BRUNA
TRANSLATES

English → Brazilian Portuguese

GAME LOCALIZATION

CASE STUDIES

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Nice to meet you!

My name is **Bruna Carvalho**, I was born and raised in Brazil, and I've been living in the Netherlands since 2022.

I believe our souls feed on stories. A good story can teach us so much. It has the potential to make us feel satisfied, scared, thrilled, concerned, nostalgic, forgiving, hopeful, inspired, seen. And so much more.

I am here to ensure there are no barriers between your story and the people who need to hear it.

But, just for today, would you mind reading some of mine?

Preface

I have written LinkedIn posts about these projects, but I thought it would be a good idea to gather everything into a single document for easier access. If you're in a hurry or only interested in the case studies, feel free to skip this preface; but since we're here, I might as well tell you a little bit about me. :)

Back in Brazil, I unfortunately didn't have access to video games growing up––except for a SNES with about 5 or 6 cartridges, which I "inherited" from my older sister, and was already old by the time my tiny fingers could hold the controller. So, I resorted to books and became a reader instead of a gamer. In school, I always excelled at linguistics and textual interpretation. However, when I met my husband 7 years ago, he initiated me in the ways of the gamers, and that's how I got here.

Some of my favorite titles are Disco Elysium, The Witcher 3, The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild and Omori. I love a good narrative-driven game with lots of exploration, RPGs, adventure, strategy and survival games, and sometimes a nice cozy game as well.

I'm also passionate about sharing emotional experiences through games. That comes from the fact that, before I became a translator, I got a degree in psychology, and I truly think it helps me translate with more empathy. Thanks to that, I understand the impact of using the correct words. You can follow this link to see a list containing some of the other certifications that helped me improve my skills as a localization specialist.

I will be discussing linguistic challenges and solutions in some of the games I've localized (in chronological order). Keep in mind that there will be spoilers, so if the game description interests you, make sure to play it before you keep reading!

Time is Solid Here

Play in English   Play in Brazilian Portuguese

Time is Solid Here by **AlgebraFalcon** is a psychological horror puzzle game set in a liminal space somewhere in the way to afterlife. Your role is to help four souls process their unfinished business so they can move on. Although it is a relatively short game, its localization was not free of challenges. It manages to communicate so much within just an hour of gameplay, and the characters' stories are meaningful and moving.

Translating the title

First, let's talk about the title: translated literally, it would be "O tempo é sólido aqui". But the problem is, this doesn't sound like a title. I'm no marketing expert, but at least I can tell this much. I decided to change it to "Onde o tempo é sólido" ([the place] where time is solid), simply because it sounded better. I guess there's no concise way to explain the unique perception of whether something sounds natural to a native speaker. Besides, "Onde o tempo é sólido" incites curiosity: just **where** can time possibly be solid? What is this mysterious place?

Finding each character's voice

Upon my first analysis, I concluded that each of the five characters had very distinct backgrounds, and therefore, this should be reflected in their voices. Here they are:

Charon – he's your guide to the underworld. He's a funny guy (or at least thinks he is) who loves monster trucks, even though he can't remember how or why he knows so much about them. He's been there for a long, long time, and the last time he even saw someone else was decades ago.
Ava – a sweet elderly lady with dementia. She wants nothing more than to be with her husband, of whom she has such fond memories. Would you tell her the truth?
Eliyas – the husband, who has a very different interpretation of their marriage. He turns out to be extremely abusive and resentful of his wife's condition, devoting all of his time to create new ways to torture her.
The Child – a little boy who misses his mother and just wants someone to play with. He doesn't understand why his father would give him such an awful fate.
The War Veteran – who has a complex set of feelings about his own horrible actions. He's confined to a bed, and you can choose to show him mercy or leave him to rot.

First of all, let me say that writing natural–sounding dialogue is not a simple thing. Unlike English, the Portuguese language has a very noticeable peculiarity: the way people speak is very different from the way they write. If you speak following perfect grammar, people will think you're either a) a robot or b) very very old.

