

*“Burn it into a reindeer, not into a moose.”*

The use of idioms in Remedy’s *Control*

Markus Tolvanen

682285A Bachelor’s Seminar and Thesis

English Philology

Faculty of Humanities

University of Oulu

Autumn 2019

## Abstract

Understanding and employing idioms is one of the hardest parts of using any language. That idioms can be very much tied to their originating cultures adds a further level of difficulty. However, idioms and the fact that they are often language- and culture-bound can also be used for various effects on purpose. In the most recent game released by the digital game developer Remedy's, called *Control*, a side character in-game uses idioms that, are translated directly from Finnish into English. This thesis aims to study the role and effect that the idioms have on the player and in the game. The research questions addressed in this thesis are: 1) How can the idioms in *Control* be categorised? and 2) What effect does the use of idioms have on the character that uses them? This is done by categorising the idioms and then comparing them with their correctly translated English equivalents. A brief character analysis is also conducted on the character that uses the idioms since the way in which he uses them forms such a large and integral part of the character.

## Tiivistelmä:

Idiomien käyttäminen ja oppiminen ovat suurimpia haasteita, joita kuka tahansa uutta kieltä opetteleva joutuu kohtaamaan. Idiomien kulttuurisidonnaisuus tekee tästä vain entistä vaikeampaa. Idiomeja sekä niiden kieli- ja kulttuurisidonnaisuutta voidaan kuitenkin hyödyntää eri tarkoituksiin. Pelikehittäjä Remedyn uusimmassa *Control*-nimisessä pelissä esitellään sivuhahmo, jonka käyttämät idiomit on käännetty tarkoituksella väärin sananmukaisesti suomesta englantiin. Tämä kandidaatintutkielma pyrkii tutkimaan hahmon käyttämien idiomien roolia pelissä sekä niiden vaikutusta, jotka niillä on pelissä ja pelaajaan. Tutkielma vastaa seuraaviin tutkimuskysymyksiin: 1) Miten *Control*-pelissä esiintyvät idiomit voidaan luokitella? ja 2) Mikä vaikutus idiomien käytöllä on hahmoon, joka niitä käyttää? Tutkielmassa idiomit luokitellaan Penttilän ja Muikku-Wernerin mallin mukaisesti neljään eri kategoriaan: täysin läpinäkymättömiin käännösideimeihin, jälkikäteen läpinäkyviin käännösideimeihin, kirjaimellisesti tai kuvaannollisesti läpinäkyviin käännösideimeihin” sekä ”kirjaimellisesti tai kuvaannollisesti läpinäkyviin mukautettuihin käännösideimeihin”. Pelissä esiintyviä idiomeja myös verrataan niiden oikeaoppisiin englanninkielisiin käännöksiin. Lisäksi tutkielma tarjoaa lyhyen analyysin hahmosta, joka idiomeja käyttää ja jonka piirteisiin niiden käyttäminen olennaisesti kuuluu.

## Acknowledgements

Accessing the idioms in Control would have been much more laborious a task if not for the gameplay videos CohhCarnage and Renki have uploaded in their YouTube channels. So huge thank you to them.

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction .....	1
2. Theoretical background.....	2
3. Research materials and methods of analysis.....	6
3.1. <i>Control</i> .....	6
3.2. <i>Ahti</i> .....	7
3.3. Methods of analysis.....	8
4. Analysis of idioms and the character of <i>Ahti</i> .....	8
4.1. Idioms.....	9
4.1.1. Totally opaque translation idioms .....	9
4.1.2. Retrospectively transparent translation idioms .....	11
4.1.3. Directly or figuratively transparent translation idioms .....	12
4.1.4. Directly or figuratively transparent adapted translation idioms .....	14
4.2. <i>Ahti</i> .....	15
5. Conclusion .....	16
Works cited .....	19
Appendix: The idioms in the game.....	21

## 1. Introduction

Usually, when translating a video game, the process is referred to as localization. This sub-genre of translation involves much more than translating the in-game text: the game is adapted to fit the target area culturally and technically as well. (O'Hagan & Mangiron 19) The issues game localisers face include terminology, slang, geopolitical issues, and humour. The increasing interest towards video games in China, for example, gives rise to many problems both linguistically and culturally. (O'Hagan & Mangiron 31-2) While acknowledging the complexity of the process of making games available in different languages and for different audiences, this study focuses solely on the aspect of translating texts.

The motivation behind this study is the fact that English is typically the source language for new idioms in Finnish. In the case of the newly released game *Control* by Remedy however, the source language is Finnish while English is the target language. Indeed, the standard procedure while translating has been to domesticate the text, in other words, to replace any and all foreign idioms of the source language with idioms from the target language that correspond with the original at least somewhat (Penttilä 4).

The questions that this study addresses are as follows: 1) How can the idioms in *Control* be categorised, and on what basis? and 2) What effect, if any, does the use of idioms have on the character that uses them?

In the following sections I will present the theoretical background of this thesis, while also providing a synthesised definition of idioms. Then I will give descriptions of the game's story, genre, and themes. After that comes the analysis of the data. For example, my initial assumption about the breakdown of the idioms into the different categories proved to be false. Also, it seems that in some cases the in-game idiom's resemblance to the correct English idiom has no effect on its transparency. Finally, I will draw conclusions based on the findings of the analysis and present possible topics for further study.

