

With over 9 million copies sold since its launch in 2005, Buzz! is one of the most successful quiz videogame franchises of the world. Such a success requires not only the creation of a large pool of fresh questions targeted to various groups of players in many different territories, but also the implementation of refined localization techniques that ensure that the questions are prepared carefully through a combination of translating, adapting, creating, ranking and testing the questions. This article illustrates the work involved from different points of view of the team: international creative brief, team building, actual editorial work performed in each country, the do's and don'ts in managing such a complex production in parallel in many countries.

KEY WORDS: videogame, transcreation, Buzz, PlayStation, audio localisation

Localizing the *Buzz!* Game Series (Or how to successfully implement transcreation in a multi-million seller video game)

¡Coger el Buzz! (O cómo lograr la transcreación de un videojuego de ventas millonarias)

Después de vender nueve millones de copias desde su lanzamiento en el año 2005, Buzz se ha convertido una de las sagas de mayor éxito mundial en la industria del videojuego. Semejante éxito requiere no sólo la creación de un enorme repositorio de preguntas diseñadas para los distintos grupos de jugadores en los distintos países de destino, sino también la elaboración de técnicas de localización específicas que faciliten la creación, traducción, adaptación, gradación y testeo de las preguntas. El presente artículo explica las distintas perspectivas del equipo: las instrucciones creativas internacionalizadas, la creación de equipos, y la labor editorial llevada a cabo en cada país, así como las recomendaciones para la coordinación de tantos equipos trabajando en paralelo desde países distintos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: videojuego, transcreación, Buzz, PlayStation, localización de audio

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The *Buzz!* video game series, available on multiple Sony platforms, isn't probably the most well-known intellectual property of the Interactive entertainment industry. Lacking a charming heroine like *Tomb Raider's* Lara Croft, *Call of Duty* vibrant environments, *Gran Turismo* photorealistic visuals or *Pro Evolution Soccer* depth, *Buzz!* is not the first name game critics mention when it comes to sorting out the most relevant titles of the last decade. The key mechanics of each *Buzz!* game are pretty basic, after all: a virtual host, unsurprisingly named Buzz, presents a series of questions on a disparate set of topics, ranging from sports to music, and a maximum of four players have to answer them in the shortest time possible. By all means, *Buzz!* is the videogame transposition of classic TV quiz shows such as «Jeopardy», «University Challenge» or «Who wants to be a Millionaire?».

In spite of this simplicity, or rather thanks to its accessibility and party-friendly approach, the series published by Sony Computer Entertainment Europe (SCEE) is much more relevant than it could seem after a superficial first look. Created in 2005 thanks to a fruitful collaboration between two British companies, creative agency Sleepydog and development team Relentless, the *Buzz!* franchise has sold to date in excess of 9.2 million copies worldwide¹, giving birth to a plethora of spin-off and derivative titles on several gaming platforms. *Buzz!* officially debuted on PlayStation 2 with the *Music Quiz* episode: players have to outclass their opponents answering music questions via their buzzers. Buzzers are custom peripherals specifically designed by Sony to enhance players' immersion in the quiz game environment. The year after, it's the turn of

The Sports Quiz and *The BIG Quiz*, whose questions touch different fields of general knowledge. This last iteration becomes an instant hit among the public and critics, even scoring a prestigious BAFTA (British Academy of Film and Television Arts) Award in the «Best Casual and Social Game» category.

In the following years, the PlayStation 2 releases are joined by the debut of the series on the more powerful PlayStation 3 and the handheld PSP, and by a new spin-off series, aimed at a younger audience, called *Buzz! Junior*. Thanks to the online capabilities of PlayStation 3, the developers at Relentless can finally open the door to user generated content, giving the chance to millions of *Buzz!* players to create their own quiz sets and to share them with other users thanks to the MyBuzz option. This feature finds tremendous success among *Buzz!* fans: to date users have created more than 400.000 quiz sets, with individual questions hovering easily over the 3 million mark.

