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# The Specifics of MMORPG Genre Translation

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## Abstract

This article deals with the specifics of the translation of the MMORPG video game genre. It focuses on the *World of Warcraft* video game (2004, Blizzard Entertainment) and then on its expanded version *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm* (2010, Blizzard Entertainment). By using a descriptive method, it presents the main features of the video game and analyzes various types of elements (belonging to the field of game mechanics) that need to be localized during translation (e.g., the user interface and the terminology that forms a part of the creation process of an in-game character). The article also includes graphic examples that clarify the nature of the video game, its differences in comparison with other types of more frequent translation, and any issues that may arise during the process of its localization. Its main goal is to explore a specific video game terminology by using relevant sources and providing guidance and ideas for future video game localization projects.

**Keywords:** terminology, localization, game software, video games, MMORPGs

## Introduction

The aim of this article is to present some of the most popular types of video games and translations of the massively multiplayer online roleplaying game (MMORPG) genre, which is considered a roleplaying game (RPG) subgenre. This is one of the most widespread types of video game globally; they are played by many players (often from different nationalities) simultaneously. This article analytically focuses on the terminology of a specific version of *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm* (2010) and various elements and terminological areas that are not typically found in common types of translation but which are typical for the translation of gaming software. The presented research worked with a few Czech and Slovak sources directly focusing on the translation of video games and built on the present author's own experience. The main aim of the

article is to raise awareness of the complexity of the translation of this video game genre and present new and interesting challenges for translators, while also describing and explaining characteristics and selecting and analyzing certain terms. This article is based on the present author's diploma thesis titled *Selected Video Game Terminology of the MMORPG Genre* which was completed in 2021 at Comenius University in Bratislava. That work contains a chapter devoted to terminology and localization procedures. This article focuses directly on the specifics and translation of the selected genre, while general translation foundations and terminology are only briefly addressed.

## 1 Video game genres

It is difficult to determine the exact number of video game genres. They are divided into subgenres, and, given the multi-genre features of some video games, such as the video game *Borderlands* (2009, an action RPG shooter), combined genres are also often mentioned. Chandler (1997) pointed out that video game genres do not have precisely defined rules and that some video games can belong to multiple genres simultaneously. This article introduces the basic genres and focuses on one selected subgenre. The basic classification of video game genres (Lee et al. 2014) has been modified to provide a general introduction without requiring extensive knowledge about video games:

- Action games include subgenres like shooters, survival games and their multi-player versions (battle royale), and fighting games. These video games are especially popular because they are simple to understand. From a localization perspective, they do not have a lot of text to translate. They rarely focus on storytelling and instead focus more on action. *Counter Strike* (2000), *Fortnite* (2017), and *Mortal Kombat X* (2015) are examples of action games.
- Adventure games are based on the interaction between the player and the surrounding environment; players may need to solve puzzles, such as in *Myst* (1993); there may be a storytelling/narrative-driven game, such as *Heavy Rain* (2010); and these games can even form a series, such as Telltale Games' *The Walking Dead* (2012).
- Roleplaying games require players to create their own character (or choose from pre-established ones.) The player then controls and develops their character's attributes, abilities, and destiny. Examples of these video games include *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (2015), *Diablo III* (2012), and *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011).

- Simulations aim to simulate real-life situations such as driving, building/construction, managing, and everyday life. *The Sims* (2000) is probably the most well-known video game of this genre. Other examples include *Euro Truck Simulator 2* (2012) and *Farming Simulator* (2008).
- Strategies are inspired by classic board games and require tactical planning and thinking. Titles belonging to this genre include *Age of Empires* (1997), *StarCraft* (1998), and *League of Legends* (2009).
- Sports games simulate real-life sports activities such as car racing, basketball, boxing, football, and hockey. Examples include *Gran Turismo* (1997) and *FIFA 22* (2021).

## 1.1 The MMORPG video game genre

MMORPGs encompass the idea of roleplaying games being played in a massively multiplayer online format. Stoffová (2016) notes that these video games require an internet connection, which makes it possible to create servers where many players can connect simultaneously, communicate with each other, and group into “guilds,” which are a type of club. Players create characters they then roleplay as heroes; the game focuses on the development of a player-controlled character and usually has a long and elaborate storyline. Usually, leveling up the character is based on gaining “experience points” (XP). Players earn XP by defeating enemies or completing tasks. “Equipment” improves with the level of the character and plays an important role as well (Stoffová 2016).

