The Effect of Video Game Localisation on Gaming Experience

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In

Translation Studies

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School of Liberal Arts

May 2023

Word Count: 16,172

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I. Justification of the relevance, originality, and novelty of the project.

In the 21st century, the gaming industry has grown to the point when making games may involve hundreds of employees including those who are in charge of localisation. The game market thrives as developers are reaching the widest possible audience by localising their products for foreign markets and generating hundreds of billions USD worldwide[1]. Games bring substantial revenues to their creators when they gain popularity.

Localisation is critical for ensuring games' popularity that is usually connected to positive gaming experiences. However, players' perceptions of a localised game have not been sufficiently studied. Drawing on the assumption that localised games and their original versions may result in different perceptions of games, this study focuses on understanding the impact of localisation on gaming experience.

The findings of this study may benefit game developers and translators by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between the quality of localisation and the players' perception of a story in a video game.

Research objectives, research question(s), hypothesis (in case)

The following research question is based on the central phenomenon of this study: How do gamers perceive localisation errors and their influence on their sense of immersion in a video game?

II. Scope, order, and terms of work performance.

Stage 1. Conducting an analysis of the existing literature on the selected topic.
Stage 2. Description of the research methodology, justification for the choice of method (quantitative, qualitative).
Stage 3. Description of the tools of data collection (interviewing, document analysis, survey).
Stage 4. Description of the results of the study.
Stage 5. Description of the conclusion, recommendations.

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[1] See the Global Games Market Report (2022) prepared by Newzoo for detailed information.

III. Thesis quality indicators

a) The use of relevant regulatory documents and literature at the time of writing master thesis;
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Stages	Supervisor's full name	Graduate's full name
Stage 1. Conducting an analysis of the existing literature on the selected topic.	Gulfiya Kuchumova	10.01.2023
Description of the research methodology, justification for the choice of method (quantitative, qualitative).	Gulfiya Kuchumova	20.01.2023
Stage 3. Description of the means of data collection (interviewing, document analysis, survey).	Gulfiya Kuchumova	28.01.2023
Stage 4. Description of the results of the study.	Gulfiya Kuchumova	21.03.2023
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Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to those who have provided invaluable support throughout my research journey, without whom this thesis would not be what it is today.

Firstly, I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to my supervisor, Gulfiya Kuchumova, for her unmatched expertise, dedication, and willingness to address my endless questions despite her busy schedule. Her mentoring was beyond professional, and I have been incredibly fortunate to have the opportunity to work under her guidance.

I am also thankful to my esteemed colleague, Sara Altayeva, who not only recommended Maqsut Narikbayev University for my Master's course, but also dedicated her time to guide me through the complexities of my research work.

At the heart of this acknowledgement, my gratitude goes out to my wife, whose love and belief in my abilities have been an infinite source of motivation. Her support have carried me through every step of this journey. I am eternally grateful for her care and patience.

Abstract

As the global video game market continues to rise, localisation has become a crucial process providing players around the world with authentic gaming experience. While recognising this, the study builds upon the theoretical framework developed by Brown and Cairns (2004) to investigate immersion as a concept that is central to the gaming experience. Although the academic literature considers immersion and video game localisation separately, this study attempts to address the research gap in understanding how localisation may influence immersion. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with ten participants, this study investigates gamers' perceptions of localisation errors and their influence on their state of immersion. The findings of this study showed that localisation errors may influence the state of immersion to a various extent depending on their type and implications on the game progress. These findings could be beneficial both from theoretical and practical perspectives, as they contribute to an under-researched face of translation studies. From a theoretical standpoint, these findings may enrich the understanding of the influence that localisation may have towards immersion, providing a foundation for future research. Practically, they may be of use for game developers and localisation teams in their practice to enhance the immersive gaming experience.

Keywords: video games, localisation, immersion, localisation errors

Аннотация

С ростом глобального рынка видеоигр локализация стала важнейшим процессом, позволяющим игрокам по всему миру испытать подлинный игровой опыт. Принимая во внимание данный факт, настоящее исследование строится на теоретической концепции, разработанной Брауном и Кэрнсом (2004) для изучения погружения, в качестве ключевой составляющей игрового опыта. Несмотря на то, что научная литература рассматривает концепцию погружения и локализации видеоигр в качестве отдельных областей, данное исследование направлено на заполнение пробела в понимании того, как локализация может оказать влияние на погружение. Исследование проводилось с использованием полуструктурированных интервью с участием десяти человек, цель которого заключалась в изучении того, как игроки воспринимают ошибки локализации, и как они влияют на их состоянии погружения. Результаты исследования показали, что ошибки локализации в разной степени влияют на состояние погружения, в зависимости от их типа и последствий в отношении игрового сюжета. Данные результаты имеют как теоретическую, так и практическую ценность, поскольку они вносят вклад в малоизученную область переводческих исследований. С теоретической точки зрения, результаты исследования способствуют более глубокому пониманию влияния локализации на погружение игроков, и могут послужить основой для будущих исследований. С практической точки зрения, они могут быть полезны разработчикам видеоигр, а также командам по локализации в их работе над созданием более иммерсивного игрового опыта среди игроков.

Ключевые слова: видеоигры, локализация, погружение, ошибки локализации

Аңдатпа

Жаһандық бейнеойындар нарығының өсуімен локализация бүкіл әлемдегі ойыншыларға шынайы ойын тәжірибесін сезінуге мүмкіндік беретін маңызды үдеріске айналды. Осыны ескере отырып, зерттеу жұмысы Браун мен Кэрнс (2004) ұсынған теориялық тұжырымдамаға негізделіп ойын тәжірибесінің негізгі құрамдас бөлігі ретінде ойынға бойлауды зерттейді. Ғылыми әдебиетте бейнеойындарға бойлау және локализация тұжырымдамасы жеке салалар ретінде бөлек қарастырылғанымен, бұл зерттеу локализацияның бойлауға қалай әсер ететінін түсінудегі олқылықты толтыруға бағытталған. Он қатысушымен өткізілген жартылай құрылымды сұхбаттарға сүйене отырып, бұл зерттеу ойыншылардың локализация қателіктерін қалай қабылдайтынын және олардың бойлау күйіне қалай әсер ететінін зерттеуді мақсат етті. Зерттеу нәтижелері локализация қателіктері ойын сюжетіне қатысты олардың түріне және салдарына байланысты әртүрлі дәрежеде бойлау күйіне әсер ететінін көрсетті. Бұл нәтижелер теориялық және практикалық құндылыққа ие, өйткені олар аударма ісінің жеткілікті түрде зерттелмеген саласына үлес қосады. Теориялық тұрғыдан алғанда, зерттеу нәтижелері локализацияның ойыншылардың бойлауына әсерін тереңірек түсінуге ықпал етеді және болашақ зерттеулерге негіз бола алады. Практикалық тұрғыдан алғанда, олар бейнеойын әзірлеушілеріне, сондай-ақ локализация топтарына ойыншылар арасында анағұрлым иммерсивті ойын тәжірибесін құру үшін пайдалы болуы мүмкін.

Түйінді сөздер: бейнеойындар, локализация, бойлау, локализация қателіктері

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Introduction

Background Information

The mid-sixties was the time when the world saw the first computer game called *Spacewar!*. The design of early digital games mainly consisted of dots and slashes rarely using any language (Czech, 2013), so game industries did not require much money, time and workforce to make their products. Once the game reached the popularity peak in the origin country, it only then could be represented abroad, so initially the localisation process was far from being a high-priority goal.

With the rise of advanced technologies, the gaming industry began to prosper and add a significant contribution to the global economy (Newzoo, 2022) reaching the point that allows the game companies to involve hundreds of employees including those who are in charge of professional localisation. The overwhelming number of people in the world who choose this leisure activity (Entertainment Software Association, 2021) led the companies to focus on the international market trying to reach the widest possible audience through their localised products (Mangiron & O'Hagan, 2006). Since 1990, localisation has become a crucial step, and the popularity of localised games has come to depend primarily on the quality of localisation that has a direct impact on the gaming experience among a target audience.

The localisation generally refers to the process of changing and adapting a specific product to a particular market (Localization Industry Standards Association, 2007) in such a way that its foreignness does not affect the profit from its sales (Mandiberg, 2009). In this understanding, foreign markets are usually referred to a country, region or even a community, whose locales, such as cultural, ethical, technical, ideological and political aspects may require a separate version of a product

(Sandrini, 2005). Since the terms of localisation and translation are used interchangeably, this complex relation needs to be clarified. While translation is defined as the alteration of in-game texts from one language to another aiming to break linguistic barriers and build communication (Mandiberg, 2009), localisation goes beyond the textual structure and may involve modifying game codes to fit the locale requirements. In this context, it may be assumed that translation simply falls into the scope of localisation when referring to video games (Czeck, 2013).

The pleasurable aspect of video games is that they can induce certain types of gaming experience (Michailidis, 2018). Gaming experience can be characterised as a combination of the gamer's thoughts, feelings, emotions, behaviour and perception in a gaming environment (Ermi & Mayra, 2005). It is important to recognise beforehand that gaming experience is a subjective measure implying that gamers may experience various range of feelings and thoughts while playing different game genres, and even the same game, having fun if the opponent is defeated, or frustration if the game session is lost (Poels et al., 2007). This subjectivity gave the rise to the various theories that are widely presented in literature through the concept of immersion.

Immersion means a powerful experience of interaction (Brown & Cairns, 2004) and the cognitive state of engagement or involvement a person feels when playing video games (Cairns, 2014). In the recent years, as the gaming industries continue to evolve, this phenomenon has become a topic of wide academic interest, however the question of whether the localised games induce the same level of immersion as their original versions has not received due attention.

Problem Statement

The problem of this study is drawn on the assumption that gamers who play the localised games and those who complete their original versions may have different

perceptions of various game episodes resulting in the different state of immersion. Poor localisation may lead to players spending less time in the game, experiencing fewer emotions, and a reluctance to associate themselves with the main characters, which can lead to unsatisfactory consequences in terms of game popularity and sales. On the contrary, high quality localisation can lead the game to worldwide fame and transfer its world beyond the gaming industry to books market, cinema and other forms of entertainment. Therefore, the problem statement indicates that if the localised product does not meet the expectations of the target audience, gaming companies may sustain significant financial losses.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of localisation errors on gaming experience.

Research Question

The following research question is based on the central phenomenon of this study: How do gamers perceive localisation errors and their influence on their sense of immersion in a video game?

Significance of the Study

The importance of this study can be underscored both from theoretical and practical perspectives. As a practical contribution, this study can be beneficial for game developers and game publishers, as it established connection between two fields of research – gaming experience and video game localisation by demonstrating that localisation errors can have influence on gamers' immersion. Moreover, the study suggests that immersion can differ depending on types of localisation errors. The findings may help developers to reconsider their localisation strategies and pay more attention to the concept of immersion to retain customer loyalty in other countries.

This is also applicable for Kazakhstani companies who just started developing this field, and may face similar problems when localising games from or into the Kazakh language.

Moreover, although video game localisation is a fast-growing phenomenon, it is still not present in Kazakhstani curricula preventing Kazakhstani translation studies graduates from working in this field. Thus, the findings of this study may also be useful for educational reforms in Kazakhstan and other countries to help university administration and professors teach future translators and localisers to be in demand on the international market.

From theoretical perspective, future researchers may find it beneficial to use the conceptual framework that builds on the concept of immersion and three types of localisation errors presented as barriers to gaming experience to continue the exploration of this topic in consideration with all limitations of this study.

Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review chapter is to critically examine and synthesise existing studies related to video game localisation and gaming experience to answer the following research question, “How do gamers perceive localisation errors and their influence on their sense of immersion in a video game?”. The literature review chapter is divided into two main sections. First section provides information on the process of video game localisation that consists of three stages such as pre-localisation, translation and post-localisation reviewed through the models, components and challenges. The following section is devoted to gaming experience explored through the concept of *immersion*, as a theoretical framework that builds on the three levels such as *engagement*, *engrossment* and *total immersion*. This theoretical framework is important as it provides a foundation to interpret the findings of this qualitative research.

The Process of Video Game Localisation

To investigate the influence of localisation errors on gaming experience and understand which of them are perceived as influential by gamers, it is important to explore the process of video game localisation thoroughly. This section delves into three stages, namely *pre-localisation*, *translation* and *post-localisation* reviewed through the models, components and challenges faced by translators and localisers when delivering an authentic gaming experience to players.

