicious towards translation quality. Unfortunately,

it usually just is substandard. … I feel like it is a combination of showing off, but also

being so familiar with English that we're fine with it. And skepticism towards the

Dutch translations, a justified skepticism.]

This then corresponds to the comments on Budgetspelen.nl as proposed in the Introduction:

translation quality is often perceived as dubious, while translated games also come with a

certain risk for the consumer, especially in regards to expansions. This was confirmed by

another participant, who stated that expansions are especially risky to translate as the market

for expansions is even more limited.

4.2.5 Sim-ship and post-gold publishing

All participants stated that they publish games both sim-ship and post-gold. One participant

stated that any multilingual editions are usually published sim-ship, but monolingual editions

are published post-gold. Two participants stated that sim-ship publishing is financially

interesting, as the production costs generally are lower. An important consideration in

whether to go for sim-ship or post-gold production for two publishers is whether or not the

translated game will have to compete with its original counterpart on the Dutch market. The

participant from Gam'inBIZ stated the following on the subject:

`   Spellen die taalonafhankelijk zijn, zijn heel kwetsbaar voor "ik neem wel de Engelse

versie". Dus voor CuBirds was eigenlijk nul reden [voor de consument] om de

Nederlandse versie te kopen, want de Engelse versie heeft hetzelfde materiaal, en de

spelregels staan op BoardGameGeek. Dat maakt het wel in het algemeen lastig voor

Nederlandse producties. Als ze later uitkomen dan de andere talen, dan ga je dus een

beetje raar concurreren met zo'n vreemde taal.

[Games that are language independent are very vulnerable to "I'll just get the English

version instead". For CuBirds, there really was no reason [for customers] to buy the

Dutch version, because the English version contains the same components, and the

rules of play can be found on BoardGameGeek. That generally complicates things for

Dutch publications. When they are published later than the other languages, it leads to

a weird rivalry with those foreign languages.]

Another participant confirmed that they also often have to consider this. Both participants

work for smaller companies, which implies that the financial consequences of this

phenomenon may be more detrimental to the smaller publishers than the larger ones.

Interestingly, one participant stated that they often first publish a game in its original language to see if it fits the Dutch market. If the original version sells, it is translated into Dutch and published post-gold. However, the publisher negotiates the rights to the translation regardless of publication, to prevent competitors from buying the rights to "their" games. If the company is certain a title will be successful on the Dutch market, the publishers will often choose sim-ship. This means that this publisher likely does not experience the same disadvantages related to the existence of the English and Dutch product in the same market as the aforementioned smaller publishers. This same participant also noted that generally, a Dutch version is more profitable, as lower production costs mean that the product can be offered to customers at a lower price.

The participant from 999 Games notes that he prefers post-gold publishing, because it gives him the opportunity to test the game before translating. This statement is supported by two other participants. Additionally, the files for post-gold published games tend to be sent to translators with more reference material, which improves translation quality.

One participant also mentioned that choosing for post-gold can have a positive effect on the text in another way. Games are often revised between the first and second (or later) publications, which means that mistakes in the text will have been corrected:

> Op het moment dat wij de Nederlandstalige versie gaan doen, kun je eventuele fouten meteen in de Nederlandse versie herstellen. Dan heb je een voordeel ten opzichte van gelijk vertalen en later zelf de fouten die in het basisspel al staan eruit halen. Het gebeurt wel eens, al moet ik zeggen dat de laatste tijd bij de Engelse spellen de bronbestanden in de basis eigenlijk al goed zijn.
> [Once we decide to do a Dutch version, any mistakes can immediately be corrected in the Dutch version. Therefore you have an advantage compared to translating immediately and then having to correct mistakes in the base game yourself. It happens

sometimes, though I must admit that lately the source files for the English games have

been of good quality.]

4.3 Translation process

4.3.1 Description of the translation process

The participant from 999 Games stated that the source text is first sent to a graphic designer, who prepares the file for translation. Generally, the file is the complete rulebook including images and vectors. The file is then sent to the translator. The translation is done directly into the file, so that the graphic layout is immediately visible. The participant stated that he first translates the terminology regarding components to ensure consistency. The translator then translates the rest of the text. The file including the translation is then sent back to the graphic designer, who does the final layout of the rules, box and other components or materials. The target text is then revised and edited, before sent to production.