This actually comes in handy when you want to emphasize age–related characteristics (such as experience, wisdom, or perhaps the loneliness of having lived long enough to lose your loved ones) as defining aspects of the character. In contrast, if you have a younger character, you might want to use more informal language, in order to make their speech sound more fluid and natural. Take, for example, the word "estou". It means "I am", when describing a non–permanent state. In real life, we actually shorten it and say "tô". Same with "para" becoming "pra".

I wanted to give the characters unique discourse markers to match their life story and personality. And so, to keep track of each character's speech style, I devised a table that looked something like this:

	Playable character	Charon	Ava	Eliyas	Child	War veteran
Gender	ambiguous	male	female	male	male	male
Tone/register	Formal, neutral	Funny, manly, uncle humor, a bit outdated	Kind, sweet, somewhat formal, grandma-like	Informal, contractions, rude	Informal, childish but smart	Somewhat informal, but not rude like Eliyas, regretful, soldier-like
"you"	você	você/colega	meu bem	"cê"	você	você
"are"	está	está	está	"tá"	tá	está
"to/for"	para	pra	para	pra	pra	pra
"listen/look/you see"	N/A	Veja bem…	sabe…	veja/escuta aqui/pois…	olha…	Assim… escuta…
"right?"	N/A	Não é mesmo?	Não acha?	né?/hein?	né?	N/A
imperative	N/A	faça	faça	faz	faz	faça
bem/bom ("Well," at the beginning of a sentence)	N/A	Pois bem	bom	N/A	bom	bem

I'm not sure how helpful this is if you don't speak Portuguese, or at least a latin–based language, but there it is. Other strategies to make dialogue sound more natural include exchanging "nós" for "a gente", "farei" for "vou fazer", and so on. Essentially, just replicate what you hear people using.

Cultural references
At a certain point, Charon mentions he has no favorite food, because he's either never had the chance to taste any, or it has been so long since he last had to eat, that he forgot what it's like. Either way, you are given the task to describe pizza, burgers, meatloaf, dumplings and tacos, so he can decide which one would be his favorite.

Now, pizza and burgers are very common in Brazil. Meatloaf, dumplings and tacos… not so much. I wanted to make sure any Brazilian person could relate to everything in this game. I resorted to making a poll to see how many people I knew had ever eaten meatloaf, dumplings and tacos. I don't remember the result now, but I do remember that the few ones who knew all three lived in bigger cities. As someone who grew up in a very small town, that bothered me. So, I turned dumplings into sushi, tacos into pastel, meatloaf into feijoada.

I'm not sure if I would make the same decision if I were to translate it now, given that the people who are savvy enough to find and play this game most probably are aware of the existence of said dishes. Although feijoada and pastel were a fun nod to Brazilian cuisine, there are times when I think back and it feels like an unnecessary change. But I try not to worry too much about it, as it's only optional dialogue that doesn't impact the game at all. The important thing is, I made sure to communicate this issue to the dev, and he agreed with my solution.

Over the years, I learned that, for translators, work is never over unless you decide it is. If I had all of eternity to translate a single sentence, I'm sure I would spend at least the first 100k years altering it again and again, in search of perfection.

Graphic/interactive elements
There are times when you come across text in a non–editable form, such as graphics. Luckily, AlgebraFalcon was very excited to participate in the localization process, so I indicated to him the correct translations and he recreated the graphics. There are also two instances where you have to type the answer to a charade in order to open a door. This meant that the code had to be changed to accept the translated answer. Again, I communicated this to the dev, and he eagerly made the necessary changes.