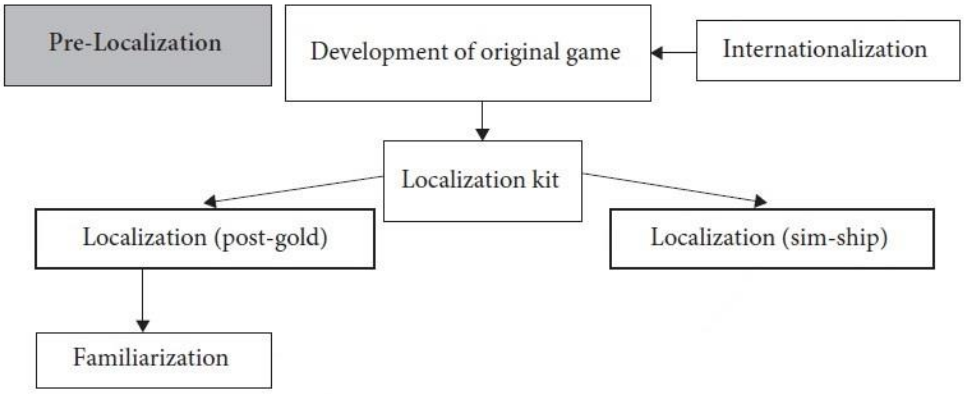
Pre-Localisation

Pre-localisation stage is the preliminary work conducted prior to any localisation-based project. O’Hagan and Mangiron (2013) state that the entire process starts with the *localisation kits* created by developers or publishers (see Figure 1). A

localisation kit is a document providing essential information about the project that usually includes translatable files, as well as instructions and reference materials for translators (Esselink, 2002). Thus, localisation kits are necessary to ensure consistency in terms of game setting and style, especially at the beginning of the process to avoid repeated questions from different translators.

Figure 1

Pre-Localisation Stage Developed by O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013)



The initial stage of video game localisation also implies that the game studios need to be aware of the inherent challenges they can face in the future to prepare themselves in the most effective ways possible. The search for a solution primarily relies on the choice of localisation models, which in turn depends on the developers' or publishers' capacities. Mangiron (2009) identified two localisation models, namely *outsourcing* and *in-house* localisation contributing to the successful outcome of the project.

In-house localisation is argued to be employed mainly by big corporations, especially in the Japanese market (Mangiron, 2007) due to the high cost of establishing entire translation departments as a part of these corporations. This model implies that staff translators have an opportunity to familiarise themselves with a

game not only through localisation kits, but also by playing it directly. Thus, in-house localisers have a constant access to the original game that they can reference when facing challenges due to a lack of context. As a drawback, this process is expensive and time-consuming, as the localisation process starts after the completion of the primary product, however it guarantees that the localised version will be of high quality (Mangiron, 2009).

On the contrary, in outsourcing model third-party localisers fully rely on the information, references and instructions given in the localisation kits, which may provide insufficient information related to the game plot and context. Nevertheless, outsourcing model is the most popular approach employed by game developers and publishers for *simultaneous shipment* (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013), meaning that the original game and all its versions in various languages are released on the same date.

Overall, pre-localisation is an important stage of the localisation process, as it defines the basis for the subsequent steps and determines the success of a localised video game. It is important to note that localisation models employed by game studios have their own benefits and drawbacks, but ultimately, effective preparation can significantly contribute to a more immersive experience for gamers playing games in different languages.

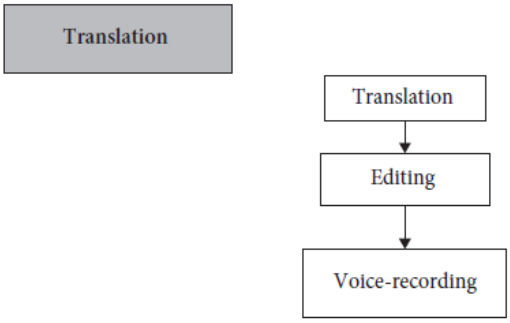
Translation and Post-Localisation

Translation is the key stage of video game localisation (see Figure 2). This stage involves translating various game components, which are the first things that would catch the eye of the gamer when a game is launched. To make it visually easier, Chandler (2005, as cited in O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013) has developed a taxonomy for the video game assets that need to be translated and integrated within the game, such as art assets, audio and cinematics, and printed materials, however this

study mainly focuses on *in-game texts* according to the conceptual framework given below.

Figure 2

Key Stages of Translation by O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013)



In a narrow sense, Siauciune and Liubiniene (2011) argue that in-game texts may be expressed through separate words, vocabulary chunks, set expressions, simple and complex sentences. O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013) provide a more comprehensive definition stating that "in-game text refers to all the text present in the user interface . . . , narrative and descriptive passages, and all dialogues that . . . appear in written form, such as conversations held with non-playable characters" (p. 122). These dialogues often take the form of *subtitles* that represent on-screen text of the spoken communication that gamers can enable or disable during gameplay.

Díaz-Cintas (2004) refers to subtitling as a linguistic practice of conveying the spoken words of voice actors through text, noting that subtitle translation is a vulnerable activity due to the technical constraints imposed by the gaming programming environment. At this point, it follows that the stage of translation offers translators various challenges that require applying different translation strategies not only to convey the meaning of textual information, but also comply with technical requirements. In this regard, Czech (2013) highlights three major categories of the

challenges of video game localisation: *technical, linguistic* and *culture-specific* challenges.

As it was mentioned above, the main *technical challenge* is related to the constraints in the number of characters to fit the programming code. O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013) argue that space constraints are particularly challenging, especially when working with Japanese or Chinese languages, as their single characters can be expressed through several characters in the Romance languages. Bernal-Merino (2007) states that the translation of original texts needs to fit the space for the text asset in a game code without truncation, however it is not always possible especially when such element as humour provide non-equivalent lexis. In the worst-case scenario, Czech (2013) argues that translators need to rely on their transcreation abilities to adapt a joke or a swearing and evoke the same emotional response of players in their native language.

Linguistic challenges also relate to the competence of translators to be creative. Mangiron and O'Hagan (2006) describe creativity as one of the greatest challenges of video game localisers, and yet their greatest merits. Thus, dialects and slang may constitute a classic example of linguistic materials that cannot be translated using their traditional equivalents. For instance, an English-speaking character who always makes grammar mistakes has to be similarly illiterate in a localised version to demonstrate that he or she might have speech disorders, otherwise such key features could be hidden from players leading to different perceptions (Czech, 2013).

Another linguistic challenge is about the *context-based issues*. As it was mentioned previously, localisers who rely on localisation kits provided by game developers do not have access to the game assets leading to the high possibility of committing errors without the contextual information. Czech (2013) asserts that the

lack of situational context can result in various mistakes related to sociolinguistic elements, including humour, style, politeness and appropriate gender indicators. For example, English language rarely draws distinguishes between genders, thus a simple phrase *'you finally came back'* may imply both male or female characters that is not clear without context. In this case, the incorrect translation of pronouns may cause confusion among gamers.

Regarding *culture-specific challenges*, Newmark (1991, as cited Czech, 2013) asserts that language significantly reflects one's culture. This implies that video games inherently convey a certain degree of cultural specificity through language. In this context, localisers need to identify cultural references and adapt them suitably to prevent their negative effect on the target audience due to sensitive issues that may arise from cultural differences. Mangiron (2007) provided an example of the cultural disparities between Eastern and Western cultures via the popular game *Warcraft III*, which tells a story about a son betraying his father. To release the game in South Korea, localisers had to alter the entire storyline because Korean society does not accept such family values and parent-child relationships. Culture-specific challenges of localisation may cause discontent and dissatisfaction among the target audience, which may lead to an adverse impact on the sales and financial success of the game studios (Mangiron, 2007).

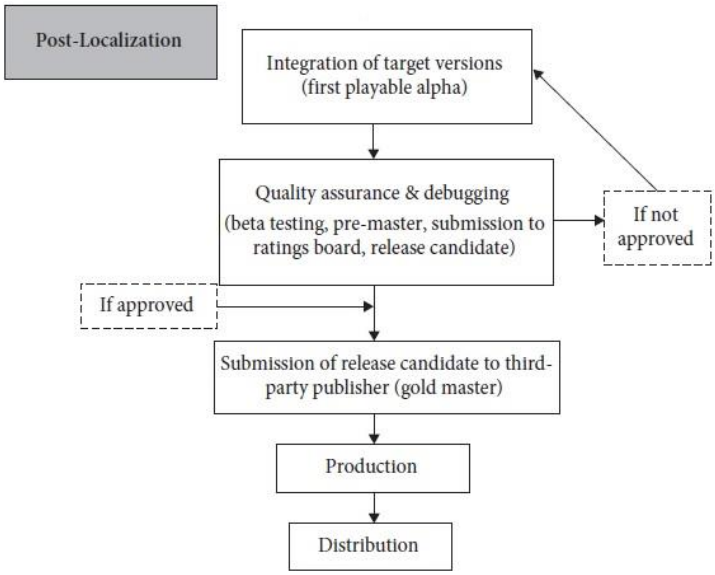
Translation is always followed by editing, which involves reviewing and proofreading the translated content. Proofreading is a careful reading that ensures accuracy and allows players to fully grasp the intended meaning and context from the original game (Smith, 2003). Correcting grammar, spelling and punctuation errors during the proofreading process guarantees that players have a coherent and immersive gaming experience. Moreover, proofreading helps maintain consistency in

terminology throughout the game. This uniformity is crucial in creating a narrative that keeps players involved in a game and allows them to feel connected to the game characters. To increase realism, the translated and proofread texts are recorded by professional voice actors. Here, the task of a translator is to make sure that all the translated materials match the game narrative (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013), since the dialogues in video games can sometimes be arranged in a non-linear manner making it difficult to understand the context of the interactions.

The stage of translation is followed by the final stage of *post-localisation* that relies more on technical activities, such as debugging, quality assurance, and testing (see Figure 3). Debugging or quality assurance refers to the process of identifying and fixing any issues and errors arising during the integration of all translated files into the game code, including programming errors and incompatibilities. Functionality testing involves running the game to ensure it functions properly in the target language, and it is crucial for identifying any remaining issues before the game is released to the market. Compliance testing is an essential step, as it ensures that localised games adhere to various platform hardware standards, as well as legal, ethical and ratings-related guidelines. Finally, linguistic testers are focusing on language issues, such as grammar and punctuation mistakes, truncations, and spaces, to make sure that cultural references and idiomatic expressions have been accurately adapted for the target audience.

Figure 3

Post-Localisation Stage by O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013)



Although the post-localisation stage does not directly relate to the process of translation, it plays an important role in ensuring that the final product is polished and error-free, which ultimately contributes to an immersive gaming experience for players.

Gaming Experience as Immersion

This study builds on the theoretical framework emerged from the grounded investigation conducted by Emily Brown and Paul Cairns (see Figure 4), who conducted semi-structured interviews to provide a robust definition and structure of immersion. The thematic analysis approach identified three levels of immersion that describe various degrees of gamers' involvement in a video game. Brown and Cairns (2004) argue that each of these levels has its own barriers controlled by game constructs or gamers themselves that need to be removed before reaching the next level. This implies that the proposed theoretical framework has a hierarchical

organisation from the lowest level of *engagement* via *engrossment*, followed by the highest level of *total immersion*.

Figure 4

Three Levels of Immersion Developed by Brown and Cairns (2004)

The framework provided by Brown and Cairns gave a rise to many other studies that were aimed to evaluate, measure or re-define immersion in video games, however a substantial body of research on immersion as a gaming experience lacks a comprehensive exploration of its relationship with the role of translation and localisation as linguistic features. In this regard, although the scientific literature considers immersion and localisation of video games as separate concepts, this study attempts to compensate the scarcity of academic research on the subject by investigating the influence of localisation errors on gamers' state of immersion.

Engagement

Engagement is the initial phase of becoming absorbed in a game that is a compulsory prerequisite for the following two levels of immersion. Brown and Cairns (2004) define engagement as the lowest level of immersion that has two barriers making it impossible for gamers to launch and *keep playing* a game. The initial barrier for engagement is *access* that is based on their personal preferences in terms of genres and styles. This means that if the gamers are not interested in a particular game

setting, they will not continue playing the game and invest their *time*, *efforts* and *attention*, constituting the second barrier for engagement.