## 2. Theoretical background

In this section I will provide a synthesized description of what an idiom is. I will also discuss some typical properties of idioms, while detailing how some of the most common idioms can transcend cultural boundaries. Furthermore, I will discuss what a translator has to take into consideration when translating idioms. Finally, I will introduce my two main sources which provide the backbone of my analysis. They provide the template using which the idioms are categorised and the necessary theory to do so. They also dictate how the analysed aspects are approached analytically.

Penttilä and Muikku-Werner (247) quote *Oxford English Dictionary* to give one possible definition of an idiom:

3.a. A form of expression, grammatical construction, phrase, etc. peculiar to a language; a peculiarity of phraseology approved by the usage of a language, and often having a signification other than its grammatical or logical use.

Idioms are tied to their original culture and language by their nature (Penttilä & Muikku-Werner 247). For this reason they are also ways of preserving the cultural identity of a language (Adelnia & Vahid 879). They are ways of expressions internalized by native users of the language and the language users use them naturally. Idiomatic expressions are ways in which native speakers can express themselves with fewer words than a non-native might be able to. An example of this would be “to commit a crime” versus “to perform an act punishable by law”. (879) Because of this, idioms can be challenging even to language professionals, not to mention amateurs who come into contact with them irregularly. Non-native speakers have almost no hope of becoming as proficient in using idioms as native speakers of a language. (Penttilä 2)

Idioms are also multi-word structures the meaning of which cannot be deduced by combining the meanings of the individual parts of the structure: for example, “to kick the bucket” could be understood literally as an act of kicking a bucket, but idiomatically it is a euphemism for dying. (Penttilä & Muikku-Werner 248) In other words, the meaning of idioms is opaque and they are more than a sum of their parts. (Penttilä 2) What is more, the images that idioms evoke can sometimes be even startling (Bassnett 34). This all means that idioms cannot be translated literally (Adelnia & Vahid 879).

Idioms are also rigid structures, they rarely allow any kind of changes, inflection, or supplementation (Penttilä 2). This means that the order of the words in an idiom is fixed and cannot be changed: for example “to and fro” is not the same as “fro and to.” The individual words in an idiom cannot be omitted either, and vice versa, new words cannot be added into an idiom. The words cannot be replaced either. (Barker, qtd. in Adelnia & Vahid 879–880) The use of some idioms is also limited by context, some are ungrammatical, some have a strong emotional charge and so on. They bring vibrancy and liveliness to a text that might otherwise be bland and neutral. (Penttilä 2)

However, this does not mean that all idioms are restricted to a certain culture or language. Culturally significant works, such as the Bible, contain many idioms that are the same across languages. Similarly, the works of Shakespeare and sports, for instance, have been sources of idioms that transferred from English to other languages. Examples of such phrases are “double-edged sword”, “forbidden fruit”, “to be or not to be”, and “to throw in the towel”. Idioms are adapted from other languages constantly, though English is usually the source language, especially when the target language is Finnish. (Penttilä 1-2)

Adelnia and Vahid classify idioms into four categories: *colloquialisms*, *proverbs*, *allusions*, and *phrasal verbs*. *Colloquialisms* are not used in formal speech or writing. They are only appropriate for use outside of formal situations. “To laugh his ass out” or even “to die of laughter”, for example, are not fit to be used in formal circumstances. *Proverbs* are ways of making our speech more concrete and easier to understand. They can also be used, for example, to soften the conveyed message. “Early bird catches the worm”, for example, can be used when encouraging someone do something earlier rather than later. *Allusions* is use of highly informal language often used as a way of avoiding saying something inappropriate or taboo. For example, women’s period can be referred to as “the monthlies”. A *phrasal verb* is a combination of a verb and a preposition, or an adverb, or both of them. They are usually used in informal contexts. An example of this would be “to go on” instead of “to continue”. (880)

When it comes to the translation of idioms, one point of view to their translation is the matter of *domestication* versus *foreignization*. Foreignization preserves the influence of the source culture in the translation, even at the cost of legibility. (Penttilä 6) Additionally, when translating idioms, the linguistic elements of the idiom are not the most important factors to take into account, nor is the image that the idiom evokes. Instead, what matters

is the function of the idiom. (Bassnett 34) The cultural differences between the source language and the target language might possess some problems to a translator who is not familiar with them (Adelnia & Vahid 880).

The translator has various strategies to translate idioms. The translator has to choose the one that helps the target language audience to understand the idiom the best. In some rare cases, the idiom has the same meaning and form in both the source language and the target language. The translator may also translate the idiom preserving the meaning while changing the lexical elements of it. If the translator is unable to find an equivalent idiom in the target language, they usually paraphrase the content and the purpose of the idiom. In the extreme case in which even paraphrasing is impossible, the translator can omit the idiom, though this is far from ideal and should only be used as the last resort. In the end, all that matters is not confusing the audience with the translation. (Adelnia & Vahid 881–2)

Penttilä and Muikku-Werner divide idioms into four separate categories: 1) *totally opaque translation idioms*, 2) *retrospectively transparent translation idioms*, 3) *directly or figuratively transparent translation idioms*, and 4) *directly or figuratively transparent adapted translation idioms*. The first category contains idioms that usually come to mind when talking about idioms. “To kick the bucket”, for instance belongs in this category and its meaning is opaque even to native speakers of English. The second category contains idioms the meaning of which might initially be opaque, but can be inferred upon closer inspection of the idiom. The third category contains idioms that are not conventionally used in the target language but would be replaced with a conventional idiom of the target language instead. However, the unconventional idioms can be understood by the speaker of the target language. Finally, the fourth category contains idioms which contain such a vivid image that they require no explanation whatsoever. (253–9)

The character analysis will focus on *nonverbal communication*, *dialogue* and *subtext*. Nonverbal communication includes temperament, body type, and body language; anything that is communicated without words is nonverbal communication. We form our initial impressions of other people based on their nonverbal communication. (Ballon 285) People have different temperaments (Ballon 286): one is cheerful, another is depressed, yet another is aggressive, and yet another is indifferent. Each behaves and acts differently, so choosing the right temperament for the right character is important. Body types are connected to personalities of characters. Endomorphs, people with soft bodies are usually

relaxed, while mesomorphs are muscular and usually the heroes, and ectomorphs are thin and delicate. (Ballon 287) Finally, body language covers a wide berth of aspects. These include, for example, expressions, stance, hygiene, and body movements (Ballon 291). We spend a lot of time trying to interpret other peoples' body language, which makes it really important.