The particpant from Gam'inBIZ stated that his current process is to open the source text as an InDesign file and add the Dutch translation over the original text, so he can immediately see whether the text will fit within the layout. If there is limited space or if he feels certain parts of the text need to be expanded upon, he might change the layout himself. He stated the following:

> Ik heb bij *Fika* (Kwibus Gamedesign 2022) echt complete pagina's omgewisseld. Dan
> is het een geïntegreerd proces, en voor mijn gevoel levert dat een betere vertaling op.
> Ik denk dat het resultaat veel beter is, maar het proces is daardoor niet meer
> schaalbaar, want dat betekent dat de vertaler ook de vormgever moet zijn.
> [With *Fika*, I switched around entire pages. Doing so, it becomes an integrated
> process. In my opinion, that leads to a better translation. I think the result is much

better, but it also means that you can no longer scale the process, because it means the translator has to be the graphic designer as well.]

After finishing the graphic design of the product, the participant has it proofread and finally sent over to the client. The participant stated that this is his preferred method, but also noted that he used to cut and paste text from the source text into Google Docs, employing a graphic designer to add the translation and arrange the layout. He changed the process as he felt the previous process was both costly and time-consuming.

One participant stated that they receive the source text and reference materials such as photos and images of the box and the components. The translation is generally done in a plain Word or Excel file. The source text is then translated and revised, before being sent back to the client. The client takes care of the graphic design.

One participant stated that he is the first to be in contact with the client. First, he determines how long the translation will take and what it will cost. If approved, the source text and reference files are sent over to the translator. The publisher receives jobs for which they do the graphic design themselves, but they also receive jobs for which the graphic design is done by the client. If the publisher does the graphic design for the translation themselves, the target text layout is done in-house, otherwise the target text is sent to the client after revision. The target text is always revised and the final translation is sent to the client. The client then sends e-proofs to the participant for a final check before publication.

One participant stated that they are contacted by clients. They are provided a deadline, to which they usually agree. Sometimes the participant contacts publishers directly, but this is usually regarding translations on a voluntary basis. They are then sent the source text and reference files. They translate the text without reading the full text or playing the game first to ensure that any uncertainties are filtered out. For smaller clients, the participant does their own graphic design in InDesign, before revising the text and sending the translation to the

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client. Otherwise, the participant revises the text and sends the files to the client for graphic design. Depending on the client, they may receive a final version before production.

The final participant stated that they receive the source text and reference materials from the client. These are generally InDesign files. The files are sent directly to the translators, who translate the text and do the graphic design themselves. The translated files are sent back to the participant, where they are revised and finally sent back to the client.

Generally, the processes are similar for each publisher. However, the amount of work that goes into a translation seems to differ between publishers, and is dependent on different factors. First, the size of the company is relevant. Bigger companies, such as 999 Games, have access to a graphic designer, who prepares the files for translation and/or does the final implementation. This also extends to proofreading: translators from bigger publishers generally have better access to proofreaders than those from smaller publishers.

Interestingly, the size of the publisher that provides the source text seems to also influence the process: two translators that take translation jobs from smaller publishers stated that they often do graphic design work and/or implementation themselves, as the publishers they work for do not have employees who do graphic design. Depending on whether the deadlines the translators are given include the time for graphic design work, this may be a disadvantage to translators working at or for smaller companies, as the time the translator can effectively spend on translating may be less than the time a translator working at or for a larger company that "outsources" the graphic design to another person or department.

4.3.2 Availability of additional information

All participants agree that translation quality is greatly improved when they receive extra material (e.g. images, term lists, actual game components). The more information translators receive on the project, the better the quality of the translation is perceived to be. Four out of six participants stated that receiving extra material makes translating easier, and that it is

especially useful when translating terms referring to game components. Three out of six participants specifically mentioned that translating the English term *token*, which has no direct Dutch equivalent in board games, is much easier when corresponding materials are provided. It is logical that additional material improves translation of board game material, as all components of a game are part of the complex multimodality of board games. Visual aids displaying these components decrease the abstractness of the multimodal texts, as the translator does not have to imagine what a term such as *token* may refer to: they have a direct reference.

Four participants stated that it is possible for translators to contact someone who can answer questions and clarify the source text for them. One participant, who functions as a translation manager, stated that they regularly contact the translators themselves, to check how the translation is coming along and whether they need any help. The other three participants, who function as translators, generally contacted the client or the person available for questions themselves when needed. Two participants did not mention the possibility of contacting someone.