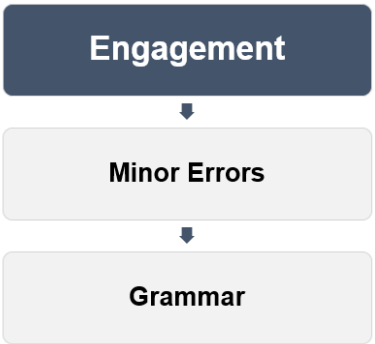
The investment of time is essential for a player to become familiar with a storyline and mechanics, and the more players become immersed in a game, the more they lose track of time. At this point, engagement has a clear connection to the concept of flow introduced by Csikszentmihalyi (2008), who argues that time distortion is an integral dimension of flow experience as a state of absorption or engagement in a playing activity. The efforts invested by gamers relate to their willingness to devote energy towards the game mechanics, and the extent to which they expect the game to reward them for their efforts. This condition matches the Player Skill criterion presented in the GameFlow model designed by Sweetser and Wyeth (2005) stating that players should be provided with appropriate rewards based on their efforts and skill development, as a way to encourage their engagement with the game. Attention refers to the concentration on game constructs, such as interesting quests and game plot, which is echoed in the study conducted by Nordin et al. (2013) who state that without attention it is difficult to reach the state of immersion. Jennett et al. (2008) and Brown and Cairns (2004) specify that the barriers at the initial level of immersion are related to person factors that can be eliminated only by gamers themselves.

In addition to the barriers of access and investment that do not specifically focus on linguistic features and do not reflect the role of translation and localisation in video games, this study introduced the third barrier of *minor localisation errors* (see Figure 5). Minor localisation errors include linguistic errors that may occur in various forms. Galkina and Radyuk (2019) present four areas of grammatical interference such as grammatical, lexical, phonological and orthographical errors involving

incorrect word order, declensions, conjugations, subject-verb agreement issues, typos, misuse of punctuation, or inappropriate usage of verb tenses. Incorrect grammar may cause difficulties (Kumala et al., 2018), interrupt the flow (Alghazo & Alshraideh, 2020) of readers and prevent them from understanding the meaning of a text. It means that when playing video games, these errors do not necessarily affect the game plot, but are still able to have a certain impact on engagement. O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013) argue that grammatical errors need to be avoided, as they may capture gamers' attention and interrupt the pace of the game.

Figure 5

Grammatical Errors in Localisation as a Barrier to Engagement



Overall, engagement is a crucial phase of immersion that is controlled by such barriers as access, as players tend to choose games based on their personal preferences, and investment, which encompasses time, efforts, and attention. Although the theoretical framework does not explicitly address the impact of translation and localisation of video games, this study proposes an additional barrier of minor localisation errors to consider the role of linguistic features and explore whether the players perceive grammatical errors as influential on their state of engagement.

Engrossment

From the initial phase of immersion where players are engaged and willing to invest their time, efforts and attention to continue playing a game, they may delve deeper into the level of engrossment. Brown and Cairns (2004) refer engrossment to a state where gamers become emotionally invested in game constructs such as interesting quests, a compelling game plot, well-developed characters and captivating challenges that demonstrate diligence of game developers in creating immersive experiences. In this context, the game constructs that affect *emotional involvement* of players act as a barrier for engrossment (Brown & Cairns, 2004).

The concept of emotional involvement was reflected as a key factor of immersive experience in many academic works. The findings of the focus group discussions conducted by Poels et al. (2007) showed that gamers who reported positive or negative emotions when playing a video game, such as amusement, pleasure, frustration, disappointment, and so on, also reported that they felt absorbed in the game surroundings. Likewise, following the results of three experiments, Jennett et al. (2008) state that emotional involvement is a psychological factor that is able to force people play video games for a long period of time in extreme conditions despite the fatigue, hunger, and the fact that someone tried to distract them from playing. The factor of emotional involvement was also represented as one of the most important heuristics in the Desurvire's Heuristic Evaluation for Playability (HEP framework). The HEP model identified four game constructs that need to be present in a game to attract players and make their gameplay more enjoyable. Thus, according to the Game Story construct, video games need to provide players with an opportunity to be personally involved in a game through emotions, such as fright, anxiety, or thrill (Desurvire et al., 2005). This implies that the game constructs that evoke a strong

emotional connection between the player and the game world provide a powerful immersive experience.

To address the research gap and explore how gamers perceive localisation errors of game constructs and their influence on their emotional involvement, this study identified two types of *context-based errors* in terms of *humour* and *profanity* that are closely related to emotions (see Figure 6). As humour and profanity are closely tied to unique linguistic and social nuances, Lepre (2014) argues that the consequences of being faced with unclear translation that does not operate same way as the original text are especially severe in video games, as they can affect the understanding of the game context.

Figure 6

The Translation of Humour and Profanity as a Barrier to Engrossment

When it comes to video games, incorporating humour into dialogues and other textual elements can maintain interest and curiosity of players, boost their energy and emotions, and promote an overall happiness (Dormann & Biddle, 2007). Grönroos (2013) explains this phenomenon through the fact that both humour and video games constitute a shift away from the ordinary life, as humour frequently refers to words, thoughts and actions that would be normally prohibited. When it comes to translation studies, the difficulty arises from the fact that humour frequently relies on cultural

context, wordplay, and linguistic aspects that may not have direct equivalents in other languages (Korhonen, 2023).

In this regard, translation of humour can be seen as one of the most challenging elements in localisation practices, and the failure to convey the humorous context may lead to disadvantaged experiences. For example, Gilleade and Dix (2004) argue that gamers may feel frustration when they are literally lost in the context and have no clear goal, which may be the result of poor translation, while Sánchez et al. (2012) highlight disappointment as a serious obstacle leading to gamers abandoning the game. Fernández Costales (2011) states that due to such cultural parameters, sometimes it is not even possible to convey the message of a certain humorous element without a loss in translation. Lepre (2014) specifies that in such cases, the loss in translation can make the localised game less pleasant and much harder since the humorous effect may play a crucial role in a video game.

Thus, localisers need to apply various translational strategies to retain the original intent of the source game and adapt it to the target audience's cultural expectations ensuring that the intended laughter and enjoyment are not lost in the process. To avoid the loss in translation and make sure that the players get the same emotive effect as in a source language, Zabalbeascoa (2005) argues that humour translation needs to be compensated to retain the function and intention of the original joke in the localised version. In this regard, capturing the meaning of humour and adapting it for the target audience is crucial to maintain players' emotional involvement and engrossment.

Similar to humour, profanity is a linguistic feature that is used to convey one's emotional state (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008), and can refer to various terms, such as swearing, vulgarity, obscenity, or cussing (Phan & Tan, 2017). In video games,

profanity has a universal property as it can indicate affection, appreciation, excitement, unity, or demonstrate trust and intimacy that occur in a particular game scene (Kusumayani, 2010). As with humour, translating profanity can be challenging, as different cultures and languages have varying levels of acceptability and taboos around certain words and phrases.

In this regard, Robati and Zand (2018) argue that when translating obscenities, translators and localisers have to be careful when choosing the similar words and phrases, or selecting an appropriate strategy such as compensation, to provide the same effect, if the target text does not have clear equivalents (Dobao, 2006). Otherwise, the profanity may lose its key function and impoverish the context of the game. Thus, Azura et al. (2019) emphasise that toning down or removing profanity in localisation may impoverish the personality of game characters, and weaken the original tone and power of the obscene message, resulting in the loss of important elements in a video game. Regarding the number of obscenities, Lafreniere et al. (2022) state that too excessive use of profanity is able to affect reader's understanding and inference about the particular situation, as it becomes unclear whether the speaker is expressing their personal habits or reflecting the situational circumstances.

Overall, accurate translation of profanity is essential to preserve the original intent for players across various regions, and it serves a powerful linguistic tool to create a unique atmosphere in video games, however its translation presents challenges due to language-specific nuances.

Total Immersion

Total immersion is the highest level of immersion. Brown and Cairns (2004) describe total immersion as in-game presence that is a rare and rather a fleeting experience when gamers feel themselves cut off and fully detached from reality. This

notion seems to be similar to the concept of escapism that relates to the tendency and desire to distract oneself from reality by engaging in video game environment (Calleja, 2010). The barriers to total immersion are *lack of atmosphere* and *empathy* that are widely reflected in the academic literature.

Atmosphere refers to the combination of visuals, auditory and mental game constructs that concurrently expose the gamers, compelling them to put their efforts and focus on the three attentional sources at the same time (Brown & Cairns, 2004). Visual components include high-quality graphics and realistic environments that make the gamers feel like they are a part of the virtual world. Auditory constructs are sounds and music that play a significant role in creating the mood and providing the players with important information about ongoing game events, such as character interactions and game achievements. Mental constructs are related to the game plot, narrative, storyline, and gameplay mechanics that require the players to think, plan, and make their decisions (Brown & Cairns, 2004).

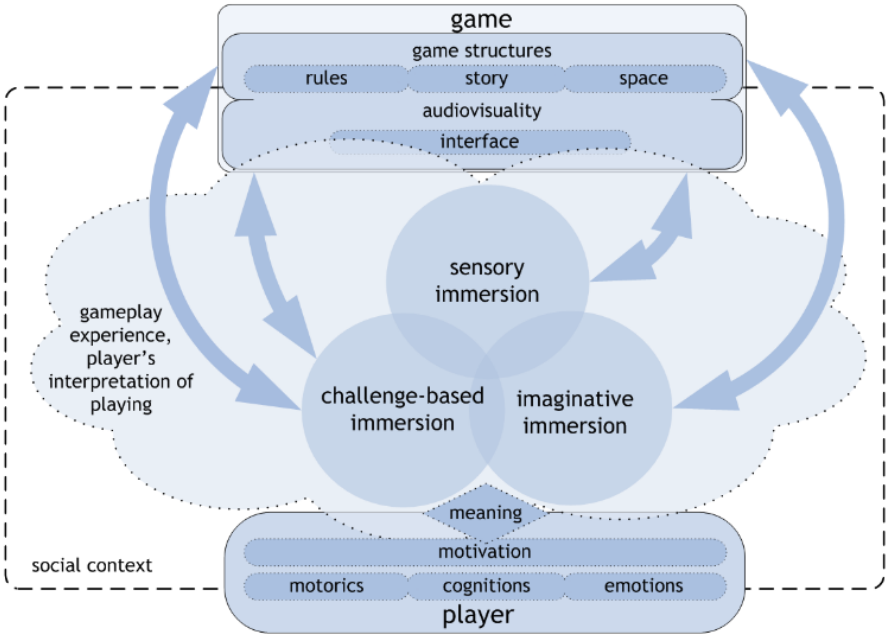
Empathy refers to the tendency among gamers to build a strong attachment with their characters accompanied with a transfer of consciousness, which is similar to identifying themselves with a game character creating a connection between reality and virtual environment. Cohen (2001) argues that players associating themselves with a game character imagine to be that character and replace their identity and role as a regular gamer with the identity and role of the character within the game. Goldstein and Cialdini (2007, as cited in Klimmt et al., 2010) state that identification with game characters is a temporary shift in players' self-experience supporting the notion that total immersion is a fleeting experience. Klimmt and Hefner (2009) specify that the changes in self-experience contribute to the greater extent of enjoyment, especially when gamers reduce the level of self-discrepancy between their

real and virtual identities. It can be inferred that gamers who are not able to empathise with the characters are not likely to be totally immersed in a game.

The concept of total immersion has been explored in various academic works, particularly in the field of gaming experience. Ermi and Mayra (2014) in their comprehensive analysis of gameplay experience found that immersion is a multidimensional phenomenon divided into sensory, challenge-based and imaginative immersion (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

The Dimensions of Gameplay Experience within the SCI-model developed by Ermi and Mayra (2014)



Sensory immersion refers to visual and auditory game constructs, and includes audio-visual elements that are present in every game. Ermi and Mayra (2014) argue that game sessions with large screens and quality sounds are able to overpower the sense of reality providing players with a full focus on the game world. This is consistent with the idea developed by Brown and Cairns (2004) who stated that

distraction free environment when gamers turn off the lights and turn on the volume enables them to be feel total immersion.

Challenge-based immersion refers to mental game constructs that imply the presence of challenge-skill balance, when gamers have to apply their motor and mental skills, strategic thinking and logical problem solving to be fully absorbed in a game. The importance of challenges in games is also highlighted by Jennett et al. (2008) who conducted an experiment with two groups of participants who played immersive and non-immersive games. The eye-tracking results of the second group showed that the lack of challenges lead to increased eye movements, as the participants became more distracted by the surrounding objects that are not relevant to the game.

Imaginative immersion refers to empathy, and centers on game characters and narrative when gamers use their imagination, identify themselves and empathise with game characters. Goldstein and Cialdini (2007, as cited in Klimmt, 2010) argue that games in which players are given a particular role or control of a specific character can promote a feeling of vicarious self-perception. This means that as players identify and empathise with their character, they become more involved in the game's narrative, further enhancing their feeling of total immersion.

Sweetser and Wyeth (2005), who designed the *GameFlow model* (see Table 1) to measure the level of enjoyment derived from video games, presented the concept of "total immersion" using the criterion with the same name "immersion". They assert that gamers who derive pleasure from playing a video game "should experience deep but effortless involvement" (Sweetser & Wyeth, 2005, p. 21), which resulted in becoming less aware of their surroundings, less self-aware, and less worried about their daily routines, while feeling emotionally and viscerally involved in the game. It

is important to note that while Sweetser and Wyeth provided a generalized model of immersion, Brown and Cairns presented this concept as a graded experience.