By the way, here's the feedback I got from the dev:

"Bruna has been one of the most kind and hardworking people I have ever had the pleasure of working with. In the process of her translating my game, Time is Solid Here, she has been incredibly vigilant in ensuring that every aspect of my work down to the last detail is not only translated into Portuguese, but wholly understandable to her intended Brazilian audience. She even wrote up a document filled with explanations and insight about specific concepts that couldn't simply be translated directly. Overall I could not recommend her more for translation work of any sort!"

And here's a comment on the itch.io page that touched my heart:
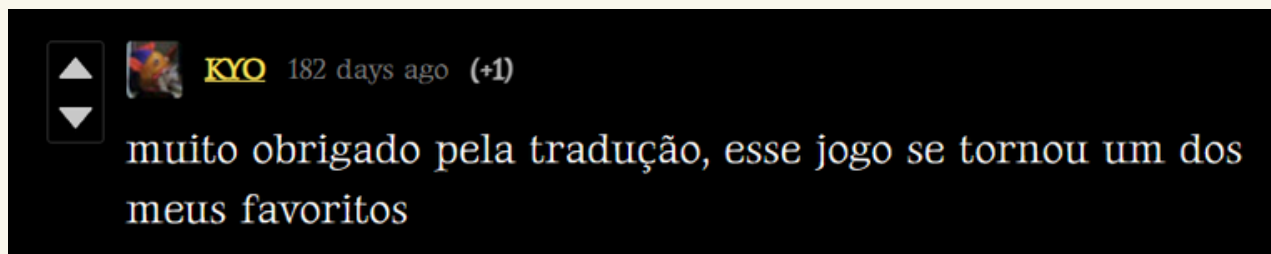
If you don't speak Portuguese, it means "thank you so much for the translation, this has become one of my favorite games". This is exactly why I do what I do.

Psychroma

[Play on Steam](#)

Psychroma, developed by **Rocket Adrift** and published by **Gamma Space**, is a narrative-driven side-scroller about a haunted cybernetic house and its residents. Set in a dystopian version of Toronto in the year 2489, it features characters whose daily struggles are so different, yet so similar to our own.

This was an initiative of Queer Them All, a project for pride month 2024. Around 80 language professionals of 20 different languages united to offer localization to a game that was made by queer people and/or featured queer topics. This game fits both categories, so no wonder it was selected.

The Brazilian Portuguese team consisted of five people (including me), and working as part of a team taught me a lot about managing communication across different time zones. Together, we performed the localization, editing, proofreading and LQA stages, while also helping report bugs.

Gender inclusivity

The English language has a well-established gender-neutral pronoun: "they". This is something that many people have strong feelings about, but there's no denying the existence of the singular "they", and everyone uses it, whether they realize it or not. E.g.: "**Someone** called me earlier, but I didn't pick up. I wonder what **they** wanted."

In Portuguese, however, it's a LOT harder. We do not have any official gender-neutral pronouns. Most times, the masculine form is used as neutral. But to trans people, who may have had very negative experiences being referred to as the wrong gender, it can be especially challenging and even triggering.

Translators usually try to keep things grammatical. The main guidelines in cases like this is to "take a detour", that is, rephrase the sentence as to avoid any gendered terms. We do this a lot when the playable character is a self-insert and the game doesn't offer the player an option to select their gender. This wasn't the case here, as Haze is non-binary.

The thing is, this was an initiative for the community. What good would it do to pretend this community doesn't have its own language? To favor a rulebook over the actual living people? We all know languages change to accommodate the needs of the speakers. In this case, "keeping things grammatical" would mean joining in on the oppression, as if saying: "your way of existing is not valid. It's not in the rulebook".

The Brazilian team opted to use the neopronoun "elu" for Haze. Any adjectives referring to this character were also adapted. Instead of using the letters "a" (typically female) or "o" (typically male) at the end of the word, we used "e" or "u".

This is not to say that this was done every time there was an adjective. We worried that an excessive amount of adapted words could damage the readability of the text or distract players from the story/gameplay, especially for people who are less used to this kind of stuff. That's why we rephrased some of it, and the result was a balanced text that respected the identity of the characters––and therefore, the players.