Three out of six respondents stated that it normally is possible to play the game before translating, either as a prototype or as a sample game. The respondent from 999 Games noted that the possibility to test the game depends on whether a game is published sim-ship or post-gold:

> Het gebeurt wel eens, en daar ben ik nooit blij mee, dat we meteen meegaan in de eerste productie van een spel van een andere uitgever, waardoor ik het spel nog niet eens gespeeld of gezien heb, en dus alleen maar spelregels krijg. Ja, en dat levert dus al fouten op. Ten minste, ik probeer dat te voorkomen, maar omdat je dat spel nooit gespeeld hebt, is het veel moeilijker te vertalen dan wanneer je het spel kunt testen. … Engelse teksten zijn vaak voor meerdere interpretaties vatbaar, en dan moet je maar

precies begrijpen wat ze bedoelen, zonder dat je het spel gespeeld hebt. Dat is bijna

niet te doen.

[Sometimes, and I'm never happy about that, we go along with the first production of

a game from another publisher, which means I have not even seen or played the game,

and am only provided the rules. Yeah, that leads to mistakes. Well, I try to prevent

that, but if you've never played a game, it is much harder to translate than when

you're able to test it first. … English texts usually can be interpreted in several ways,

and then they expect you to just understand what it says without having played the

game. That's nearly impossible.]

Two participants stated that employees from the publisher, who are not the translators, usually

test the games to examine whether they are a good fit for the catalog. Both participants stated

that the game samples are also available to the translators, but that they tend to prefer extra

materials (such as pictures of the materials and box) over the samples.

4.3.3 File extensions

Three participants stated that they work with Adobe InDesign files. Similarly, the participant

from 999 Games receives files for a graphic design software, though the specific software was

not mentioned. Participants noted that they translate directly into these files.

Two participants stated that their translations are often done in pdf files. Three

participants stated that they regularly receive Word or Excel files. One participant added that

he prefers to receive a Word document with two columns, with one containing the English

text and one for the Dutch translation.

4.3.4 Usage of translation software

None of the interviewed participants are currently using a form of translation software. One

participant answered that they were recently informed that the main office would be providing

access to translation software and that this will be used for translations in the near future. The participant from Gam'inBIZ stated that he would like to use translation software for its ability to save terminology, as this would increase the consistency of translations. However, he also felt that using translation software may be detrimental as the segmentation of the text may lead to a translation that is much closer to the source text. Another participant also stated that they feel the segmentation may have a negative influence on their translations, and that it may even lead to a more anglicized text.

The remaining four participants did not show any interest in the usage of translation software. An important reason for not using translation software was the cost of the software: generally, the purchase or licensing costs were deemed too high to be profitable. Although valid concerns, the consistency of board game translation could be improved with the usage of translation software. Two out of six participants mentioned that terminology can differ greatly from translator to translator. This could partially be avoided by using translation software that includes a term base for terminology management, as software such as SDL MultiTerm or memoQ will automatically present users with the preferred term. Terminology management is proven to improve consistency in texts, which in turn improves usability, readability and the transferability into other languages, should the text come to function as a source text (Steurs, De Wachter & De Malsche, 2015, 224).

This already occurs in video game translation, where multiple translators work on texts for the same game. The usage of translation tools and terminology management tools is relatively new in video game localization, but has become part of the standardized process of video game translation. An issue with the usage of translation tools for video game localization is the relative diversity between products, which limits the option for a true standardized approach.

Nevertheless, special tools have been developed for video game localization, through which the process has partially been standardized. O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013, 143-146) state that this standardization and the widespread use of tools within video game localization have both optimized the localization process and improved the quality of localized video games. However, it would be difficult for board game translation to achieve such a level of standardization in a short period of time: standardization of the process would mean that not only the Dutch publishers, but also their clients, need to implement standardized processes. Whether these publishers would be able to implement standardized processes similar to what is seen in video game localization is heavily dependent on their financial situation, which can vary greatly between companies, both within the Netherlands and outside of it. Therefore it is impossible to expect a level of standardization comparable to the video game industry on a short-term basis.

4.4 Revision

All participants stated that translations are revised in some way. One participant stated that the translation is revised three times, of which once by the project manager, once by a colleague from the graphic design department and finally by a colleague who is good at revision. Another participant works together with the other translator employed to revise each other's translations.