Table 1

The Criteria for Immersion as Part of the GameFlow Model Developed by Sweetser and Wyeth (2005)

Element	Criteria
Immersion Players should experience deep but effortless involvement in the game	Players should become less aware of their surroundings Players should become less self-aware and less worried about everyday life or self Players should experience an altered sense of time Players should feel emotionally involved in the game Players should feel viscerally involved in the game

The concept of total immersion developed by Brown and Cairns (2004) was also taken as a foundation for the doctoral thesis written by Charlene Jennett who investigated the factor of real-world dissociation (RWD) (see Table 2) while playing video games. Jennett (2009) argues that RWD is “the factor that has strong loadings for items expected to measure mental transportation and being less aware of your surroundings” (p. 19) occurring when an individual’s awareness of the real world diminishes to a certain extent.

Table 2

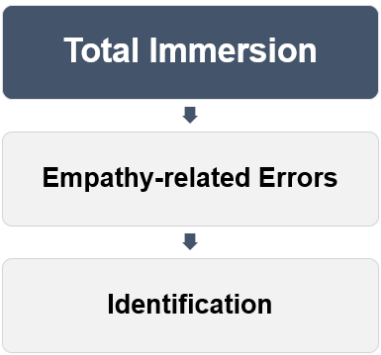
Real-World Dissociation as a Factor of Immersion Defined by Jennett et al. (2008)

Real World Dissociation (RWD)	Strong loadings for items expected to lack of awareness of surroundings and mental transportation, e.g. “To what extent did you feel consciously aware of being in the real world whilst playing?”

Therefore, to explore the influence of attachment between players and their role in a video game on total immersion, this study introduced *empathy-related errors* (see Figure 8). Empathy-related errors still refer to the localisation of game constructs, but affect the sense of identification rather than emotions. Hefner et al. (2007) define identification as an illusion of appropriating the key attributes to temporarily feel as a central character in a video game, as a crucial element for immersion.

Figure 8

Empathy-related Errors as a Barrier to Total Immersion

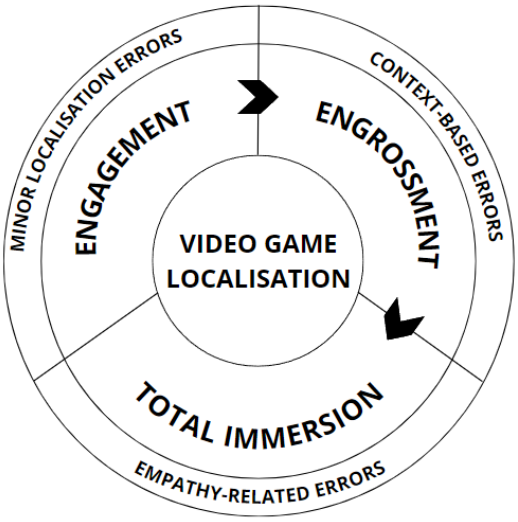


Overall, this study explores the concept of immersion as a graded and hierarchical gaming experience that includes three levels, such as engagement, engrossment, and total immersion. The theoretical framework provided by Brown and Cairns (2004) shaped the understanding of various barriers that gamers must overcome to move towards each level to fully immerse in a video game. Although gaming experience has become a matter of interest among scholars for the last decades, the concept of immersion was given little consideration in linguistic perspective, particularly in terms of localisation. Thus, it is still unclear whether a localised game is capable to serve as a barrier to engagement, engrossment and total immersion, and provide gamers with the same immersive state as it was intended in the original game. For this reason, this study aims to bridge the gap and address the

lack of academic research on the subject by examining the role of translation and localisation in video games through the conceptual framework (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

Conceptual Framework: Localisation Errors as Potential Barriers to Immersion



Conclusion

Video game localisation is a complex process of adapting a video game to meet the expectations of a foreign market audience. Video games involve interaction with players and are able to induce certain types of gaming experience. Across a wide range of research conducted into gaming experience, immersion appears to be its important dimension that players actively seek when playing video games.

In this study, immersion was reviewed as a graded experience encompassing engagement, engrossment, and total immersion having their own barriers preventing players from achieving their benefits. The greater the level of immersion, the more immersed players become in the game world, experiencing a wide array of emotions and becoming increasingly invested in the storyline.

Methodology

This chapter presents the research approach and design, data collection tool, sampling strategy, procedure and data analysis, ethical considerations, and limitations of this study. The following sections provide a comprehensive overview and justification of all methodological choices, and how they were implemented to answer the research question related to the perception of gamers towards localisation errors and their influence on their immersion in a video game.

Research Approach and Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach. This approach was used because of two main reasons. First, a qualitative approach allows for flexibility in the research process (Creswell, 2008), which is important in a rapidly evolving field like gaming industry. This flexibility was helpful in exploring new and unexpected insights that were not anticipated during the initial stages of the study. Second, the specifics of the research question required the use of interview-based study for an in-depth exploration of the personal experiences and perspectives (Creswell, 2008) of gamers. In this case, understanding how gamers experience localisation and their state of immersion can provide valuable insights into the factors that contribute to a successful gaming experience, which can underpin further studies.

Sample

The participants were selected using a criterion sampling to “meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (Patton, 2002, p. 238). First, it was important to make sure that the participants are familiar with the Witcher universe, and played the most popular game of the entire franchise, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, as the questions from the interview protocol built on the English-Russian localisation of this game. This game was chosen due to its relevance, as described in the Materials

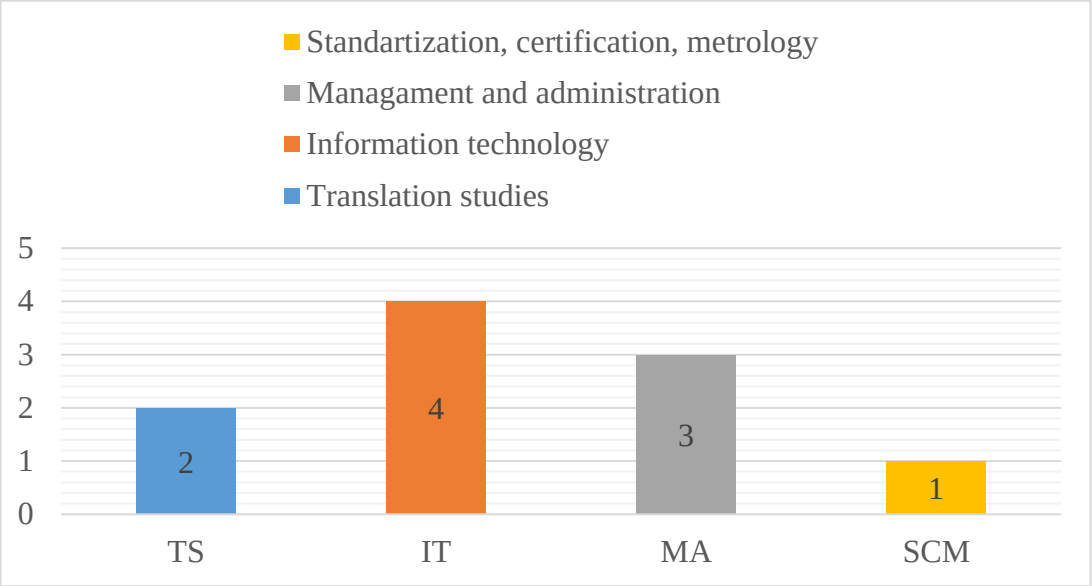
section. *Age appropriateness* was also crucial, as the game received a PEGI 18 rating for intense graphic violence, explicit sexual content and the use of strong language that are not suitable for younger audiences. In this regard, the interviews involved only adult participants.

Given the inherent difficulties in recruiting gamers for interviews, particularly due to their time constraints and trust-related concerns, the snowball sampling was employed as an effective strategy to overcome these challenges and build trust with potential participants through referrals from those people they already know.

The interview-based study involved 10 participants, one female and nine males whose age ranged from 23 to 36. All of them considered themselves as gamers with extensive gameplay experience. Some had been playing video games since they were children, while others had been active players for several years. The participants are involved in a diverse range of professional backgrounds (see Figure 10), where information technology (IT) was a predominant field. It is important to note that this study reached data saturation, as the information collected from the last two participants was similar to the previous responses and provided no new insights. Three participants were interviewed in the form of face-to-face meetings in their offices during their free time, while the rest of the participants were interviewed via Zoom and Discord platforms, as they live in other cities, countries or due to time constraints.

Figure 10

Professional Background of the Participants



Data Collection Tool

This research employed individual semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to collect empirical data. Desai and Reimers (2019) stated that these types of questions may elicit unexpected responses, which call for retrieving information from the memory without any cues rather than recognising previously encountered information. In this regard, the participants were asked to share their experience and recall meaningful information rather than identify familiar concepts and giving “yes” or “no” responses.

The interview protocol consists of sixteen main questions (see Appendix A). The first seven were introductory questions designed to initiate a conversation in a comfortable manner, such as, “Why do you play video games?”, while the remaining nine were the questions focused on exploring the central topic of this study, for example, “What expectations do you have regarding the quality of video game localisation?”. In addition to the sixteen main questions, the interview protocol included follow-up questions to delve deeper into the participants’ initial responses and provide clarity.

In the initial phase of this study, a pilot interview was conducted with one participant to test the suitability of the interview questions. The data collected from this pilot interview was not used in data analysis, as the interview protocol was revised to improve their relevance to address the research question. For example, a question probing the general understanding of the term "localisation" was introduced, as it was found that the initial participant associated localisation solely with dubbing. As a result, it became important to clearly understand the participants' interpretation of the term "localisation" to fully grasp their viewpoints.

Materials

The interview protocol included four questions referred to video samples taken from the video game, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (see Appendix B) providing the participants with scenes and events that included various types of localisation errors corresponding to the theoretical framework. Bignante (2010) described this technique as *Photo-Elicitation Interviewing* that may include all types of visual representation and used to elicit the insights that might not obtained during the traditional verbal conversation. In this regard, the analysis of the pilot interview showed that the participant struggled to give precise answers, as he needed much time to remember the cases from his own practice. Therefore, these video extracts were used to remind the participants the challenges they encountered when playing the video games localised into the Russian language.

To find the videos with crucial localisation aspects it was necessary to play the Russian localised game exactly the same way as its original version. For the sake of time, the localisation errors were identified by watching the Russian version of the walkthrough gameplay uploaded on YouTube platform that lasts more than 24 hours, which were further compared with the English version. The videos were extracted and

cut into 30-seconds video clips using Movavi Video Editor software. As a result, the choice of these video extracts was a good way to start a conversation about localisation errors with clear examples, and to give the participant a possibility to share their own examples from other video games.

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt was released in 2015, and was selected due to its popularity, successfulness, and relevance. Even today it is considered one of the greatest video games with more than 280 awards (Foster, 2021) and over 40 million copies (Ivan, 2019) shipped worldwide, also making it one of the best-selling video games of all time. The popularity of this game made this interview-based study more attractive for some participants, as they wanted to share their personal impression about this game.

Procedure

In the initial phase of this study, the participants were recruited via *an invitation* posted on Pikabu, as one of the largest Russian platforms with gaming communities, and included brief information about the nature of this research (see Appendix C). According to the above-mentioned criteria, all interested individuals were offered to fill in a *Google Form* that described general information about the forthcoming interview, and included questions about their name, age, contact preferences, and whether they played the Witcher 3: Wild Hunt.

Unexpectedly, only 6 candidates expressed their will to be interviewed, however two of them were not familiarised with the witcher universe, and their candidacy was rejected. The other four candidates were provided with more detailed invitations via preferred means of communication, and only 2 candidates confirmed their participation. Using the messaging platforms, such as Telegram and WhatsApp, they appointed the date and time for the online meeting that were most convenient for

them. The rest of the participants were invited with the use of snowball sampling. All interviews were conducted in the Russian language, recorded using the in-built phone recorder and lasted between 50-60 minutes.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process started with verbatim and manual transcribing of the interviews. The interviews were conducted in the Russian language. The interview excerpts that were used as evidence for the Findings chapter were translated into English using the Deepl Translate neural machine followed by their manual revision. All interviews were carefully re-read to get an overall understanding of the provided information, and gain in-depth understanding of their gaming experiences and perceptions of localisation errors

This study employed both inductive and deductive analyses. Creswell and Clark (2007) described inductive analysis as a bottom-up approach to arrange abstract units of information directly from the data. This approach was valuable when uncovering additional findings. For example, the data analysis revealed the implications of the errors in video game localisation that were not anticipated at the initial stage of this study.