And then there's Salem. Salem is a transgender character who realizes their true identity in the middle of the game. At the beginning, Salem is referred to as male, and midway through the narrative, their pronouns are changed to female. After this, Agatha, Salem's partner, even redacts the masculine pronouns she used for Salem in her former log entries. We had to be extra careful not to misgender Salem, pinpointing the moment her transition begins. Even when a sentence has no pronouns, it can still be gendered; in Portuguese, we use articles (the) before someone's name when we are referring to them in the third person, and those are also gendered ("o Salem" or "a Salem").

Sensitive content

Psychroma dives deep into the emotional experiences it aims to portray, and because of that, it includes a fair amount of sensitive content. Besides expressions of struggle with self-identity, its stories also contain depictions of trauma, abuse, amnesia and C-PTSD. These topics must be dealt with a healthy amount of care and attention, as to not offend anybody or reinforce any of the endless stereotypes associated with such situations.

Having a degree on psychology means I spent five years of my life analyzing the most delicate way to use my words in that sort of context. My experience also helped me translate the psychiatrist reports about the research study in the game, as I'm familiar with the tone and technical language used by Brazilian mental health professionals in their documents.

Kenzie's Project

begin transcript.

i'm trying not to feel sorry for myself for having to explain this. it's not going to be easy, and a lot of it isn't going to make sense, but i'm going to be honest, and you'll have to trust me on that. my brain has felt like it's been on fire for as long as i can remember. this was the only thing that made everything truly make sense. it's... kind of funny to think that just a few months ago, we only referred to this as

kenzie's project

Play in English (PT-BR coming soon)

Kenzie's Project is a surreal horror tabletop RPG developed by stargazersasha (Sasha Winter). It depicts the struggles of trying to survive in a bizarre academic setting. Since it's a role–playing game, players have the freedom to fully personalize their experience, meaning that every playing session will be different. This is a game for exactly three players, who each play as a character and a threat. Each character has its "project", that they have to advance in order to push away the threats and reach a satisfactory conclusion for the narrative.

I worked with 4 other translators, dividing the word count as equally as possible. After everyone finished their share, I was responsible for the final revision of the whole text, in order to ensure consistency, clarity and naturality. Although I was the only one in a different time zone, we were able to make it work with the help of instant messaging apps and scheduling voice calls.

Translating instructions

Although it might seem straightforward at a first glance, translating rules is actually quite complex. You have to make sure that the instructions are easy to understand and follow, otherwise the players will likely give up and possibly even request a refund. Analog games, unlike videogames, don't have as much visual context to give you clues on what something means; Kenzie's Project fully relies on words only.

KP has a very unique style: the instructions are presented to the player by the character, who uses the first person. E.g.: **"Pick 2+ to describe my RESEARCH"**. At first, this caused us to perceive a certain degree of differentiation between player and character, which felt odd for a game in which the player is supposed to get into the role and feel like they **are** the character. As a group, we debated on whether to keep it like this or change it to "your research", but after voting, we decided to keep that little quirk, respecting the creator's intention.

One instance when this dynamic became a little too confusing was **"when you and i are together for a period of 6+ hours, we can choose 1 together from either of our Studious Moves lists"**. Our final translation was **"depois que o jogo passar de 6 horas, podemos escolher em conjunto 1 Jogada de Estudo de qualquer uma das nossas listas"**.

Our second big discussion was about which grammatical mood we should use: imperative vs. infinitive. Some of us felt that the imperative (e.g., "faça" instead of "fazer") would amplify even further the divide between player and character. Again, we each exposed our point of view, voted, and the conclusion was that the target audience would not find this excessively confusing, and the imperative mood felt more natural.

One of our most frequent questions to the creator was whether she meant to use "you" as individual or plural, as we wanted to make it very clear when a move was meant to be individual or happen between 2 or 3 players.