Massively multiplayer online video games began to develop in the late twentieth century. Players found that interacting with real individuals (initially at the local level and later internationally) brought more fun and that it was not as easy to predict what the opponent would do in comparison with a computer. Thanks to this genre, playing video games has become a common leisure activity for people around the globe. The advantage of having big playerbases is that developers can gather feedback about game bugs more quickly, determine player preferences, and base their updates and expansions on this information (Bernal-Merino, 2013). The most well-known and played video games of this genre include *World of Warcraft* (2004), *Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn* (2013), *The Elder Scrolls Online* (2014), *Guild Wars* (2013), and *World of Tanks* (2010).



## 1.2 The translation of MMORPGs

For most other video game genres, it can be said that the game pauses (or nothing further happens within it) when the player logs out. The MMORPG genre differs in that the video game takes place in a world that is constantly changing, regardless of whether the player is connected or not. The world in which the game takes place is continuously changed by other players who are connected. In other genres, it is possible to save the game or pause it for a certain period, but in MMORPGs there is no such thing. It is usually impossible to “win” games of this genre because they are not following a story that needs to be completed and progressed. The game evolves at the pace chosen by the player. Due to the extensive storyline and the fact that these video games are rarely sold in the way that we are used to (as a monthly subscription rather than online or in a store), they can have a longer lifespan and their localization brings long-term revenue to developers. This means that even if a player reaches the highest level, they still have the opportunity to earn new “achievements.” In the case of *World of Warcraft*, it is possible to transfer characters to newer versions (or expansions) of the game, which are released about every two years.

The fact that new game elements, updates, and paid content (such as exclusive in-game items) are regularly added to MMORPGs presents a risk for developers. Thanks to localization, they are more likely to have a greater success in different countries, but they must count on the fact that such a product needs to be constantly monitored for quality control; communication with players and their feedback is crucial in this regard. Many updates and bug fixes are based on feedback from players, who can report issues or “open” a “ticket” in the game or “on the official website if something is not working for them in terms of gameplay (e.g., they are not able to complete a quest.) Repairs are then made based on these tickets. This communication between developers and players can take place through official announcements, patch notes addressing bug fixes, social media, game forums, or the player tickets already mentioned. This means that, unlike other video games, where issues are addressed and bugs are fixed during the testing phase, MMORPGs rely upon player feedback and collaboration in addressing and resolving issues. This is in addition to the input from language and software testers, who can also influence changes in the game. Their criticism and suggestions are an integral part of the product’s localization process. When players buy a video game localized in their language, they expect technical support to be localized as well. This support is part of other non-game texts that need to be localized, which only confirms that video game localization is a comprehensive and continuous project (Fry 2003; Esselink 2000).

One of the basic features of MMORPGs is that there is fighting. There are two types of video games in terms of how and with whom the fight is going on. The first are video games where players fight each other (“player versus player,” PvP), either individually or in teams, and video games where players fight against the environment (“player versus environment,” PvE). These two ways to play MMORPGs can be mixed. In *World of Warcraft*, a separate server is created for each of the game modes, and players can activate or deactivate them directly in the game.

Often a certain form of trade takes place, such as through an auction. Players can sell their collected resources or equipment for a fee to other players, or they can sell these items to NPCs.<sup>1</sup> From a localization perspective, this means that a video game may have many terms that are not directly related to the characters, user interface, or main objective; however, their translation is equally important.

When translating, it is important to be careful with terms found in character creation menus and those encountered by the player in the early levels (such as spell names) as they later appear in various locations and contexts within the game where the translation may not fit. If we translated the English name of the Lightning Bolt spell in the “spellbook” to Slovak as *Blesk*, we would have to check that this translation would be suitable for all contexts. We would not be able to translate it later on as *Bleskový zásah*, for instance, if it appeared in the description of a specific quest. Another example is the translation of individual achievement names (e.g., obtaining some items). If the translation of the items were not consistent, it would be virtually impossible for the player to meet the requirements to obtain that achievement since the item could be called differently in the game than in the description of the achievement. It is therefore necessary to maintain terminological consistency so that players are not faced with ambiguities that could stop them from completing quests.

Communication between players is also an important part of the game. As Petruš points out (2011, 92), this social interaction “resembles social networks, such as Facebook, rather than standard video games” because players tend to spend quite a lot of time in the game. Communication between players usually takes place through an in-game chat (see Figure 1), which includes real-time messages from players (3) and server-generated messages (2) or gestures (1) that the character performs based on player commands in the chat. All these forms of communication are part of the product localization.

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<sup>1</sup> The English acronym for “non-player character,” translatable into Slovak as *nehráčska postava*, was not translated because of its widespread usage among players.