The deductive approach was involved to guide the initial analysis according to the selected theoretical framework. Thus, initial codes were generated to break down complex data into meaningful units to ease data interpretation. These codes varied across the participants due to their individual perspectives and experiences; however, similar codes were combined to form wider themes and categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006) (see Appendix D). Finally, final reports were created for each participant and included the identified themes accompanied with translated key quotes to move on to the Findings chapter.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to the interviews, the participants were provided with consent forms (see Appendix E) via preferred means of communication. This document encompassed all essential details regarding the purpose of this study, risks and benefits of participation, along with their rights and confidentiality. For example, they were informed that they are able to withdraw from the interview at any point without any negative consequences. The participants signed this document and reported that they have carefully read and understood their expected involvement, and agreed to take participation voluntarily. Each party was provided with the duplicate of the inform consent. The collected data was saved on a laptop with a password-protected account, and on external hard-drive as a back-up measure and

will be stored for three years with the following deletion. Each participant was assigned his or her number from 1 to 10 according to the order of interviews, for example, Participant 1, Participant 2, as this study did not mention their real names for confidentiality purposes.

Findings

This chapter presents the findings of a qualitative study that explored the gaming experiences of ten participants. The interview-based study was used to gain insights and provide a comprehensive answer to the research question related to the gamers' perception of localisation errors in video games and their influence on their state of immersion. The structure of this chapter is based on the theoretical framework that consists of three main sections: *engagement*, *engrossment* and *total immersion* followed by one more section of *additional findings* explaining the implications that are relevant to the scope of this study.

Engagement

At the level of engagement, as the lowest level of immersion, it was important to investigate the influence of minor localisation issues on gamers' intention to start and *keep playing* a localised game before they turn to the next level of engrossment. In the context of this study, minor localisation issues of in-game texts consist of grammatical, syntax or morphological errors including typos, declension, conjugation, and punctuation issues that are unable to change the game progress or make it more difficult. At this point, the level of engagement refers to the first impression of the game.

The majority of participants (9 out of 10) reported that minor issues in Russian localisation of in-game texts did not diminish their eagerness to explore the virtual worlds nor hinder them from continuing a game. Participant 3 provided an illustrative example that echoes the majority views on minor translation issues, stating, "Games cope well with immersing its players back to the game. After 3-4 hours of gameplay, you will not notice such things as you get used to the pleasant sounds and voices".

At the same time, while the presence of minor localisation issues did not lead to gamers quitting their games, all participants agreed that such issues may cause slight dissatisfaction. For example, Participant 4 noted that morphological errors may degrade the quality of dubbing, as actors fully rely on the quality of localisation kits used to voice game characters, “The dubbing of the Dragon Age was a real ‘facepalm’. Sometimes, female characters addressed male characters using feminine endings of the words or spoke with male voices. These situations can really ruin the atmosphere”.

As the minor result, only one participant was particularly critical about any issues of video game localisation that appear during the gameplay. In response to a question about the negative experience related to minor errors in Russian localisation, Participant 6, who can speak six languages, noted that if the translation seems unnatural, he would switch the game settings to another language to keep enjoying the game, however, this workaround solution is only possible for multilingual gamers.

Overall, the analysis showed that the majority of participants were not disturbed from the game because of minor localisation issues. Therefore, it is worth to note that while all the participants discourage the presence of such issues in the localised games, the most of them are still ready to invest their time, effort and attention and keep playing the game.

Engrossment

Once gamers found themselves engaged in a game, they may deepen their involvement by reaching the level of engrossment. This level is characterised by a high *emotional response* that gamers may have towards the *game constructs* that directly refer to the narrative. In this study, dialogues featuring the elements of

humour and profanity were identified as key game constructs, as they are closely related to emotions.

This study explored how localisation errors of humour and profanity could influence the gamers' state of immersion. The analysis revealed that gamers who struggled to follow the meaning of humorous content due to localisation errors experienced reduced immersion and lack of emotions, as they had to guess the context of specific game scenes, which interrupted the flow associated with engrossment.

Translation of Humour

To explore the influence of the humour translation on gamers' emotions, the participants were asked whether it is important for them that the translation of humour fully corresponds to what was meant in the original version. Eight participants replied that despite the cultural differences, linguistic diversity, and non-equivalence in humour localisation in general, the localisers should domesticate foreign elements using culture-specific locales. For example, Participant 8 stated that, "Event though it is impossible to preserve the original form of a joke, British and American humour could always be lead to a general consensus. Especially those that are pretty common to all nations worldwide".

At the same time, it was generally accepted by the participants that word-by-word translation can cause the opposite effect. Participant 1 replied that word-by-word translation demonstrates the lack of diligence of the localisation team, "It would be better if the localisers understood that they cannot translate a joke, and used something neutral. Otherwise – please, stop forcing something unfunny, because clownery is really frustrating".

One unanticipated response offered a new perspective that was not initially considered. Participant 9 commented that domestication as one of localisation

strategies has its own limits, "(…) at the same time, the translation should not be beyond the game setting, because otherwise it fully ruins immersion. The jokes were funny, but can you imagine that the Middle Age game characters speak about a steam locomotive?". This hypothetical situation refers to the importance of maintaining consistency with context and game setting.

Moreover, for illustrative purposes, all ten participants were shown an example of a cut scene taken from the Witcher 3: Wild Hunt with a game construct containing a pun translated into the Russian language. The story of this pun was as follows: Two main characters of the game, Geralt – a witcher, and Yennefer – a sorcerer, having quite complicated relationships, were working together to lift a curse from a strange creature who was supposed to be their key ally against a common enemy. While having a small talk in a laboratory, Yennefer, who was better versed in magic abilities, tried to explain Geralt the operational principle of a device "potestaquisitor" designed to find a source of magical disturbance, "Grasp it firmly, move it around, and the louder it squeals, the closer you are". The next moment, a smile came immediately to Geralt's face, but before turning this moment into sexual connotation, Yennefer commented, "Spare me your juvenile wit, please". The Russian translation was as follows, "Зато действует просто! Чем громче пищит, тем ты ближе к цели", followed by "И без шуток о сексе, очень прошу!". The participants were asked whether they understand the dialogue between the two main characters and what they felt during this scene.

The majority of the participants (7 out of 10) reported that the pun that was used in the dialogue between Geralt and Yennefer did not make any sense to them and they missed something that should have evoked positive emotions. Participant 4 stated, "I know what was meant originally and I see that they failed to adapt this

wordplay, that is why Russian gamers would not understand why Geralt smiled, and what is so dirty about this scene at all". Participant 5 explained that incomplete translation influenced his emotional state, "The mimics of characters made this scene funny, but I did not catch up the pun itself. If the joke had been translated well, there would have been way more emotions".

Overall, proper localisation of humour in video games is essential for creating an enjoyable gaming experience. Based on the given responses, it may be reasonably assumed that the translation of humour, especially when it involves idiomatic expressions or wordplay, presents a significant challenge for localisers, and if not performed appropriately, it could result in diminished emotional involvement for gamers.

Translation of Profanity

Before moving on to the translation of obscenities, the participants were asked about their general attitude towards profanity as an element that is closely related to emotions. When asked whether gamers find it confusing when they see or hear obscenities in Russian localisation, Participant 6 was the only one who stated that swearing in any form would stop him from playing a game, "Any emotions can be expressed by acting and voices without using strong words. I associate video games with art, while obscenity is the opposite". In this regard, the further answers from this participant were neglected as he has clearly expressed his attitude with no possible exceptions. At the same time, Participant 1 expressed a common viewpoint, stating, "I am quite positive with swearing in any art production. It works quite well from the artistic perspective, and the gaming industry is not an exception".

To explore the influence of profanity on gamers' emotions, the participants were asked what they feel when obscenity language in the Russian localisation is

substituted with less vulgarity, for example, when the English swear words such as “fuck” or its derivatives “fucking hell” and so on, are substituted with “Проклятие!”, “Черт возьми!”, or “Святые небеса!”. The analysis showed that more than a half of the participants (Participants 1, 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9) believes that this practice does not correspond to the game setting and does not enhance their emotional involvement. Two participants (3 and 4) shared their experience of playing Mafia 2, where gangsters and criminals used too polite expressions to show their discontent in such intensive events as gunfights and robbery. Participant 3 mentioned that these substitutions changed the perception of a main character for the worse, “The original Mafia 2 uses lots of obscenities (…) as it reveals the nature of the main character, but in Russian localisation (…) Vito is too soft and polite, and looks mediocre and less charismatic than other supporting NPCs”. Participant 4 replied that utterances and expressions used in Russian localisation of Mafia 2 did not meet his expectations, “Sometimes, the situation calls for something else rather than “Oops!”. For example, if I were him, I would say something else, as the situation requires another emotional response”.

As minor results, Participant 7, who is a founder of an IT company, expressed his opinion from two points of view, “Localisers can change or even cut [profanity] to release a game with a rating less than 18+ to attract more audience. From market perspective, I fully understand this strategy, but as an end user I do not really like it”. Participants 2, 5 and 10 had an opposite point of view and reported that video games are not fully based on obscenities, and violent language can be successfully replaced with decency. However, Participant 2 shared a common opinion that in this case it is important to make sure that the localisation of profanity does not change the narration, “Let’s imagine a joke that builds on a swearing. If they change it with something else

and it became meaningless, then I do not support such methods. The most important thing is to keep the meaning".

Two participants (5 and 9) provided their own perception of dealing with the translation of profanity in video games. As an indie-game developer who is familiarised with gaming industry, Participant 9 compared profanity with medicine implying that it serves a good cause in small doses, and is dangerous when in high doses. He suggested that localisers should use new game mechanics that is still not so popular to this day, "It is important to use filtering that players can enable in settings. Some people may dislike such phrases. They are not always good even for me. In Atomic Heart they were fun … , but then it was too much". As a translator, Participant 5 considered this issue from linguistic point of view. He reported that the perception of profanity in the Russian and English languages are completely different, so localisers should not overuse obscenities, as they would sound too harsh among Russian gaming community. To prove his point he provided an example of his fellow student, a native speaker of the Kazakh language, who does not use Kazakh swearing as she thinks it sounds too powerful, but sometimes can use Russian as a less strong one, "When [English] dialogues include swearing, their translation will sound too much for Russian gamers. Then, localisers should have some liberties to slightly deviate from the original phrases, and convey the meaning of the scene to sound more appropriate".

Although the majority of the participants found it pretty common to hear or read obscene language in video games, the following answers differed from their previous views. The participants were provided with a video extract from the Witcher 3: Wild Hunt in the English and Russian languages. In this cut scene, the main character Geralt known as a monster slayer was chasing a sorcerer Philippa Eilhart to

ask her for a favour as her old friend. Due to some disputes, she was on the run and thought he was trying to kill her, which is why she put a spell on a cave troll to protect her. When Geralt met the troll, he said, “Dammit, cast a spell on him too”, however the Russian localisation was different, “Зараза, сука, падла! Она и на него чары наложила!”. The participants were asked to describe their feelings about this scene and share their general thoughts about whether profanity is capable to increase or decrease their emotional involvement in a game.

All the participants (9 out of 9) shared a common opinion that the excessive use of profanity in the video game localisation can be taken as a bad experience and induce negative emotions. Participant 1 described his feelings as follows, “The obscenities lose their powerful impact when there are too much of them. It turns into something that is out of place and sounds weird. And the example that I watched now confirms my points of view”. When giving her answer, Participant 8 changed the tone of her voice and sounded a little confused, “They just added three words that do not match each other in terms of intonation”. She also added, “There is no surprise, if someone said extremely vulgar in gang fights, but here is Geralt insulting Philippa (…),it does not look like it could happen in this scene”.

Remarkably, three participants (4, 7 and 8) noticed that adding swear words in the Russian localisation is a common practice for the Russian voice actors. Participant 8 was surprised that the character with whom she is familiar through books and TV series uses such vocabulary, which is quite atypical for his nature, “Russian localisers love to … add them in wrong places. It sounds awful, because these words are added for no reason. … I also read all the books and I have not noticed Geralt behaving like this before”. Participant 7 explained this tendency from a market perspective, “It seems like localisers … understood that they can make more money with 18+ games.

To do this, they need to create the relevant content, saying, ‘Now we are talking! Let’s add everything we can, obscenities and nudities’”.

Overall, the research findings highlight the complexity related to the localisation of the Russian profanity in video games. The analysis showed that the majority of gamers found it acceptable to use profanity in video games, unless it is used in moderation and is not beyond the context of the game. Most participants also expressed their dissatisfaction with the substitution of profanity with less violent language, as they think this is not sufficient to convey strong feelings and emotions required by the game events. Therefore, as a powerful tool to provide an immersive experience and convey the emotions of game characters, the translation of profanity should be performed with great caution.