Given the universal appeal of quiz games, SCEE has released *Buzz!* games in a multitude of territories, localizing different episodes from the source language (English) into French, Italian, German, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, Polish, Czech, Croatian, Greek and Russian. Such a large number of target languages, where most of the games released in Europe are available only in English, French, Italian German and Spanish, is only part of the challenge that the localization departments of SCEE and Relentless have had to endure for this franchise. The game's nature makes *Buzz!* a unique product when compared to more linear products like action adventures or role playing games. Even titles where the player is given an enormous amount of freedom like *Grand Theft Auto* for example are basically story-driven and the

¹ Vanessa Wood (2009): «Behind the Curtains of BUZZ! The Multi-million Seller of SCEE Franchise», Localization Summit, Game Developers Conference 2009, San Francisco.



localization work is quite direct. In *Buzz!* every single question has to be tailored according to the target audience and, given the obvious cultural differences between the populations of the UK, Russia and Portugal, for example, the localization work isn't limited to the mere translation of questions and answers, but more a work of transcreation, like no other title in the video gaming industry.

When undertaking such a job, the first task localizers have to keep in mind is to identify three different components in the game. The first one is the commentary. These are oral comments by Buzz, the host of the game, and can be translated straightforward, without specific restrictions. Since Buzz is a colorful character, it's always important to be as imaginative and funny as possible, imitating the style of quiz game hosts in each locale. After being translated, the part is then recorded and used in game to comment on the different players' performance. In the past, Buzz had a virtual assistant, helping him on screen, but in the most recent episodes her role has come to be absorbed by Greg, the voice of the questions.

After the commentary, we have the User Interface (UI). The UI is mostly made of gameplay options and system messages which are displayed onscreen only. There are no specific problems related to this translation task and, once again, the translation job is very straightforward. Obviously translators must cater to the length restrictions approved by the development team and ask for explanations for those strings with little context information to avoid mistranslations.

Third and most important, are the batches of questions and answers, the real core of any *Buzz!* title or trivia game. They consist of a series of questions (to be displayed and recorded) and answers (to be displayed only).

In all *Buzz!* games these can be questions with text only or asset-based questions. The content of some questions are global, so it's essential not to have any question strictly related to the United Kingdom, where the game is developed. In addition to these, there are locale-specific questions that will only be present in definite countries: needless to say, these need to reflect the culture of each particular country.

All questions in *Buzz!* are categorized. Each question can be placed in different categories, according to a set of rules and hierarchies. There are 10 'Main' categories in *Buzz!* that are used to categorize the pool of 5000 trivia questions. These are:

- Music
- The World
- People
- Movies
- Arts and Literature
- Science and Nature
- Leisure
- Sport
- TV
- Events

Every trivia question must be part of one of these categories. Each parent category is then subdivided into sub-categories, like the examples below (table 1).

From a translation and localization point of view, it's possible to identify four major categories in accordance to the task the translators or the country-specific writers have to perform. They are:

1. Questions to be translated
2. Questions to be adapted
3. Questions based on local content with no assets
4. Questions based on local content with assets

TABLE I



32

Music						
Musical Pot Luck	Musical Instruments	Lyrics	Oldies Music	60s Music	80s Music	
Recent Music	Gigs and Venues	Rock on!	Perfect Pop	R 'n' B	Hip Hop	
Indie Music	90s Music	Indie Music	Dance Music			
TV						
Sitcoms	Soaps	70s TV	80s TV	90s TV	Recent TV	
Cartoons	Kids TV	TV Drama	TV Moments	TV Detectives	American TV	
TV Personalities	Reality TV					
Movies						
Blockbusters	Schlock-busters	Movie Stars	Family Films	Comedy Films	Movie Horror	
Action Movies	Animated Movies	War on Film	Westerns	Whodunit Movies	Musicals in Film	
Early Cinema	Cult Movies					

QUESTIONS TO BE TRANSLATED

As the title suggests, the first category is made of questions that should only require what is traditionally described as a literal translation. In fact, they are suitable for an international audience as they are. The subject is likely to be well-known, and the question is not too specific. These questions are divided into main categories and sub-categories. This means that in sports questions, for instance, athletes mentioned are known worldwide and a geography question is always on a landmark or city well-known to the international audience.

For instance, see table 2.