Figure 1: *In-game chat in World of Warcraft*

According to Strong (2018), some MMORPGs may differ from each other in parts such as:

- a) looking at the character from a first-person view (see Figure 2) in the case of *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011); from a top-down third-person view (see Figure 3) in the case of *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (2014); or from a third-person view from behind (see Figure 4) in the case of *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm*



Figure 2: *First-person view*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://img.dtcn.com/image/digitaltrends/the-elder-scrolls-skyrim-review-693-500x300-c.jpg>



Figure 3: *Top-down third-person view*<sup>3</sup>



Figure 4: *Third-person view from behind*

- b) style and gameplay mechanics (The gameplay in *The Elder Scrolls Online* [2014] revolves around using the mouse buttons to attack, while in *Blade and Soul* [2012] you need to use a combination of keys to perform stronger attacks.)
- c) several intertextual references to real events and individuals

From a localization perspective, the last aspect is the most important because, with many references and complex terminology, the translator must be able to fully use their creativity and search for sources, specifically when translating quest names and spells. One spell from the *Death Knight* class is called *Winter is Coming*, which is an intertextual reference to the *Game of Thrones* series of books and TV series.<sup>4</sup> Also, the translator

<sup>3</sup> Source: [https://www.gamegrin.com/assets/Uploads/\\_resampled/resizedimage638339-dragon-age-2.jpg](https://www.gamegrin.com/assets/Uploads/_resampled/resizedimage638339-dragon-age-2.jpg)

<sup>4</sup> The English word “class” can be translated to Slovak as *trieda*, but due to the common usage of the term *klasa* among players, this slang term was chosen instead. *Klasa* is suitable because it is used in the sense of having excellent knowledge from a particular field. This relates to the meaning of “class” in the game context because the *klasa* members are trained in the relevant spells.

must be able to search for sources, such as terms commonly used in parallel texts to name English terms such as “quest,” “spell,” or “mount.”

Pedersen (2011) divides references in the video game context into transcultural (present in several cultures), monocultural (existing only within a source culture), and micro-cultural (existing in a source culture but only a smaller group of target culture people can understand them) ones. Examples from *World of Warcraft* are presented in the following table in accordance with Pedersen’s classification.

**Table 1: Examples of references in World of Warcraft**

	<b>Source text</b>	<b>Explanatory note</b>
<b>Transcultural reference</b>	NPC’s name: “Harrison Jones”	This character is part of archaeological quests and references the <i>Indiana Jones</i> movie and the actor Harrison Ford.
<b>Monocultural reference</b>	Recipe in the cooking profession: “Suramar Surf and Turf”	This recipe includes meat and seafood, the combination of which is considered a dish from the source video game culture.
<b>Microcultural reference</b>	Quest name: “Ain’t too proud to beg”	This name refers to a song by The Temptations, and only a certain group of players knows it.

There are several strategies to translate the references. The translator has some freedom, and, with each solution being correct and applicable, their possibilities are as follows: find an official or established translation; preserve a part of the source reference or make only minor changes; preserve the original text of the reference using an explanatory note; generalize (instead of a specific reference use a more general translation, such as Claude Monet – *maliar* [“painter” in Slovak]); and replace the reference with one close to the target user or omit it altogether if none of the previous strategies can be applied. In this context, Mangiron and O’Hagan (2006) use the term “transcreation” to refer to the translation process that captures the translator’s freedom to change, omit, and even add elements to the video game, believing these changes could enrich the gaming experience and make them feel natural within the game.

## **2 World of Warcraft: Cataclysm**

The plot of this game focuses on two hostile factions – the Horde and the Alliance – who are in a constant battle for dominance. They join forces against a stronger power that threatens their home, Azeroth. The story follows the first strategic video game *Warcraft* (1994), and the period in which it is set can be compared best to the Middle Ages. This



period features typical elements of RPG video games like *Dungeons and Dragons* (1998), including swords, magic, and dragons. In *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm*, elements of other genres, such as steampunk (airships), horror (ghosts), and science fiction (portals) can be found. The storyline is not yet complete and is still developing through new updates, books, and expansions.

Based on the present author's own experiences, it can be said that this game has typical RPG features. Players create a Level 1 character with only basic equipment. They begin to explore the world around them, complete quests (e.g., defeating some monsters, animals, or robbers, or finding an item and bringing it to the quest giver [NPC]), and earn experience points until they reach the maximum level. They can also learn various skills and professions such as herbalism, blacksmithing, and first aid. By increasing the level, characters acquire new abilities (learning newer spells) and new equipment and can visit new places and continents and complete quests. When players reach the highest level (in *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm*, this is level 85), the video game does not end but continues in a phase that used to be called "endgame" in the gaming environment and which is full of new and more challenging opportunities. Players decide whether to continue earning achievements, fight other players in arenas, walk in a group of five players to the dungeons of monsters (by defeating them they can get the best equipment), or organize raids in groups of ten to twenty-five players (in the latest expansion, these numbers change) with the aim of getting better equipment. The new updates and expansions are mostly intended for players who are in the endgame and searching for new content.