Impact on Emotions

The minor results derived from the thematic analysis showed that 9 out of 10 participants experienced various negative emotions due to the challenges in the Russian localisation of video games. It was found that the range of such emotions encompasses a broad spectrum, including but not limited to *disappointment*, *frustration*, and *confusion*.

Participants 1 and 3 highlighted that they feel disappointed when the high price of a game does not correspond to the quality of localisation. Participant 1 remarked “Poor translation can spoil the impression about a game, and it also feels like I wasted my money and purchased something of bad quality”. Similarly, Participant 3 stated, “I am playing Hogwarts Legacy, but I still come across translation issues. In this regard, the game looks incomplete, and it is sad because I paid 15,000 tenge for it”. Participant 4 also mentioned that poor localisation can lower a gamer’s expectations and result in a feeling of disappointment, “If I purchased a

game with such issues, my impression would be spoiled, and I would understand that I had too high expectations". Therefore, the analysis showed that high price for a game often relates to high expectations about the quality of localisation, however otherwise high price may cause a strong feeling of disappointment among gamers.

Participants 4, 8, 9 and 10 reported that they feel frustrated when they do not follow the story of a game due to unclear translation, and they *have to guess* what was meant in a dialogue, what they are supposed to do and where they are supposed to go. For example, Participant 9 replied, "Guessing the meaning of dialogues can be really frustrating, but at the same time it is interesting to explore the game world by using the method of trials and errors". Participant 8 added that if subtitles are unclear and dubbing sounds unnatural, she is trying to guess what is going on in a game, but eventually, "guessing and deciding what your character was trying to say is the last thing I would love to do, because I just want to relax and follow the story". The analysis showed that gamers may experience frustration due to inaccurate or unclear translation of in-game texts. This is particularly critical in game genres where narrative is crucial, as poor translation can change the storyline and hinder players' comprehension.

Participants 8 and 2 reported that localisation can cause confusion when Russian subtitles and original dubbing in a game do not match each other. Participant 8 stated, "In the Last of Us 1, sometimes, characters were saying one thing, but subtitles showed something different. I was like, 'wait, what are you talking about?'". The inconsistencies between dubbing and subtitles may create a mismatch between the audio and visual components of a game, making it difficult for the gamers to follow the storyline, and making them decide which version is more accurate. The

analysis showed that confusion caused by localisation errors may disrupt gamers' engrossment and decrease their overall enjoyment.

Total Immersion

The highest level of total immersion is the most powerful state experienced by gamers. Once they reach in-game presence, they lose track of time and become dissociated from real life for a short period of time. Total immersion is closely related to *empathy* towards the main characters in a game, and *atmosphere* in terms of the game construction development. In this study, it was important to explore the influence of localisation on empathy and atmosphere through *empathy-related errors* that can change the context of a particular game scene, perception of the characters and game construct development.

Perception of Total Immersion

Participant 8 shared her emphatic vision of total immersion in a game by providing the main difference between watching movies and playing games. She compared the movies with third-party narration when viewers are not able to change the story, while games are considered a unique platform that gives a player an opportunity to play different roles rather than be yourself in a real life. "When you play a game, you live a life of your character, as you feel their personality and make decisions on their behalf. You can be anyone you want, for example, a witcher rather than a web-store administrator". When she was asked whether she usually associates herself with a protagonist, she agreed and provided an example of a game with three main characters having different backgrounds, fates and destinies, "In *Detroit* you take a role of a detective, maid and housekeeper. I always put myself in their shoes to make decisions depending on their personality and experience, so every time I try to adjust myself to a certain character".

This point of view is closely connected to the concept of *escapism* that was quite frequently mentioned in the answers by the majority of the participants (8 out of 10). Although Participant 6 did not associate escapism with negative connotations, he commented that, “Games give me an opportunity to live multiple lives … with different abilities that [are impossible] in real life. I cannot fly, be invisible, kill bandits, and monsters. I try to take there something that is not reachable in reality”. Participant 4 stated that games help him to distract from the geopolitical situation that is happening in his country, “Although games are always about a conflict, they help me to get away from the things happening right now in the world. [When playing games], I want to feel some “magic” to deceive the fate”. On the contrary, Participants 7 and 10 argued that they do not need to be deeply immersed to enjoy games and they consider them as nothing more but a leisure activity. Participant 7 described his point of view, “There is no need for me to be fully immersed in a game. It is similar to reading a book, I am there at the moment, but it is not a big deal to look outside and have some tea”.

Overall, the analysis showed that the majority of participants experienced total immersion that is closely related to the concept of escapism allowing players to experience the situations that they would not encounter in real life. Therefore, the following sections present more information about the influence of empathy-related errors on total immersion.

Impact of Empathy-Related Errors

Two participants (6 and 9) provided examples from their own gaming experience, when empathy-related localisation issues were able to break total immersion through the lens of *empathy* and *atmosphere*.

In terms of *empathy*, both of them mentioned the final episode from the *God of War: Ragnarök*, the action-adventure video game telling a tragic story about Kratos, a Spartan warrior who seeks revenge against the ancient gods who betrayed him and killed his family. After a long time of countless battles, he found new love of his life who brought him a son, Atreus. Dealing with guilt and trauma, Kratos could not find a way to connect with his son calling him "boy" during the last two parts of the game series. However, as they face challenges together and learn more about each other, in the final scene Kratos called Atreus "son" for the very first time. The Russian localisation provoked a strong reaction in the gaming community, as from the beginning of the game the phrase "boy" was translated as both "мальчик" and "сын", so the Russian localisation lost this strong emotional moment when Kratos finally accepted his son as an equal. Participant 9 gave a detailed comment:

> In the end, he called him "сынок" in a very special way, however he called him that way all the time. When my friend and I watched a game review, we understood [what was wrong]. In the final episode, he recognised him, he was proud of him. They [localisers] failed to reach such effect because their version did not convey the relationship developed between a father and a son. In the Russian localisation, they showed that they had absolutely normal relationships. I have not felt such a deep connection between Kratos and Atreus, but should have felt. This is the best example how to spoil localisation, because this is not just a grammatical or linguistic error, this is a context-based error that deteriorates the game plot. (Participant 9)

The analysis showed the substantial influence of empathy-related localisation errors on emotional depth of players disrupting their state of total immersion, and

emphasising the importance of accurate and context-sensitive translation in video game localisation.

Participant 9 provided another example of empathy-related errors in the localisation of game constructs making the game more difficult. He mentioned *Stellaris*, a large-scale space strategy that builds mainly on the in-game text components, where a single round may last tens of hours. The translation issue that interfered with his experience related to the misleading description of the nations playing as allies or enemies depending on the decision-making process. The decision that was based on this description lead him to continuing the game with undesirable circumstances due to which he eventually quitted the game:

> I launched Stellaris, a large-scale strategy about space wars. It consists of many text elements where you have to interact with allies and foes, and its translation was quite unfinished. In other words, it was not proofread, and some game constructs did not have connections. The game gives you a choice to play either martial or peaceful nations. I played a military race, and my close neighbour was described something like “аскетичная” [ascetic]. I thought they do not mind fighting, so I attacked them. It turned out these dudes despise war and live in peace, “no war, make love”. I instantly regretted about this decision, as I could have played differently. This decision lead to a series of other emotionally difficult circumstances. This round lasted for 13 hours and then I put it aside, as the Russian translation was unclear and this was freaking me out. One of those games that shows how not to perform localisation. (Participant 9)

In conclusion, this study underscores the influence of precise and context-sensitive localisation on total immersion in video games. The findings revealed that 7

out of 10 participants considered empathy-related localisation errors to be influential on their state of immersion. Such errors may change the players' perception of main characters and potentially increase the game's difficulty.

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

To give the participants an opportunity to provide examples from their own gaming experience and elicit more information, they were demonstrated a video extract showing a suspenseful moment from *the Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* containing an empathy-related localisation error. The video sample showed the players the final chapter of the game when Geralt invited all his friends to Kaer Morhen stronghold to give the last battle to the enemy. After planning the defensive strategy, Geralt and his friend Lambert were left alone to share their concerns and heavy thoughts. Geralt blamed himself for gathering all the people he cares about and putting them to a great risk, "Can't help feeling we've overlooked something important. I am exposing you all to danger. Unnecessarily". The key phrase was translated into Russian as follows, "У меня такое ощущение, что мы упустили что-то важное. Вы все сейчас здесь не нужны" meaning "You are all not needed here" or "You do not belong here". The video sample was first shown in the Russian language, as it was important to see whether the participants understood the dialogue. Shortly after that, they were provided with the English version to find out whether both versions convey the same meaning, and if not – whether such empathy-related errors can change the perception of the main character, and finally whether they can bring them back from the game to reality.

The participants were asked, "What is your understanding of the conversation between Geralt and Lambert during this game scene?" The majority of the participants (8 out of 10, except for Participants 4 and 9) could not certainly explain

what was meant by the key utterance. All of them had a feeling that although Geralt put so much effort to gather his allies altogether, he was trying to kick them out without a reasonable cause. Participant 3 suggested that, “This dialogue sounds confusing, but I suppose he just wanted to be alone meaning that Lambert should go”. Participant 5 commented, “This can affect the perception of the game character and the actions he takes. I through that even though Geralt invited them, he regretted about this decision. However, in English, he feels very sorry to put them in danger”. Participant 6 stated that it looked like Geralt ignored his friend and started to talk to himself, “The witcher grabbed his head with hands and started to talk to his inner voices. Lambert said, “Don’t worry” assuming that Geralt was talking to him, (…) but generally, I did not understand the meaning of this conversation”.

The findings indicated that most of the gamers were not able to feel the sense of regret Geralt had towards his friends, but mentioned that he was represented as a man with a rough personality even with his close ones. At this stage, it could be suggested that localisation errors can change the perception of a game character, however when asked, "Do such localisation errors disrupt your “presence” in a game?” the answers started to vary significantly.

Thus, Participants 1, 5 and 8 were absolutely agree that the empathy-related localisation error that was provided in the video extract is enough to break their total immersion. When describing his feelings, Participant 1 smiled sarcastically, “This episode looks funny and creates a humorous effect because I clearly see the contradiction”. Participant 5 shortly summarised that, “This scene impoverishes the context. I think this is a serious mistake”.

On the contrary, Participants 3, 9 and 10 provided some intriguing insights stating that they did not notice such errors neither when they played the game some

years ago, nor when they watched the video sample for the first time, as they had to watch it once again. Participant 3 stated, “I agree that this scene could raise some questions. However, while I did not notice anything unusual, my dad did ask me about it when he played the Witcher”. Participant 10 shared the same opinion, “If I noticed such mistakes, it would break the state of immersion. Especially in the RPG games, where you want to hear every possible dialogue, and where texts are the most important game elements”. The possible explanation was given by Participant 9, who stated that gamers may miss such localisation errors due to cognitive overload, “These dialogues are a safety island for me, where I can finally relax. I would consider this conversation as a background information (…) without any pitfalls. I think this is the reason why gamers often miss translation errors”. Conversely, Participants 2, 4, 6, 7 did not find the given example as a barrier to total immersion.

Additional Findings

This section presents further insights that emerged from the data analysis, and that were initially beyond the primary themes identified in the findings. These insights offer supplementary information that enriches the overall understanding of the topic that can be valuable for future research.

The findings showed how gamers perceive various types of localisation errors and their influence on their state of immersion. When it comes to game purchase decisions, immersion plays a crucial role. In this regard, the participants were asked about their perception of localisation errors and their influence on *game purchase policy*. At this stage, *Hogwarts Legacy*, a new triple-A game with a significantly high budget for production, development, and marketing released on 7 February 2023 was taken as an example, as it also contains many localisation errors that were presented to the participants.

The participants were provided with a screenshot (see Appendix F) of an announcement made by the Games Voice studio that was responsible for the localisation of Hogwarts Legacy, and taken from the official page on Vkontakte social media. They opened a fresh thread related to this game asking the community who played it in the Russian language to share their comments on incorrect translation of subtitles to fix them by the day of the new patch release.

Once the participants read this message, they were shown the screenshots (see Appendix G) taken from the game with various localisation issues. Further, they were asked to describe their feelings about the problem-solving approach proposed by the Games Voice studio and whether such attitude to fix errors after the game release can influence their game purchase policy in the future. The majority of the participants (except for Participants 7 and 10) replied that pre-ordering or buying a game on the date of release is not advisable due to many issues that players may encounter, including bugs, glitches, high price, hardware compatibility, and localisation. Interestingly, the participants did not expect to see such issues in the AAA games with high financial resources, and stated that localisation studios are paid decent salaries to perform their work appropriately at the first try. Participant 3 is one of those who played this game, and shared his point of view in details:

> I found many translation issues, and I see that the game is not finished, as translators did not pay much attention to the details. I understand that this industry is still developing, and quite tolerable to such issues when the game does not build on text components. However, here we have many dialogues, and it is just sad… A month later, they will release a patch to fix all of them, but it is very upsetting, because I will finish this game by this moment, and I will not play this game twice for sure. Yes, this influences my purchase policy.