We also aimed to avoid any assumptions about the gender of the players. In Portuguese, even the word for "player" ("jogador") is gendered, so we had to replace it with options such as "pessoa" (person), which does not vary based on gender (it's always feminine), and "participante" (participant), which, if you avoid using an article (o/a), can be understood as neutral, such as in "cada participante" ("each participant").

Even though, grammatically, the masculine gender is understood as neutral, nowadays that is no longer perceived as fair by people who do not identify as men. It also creates many biases around which activities are seen as "for boys" or "for girls", and gone are the times when only men were allowed to play games.

We are aware that perfect inclusivity is something that's very hard to attain, especially considering the challenges that gender-neutral language can create in terms of readability. We did use the neutral, scarcely-accepted "e" ending for gendered words that could not be replaced, such as "professore" (the professor) and "reitore" (the dean). However, everywhere else, we tried to find other alternatives to minimize the impact on grammar, changing word classes and even rewriting full sentences.

As gender neutrality is still a relatively recent concept, some group members were under the impression that they had to "neutralize" words that did not refer to people, such as possessive pronouns, or words that never had any gender variation to begin with, such as "fantasmas", (ghosts) "espíritos" (spirits), "ciclista" (biker; but in this case you have to find a way to omit the article). In this regard, this project was a great learning opportunity for the linguists that had less experience in this particular matter.

In these changing times, we did what we could with the limited resources we have nowadays as linguists, taking into account the compromises we have to make when we're working with a group. Even if our translation is not perfect inclusivity-wise, I hope non-binary players can appreciate our effort in every sentence we got right.

Style & flavor text

Kenzie's Project is a game with a very clear stance on some very important topics. It mostly appeals to young people with non–standard identities, who are burnt out due to a system that is brutally unfair. One of its main themes is the oppressive nature of academia, and so we understood that every "sin" against grammar was actually an act of resistance. Take the following example:

> "everyone has one, i'm just honest about mine. sweet, how'd you get your hands on this? i love what you've done with the place. does it hurt? yeah, sometimes. i'm getting pretty frustrated, i need a break. a lot of people think i'm an aries or whatever, but i'm really a pisces. weird, huh? […] i'm fine, i don't really want to talk about it. being with you makes me feel things i thought i couldn't anymore. you come here often? one day, i want to have a big bus that i'll paint blue and live in for i don't know, a few years. my rats miss you a lot, they say they want you to come over again soon. […]"

This excerpt is a stream of consciousness that gives the player a glimpse on the personality of the character named "the candle". As you can observe, there's almost no punctuation, and no capitalization at all. These parts of the game are stylized as a transcription, but the lack of formality also serves to make the characters feel more real. This aspect was preserved in our translation.

We quickly realized that these sentences were purposely context–free; that means the translation had to be left equally vague, as to stimulate the players' creativity and encourage them to incorporate these words into the many different scenarios they could imagine.

To me, this kind of flavor text is especially delicious to translate, and my hope is that anyone who plays Kenzie's Project can enjoy it as much as I personally did, imagining the endless possibilities for backstories and intricate relationships that these characters could develop with each other.

Thank you!

I hope you enjoyed reading these case studies. Hopefully they were able to transmit just how much care and thought I put into my translations, and how thrilled I am that I get to do this for a living.

The insights I shared here are only a small fraction of what happens inside the brain of a translator while they are immersed in a project. I will probably come back to this file and add more comments as they come to mind, and more projects as they come my way.

You can also check out my translation samples file, which is a lot more concise than this one. It's less focused on localization and more on translation as a broader subject. It's available at brunatranslates.com.

If you need localization services for your game, or have a localization agency in need of specialized linguists, I would love to help. Just email **contact@brunatranslates.com** or connect with me on Linkedin. I will gladly answer any questions and give you a free, totally non-binding quote for your project.

Wishing you all the best,

Bruna