Another participant stated that they usually check the translation themselves, before they send it to the publisher. The publisher is in charge of the final revision. The participant stated that the quality of the revision process heavily depends on the company they are working with, as he stated that the revision at one of the publishers they work for generally causes the text to be in a worse state than before revision, due to the revisor adding mistakes

to the text (most notably adding spaces between compound words, which is a persistent anglicism in Dutch).

Another participant noted that the publisher first employs someone with good knowledge of languages to revise the text, before final revision is done within the company. The participant from Gam'inBIZ stated that he always employs a proofreader if possible. He stated that he would like to have a more thorough revision process, but that this is generally not possible due to financial constraints. The participant also noted another part of the process which he thinks of as strange:

Wat ik omgekeerd wel gekker vind, is dat er nooit een soort van controle achteraf lijkt te zijn, van de uitgevers, van is dit correct vertaald? Ik zou me heel goed kunnen voorstellen, als de belangen groot zijn moet het gebeuren, met wetteksten is het zeker zo, maar dat je het laat vertalen, vervolgens door een tweede vertaler laat valideren. Dat gebeurt nooit. Er is niemand die kijkt of de spelregels kloppen. … Als ik een spel maak en het wordt verkeerd vertaald, die dingen gebeuren in de praktijk, dan kan het heel veel afbreuk-risico opleveren voor mijn spel in andere markten. BoardGameGeek is onverbiddelijk.

[On the contrary, what I think is strange, is that there's no checking after translation by the publishers, to see if it's translated correctly. I can imagine that this has to happen when stakes are high, it definitely is done with law texts, that it is translated and then checked by a second translator. That never happens. Nobody checks whether the rules are translated correctly. … When I make a game and it is translated badly, and this happens, you risk damaging the reputation of your game in other markets. BoardGameGeek is unrelenting.]

This participant was the only participant to make remarks on this subject, despite this being an important remark. Translations not being checked for mistakes by comparing the translation

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to the original text signifies a certain trust in the translator (and by extension reviewer). In this area, the process is again similar to video game localization: the translation is reviewed and/or tested to filter out linguistic errors (known as *linguistic testing* in video game localization (O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013, 138)), but no comparative review is done.

4.5 Implementation

4.5.1 Testing

Three participants stated that their translated games are tested before they are published. Only one participant stated that all of their translated games are tested before they are published. The remaining two participants stated that games categorized as escape games (sometimes referred to as escape rooms) were regularly tested. Both participants stated these really need to be tested, as escape games usually can only be played once. The participant from 999 Games stated the following:

> Bij spellen die maar één keer speelbaar zijn, dan moeten we het wel doen. Een EXIT
> uitgeven die niet klopt, dat zou echt niet kunnen. Dan heb je gewoon een spel dat één
> keer speelbaar is, wat eigenlijk nul keer speelbaar is. Dat wil je gewoon echt
> voorkomen.
> [For games you can only play once, we have to do it. To publish an EXIT-game that
> cannot be solved, that's just not done. You'd have a game that you can play only once,
> that in reality cannot be played at all. You definitely want to avoid that.]

The remaining three participants stated that translated games are generally not tested. One participant noted the following reason:

> In de meeste gevallen is het spel al gespeeld of moet diegene die het proefleest het mij
> eigenlijk kunnen aangeven als ze twijfelt over onderdelen die bijvoorbeeld een

discussie kunnen opleveren. Het moet duidelijk zijn. Ik moet bij wijze van spreken het

aan een proeflezer kunnen geven die het nog nooit gezien heeft, die moet het lezen,

kunnen begrijpen wat er staat en hoe het spel gespeeld wordt. Dus soms dan gaat er

kort testrondje overheen om het nog zeker te weten, maar in de meeste gevallen is het

oké.

[In most cases, the game has been tested already, or the person who does the

proofreading should notify me if she has any doubts on parts that may be subject to

debate. It has to be clear. Generally, I should be able to send it to a proofreader who

has never seen the game before, they should be able to read it, understand what it says

and how the game is played. Sometimes we do a short round of testing, but generally,

everything is already OK.]

Another participant stated that they would like to test the translated games, but are not able to

do so due to time constraints.

4.5.2 Feedback

All of the participants noted that they receive feedback on the translation of the games. Four

out of six participants also noted that they generally only receive feedback when the

translation contains mistakes or is otherwise perceived as bad. Three out of six participants

stated that they generally only receive feedback when customers do not understand the rules.