> I am waiting for *the Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines 2*, and I will not buy it on the release date, as I am sure that it will not be ready by this time. (Participant 3)

Moreover, two participants (4 and 9) commented that such issues might lead players to *pirating games*. Participant 9 explained why that happens in gaming communities, and whether this practice needs to be changed in the future:

> This practice needs to be changed. If we go back in time, game developers uploaded their games to CDs, so they could not change anything afterwards. That is why, back in time games were more thoughtful, because now they can release updates, and users will have to wait [to download and install them]. However! We did not have a choice, but now we do. You can simply download a game version created by a random mod developer or a hacker who cracked and optimised it to a decent form. Gamers can pirate games. If I want to play Hogwarts Legacy, I would rather download it, and then buy to support developers, because pirated versions are more stable and optimised. (Participant 9)

Overall, the analysis showed that localisation issues could have a great influence on game purchase policies of the gamers, as they often choose not to buy games on the release date and instead wait for developers to fix any problems, sometimes even for years. Moreover, gamers often resort to pirating games, as these versions developed by hackers and mod developers tend to be more stable and optimised. This trend is unfavourable to the game development industries, as it leads to decreased sales, increased use of pirated versions, and negative ratings, feedback, and game critiques. These factors seems to play a particular role during the release period, as they could shape a game's overall success and reputation. Addressing

localisation issues and ensuring high-quality are essential for the industry to maintain consumer trust and reduce the negative consequences of these practices.

Discussion

The chapter of discussion delves deeper into the core of this study and extends beyond data presentation covering the interpretation, analysis and a meaningful synthesis of the findings within a broader context of literature. Specifically, it situates the findings within the larger academic discourse, comparing and contrasting them with previous studies, and contributing to the existing body of knowledge on video game localisation and players' immersion.

This study gained insights into gamers' perceptions of localisation errors, and how they shape their sense of immersion in video games. It was explored that players who encountered localisation errors found them to be influential to an extent depending on the level of immersion that was reached during the gameplay. Most findings of this study align with prior research on immersion as gaming experience, and linguistic errors within the translation studies; however, certain findings diverge from the existing knowledge.

Engagement

This study found that while players do notice minor localisation errors, they do not significantly diminish their level of engagement. The implications of such errors are unlikely to be sufficient to make gamers stop interacting with a video game. This seems to contradict the concerns that grammatical errors could disrupt one's positive experience by interrupting the flow and preventing a reader from following and understanding the overall game context (Alghazo & Alshraideh, 2020; Kumala et al., 2018). As this study suggests, the plausible explanation for a discrepancy between these concerns and actual player behaviour could be that when it comes to purchasing video games, players tend to rely on their personal preferences and prioritize such aspects as game genre, mechanics, setting and other elements over linguistic accuracy.

In other words, while players do find minor localisation errors unpleasant, linguistic accuracy does not appear to be a primary criterion when choosing a video game, but rather an additional benefit in combination with its other elements.

The findings of this study also suggest that minor localisation errors do not seem to distract players' attention from the game narrative, which is in contrast to the findings of O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013). A possible explanation for this might be the tendency of players, who are deeply engaged in the narrative of a game, to overlook such errors and inconsistencies, especially when anticipating an intense game event. Another explanation could be that gamers appreciate the scale of the project and the diligence of game developers, on the background of which minor localisation issues do not seem to catch the eye. Moreover, it is also suggested that contrary to the findings of O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013), minor localisation errors are unable to adjust the game's progression to a slower or faster pace. One possible explanation for this is that it appears that players might be focused on the story progression that they typically do not perceive these errors as significant enough to alter the difficulty level directly influencing the pace of the game.

In this regard, this study suggests that despite noticing minor errors in localisation, video game players focus primarily on the game constructs and forthcoming game events, prioritize them over grammatical precision and are still willing to dedicate their time, efforts and attention to continue their gameplay.

Engrossment

The findings of this study also suggest that inappropriate translation of humour in video games can lead to a less immersive experience and serve as a barrier to engrossment. A possible explanation for this is that humour is a critical component of many video games, as it can help to create memorable characters, understand their

relationships and win gamers' favour. If humour is not localised properly, it may fall flat, raise questions, create misunderstandings, and eventually lead to a less immersive experience. Moreover, the analysis showed that when such issues occur, players keep guessing what they could possibly miss and eventually ignore an entire dialogue tree or a cut scene to prepare for another game event. Therefore, inaccurate translation may cause confusion, frustration (Gilleade and Dix, 2004), and disappointment (Sánchez et al., 2012) among gamers, since humour frequently draws upon cultural dimensions, wordplays, and linguistic features, which might not be directly translatable into other languages (Korhonen, 2023).

This study accords with the evidence from previous research that the translation of humour in video games plays a significant role in fostering players' emotional involvement, which is essential for achieving engrossment (Brown & Cairns, 2004). This finding is consistent with that of Desurvire et al. (2005) who stated that video games must foster a deep emotional bond between the player and the game constructs to provide a more powerful immersive experience. Similar finding was also reported by Poels et al. (2007) who employed focus group interviews to find that the more emotions are experienced by gamers, whether negative or positive, the greater their level of absorption in the game world. These findings fully align with a statement that players who experience strong emotional response to game constructs have a decreased level of self- and situational awareness, which are necessary to reach engrossment (Brown & Cairns, 2004).

Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that humour can make the game more entertaining and enjoyable, while emotions having a wide range from fright to enjoyment are crucial to maintain the interest and curiosity of gamers triggered by game constructs with humorous twists (Dormann & Biddle, 2007).

The findings also indicated the importance of appropriate localisation of profanity in video games, as another linguistic feature that is used to convey gamers' emotional response to game constructs (Kusumayani, 2010). While gamers find the use of profanity in video games acceptable, it is suggested that the overuse of obscenities or their improper positioning in localised video games can induce negative feelings and interfere with the overall enjoyment. This aligns with the literature indicating that excessive or misplaced use of profanity could be confusing, as in video games, it could be unclear whether the game characters use swear words to express their behaviour and reveal their temper, or convey their attitude towards the unfortunate events occurring as the game progresses (Lafreniere et al., 2022). This finding also validates the concerns highlighted by Robati and Zand (2018) emphasising the need for translators to choose equivalent words and expressions to prevent the loss of the inherent value and powerful effect of the profanity.

It was also found that substituting profanity with less violent and explicit expressions in localised video games caused dissatisfaction among the gamers. There are two possible explanations for this finding. First, gamers might value the authenticity of the gaming experience, where the use of profanity might be seen as contributing to the realism. Another explanation for this is that profanity could also convey specific character traits and details, the lack of which may lead to a distorted representation and image of the character. This finding is consistent with that of Azura et al. (2019) who found that mitigating or eliminating the effect of profanity could potentially diminish the original intensity and the depth of game characters' personality leading to the omission of significant components that are integral to the overall gaming experience.

It is also worth mentioning that the possible explanation of why localisers use such substitution strategies leading to a less immersive gaming experience might relate to censorship imposed by the legal requirements in various countries. When it comes to Russian localisation, it was found that the legislation of the Russian Federation bans obscenities in movies, broadcasts, theatres, and media. Despite this assumption, it is still unknown why some game developers continue using profanity while others do not. The research question of this study does not cover this research gap; however, it could be explored in the future studies related to translation studies and localisation of video games.

Total Immersion

The findings of this study suggest that gamers perceive empathy towards the game characters as a crucial component that is necessary to experience total immersion. A possible explanation could be that when reaching the previous engagement and engrossment, gamers are likely to emphasise with and relate to the game characters and their roles on a deeper level. They do not just play a game – they step into the shoes of their characters adopting their personal traits and experiencing all the challenges first-hand (Cohen, 2001). When this connection occurs, they feel completely separated and disconnected from reality, fully absorbed in the game environment for a limited period of time. This is consistent with the previous studies emphasising the significance of empathetic connection with game characters (Ermi & Mayra, 2014), where players have a low level of self-discrepancy between the real and virtual realms (Klimmt & Hefner, 2009), or increased feeling of vicarious self-perception leading to a more powerful experience (Goldstein & Cialdini, 2007, as cited in Klimmt, 2010).

The findings also suggest that gamers perceive total immersion as a gaming experience that is similar to escapism. This concept highlights that in video games, players may feel that their real-life circumstances are beyond their control, such as dealing with personal situations, stress, and social pressure leading them to distract from reality, which is consistent with the insights provided by Calleja (2010). Moreover, similar finding was also reported by Hefner et al. (2007) who defined connection between players and protagonists as the concept of identification when the former associates themselves with the latter, and adopts their various traits and characteristics. A possible explanation for this finding is that modern games provide players with rich detailed environments and compelling narratives that engage them on a deep level. Therefore, players seem to perceive total immersion as a way to forget about their real-life problems and become fully absorbed in the game.

Moreover, consistent with prior research which suggests that each level of immersion has barriers interrupting the gamers' experience and fostering disinterest in a particular game (Brown & Cairns, 2004), the findings of this study demonstrate that such disinterest can be manifested in unwillingness to buy games. In other words, players who are dissatisfied with the game constructs, including localisation and translation, may be reluctant to purchase games, especially on the date of release. This dissatisfaction often leads them to pirate games or waiting for an extended period of time until the game is free from any errors.

Conclusion

As the global game development industry continues to make significant strides forward, a fundamental role of localisation cannot be underestimated. Localisation of video games extends the reach of gamers across diverse linguistic backgrounds, and significantly contributes to their worldwide popularity. However, it is important to acknowledge that the complexity of this process causes challenges that gamers may perceive as influential on their gaming experience. The problem of this study suggests that the localised version of a video game may not always provide the same level of gaming experience as the original one leading to a low interest among target audience and posing financial risks to gaming studios.

In this regard, this study was aimed to investigate gamers' perception of localisation errors in video games, and to ascertain how these errors influence their state of immersion as gaming experience. To find the answer to this research question, interview-based method was employed to delve into gamers' perspectives and personal experience. Having interviewed ten participants, it was found that various localisation errors may influence their state of immersion depending on their implications on the plot and overall game narrative.

When encountering minor localisation errors related to grammatical precision in in-game texts, gamers tend to overlook such inaccuracies, as they do not significantly deviate the essential context of the video game. This is likely the reason why gamers focus more on the upcoming scenarios rather than grammar mistakes. This is the only finding that differs from the previous research indicating the role of grammatical accuracy in understanding the meaning of written texts within the field of translation studies (Alghazo & Alshraideh, 2020; Kumala et al., 2018; O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013). Gamers also find it influential when context-based localisation

errors prevent them from grasping the emotional response from game constructs related to humour causing negative emotions, such as frustration, confusion, and disappointment (Gilleade and Dix, 2004; Sánchez et al., 2012). Moreover, when it comes to profanity, players find it important to encounter explicit language that conveys the intended meaning and tone, as otherwise the inaccurate translation of obscenities or their mitigation may lead to a game losing its ability to convey realism (Azura et al., 2019). Finally, players also tend to develop strong attachments between themselves and their game characters, identifying with them and adopting their best qualities (Cohen, 2001). Therefore, to reach total immersion, it is crucial for gamers to feel empathy towards their game characters.

This study has several implications. As for theoretical implications, the findings of this study may be employed for future quantitative research. The themes identified regarding the gamers' perception of localisation errors and their influence on their state of immersion could be used as a basis for measurable variables in a quantitative study. They would allow researchers to analyse the impact of three types of localisation errors, namely minor, context-based and empathy-based errors on three levels of immersion, such as engagement, engrossment, and total immersion. Such future research may possibly uncover new insights about the extent of this relationship, and contribute to a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of the role of localisation in video game industry.

The practical implications of this study might be particularly relevant for game developers, publishers, and localisation studios. The findings highlight the importance of localising and translating video game components with great caution, particularly those that may influence gamers' immersion. In response to these findings, the above-mentioned stakeholders are encouraged to employ new approaches and strategies in

their practices. A new mixed model of localisation that includes both outsourcing and in-house localisation features is needed to provide outsource translators with extensive context about the game, including culture-specific terms, and explanation of untranslatable units that may be missing in localisation kits.

It is also important to acknowledge that this study has several limitations. The first limitation is related to the insufficiency of provided responses. Even with open-ended questions, some participants opted to answer briefly, while the others provided too much irrelevant information. In this case, more clarification questions were needed to make sure that collected data is sufficient to address the main research question.