QUESTIONS TO BE ADAPTED

But how to identify if a question created by an England-based content writer is a real international question? After all, it's not always easy to judge whether a question is «global» or not. Sometimes the subject is global, but the ques-

tion is on a specific local aspect/side/branch of the topic, and therefore can only be answered by a local player. The question cannot be translated as is, but needs adaptation. So every time the localization team receives a question to be translated, two things must be checked immediately:

- Is the subject of the question known in all territories?
- Is the difficulty level of the question consistent in all territories?

It's of paramount importance to ensure that the questions fit the corresponding difficulty level (easy, medium, and hard). When adapting the questions, if the difficulty level of an English question is too hard or too easy for the target country, the localization team must feel free to adapt the question so that it matches the original level of difficulty. If both the subject and difficulty levels are aligned with the English one, the question can be translated.

When assets and/or segue text are included

TABLE 2

	Question Text	Answer 1	Answer 2	Answer 3	Answer 4
English	Which of these femme fatales leveled New Orleans in 2005?	Katrina	Xena	Helena	Tracy
Spanish	¿Cuál de las siguientes femmes fatales arrasó Nueva Orleans en 2005?	Katrina	Xena	Elena	Tracy
Italian	Quale delle seguenti «femme fatales» ha devastato New Orleans nel 2005?	Katrina	Xena	Helena	Tracy
Finnish	Kuka hurjatar kaatoi New Orleansin maan tasalle vuonna 2005?	Katrina	Xena	Helena	Tracy
English	Traditionally, what do Sumo wrestlers throw into the ring before a fight?	Salt	Bread	Insults	Sushi
Spanish	Tradicionalmente, ¿qué lanzan los luchadores de sumo al cuadrilátero antes de una pelea?	Sal	Pan	Insultos	Sushi
Italian	Tradizionalmente, cosa gettano sul ring i lottatori di sumo prima di un incontro?	Sale	Pane	Insulti	Sushi
Finnish	Mitä sumopainijat perinteiden mukaisesti heittävät kehään ennen ottelua?	Suolaa	Leipää	Pilkkalappuja	Sushia



in the questions the translator has to be very careful: the localized segue should not reveal the solution to the player. The question should be based on the asset, but again without giving away the answer, just a pointer or a clue.

If the English question is not suitable as is for the international audience, then it's mandatory to adapt it. These are questions originally written for an international audience, but which a further analysis labeled as «needing cultural adaptation». This means that once translated they would either not make sense or be too hard/easy to answer for the difficulty level assigned. There are two parameters to consider: subject and difficulty level. Unfortunately, the only way to identify them is to perform a 2-step analysis which takes valuable time, but guarantees the best possible outcome, and player satisfaction. The first step is performed by an international linguistic team that identifies a

first set of core questions that are clearly not suitable for non-UK players. The second one is taken care of by the editors in each territory. This analysis tunes the core set of questions and helps the international team identifying any other problematic questions. At the end of this 2-step analysis, the localization team will usually end up with two groups of questions:

1. Questions to be adapted
2. Questions to be rewritten

Here is a question from one of the latest *Buzz!* games that makes for a good example of a question to be adapted:

Source: «Which of the judges from 'The X Factor' has a very famous pop star sister?»

In this instance, the translator can easily adapt the question keeping the same topic (the popular X-Factor TV show). He will just have to refer to his local edition of the TV format.



TABLE 3

	Question Text	Answer 1	Answer 2	Answer 3	Answer 4
34	English Rangers, Celtic, Queens Park ...?	Partick Thistle	Aberdeen	St. Mirren	Raith Rovers
	Spanish ¿Real Madrid, Real Club Celta, Real Betis...?	Mallorca	Barcelona	Numancia	Las Palmas
	Italian Rangers, Celtic, Queens Park ...?	Partick Thistle	Wigan	Tottenham	Coventry
	Finnish FC Jokerit, HJK, Atlantis FC ...?	FinnPa	FC Honka	FC Jaro	Pallo-Iiro
	English Shep, Petra and Goldie were dogs that featured in which TV show?	Blue Peter	Top Gear	The Young Ones	Emmerdale
	Spanish ¿Cómo se llama el gato de Lisa Simpson?	Bola de nieve	Ayudante de Santa Claus	Brian	Garfield
	Italian In quale programma televisivo sono apparsi i cani Joe e Cocker?	Striscia la notizia	Affari tuoi	Uno Mattina	Quelli che il calcio
	Finnish Mikä TV-sarja on Ransu-koiran koti?	Pikku Kakkonen	Pyjama-banaanit	Simpsonit	Emmerdale

Another example:

Source: «*Who is Ricky Gervais' slightly altered ego in 'Extras'?*»

Here the source refers to a British sit-com which has not been exported to many other countries. This question can't simply be adapted, it needs rewriting.