Next, the dialogue, which is what the characters in a story say out loud. It is used to reveal information, move the story forward, or to reveal more about a character. The tone, use of language, grammar, and many other aspects of spoken language are important when analysing characters. (Ballon 293) All of these relate to the personality of a character: a character with a certain personality uses spoken language in a certain way that fits the character's personality. This may reveal something about the character that is not stated explicitly, and thus offer some further insight into the character in question.

Subtext means everything left unsaid or said between the lines. These hidden messages are injected into the dialogue of a character to make the audience identify with them. If there were no room for the audience to project their feelings onto the characters, that would make them melodramatic. (Ballon 295–96) Thus the character would not be as interesting as it could be. Emotional imagery invokes, like the name implies, emotions. They also appeal to the physical senses. Usually the emotional imagery is used to make the player emphasise with a character, though that is not always the case. Visual images are no less effective in evoking emotions. Colours especially are commonly used to convey a variety of meanings: black versus white, evil against good, is one of the most common uses. Use of animals is also part of visual imagery. (297–99)

Gestures, quirks, and expressions are also a way of making characters more expressive. Silence, facial expressions, and physical gestures are all ways of expressing a plethora of emotions and the nature of characters. (Ballon 303) For example, dishonest persons behave in a distinct way that is completely different from that of sociopaths. Sometimes the interpretation made of a character's behaviour can be completely wrong because the audience projects erroneous feelings to the character. Relating to reading between lines, the tone in which a line is delivered also affects how it is interpreted. The tone of voice can also contradict the character's body language, forcing the audience to consider which projects the correct message. (Ballon 304) The physical appearance of characters can

reveal a lot about them, but it can also be used to mislead the audience. Age, appeal, physical marks, clothing, and many more aspects affect the appearance. (Ballon 302–9)

### 3. Research materials and methods of analysis

In this section I will describe the storyline of *Control* on a general level, while focusing mainly on the character of Ahti the Janitor. I will also provide a description of the genre that *Control* represents and how the genre is realised in-game. Moreover, I will describe the actual methods with which I will analyse the idioms used by Ahti.

#### 3.1. *Control*

The story of *Control* begins as the protagonist Jesse Faden finds the headquarters of the elusive Federal Bureau of Control after years of searching. She has been guided there by a presence in her head that she calls Polaris. Jesse finds the bureau empty, bar Ahti, the janitor, who points her to the director's office. Outside the office, she hears a gunshot and finds the director dead inside. She grabs the gun and is transported into the Astral Plane, the home of the mysterious Board of Directors, who is represented by an upside-down pyramid hanging over the Astral Plane. (*Control*)

Jesse finds herself reluctantly as the new director and she makes her way through the Bureau, battling the Bureau personnel infected by an entity called the Hiss while also trying to find her brother Dylan, guided by the ghost of the previous Director. Along the way, Jesse finds that the events of her childhood have come back to haunt her. She also gains various paranatural (a term used in the game instead of "supernatural") abilities by bonding with various Objects of Power. (*Control*)

Moosa discusses how *Control* represents the horror genre, but not of the traditional kind. Instead, she argues, its horror leans towards weird horror, a genre for which H. P. Lovecraft is known. According to Moosa, weird horror is not about blood and gore like mainstream horror. She writes about how weird horror is about the fear of the unknown in their stead. Brooke Maggs, *Control's* Narrative Designer (qtd. in Moosa), describes it in the following way:

[I]t's not about horrifying you or presenting the face of horror. When engaging with the New Weird, we may feel dread, but I would say there is more of a sense of awe, something too large to be explained, too elusive to be fully grasped, which is terrifying and beautiful.

Moosa writes how the weirdness in *Control* is achieved through various means and then lists the means that the game uses and the effects that they each have. First of all, she argues, the scene of the game itself, a federal bureau, is unsettling: this is achieved by creating a location that feels authentic and believable. The second means, she continues, is how the bureaucrats in *Control* handle paranatural events referenced in the game with the same boredom and routine as any other government activity and how normal objects can be used to achieve otherworldly effects. According to Moosa, all this contrast builds up the weirdness in *Control*.

### 3.2. Ahti

Ahti is the archetypical wise old man of the stories. He seems to know what is going on and gives the first push to the protagonist, setting the story in motion. He also provides help when the protagonist gets stuck. (See, e.g. Ramaswamy 231) Ahti is depicted as a very mysterious, even somewhat threatening character. The game also makes his nationality very clear in various ways. When the player first meets him, he is heard singing a Finnish tango before he is actually seen. He also speaks with a very strong Finnish accent, and his speech is sprinkled with Finnish words, especially swear words. (*Control* Welcome to the Oldest House) His office also has some posters advertising Finland, a Finnish dart board on the walls, and a painting depicting an idyllic Finnish summer cottage vista (*Control* e.g. Directorial Override).