Then, some participants provided contradictory information. When asked "What are the most important elements in video games?", they stated that they pay special attention to all textual information that contributes to the game plot development, such as dialogues between game characters. However, when provided with video samples with incorrect translation of subtitles, they stated that they would skip this moment due to their insignificancy. Further, it was clarified that localisation errors only matter when they change a particular arc within a game design, while otherwise they would be ignored.

The further research could benefit by triangulating data collection tools. The interviews can be combined with observations to achieve more comprehensive understanding. For example, additional information could be elicited from observing the participants or recording their gameplay sessions, and then discussing their feelings and perceptions. Moreover, it could be beneficial to conduct experiments as another research design, and ask the participants to play both well-localised and poorly-localised video games to provide an additional layer of depth to the findings.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. How old are you?
2. What is your occupation?
3. How many languages do you speak?
    1) How would you rate your proficiency in English?
4. How much time a day or a week do you play video games?
    1) Could you identify yourself as an experienced gamer?
5. What are the most important elements in video games?
6. Why do you play video games?
7. What is your understanding of the term “video game localisation”?
8. In which language do you prefer to play video games, and why?
9. What expectations do you have regarding the quality of video game localisation?
    1) Do you perceive video games with Russian localisation as if they were originally created in the Russian language?
10. Could you provide examples of video games with good localisation?
    1) If yes, could you explain what aspects of localisation you found pleasant?
    2) If no, what is your perception of good localisation?
11. Could you provide examples of video games with poor localisation?
    1) If yes, could you elaborate on the specific aspects that were particularly displeasing?
    2) How did it affect the quality of your gaming experience?
    3) What emotions did you experience?

4) Have you ever felt inclined to stop playing a video game due to poor localisation?

Two video samples from the Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

12. What is your understanding of the key phrases “Вы все здесь сейчас не нужны” и “Не слишком ли длинные у меня уши”?
    1) Do you find yourself needing to guess the meaning of these phrases?
    2) What do you usually experience when guessing the meaning of dialogues in video games?
    3) How do these problems influence your immersion in video games?

Third video sample from the Witcher 3: Wild Hunt. Translation of humour

13. Do you understand the meaning of the pun?
    1) If yes, do you think that the original joke corresponds to Russian localisation?
    2) If no, what do you feel after watching this scene?
    3) How important is it to translate humour according to the original?

Fourth video sample from the Witcher 3: Wild Hunt. Translation of profanity

14. What do you feel about the presence of profanity in video games?
    1) What do you feel when profanity is substituted with milder words in localised video games?
    2) In which cases does profanity in video games become unacceptable and cause rejection?
    3) In which cases does profanity sound acceptable and cause positive emotions?
15. What are your thoughts about censorship in video games?

16. What is your attitude towards the fact that newly released games contain localisation errors?
    1) Does the quality of localisation of a newly released game influence your game purchase policy?

Appendix B

Screenshots from The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

Appendix C

Invitation Letter

Hello, Pikabu people!

I am an interpreter and translator, and a 2nd year MA student in translation studies at M. Narikbayev KAZGUU University.

At the moment I'm conducting a little study, and the topic of the thesis is “The Effect of Video Game Localisation on Gaming Experience", which in Russian sounds as follows: “Влияние локализации видеоигр на игровой опыт”.

In this study, I would like to explore the perception of players of various errors in localised video games, and their influence on gamers’ immersion. In this case, the perception and immersion of the Russian-speaking community.

The findings of this study could be applied in the field of translation and would be useful for those who teach localisation of software and video games, or just involved in this activity.

As for data collection, I decided to use qualitative research, and interviews would be most appropriate. This is the main message of this post.

The interview contains more than 15 questions. I would also ask some questions about the game “The Witcher 3” (main game only), which will be accompanied by short videos (20 sec) uploaded on my YouTube channel. On average, the interview will take about 1 hour.

If you agree to participate in the research, please fill out the google form below so I can send you an invitation with more details, and answers to any of your questions about the subject of my research.

https://forms.gle/G22V6iRGVkLDyQeGA

It is worth mentioning that interviews will be recorded (audio only, as video recording is prohibited by university requirements) for further transcription and analysis. Please, keep in mind, your personal information will be completely safe (e.g., your names will be replaced with pseudonyms, or nicknames).

Thank you all for your attention!

PS: If you have any suggestions about other game platforms to post this invitation, or if you know someone who would agree to take part, I'd be happy to hear that. You can also give their contacts in the google form.

Appendix D

Codes and Themes

Data	Codes	Themes
Тоже, пожалуй, мелочь. Конкретно здесь, наверное, можно притянуть за уши и сказать, что речь идет о человеке, а не просто о женщине. Но, скажем так, если мужчина будет говорить о себе в женском роде, это будет гораздо сильнее резать слух, нежели женщины, которые говорят о себе «он», потому что я, в общем то, нередко слышу женщин, которые говорят о себе в мужском роде, но не являются трансгендерами. Почему бы и нет? Диссонанса нет, это вопрос привычки. Если такое встречалось раньше, то это не отторгается, если такое встречается редко, то скорее всего не будет резать слух.	Misgendering as a grammatical error	Engagement
Нет, если там фраза за фразой, то это конечно же большой минус, а вот такие ошибки, то что там мужской род… как-то неправильно фразу произнес, как в предыдущем, то в такой большой игре считается и ощущается мелочью. Если ошибка за ошибкой, то да, тогда можно считать озвучку плохой.	Gamers appreciating large-scale projects and overlooking minor errors	
Я бы сказал, что нет, потому что я просто не могу вспомнить какого-то яркого примера. Такого, что я бы там прям «Ну елки палки, что вы там несете?». Бывает так, что коробит, но это дело не в субтитрах, а в озвучке, и часто даже в озвучке оригинала, когда как будто бы озвучка нарочита… пытаются какой-то атмосферности придать, но она там лишняя.	Sounds and voices prioritize over grammatical accuracy	
Это не задевает, а слегка выбивает из колеи. Идет ровно повествование, и такие фразы – выбивают повествование, немножко	Grammatical errors are noticed, but	

выталкивают. Ты принимаешь это как «ну окей, это косяк, но ничего серьезного».	considered acceptable	
Нет. Не вызвала эмоций ни сейчас, ни тогда. Как будто бы не перевели какой-то фразеологизм, который в языке оригинала звучит смешно. И вызвал реакцию у героини… И еще это лицо у Геральта, тут непонятно. «Пищит», а что пищит?	Missing jokes are considered as negative experience	Engrossment
Ты понимаешь, что если переведешь просто как есть шутку – она будет понятна, но она будет не такая эффектная. Можно так и оставить, но мне кажется лучше на каждый язык переводить локальными шутками, которые больше «зайдут» под ту аудиторию. В то же время, шутка не должна выходить за рамки сеттинга. Если выходит за рамки сеттинга – это полностью ломает погружение. Были такие шутки, когда они ломали мое погружение в игру, я еще думал «блин! Ну нафига?!». Шутки поменяли, она залетела, но она была не по теме, вышла за рамки не только диалога, а вообще сеттинга игры. Как будто в средневековой атмосфере шутили про паровоз.	Adapting humour beyond the game setting	
Допустим, если взять Mafia 2, то там персонаж вообще не матерится, главный герой, если не ошибаюсь. А в оригинале он очень часто употребляет нецензурную брань, и это тоже влияет на его харизму. Без нецензурной лексики он воспринимается более как посредственный персонаж.	Substituting profanity with less explicit language	
Насколько я понимаю, не смогли перевести шутку. Там игра слов имелась. Меня бы позабавило то, как Геральт пытается это слово выговорить «потестиквизитор». И сама мимика Йеннифер тоже забавляет, хоть и шутки самой не прозвучало, но некоторые	Humour encouraging high level of immersion	

положительные забавные эмоции это может вызвать, по идее. Но если бы шутка была переведена хорошо, то эмоций было бы вдвойне больше. Там есть намек на шутку, поэтому да, меня улыбнуло. Может как будто будет смешно, но это спорный момент. Кому-то может быть и непонятно.		
A God of war мы проходили полностью на русском, и там Кратос говорит своему сыну «мальчик, мальчик, сынок». А в конце, когда они развеивают прах жены, он по-особому сказал «сынок», я еще подумал, очень эмоциональная сцена. А потом мы посмотрели обзор, оказалось, что Кратос всю игру говорит ему «Boy», то есть «мальчик», но не «сынок». И только в конце, когда они развеяли прах, он сказал «сын», как бы признавая его только в этот момент, что он его сын. Он гордится им. Это очень эмоциональный посыл был бы. Не удалось достичь такого эффекта, потому что ты уже сколько это слышишь «мальчик, мальчик», и это не передает то, какие взаимоотношения возникли между отцом и сыном. Я просто не прочувствовал такой глубокой связи между Кратосом и его сыном, хотя должен был. Это самый лучший пример как испортить локализацию, мне кажется, потому что там не только какая-то орфографическая или лингвистическая ошибка, там именно смысловая по сюжету, очень серьезная ошибка.	Lack of empathy	Total immersion

Вроде как Ведьмак сослался на внутренние голоса в голове, сам с собой разговаривает. Схватился за лоб, и начал говорить так, как будто с ним были какие-то голоса, тогда как Ламберт ему говорит «не беспокойся», то есть Геральт говорит сам с собой, а Ламберт считает, что обращаются к нему.	Changed perception of a game character

Appendix E

Consent Form

I voluntarily agree to participate in this interview.

I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me orally and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

I agree to my interview being audio and video-recorded.

I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

Date:

Signatures

Participant: _____

Researcher: _____

Appendix F

GameVoice Announcement

Hogwarts Legacy: Ошибки официального перевода

1 2 3

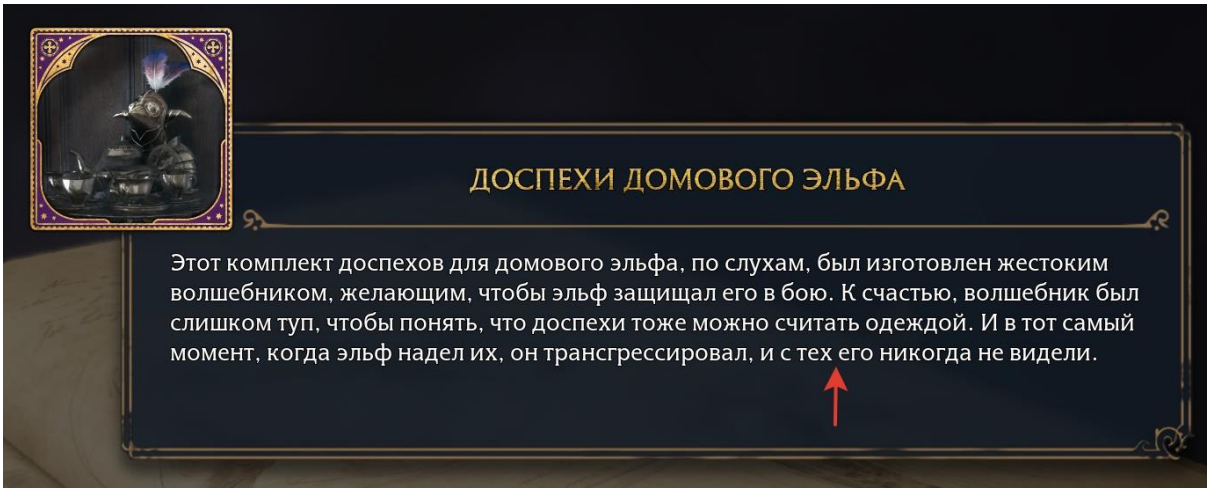
GamesVoice – перевод и озвучка игр 19 Feb 2023 at 5:42 pm

Присылайте в этот топик примеры ошибок официального перевода, чтобы мы могли их исправить. Желательно — скриншотом, и с небольшим контекстным пояснением (если ошибка не очевидна).

Про жену/подругу — знаем.
Тема именно для информирования. Сообщения не по теме и повторные публикации одних и тех же ошибок (если они не содержат дополнительных пояснений, которые могут быть полезны) периодически будут удаляться. Это нужно прежде всего для удобства навигации по теме.

2

Hogwarts Legacy: Official translation issues. We would like to ask you to send the examples of the errors in the official translation to this thread so that we can fix them. Preferably with screenshots and with a little contextual explanation (if such errors are not obvious). Yes, we already know this “wife/friend” case. This topic is created for information purposes. Off-topic messages and reposts (unless they contain additional useful explanations) will be deleted. Such measures are required to ease the navigating around this topic.

Appendix G

Screenshots from Hogwarts Legacy