One participant stated that they generally do not implement the feedback they receive, as the

feedback is often very specific and only applies to specific games. The participant from 999

Games stated that they often receive feedback on children's versions of popular board games

when the rules are deemed to be too complex in formulation. He stated that they implement

this feedback when translating new games.

None of the publishers contact customers to ask for feedback. One participant noted that he does have intentions to set up a project to contact customers directly about translation quality, for example through a poll.

Feedback in board game translation therefore is mainly given after publication, which is very different from feedback in video game localization. Video game production consists of different phases, including an alpha and beta phase in which an unfinished version of a game is made public to (a select group of) gamers, strictly with the intent of gathering feedback (Mangiron & O'Hagan 2013, 62, 76). There is a very limited possibility for publishers to give feedback on source texts with regard to the target texts: one participant stated that they regularly provide feedback to clients on both source and target texts, even revising and redoing previous translations if they feel they are inadequate. From the answers gathered, this does not seem to occur within the translation process of board game translation, as this likely occurs much earlier in the process before translation starts playing a role.

Two participants note that they are able to give feedback on and change the layout of translations, with one participant stating they might even negotiate box sizes with their client if the publisher feels that the box is too large or too small to be successful in the Dutch market.

4.5.3 Length restrictions

All participants note that their translations are affected by length restrictions. Three out of six respondents note that this due to Dutch sentences generally being longer than English sentences with the same meaning. One participant noted that he experienced the opposite with German texts, meaning the German text is generally longer than the Dutch translation.

4.6 Concluding remarks

Through the interviews conducted with participants from several Dutch board game publishers, a general overview of the translation processes at board game publishers in the

Netherlands has been presented. In Chapter 5, the findings as presented in Chapter 4 will be summarized and concluded, and avenues for further research will be presented.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This research aimed to give a general insight into the translation processes that occur within board game publishers in the Netherlands. By interviewing participants from board game publishers, a general overview of these processes has been formulated. In this concluding chapter, I summarize the results, make some recommendations, and suggest avenues for future research.

5.2 Summary of findings and recommendations

Generally, the translation process takes on a similar form in all companies. Both smaller and larger publishers prefer employing translators with experience in board game translation rather than translators with an academic background. Volunteer translation is an important part of the board game translation process: both small and large publishers rely on volunteers, mainly for financial reasons. Indirect translation occurs in both small and large publishers. This may lead to an increased risk of misinterpretation and mistranslation, which corresponds to the theories described in Section 2.4.2. All publishers struggle with length restrictions when translating. Testing translated versions of games is not very common, and usually occurs only for escape room-type games.

The most important factor affecting the form that the translation process takes is the size of the publisher: due to the relatively small Dutch market, smaller companies tend to have more financial limitations. Smaller publishers are more dependent on volunteer translators and generally have less opportunities to test games and have translations proofread.

Another factor is whether games are published sim-ship or post-gold: post-gold is the preferred method overall as the source text has usually gone through revisions and translators have more time to prepare, but sim-ship publication occurs regularly, especially when

publishers think the Dutch title will otherwise have too much competition from the (original) English version.

Publishers note that translation quality is affected by several factors. The availability of additional information aside from the source text greatly influences translation quality, as all participants agree that this improves terminology. All participants also agree that experience with board game translation is more important than an education in translation, as translators with experience in board game translation are perceived as being better at technical yet creative translations. Sim-ship versus post-gold publication also affects translation quality, due to sim-ship publications often arriving with less additional materials and sim-ship texts often having more mistakes in them. This corresponds to the theory on the effects of sim-ship versus post-gold as proposed in Section 2.5.1.

Board game translation processes in the Netherlands could benefit from standardization similar to what is seen in video game localization, but this would be difficult due to the aforementioned financial constraints. While the employment of translation software and term bases would be beneficial, at the moment this is not a viable option for most publishers due to the costs associated with this. Some very limited steps are being taken regarding the implementation of these types of technologies, which may expand in the coming years, but this is uncertain still.

5.3 Further research

The most obvious direction for further research would be to expand the focus to board game translation processes on an international scale. The French or German board game market would be a good start, as they are the second- and third-largest board game markets in the world, only surpassed by the market in the United States (Breuer 2022). Translation also plays a much larger role in these markets as the number of translated games is simply much higher than in the Netherlands, due to the lower number of English speakers in Germany and France.