Ahti himself is an example of weird horror (see, e.g. Moosa). He is someone ordinary, a character recognisable from various public spaces. However, because little to nothing about him is revealed either initially or during *Control*, Ahti becomes a mysterious, even menacing, character whose motivations remain unclear and make the player doubt him. The way he can telepathically contact the player (*Control* e.g. Directorial Override) makes the player doubt Ahti's benevolence.

My research materials comprise the idioms used by Ahti the Janitor and the parts of the game that feature him (see the Appendix at the end for a complete list). In the parts of the game that I have access to, I have found 26 idioms in total, but it is quite that there are more of them in the game.

### 3.3. Methods of analysis

I will analyse and categorise the idioms that appear in *Control* using the classification introduced by Penttilä and Muikku-Werner. Additionally, I will analyse Ahti's character based on the aspects of nonverbal communication, dialogue, and subtext as presented by Ballon. The emphasis in the character analysis will focus on the use of idioms. However, I will also consider the other aspects discussed by Ballon in relation to the use of idioms because they are not just separate parts of a character, but interlinked aspects that contribute to a single whole. It should be noted that, for story reasons, Ahti's character is developed very little over the game. Since almost all interaction with Ahti occurs during story cinematics, the character and his use of idioms are fairly easy to identify and analyse.

## 4. Analysis of idioms and the character of Ahti

In this section I will analyse Ahti and the idioms he uses in *Control*. I will categorise the idioms based on the categories introduced by Penttilä and Muikku-Werner (255–261). I have strived to categorise the idioms as someone with no knowledge of Finnish may have done. I will also compare the directly translated idioms with English equivalents or English idioms that are similar enough in their use and meaning. Finally, I have assumed that the player knows English and the proper English equivalents to the idioms used in the game. Furthermore, I will carry out a brief analysis of the character Ahti. He remain a very mysterious character in the game, and his use of idioms plays a large part in the construction of the character.

## 4.1. Idioms

As mentioned in section 2.2., Penttilä and Muikku-Werner divide idioms into four categories. Totally opaque translation idioms are, as the name implies, idioms the meaning of which have to be learned by heart and, cannot be inferred in any way. Retrospectively transparent translation idioms are idioms the meaning of which can be inferred in some way or other. Directly or figuratively transparent translation idioms are idioms which that sound a bit weird to the user's ear, although they would understand their meanings. Directly or figuratively transparent adapted translation idioms are idioms that have been assimilated from the source language to the target language in such way that native speakers of the target language use them naturally. (255-261)

### 4.1.1. Totally opaque translation idioms

“Sheaths gonna rattle” (*Control* Directorial Override), “tulla tupenrapinat” in Finnish, is an example of a totally opaque idiom. Its meaning is totally opaque even in its Finnish form “tupenrapinat”, suggesting that even native Finnish speakers have to be aware of the idiomatic nature of the word for it to make any sense in a sentence. In *Control*, Ahti uses it as a vague threat if someone cancels his holiday (*Control* Directorial Override). “Someone is going to get it” would be an appropriate English equivalent for “sheaths gonna rattle”. When one compares the directly translated idiom with the English equivalent, it is easy to see that the only thing they have in common is the ‘going to’ part. Moreover, rattling of sheath implies that the one issuing the threat has a knife, whereas the English equivalent threat includes the threat of bodily violence. The first impression of “tupenrapinat” is someone reaching for a knife on their waist, while “someone is going to get it” invokes an image of someone turning up their sleeves in preparation of beating someone up.

“Throw the spoon in the corner” (*Control* Directorial Override), “heittää lusikka nurkkaan” in Finnish, is also a member of this category, although someone with no knowledge of Finnish might place it erroneously into the category of retrospectively transparent translation idioms. The presence of the verb “throw” in the idiom might deceive an unwary person to connect the idiom with “to throw in the towel”, which is incorrect. The original

Finnish idiom means “to die”, not “to give up”. The actual English equivalent idiom is “to kick the bucket”, which corresponds better with another Finnish idiom for dying, “potkaista tyhjää”, “to kick the void / empty space”. If the game had used “to kick the void” instead of “to throw the spoon in the corner”, the player would most likely have been able to infer the meaning of the idiom. Another reason for the opaqueness of the idiom is the fact that it is a euphemism, a way of avoiding saying something directly, for death.

“Lomille lomps, holiday homps” (*Control* Finnish Tango) does not have an English equivalent, most likely because it is a novel Finnish idiom originating from army slang (Sippola). For that reason alone, it is a totally opaque translation idiom. The Finnish original is probably adapted from the phrase “lompsia lomille”, “traipse on a holiday”. It is a humorous statement one can say when their holiday starts. Because the writers of the game have preserved the alliteration, which means repetition of an onset in subsequent words (Montgomery et al. 2003), the English translation becomes practically nonsense. The writers seem to have just replaced the ‘l’ onset in “lomps” with ‘h’ to achieve the alliteration. Although the word “homps” is nonsense, it does resemble the word ‘hop’ a bit.

“The old twig pants” (*Control* Directorial Override), “vanha vihtahousu” in Finnish is another totally opaque idiom. A reason for this is that it is also a euphemism for Satan. The origin of the Finnish idiom is unclear, but, in old Finnish rock paintings, Adam and Eve are depicted covering their shame with ‘saunavasta’, a sheaf of birch twigs. The name ‘Vanha Aatami’, ‘Old Adam’, was also used when talking about the Devil or the Original Sin. (Helsingin kaupunginkirjasto) A non-Finn would have no way of knowing the meaning of the idiom. English certainly has its own euphemisms for the Devil, but the most popular ones do not evoke the same kind of image as the Finnish one does.