Basically, sometimes a slight adaptation is enough (first example), other times the question needs to be rewritten from scratch (second example).

Another example of questions that need a rewrite are the Mini Quiz Questions. These are eight-question quizzes on specific subjects and should be translated/adapted/removed as required by each locale. They are challenging from a translation perspective. Some of these questions need to be fully rewritten and most of them will probably end up being totally different from the English source text.

A basic example of adaptation in table 3.

In the soccer question we can see the English and Italian share the same question. This is due to the fact that Italian writers opted to keep the original question and then adapt the four answers. Spanish and Finnish writers instead chose to keep the same subject, but to adapt the question as well.

Some questions will need to be completely rewritten such as in table 4.

The Joke Quiz questions require a full adaptation. A literal translation is not possible and would not work. Questions and answers need to be rewritten to suit the different countries' sense of humor and sensibility (table 5).

The same applies for the Nonsense Quiz even though it might be possible to literally translate some of the questions. Some examples in table 6.

TABLE 4

Which country could be a likely home for MEG RYAN?	Germany	Romania	Greece	Norway
Which hazard is scrambled in this GARDEN!?	Danger!	Beware!	Siren!	Eggs!
I'D GO IN is an anagram of which color of the rainbow?	Indigo	Violet	Yellow	Ultramarine
Which American city's name can be made DOTTIER?	Detroit	Dallas	Toledo	Tucson
Of which American might it be said 'HE BUGS GORE'?	George Bush	Bill Clinton	John Glenn	Jeremy Clarkson



TABLE 5

What sits at the bottom of the sea, shivering?	A nervous wreck	A scaredy catfish	Whale blubber	A cold prawn
What time does Andy Murray go to bed?	Ten-ish	One hour before Roger Federer	Andy Murray doesn't sleep	After Eastenders
What's green and furry and goes up and down?	A Gooseberry in a lift	Kermit the Frog's Adam's apple	The economy of Greenland	A tree
What do you call a fish without an eye?	A Fsh	No idea	Anything you like, he can't see you	Toby the Goby

TABLE 6

How do you make a sausage roll?	Throw it down a hill	Put a sausage in batter, hey presto!	Use plane flour	It's all in the seasoning
Why did the crab blush?	The lobster forgot his underpants	The sea weed	He was lonely	No idea
How long is a piece of string?	Twice as long as half of it	3.62 Miles	15 letters	Four times as long as twice the size of it
What's the difference between a duck?	One of its legs are both the same	Only one has feathers	Small changes in color distribution	Seasonal variability

QUESTIONS BASED ON LOCAL CONTENT WITH NO ASSETS

For this third category of questions, the localization team receives directions from SCEE such as topics and categories, and question creation

is managed via a custom Excel template containing the Local Specific Questions structure. It's very important to set up a file with a list of categories and a range of difficulty levels to have a consistent number of questions for all countries. Writers involved have to stick to the category,



TABLE 7

	Subject	Question Text	Answer 1	Answer 2	Answer 3	Answer 4	DIFFICULTY
36	Ainhoa Arteta	¿En qué género musical ha triunfado esta famosa soprano española?	En la ópera	En el jazz	En el tango	En el flamenco	easy
	Ainhoa Arteta	¿En qué país debutó esta cantante en 1990?	En Estados Unidos	En el Reino Unido	En Italia	En Francia	medium
	Ainhoa Arteta	¿Quién era el presidente de Estados Unidos cuando dio un recital en la Casa Blanca?	Bill Clinton	George Bush Sr.	Ronald Reagan	Barack Obama	hard
	Enrique Villén	En la película «El penalti más largo del mundo», este actor interpretaba a un entrenador. ¿De qué deporte?	De fútbol	De baloncesto	De béisbol	De petanca	easy
	Enrique Villén	¿En qué película protagonizada por Santiago Segura pudimos verle en acción?	En «Torrente 3»	En «Acción Mutante»	En «El oro de Moscú»	En «Una de zombis»	medium
	Enrique Villén	¿Cómo se llama el personaje que interpreta en la serie «Plutón B.R.B. Nero»?	Roswell	Hoffman	Capitán Valladares	Querejeta	hard