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This would likely yield important insights into board game translation processes on a larger scale, and it would be interesting to compare those results to those of the Dutch board game market.

Given that a variety of role-players are involved in translation processes, it would be important to consider the view of different groups, such as translators and translation managers. Having participants with a more uniform background answer the same (type of) questions would likely yield different and more structured results.

Finally, this research has relied on data provided by a small number of participants, and expanding the sample of interviewees (or making use of survey) would enable verification of the findings of this study, and a greater degree of generalization.

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Appendix A: Full list of board game publishers in the Netherlands

Company	Related companies
999 Games	Drie Magiërs Spellen
Asmodee The Netherlands	Zygomatic Board Game Studio, Days of Wonder, Repos Production, Libellud, Space Cowboys, Exploding Kittens, Fantasy Flight Games i.a.
BARPIG	
Bitterballen Games	
Black Box Adventures	
Boosterbox	
Bright Lemming	
Broken Mill	
Cinnamon Games	
Cloak Games	
Cwali	
Dark Secrets	
Elven Ear Games	
Excellent Games	
F&F Games	
FableSmith	
Fasold Publishing	
Ferry Nice Games	
Formula Games	

Games for Motion	
Gam'inBIZ	
Garlock Games	
Gigawatt	
Goliath	
Grumpy Owl Games	
H-Town Games	
Hasbro	
HenMar Games	
H.O.T. Games	
House of Monks Games	
Identity Games	
Jolly Dutch	
Jumbo	
Just Entertainment	
Keep Exploring Games	
Kuna Una Tuna Games	
Liberation Game Design	
Mare Infinitus Games	
Mattel	
Meeples Bordspellen	
Neighbour Games	
NiNi Games	
NRP Games	

Opstelten Speelgoed	
Phalanx Games	
Pumpkin Games	
Quality Beast	
Quality Time Games	
Quined Games	
ReRoll Works	
Sensalot	
Spellènko	
Splotter	
Sunny Games	
Tactic	Selecta
The Dutch Game Mill	
The Gamefantry	
The Game Master	
Tucker's Fun Factory	
Ravensburger	Alea, Wonder Forge
Uniek Bordspel	
University Games	
Vendetta	
Waterfall Games	
White Goblin Games	Queen Games

Appendix B: Information letter

Informatie over deelname aan

Board Game Translation: A Study of Translation Processes in the Netherlands[4]

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1. Inleiding

U ontvangt deze informatiebrief omdat u bordspeluitgever in Nederland bent. Ik wil u daarom graag uitnodigen deel te nemen aan het onderzoek *Board Game Translation: A Study of Translation Processes in the Netherlands*. In deze brief staat belangrijke informatie over waar het onderzoek over gaat, hoe het onderzoek verloopt, wat er met de gegevens gebeurt en welke rechten u als deelnemer heeft.

2. Wat is de achtergrond en het doel van het onderzoek?

In dit onderzoek wordt informatie over vertaalprocessen bij bordspeluitgevers in Nederland verzameld. Deze informatie wordt verzameld om inzicht te krijgen in hoe spellen in Nederland vertaald worden en welke keuzes er tijdens het vertaalproces gemaakt worden.

3. Door wie wordt het onderzoek uitgevoerd?

Het onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd door Demi Bartels (d.bartels1@students.uu.nl), masterstudent Professioneel Vertalen aan de Universiteit Utrecht. Dit onderzoek wordt begeleid door prof. dr. Haidee Kotze (h.kotze@uu.nl).

4. Hoe wordt het onderzoek uitgevoerd?

De informatie wordt verzameld met behulp van een interview. Het interview vindt op locatie of via beeldbellen plaats. Tijdens het interview worden een aantal vragen gesteld over

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[4] This is a previous working title for this thesis.

vertaalprocessen binnen uw bedrijf. Het interview duurt naar verwachting ongeveer een half uur tot een uur.

5. Wat gebeurt er met uw gegevens?

Tijdens het interview worden beeld- en/of geluidsopnamen gemaakt. Deze opnamen worden uitgeschreven (getranscribeerd) en daarna verwijderd. De opnamen worden niet gedeeld. De uitgeschreven interviews worden na publicatie van het onderzoek 10 jaar bewaard in een beschermd archief, waar alleen de onderzoeker en begeleider bij kunnen. Dit is een formaliteit, de gegevens zullen niet gedeeld worden met personen buiten deze scriptie.