The last example of a totally opaque translation idiom is “burn it to reindeer”, “polttaa poroksi” in Finnish (*Control* Directorial Override). The correct translation of the idiom would be “burn it to a cinder”. It is interesting to note that “to burn to a cinder” is also a literal translation of “polttaa poroksi”, for ‘ash’ or ‘cinder’ are other archaic meanings of ‘poro’ in Finnish (Helsingin kaupunginkirjasto), which even many Finns do not necessarily know. Thus, on the lexical level, the English translation is identical with the Finnish original. However it lost its transparency when the writers of the game chose to translate it as ‘reindeer’ and not ‘cinder’. The absurdity of the literal translation makes it very amusing for

those who understand what the Finnish original idiom is. A possible English euphemism for the Devil that has roughly the similar tone could be something like “Old Nick”.

#### 4.1.2. Retrospectively transparent translation idioms

“Yesterday’s grouse’s son” (*Control* Directorial Override), “olla eilisen teeren poika”, is an example of a retrospectively transparent translation idiom. Although its meaning is not immediately transparent, some factors should lead the player to the correct conclusion about its meaning. Firstly, it somewhat resembles the English equivalent idiom “to not be born yesterday”. Both the direct English translation and the Finnish original contain the word ‘yesterday’. They both also contain a word that deals with being born. The correct English idiom has this with the verb ‘born’, while the Finnish idiom has it in a more roundabout way in the word ‘son’. Secondly, the context in which the idiom is used should also imply its meaning. In a cutscene during the guest Directorial Override (*Control*), Jesse thinks to herself that Ahti has not said everything that there is to the task he is giving her, after which Ahti uses the idiom.

“Last winter’s snow” (*Control* Directorial Overdrive), “mennen talven lumia” in Finnish, is another retrospectively transparent translation idiom. Its proper English translation is “a thing of the past”. The idiom does not evoke a very strong image or resemble the correct translation very closely; it requires some consideration from those who do not speak Finnish. The meaning of the idiom is best inferred from its literal sense: last winter’s snow will have melted away already, no matter during which season a person refers to it. Thus, the snow would no longer matter, it would be “a thing of the past”.

“A dog buried in this” (*Control* Directorial Override), “olla koira haudattuna” in Finnish, is a retrospectively transparent translation idiom that borders on being a completely opaque one. It can be translated into English in a few different ways. One possible translation for the idiom is “to have something more to something”, or alternatively, “to be something fishy about something”. The fact that the Finnish idiom and the latter English equivalent both have an animal in them should be enough of an indication of the meaning of the directly translated idiom. The context in which the idiom is used also implies its meaning: right before Ahti uses the idiom, the main character thinks to herself that there must be more to

what he is saying. Another aspect to consider is smell. In the past, people used to bury their alive under barns to prevent other animals from having accidents, and the dog buried in a shallow grave caused later no small amount of stink (Helsingin kaupunginkirjasto). Similarly, fishes tend to smell really bad if one lets them start rotting.

“There be work for the axe, take them behind the sauna” (*Control* Welcome to the Oldest House) is a very interesting pair of idioms. The idioms are “olla kirveelle töitä” and “viedä saunan taakse” in Finnish, respectively. In English, they are “someone is going to get the axe” and “make them sleep with the fishes”, respectively. “There be work for the axe” resembles the English equivalent idiom, but whereas someone getting the axe in a figurative sense means that they get fired, the idiom here should be understood in a literal sense. The context in which the idiom is used reveals its literal meaning to the player. “Take them behind the sauna”, in turn, would be a totally opaque translation idiom if it was not paired with the first idiom. A non-Finnish player might be able to guess the meaning, but they could not be sure without cultural information. The backs of buildings are associated with shady deals in English rather than executing people like in the Finnish idiom.

The last idiom to be analysed in this category is “bark don’t make a wound” (*Control* Finnish Tango), “ei haukku haavaa tee”. The idiom does not have any direct equivalent in English, and the closest equivalent is used differently and looks different. The closest English equivalent for the idiom would perhaps be the famous children’s rhyme “Sticks and stones may break my bones / But words will never harm me”. Nevertheless, the player will probably be able to infer that the word ‘bark’ is used in a similar sense as in the idiom “his bark is worse than his bite”.

#### 4.1.3. Directly or figuratively transparent translation idioms

“Did you have piss in your sock” (*Control* Finnish Tango), “tuliko kusi sukkaan” in Finnish, is an example of a directly or figuratively transparent translation idiom. The English translation of the idiom would be either “did you wet your pants” or “did you shit yourself”, depending on whether the translator wants to preserve the expletive nature of the Finnish original idiom. Both of the English translation possibilities have some bodily excrement in

them, indirectly in one case, even though using the variant with the word 'shit' makes the statement much stronger. Even though the translated idiom is not a conventional English idiom, having piss in one's sock seems to indicate that the idiom is about getting scared.

"Hit the facts on the table" (*Control Directorial Override*), "lyödä fakat pöytään" in Finnish, is another example of a directly or figuratively transparent adapted translation idiom. Its proper English translation would be "to come clean". Another possible English translation for the idiom could be "to reveal the cards". The image that the idiom evokes is so strong that upon some reflection on the idiom the player should be able to conclude what the correct English equivalent is: the idiom is about coming clean and disclosing everything, even though the English and Finnish idioms do not share any similarities on a lexical level.