specific subject and to the difficulty level provided for each question. They cannot create questions on gossip, only on facts. Nothing rude/defamatory can be included in the text.

Some examples taken from the Spanish version in table 7.

Italian samples in table 8.

QUESTIONS BASED ON LOCAL CONTENT WITH ASSETS

The final category is questions based on local content with assets. Since these are similar to the one in the previous category, the task of the localization team is still based on local content creation, but with an extra constraint.

The quiz solution is provided by an asset, such as a picture, a video or an audio file. The solution to the quiz is directly or indirectly provided by the asset, so the question must not mention the name of what is depicted in the asset, nor give out information that might give away the answer. Ideally, questions should be a mix of historical and modern, they shouldn't be too difficult and should always have fun answers. The template indicates that of the four answers, one should be the correct one, one should be nearly correct, one could be correct/similar and the last one should be completely wrong, but entertaining/funny to the player.

Also, since questions need to be translated, sometimes the assets received are strongly

TABLE 8

Subject	Question Text	Answer 1	Answer 2	Answer 3	Answer 4	DIFFICULTY
Lucio Gallo	Per quale talento questo personaggio è celebre nel mondo?	La voce lirica	La verve comica	La direzione d'orchestra	Il carisma da attore	EASY
Lucio Gallo	Che tipo di voce caratterizza questo interprete?	Baritono	Tenore	Basso	Falsetto	MEDIUM
Lucio Gallo	In quale regione è nato questo virtuoso delle 7 note?	Puglia	Sardegna	Marche	Lombardia	HARD
Negra Maro	Qual è il nome del cantante e autore di questa band?	Giuliano Sangiorgi	Max Casacci	Omar Pedrini	Cesare Cremonini	EASY
Negra Maro	Con quale canzone sono stati eliminati al Festival di Sanremo 2005?	Mentre tutto scorre	Parlami d'amore	Come sempre	Estate	MEDIUM
Negra Maro	Quale star ha collaborato con loro nella canzone «Cade la pioggia»?	Jovanotti	Dolores O'Riordan	Gianna Nannini	Ligabue	HARD



related to a specific country so it's not easy to provide the requested number of questions per asset. A solution to solve this problem is to focus not only on assets, but also on what an asset may suggest.

Assets sometimes are not very global, but it's not always possible to change them due to

copyright. What's the solution? Focusing on assets, but also on what an asset may suggest. For example: Above you can find two examples of not so internationally recognizable faces, part of the global assets in the game. The development team provides the localizers with photos of two famous golf players. In countries such as



Italy or Spain, golf is not a very popular sport. It's not impossible to create questions on golf, of course, but when the localization team receives very specific pictures such as the ones above, the creation of «easy» questions may be difficult or turn out far too simplistic to present a decent quiz show challenge. If the writers can't find a suitable question for their local audience, the assets are discarded immediately.

On the contrary, the pictures seen above can be considered almost international. The subject is well known and it's easy to create a lot of questions on them even with very different difficulty range.

CONCLUSIONS

To summarize the concepts expressed in this article, when localizing a product like *Buzz!* it's essential to focus on three points. These are vital in the question creation and management process of such a particular title.

1. When developing a game like *Buzz!*, the writers should consider that at least half of the contents within their game will be specifically created for each country. Either that or the appeal of the title will be limited.
2. The localization team should take plenty of time to select resources and use their experience, competence and passion to create the best possible set of questions.
3. The last one could seem pretty obvious, but it's particularly relevant when considering budget and schedule of the project. Since each territory is very specific, adapted or rewritten questions will greatly vary from country to country. This will eventually mean that time and money spent on adaptation and creation will be higher than those of a simple translation.

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