De uitgeschreven data wordt gebruikt om bepaalde processen die in het vertalen van bordspellen voorkomen te identificeren. De data worden in geaggregeerde vorm gerapporteerd (bijv. "Van de 10 ondervraagden, maakten 5 ondervraagden gebruik van X."). Ook kunnen er citaten opgenomen worden in de scriptie.

De informatie uit de interviews die gebruikt wordt in het onderzoeksdocument zal geanonimiseerd worden, tenzij op de verklaring expliciet wordt aangegeven dat dit niet nodig is. Anonimiseren betekent hier dat de informatie opgenomen mag worden in de uiteindelijke scriptie, maar dat de bedrijfsnaam en andere elementen die mogelijk geassocieerd kunnen worden met het bedrijf (bijv. namen van bordspellen) verwijderd worden. Voordat de scriptie wordt ingediend, is er de mogelijkheid om de scriptie te bekijken. De onderzoeker kan eventuele citaten of verwijzingen dan nog weghalen.

6. Wat zijn uw rechten?

Deelname is vrijwillig. Uw gegevens mogen alleen voor ons onderzoek verzameld worden als u hier toestemming voor geeft. Als u toch besluit niet mee te doen, hoeft u verder niets te doen. U hoeft niets te tekenen. U hoeft ook niet te zeggen waarom u niet wilt meedoen. Als u wel meedoet, kunt u zich altijd bedenken en op ieder gewenst moment stoppen — ook tijdens

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het onderzoek. En ook <u>nadat</u> u heeft meegedaan kunt u uw toestemming nog intrekken. Als u daarvoor kiest, hoeft de verwerking van uw gegevens tot dat moment overigens niet te worden teruggedraaid. De onderzoeksgegevens die wij op dat moment nog van u hebben, zullen worden gewist.

7. Goedkeuring van dit onderzoek

Heeft u een klacht of een vraag over de verwerking van persoonsgegevens, dan kunt u terecht bij de functionaris voor gegevensbescherming van de Universiteit Utrecht (privacy@uu.nl). Deze kan u ook helpen bij het uitoefenen van de rechten die u onder de AVG heeft. Verder wijzen we u erop dat u het recht heeft om een klacht in te dienen bij de Autoriteit Persoonsgegevens (www.autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl).

8. Meer informatie over dit onderzoek?

Bij vragen over dit onderzoek kunt u altijd contact opnemen met Demi Bartels (d.bartels1@students.uu.nl).

9. Bijlagen:

Toestemmingsverklaring (gw_TV-volwassen-16_20211210_DB.docx)

Appendix C: Informed consent form

TOESTEMMINGSVERKLARING voor deelname aan:

Board Game Translation: A Study of Translation Processes in the Netherlands

Ik bevestig:
- dat ik via de informatiebrief naar tevredenheid over het onderzoek ben ingelicht;
- dat ik in de gelegenheid ben gesteld om vragen over het onderzoek te stellen en dat mijn eventuele vragen naar tevredenheid zijn beantwoord;
- dat ik gelegenheid heb gehad om grondig over deelname aan het onderzoek na te denken;
- dat ik uit vrije wil deelneem.

Ik stem ermee in dat:
- de verzamelde gegevens voor wetenschappelijke doelen worden verkregen en bewaard zoals in de informatiebrief vermeld staat;
- er voor wetenschappelijke doeleinden beeld- en/of geluidsopnamen worden gemaakt, die getranscribeerd (uitgeschreven) worden en daarna verwijderd worden.
- citaten van het interview gebruikt kunnen worden in [ ] geanonimiseerde vorm, of [ ] niet-geanonimiseerde vorm (vink het juiste vakje aan).

Ik begrijp dat:
- ik het recht heb om mijn toestemming voor het gebruik van data in te trekken, zoals vermeld staat in de informatiebrief.

Naam deelnemer: _____

Handtekening: _____   Datum, plaats: ___ / ___ / ____, _____

In te vullen door de uitvoerend onderzoeker: Naam: _____

Ik verklaar dat ik bovengenoemde deelnemer heb uitgelegd wat deelname aan het onderzoek inhoudt.

Handtekening: _____

Datum: ___ / ___ / _____