"Disappear like a fart in Sahara" (*Control Directorial Override*), "kadota kuin pieru Saharaan" in Finnish, is yet another example of a directly or figuratively transparent idiom. Correctly translated, it means "to vanish into thin air" in English. The idiom is more transparent in a figurative sense than in a direct one. The image that it evokes, a small cloud of gas in the vast open space of Sahara, with wind blowing the sands, is strong enough for the player to understand its meaning, even if it is not a conventional idiom in the English language. Furthermore, the English and the Finnish idioms have the verbs 'vanish' and 'disappear', respectively. The synonymous verbs help the non-Finnish player to understand the meaning of the idiom.

"Run with your head as your third leg" (*Control Directorial Override*), "juosta pää kolmantena jalkana" in Finnish, is another idiom that is figuratively transparent in its meaning. Its possible English translations include "to get a hurry on" and "to run like the wind". The word 'run' clearly indicates that the idiom is about hurrying. The third leg also indicates that someone is in potential need of extra speed, and thus of another leg, to help them get somewhere faster. However, one has to consider another option. Traditionally, excessively large male genitals can be referred to as 'a third leg'. Because of this possible reading, the idiom might not make sense to some players.

"It happened in the last drop" (*Control Directorial Override*), "se tapahtui viime tipassa" in Finnish, is an interesting idiom because it may be hard to place in a particular category. The correct English translation of the idiom would be "it happened at the last moment / second", which means that, for the initial part, the directly translated idiom resembles the correct translation. However, the latter part of it might cause confusion in some players: 'to

be the last drop', means that something was a thing that caused some sort of build-up to finally erupt. Its Finnish equivalent 'olla viimeinen pisara' is in effect a literal word for word translation of the English idiom. If the initial part of the idiom is enough of a clue, the player may realise its meaning.

The final idiom to be analysed in this section is "go as far as the pepper grows" (*Control* Directorial Override), "mennä niin kauas kuin pippuri kasvaa" in Finnish. A possible English equivalent of the idiom could be "to go over the hills and far away", although the tone and inherent meaning of the Finnish and English variants do not match each other perfectly. The pepper referenced in the idiom is Cayenne pepper, which grows in French Guyana, near Cayenne River, an area that is known for its bad climate (Helsingin kaupunginkirjasto). Thus the English variant is much milder and nicer than the Finnish one. The word 'pepper' also makes the Finnish variant more exotic than the English one. That is the case especially when one considers the fact that the idiom was created in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Helsingin kaupunginkirjasto) when peppers were a rare and valuable commodity. Overall, at least people living in the Western world are probably able to understand the meaning of the translated idiom because pepper usually grows in warmer climates.

#### 4.1.4. Directly or figuratively transparent adapted translation idioms

There is actually only one idiom that fits this category in the entire game: "discover yourself", "löytää itsensä" (*Control* Take Control). That is most likely because the Finnish form has been translated literally from English at some point, and then in the game it is translated literally back to English. That way the idiom stays essentially the same despite the change of language. The idiom means discovering oneself in the spiritual sense, rather than in an actual physical sense.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> As a side note, it was interesting to note that there was a single occasion where the game actually broke its own rules and properly translates an idiom instead of translating it literally. That is found at the start of Directorial Overdrive (*Control*) when Ahti says "easy peasy". The adapted Finnish translation of the idiom is "helppo nakki", which is "easy frankfurter" when translated literally back to English. It is kind of funny to note that the English idiom has peas and the Finnish equivalent has frankfurters, greens and meat product respectively.

## 4.2. Ahti

As mentioned earlier, Ahti remains a very mysterious character and not much is revealed about him in the game. More or less the only facts known about Ahti are that he is a Finn and that he likes Finnish tango. (Control) Everything else is just guesses and conjecture, which makes wildly different interpretations about his character possible. It is possible that Ahti is a god in the universe of *Control*. The first hint of this is his name, Ahti, the god of the sea in Finnish mythology. The blue colour of his overalls could also hint towards this. Another hint is the band that exists in *Control's* universe called Old Gods of Asgard. Ahti calls the members of the band his friends, which seems to indicate that the members of the band are actual gods. Finally, during the last cutscene in Finnish Tango (*Control*), a symbol of the tree of life appears briefly on the screen and Ahti talks about how his Swedish brothers could not handle the heat of the sauna.

Body language is a huge part of communication that we do and analyse constantly (Ballon 291). Throughout *Control*, Ahti is depicted only in three poses. In the first pose, he is mopping the floor with the camera behind him. In the second pose is, he holds his mop in his hand with the camera in front of him. Those are the two poses in which he is shown for the most part of the game. The last depiction of Ahti is in a painting, in which he is depicted standing on the porch of a sauna located on the lakeside, wearing nothing but a towel around his waist and a bottle of beer in his hand. That happens during the quest Finnish Tango. He is also shown in the second pose during the quest, but he seems nicer for reasons discussed later. (*Control*) Especially the first pose, and to some extent the second one, make Ahti seem menacing and closed off. Conversely, the third pose makes Ahti seem more friendly and open. Just the fact that he is basically naked, and thus figuratively bares himself to the player, is a huge factor in that. The player sees a seemingly normal, slightly overweight man, and a more benign Ahti.

The tone of Ahti's voice also affects how the player perceives his character. For the most of *Control*, the tone of his voice is very gruff, tense even. That changes in the quest Finnish Tango, when his voice, just like his pose in the painting, becomes more relaxed and happier. He is even occasionally heard humming some song under his breath. The tone of his voice makes him seem much nicer when he appears at the end of the quest, even though he is depicted in the second pose from earlier in the game.

The most obvious quirk Ahti has is that he likes to sprinkle Finnish words in his speech. The most frequent Finnish words he uses are expletives, since Finns are stereotypically considered to enhance the message they are trying to convey with liberal use of swear words. Occasionally Ahti even speaks whole sentences in Finnish. The way he uses idioms is another quirk of the character. The reasons for Ahti's verbal quirks are not clear, and mostly guesswork. One possible reason is that he simply refuses to learn the English language properly, preferring to preserve some of his Finnishness instead. Another reason could be that people speak to him so little that as a result he has not learned English that well. He also pronounces the English words with a Finnish accent, the word *assistant* being a notable example of that (see e.g. *Control* Welcome to the Oldest House).

## 5. Conclusion

Idioms are one of the hardest aspects of using any language. They are something that a language user just knows or does not know; there is really no middle ground in the matter. The idioms that Ahti uses in *Control* are interesting because one would expect such language use from someone who is not familiar with the language. The fact that so many of the idioms are so strongly tied to the culture from which they originate only complicates the matter even further. In a sense, the idioms used by Ahti in *Control* highlight some of the issues learners of any language have to face and display when learning a new one, even though the incorrect use is intentional and done on purpose in this case.

The classification of the idioms, especially into the second and the third categories, proved to be very hard. Determining where the border between retrospectively transparent and just weirdness goes was hard. That is most likely because one cannot simply forget their native language, it will always introduce some amount of bias when conducting studies like this.

Before any kind of analysis or put a serious thought had been put on the matter, the initial assumption had been that the ratio between idioms in different categories would end up being slanted very heavily in the favour of the totally opaque translation idioms. That the ratio was more even than had been assumed, with the exception of the directly or figuratively transparent adapted translation idioms, was a pleasant surprise. In fact, in the

end the largest category ended up being that of directly or figuratively transparent translation idioms (see the Appendix for the list of all idioms).

Unsurprisingly, the idioms that are tied to the Finnish culture were the most predominant ones in the category of totally opaque translation idioms. With those kinds of idioms, knowing the Finnish language is not enough. One must also be familiar with the intricacies of Finnish culture and history. Idioms in the second, retrospectively transparent translation idioms, were idioms that did not evoke a strong enough image to qualify a place in the third category. They also either resembled the English equivalent idiom closely enough on the lexical level for the player to infer their meaning or the context in which they were used provided a clue about their meaning. The directly or figuratively transparent translation idioms evoked stronger images than ones in the second category. Interestingly, the most vulgar idioms in the game fell in this category. Against my expectations, only one idiom fit into the category of directly or figuratively transparent adapted translation idioms. The idiom has been introduced into Finnish from English, and now it was directly translated back into English in the game.

It was interesting to note that, although it helped, the extent to which the translated idioms resembled the English equivalents had very little impact on how understandable they were. Especially the directly or figuratively transparent translation idioms were very different from what the English equivalent looked like, but they were simply slightly quirky expressions and not entirely incomprehensible. Another interesting point is that there are a lot of expressions that are idioms.

The way in which the character Ahti used the directly translated idioms in the game is what ties all his other characteristics together. It is the overarching theme of his character that makes an otherwise unbelievable character a believable one. As noted earlier, not much information is provided about Ahti and his background, and so the use of idioms adds a needed layer of complexity into his character. The fact that the idioms he uses are translated directly from Finnish is what ties his use of idioms with his clearly Finnish background. What is more, the fact that the idioms are directly translated from Finnish and thus not transparent in their meaning, or at least very exotic and perplexing, is what ties the idioms with his mysteriousness. It is difficult to describe the effect that the use of idioms has on the player to someone who has not played or experienced the game. In my

experience, the way Ahti used idioms elevated him from the status of a generic mysterious non-playable character and made him a memorable one.

Being a new game, *Control* offers plenty of possibilities in both topics to study and approaches to adopt. As I mentioned earlier in the description of *Control*, the game belongs in the genre of weird horror. It therefore provides ample possibilities of analysing the various horror elements that appear in-game. One other possible topic of studying could be the language use in-game. Another possible topic of study could be the intertextuality of the game; how it references other cultural works. The game also offers a possibility of conducting a poetry analysis. The narratology of the game is one more possible topic of study. Finally, the genre of the game is a possible topic for future studies.

## Works cited

- Adelnia, Amineh & Vahid Dastjerdi, Hossein. "Translation of Idioms: A Hard Task for the Translator." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 7, July 2011, pp. 879–883. doi:10.4304/tpls.1.7.879-883. Accessed 31 Oct. 2019.
- Control*. Windows PC version, Remedy, 2019.
- Helsingin kaupunginkirjasto. *Kysy.fi*. <http://www.kysy.fi/kysymys/mista-juontuu-sanonta-koira-haudattuna>. Accessed 6 Dec. 2019.
- . *Kysy.fi*. <http://www.kysy.fi/kysymys/mista-on-tullut-sanonta-painu-niin-kauas-kuin-pippuri-kasvaa-painu-missa-pippuri-kasvaa>. Accessed 4 Dec. 2019.
- . *Kysy.fi*. <http://www.kysy.fi/kysymys/mista-peraisin-nimitys-vanha-vihtahousu-kun-puhutaan-pirusta-mika-ihmeen>. Accessed 6 Dec. 2019.
- . *Kysy.fi*. <http://www.kysy.fi/kysymys/sana-poro-suomen-kielessa-monessa-merkityksessa-mm-poro-itse-poro-siis>. Accessed 2 Dec. 2019.
- Montgomery, Martin, Durant, Alan, Furniss, Tom & Mills, Sara. *Ways of Reading* (4<sup>th</sup> edition). Routledge, 2013.
- Moosa, Tauriq. *Control Confronts Us With A Very Specific Type of Horror: A Lack of Control*. IGN, 7 Oct. 2019, <https://nordic.ign.com/xbox-one-gaming-hardware/29944/feature/control-confronts-us-with-a-very-specific-type-of-horror-a-lack-of-control>. Accessed 29 Oct. 2019.
- O'Hagan, Minako & Mangiron, Carmen. *Game Localization: Translating for the global digital entertainment industry*. E-book, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2013.
- Penttilä, Esa 2010. Näkökulmia ja menetelmiä englannista suomennettujen uusidiomien tutkimukseen. *Kääntämisen ja tulkkauksen tutkimuksen symposiumin verkkojulkaisu* 4, 1–8. [https://www.sktl.fi/@Bin/40740/Penttila\\_MikaEL2010.pdf](https://www.sktl.fi/@Bin/40740/Penttila_MikaEL2010.pdf). Accessed 31 Oct. 2019.

- Penttilä, Esa & Muikku-Werner, Pirkko. "English Gatecrashers in Finnish: Directly Translated English Idioms as Novelties of Finnish." *Beyond Borders – Translations Moving Languages, Literatures and Cultures*, edited by Pekka Kujamäki, Leena Kolehmainen, Esa Penttilä, and Hannu Kemppainen, Frank&Timme, 2011, pp. 247–265.
- Rachel, Barrion. *Breathing Life Into Your Characters*. E-book, Writer's Digest Books, 2009.
- Ramaswamy, Shobha. "Archetypes in Fantasy Fiction: A Study of J .R .R. Tolkien and J. K. Rowling." *Language in India* , Vol 14, No 1, Jan 2014. Accessed 31Oct. 2019.
- Sippola, Jussi. "Miksi sanotaan "lomalle loms"? Alkuperä yllätti kielitieteilijän". *Helsingin Sanomat*. 20 Jun. 2016. <https://www.hs.fi/elama/art-2000002740339.html>. Accessed 3 Dec. 2019.

Appendix: The idioms in the game

The idiom in-game	The idiom in Finnish	The English explanation
<b>Totally opaque translation idioms</b>		
burn into reindeer <sup>2</sup>	polttaa poroksi	burn to a cinder
lomille lombs, holiday homps <sup>3</sup>	lomille lombs	a humorous utterance said when leaving for a holiday, has no English equivalent
now this boy left, said the son of Annikki Tähti <sup>3</sup>	nyt tämä poika lähti, sanoi Annikki Tähden poika	Annikki Tähti was a famous Finnish tango singer, I'm out of here
sheaths gonna rattle <sup>2</sup>	tulla tupenrapinat	someone is going to get it, woe betide someone
the old twig pants <sup>2</sup>	vanha vihtahousu	the Devil
throw the spoon in the corner <sup>2</sup>	heittää lusikka nurkkaan	to die; to kick the bucket
<b>Retrospectively transparent translation idioms</b>		
a dog buried in this <sup>2</sup>	koira haudattuna	to have something more to something, to be something fishy about something
bark don't make a wound <sup>3</sup>	ei haukku haavaa tee	words cannot hurt you, sticks and stones may break my bones
keep work in the glove and the house standing <sup>3</sup>	olla homma hanskassa ja pitää talo pystyssä	to have everything under control
last winter's snow <sup>2</sup>	menneen talven lumia	a thing of the past
there be work for the axe, take them behind the sauna <sup>1</sup>	olla kirveelle töitä, viedä saunan taakse	someone is going to die, make them sleep with the fishes
yesterday's grouse's son <sup>2</sup>	eilisen teeren poika	to be not born yesterday
<b>Directly or figuratively transparent translation idioms</b>		
couple hours of job <sup>2</sup>	parin tunnin homma	a job that will only take a while, make quick work of

did you have piss in your sock <sup>3</sup>	tuliko kusi sukaan	get scared, to piss one's pants / to shit oneself
disappear like a fart in Sahara <sup>2</sup>	kadota kuin pieru Saharaan	vanish into thin air
feel the band around his head tighten <sup>2</sup>	tuntee hinnan kiristyvän pään ympärillä	to feel very uncomfortable, feel ill at ease
go as far as pepper grows <sup>2</sup>	niin kauas kuin pippuri kasvaa	go very far, go over the hills and far away
hit the facts on the table <sup>2</sup>	iskeä faktat pöytään	to come clean
it happened in the last drop <sup>1</sup>	se tapahtui viime tipassa	happen at the last moment
it's place for congratulations <sup>1</sup>	onnittelujen paikka	to pat on the back
need to get you working <sup>2</sup>	pitää laittaa sinut hommiin	to get someone started on the work
run with your head as your third leg <sup>2</sup>	juosta pää kolmantena jalkana	to hurry, get a hurry on, to run like the wind
we got him caught with his hand in the fish trap <sup>2</sup>	me saimme hänet rysän päältä kiinni	to be caught on the act, to be caught red-handed
<b>Directly or figuratively transparent adapted translation idioms</b>		
find yourself <sup>4</sup>	löytää itsensä	to discover oneself in a spiritual sense, find yourself

<sup>1</sup> *Control* Welcome to the Oldest House

<sup>2</sup> *Control* Directorial Overdrive

<sup>3</sup> *Control* Finnish Tango

<sup>4</sup> *Control* Take Control