## **2.1 *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm* and translation**

According to the official website of the developer (Blizzard Entertainment), the game has been localized into nine languages: English, Portuguese, German, French, Russian, Chinese, Spanish, Italian, and Korean. Due to its large-scale and successful nature, localization into the EFIGS language group was highly expected. Due to the different varieties of English, Spanish, and Portuguese, there has been a demand for localization into specific variations of these languages – such as Mexican Spanish.

One of the first localizations was into Chinese. Both linguistic and software changes occurred due to different legislation. In August 2009, due to new regulations from the Chinese government, players could not play the game for several weeks as developers had to wait for approval of the game's change of Chinese publisher. Along with the new guidelines, the Chinese government established censorship, according to which

developers had to change some of the visual elements of the video game (Alexander 2009). There was a form of depth localization<sup>5</sup> and a reshaping of video game graphics, which in the source version was not consistent with the target culture. It specifically involved a dispute regarding the depiction of bones and death-related elements, which were prohibited from being shown in China. It primarily affected the race of the Undead, which consists of skeletons. Their visual side had to be adjusted so that no bones were shown (see Figure 5). Further, the intervention in the graphics was related to piles of bones in different places in the game world. They had to be replaced with sandbags (see Figure 6). While in other countries a skeleton appeared after killing a player, in China a grave would appear instead. In addition, the color of the blood of some monsters was changed from red to black (Alexander 2009), and, instead of raw meat on the table, players were shown a loaf of bread. Changes were also made on the linguistic level. One example of this is the renaming of the Death Knight to Fade Knight, and in all spells the English word “death” was changed to “fade.”



**Figure 5:** *The Undead in China’s World of Warcraft localization (2004)*

**Figure 6:** *Sandbags instead of a pile of bones in China’s World of Warcraft localization (2004)*

<sup>5</sup> According to Bernal-Merino (2013), the goal of deep localization is to transform the product according to the preferences and expectations of target users (e.g., changing the choice of ethnicity of characters in the game).

One of the latest localizations was into Italian; this took one year and included five million words (with each new expansion, there are usually about 1.5 million new words). Since English is a flexible language, nouns, and adjectives can be combined in various ways to create compound words. Not all languages have so many options for creating compound names (Blizzard Entertainment 2012), and Italian localizers had to deal with this. A similar issue arises in the case of Slovak, where there was the spell of the Rogue class with its original English name Backstab, which could be literally translated to Slovak as *vraziť niekomu nôž do chrbta* (“stab someone in the back”). In this attack, the player must be positioned behind the enemy, so it is important for the translation to incorporate the idea of the back or indicate in some other way that it is an attack from behind; therefore, it cannot be translated as *Podraz*. The problem arises in the length of the Slovak translation, which would be considerably longer and less comfortable for the player than the English original. During the localization into Italian, the localization team had to follow several strategies. One of these was setting a limit of four syllables in invented names to avoid long constructions. If they felt that an Italian player would not understand a cultural reference, or if the reference was not appropriate, they replaced it with a reference from the target culture. Presumably such specifics were documented in their style guide (for comparison, see Kabát 2022a). Interestingly, they used a Neapolitan accent for the troll race in the game’s dubbing because the inhabitants of Naples are known for being distinctive, proud, and respectful of their ancestors. The localization team thought this characteristic was similar to the culture of the trolls, and so they decided to embody the Neapolitan accent in this way (Blizzard Entertainment 2012).

When comparing translations, it is possible to identify a certain tendency where terms that are translated in one localization are also translated in others. This is not always the case, for example, with toponyms, where accents were added in the French localization – Desolace turns into *Désolace*. In Spanish localization, Shattrath City was translated as *Cuidad de Shattrath* (the city of Shattrath) while the other localizations simply called it Shattrath. In the Spanish localization, it is also possible to see an exception in the translation of the Zangarmarsh region, where they decided to keep the original name. (Given that the English word “marsh” is in the name, it could have been at least partially translated.) In the French localization, it is translated as *Marécage de Zangar* (the Zangar Marsh).

During the localization of such names, the translator must pay attention to already finished translations (e.g., a book or film). In the Czech translation of the books, there was a problem with the translation of the Night Elf race because the translators could not



agree on whether it should be translated as *temné elfy* or *noční elfy*. In *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos* (2002), the Night Elves were translated as *temní elfové* (dark elves) in the localization published by Cenega Czech. In later book translations by Netolička, Kratochvíl, and Komprdová, they were *noční elfové* (night elves) because their name was intended to refer to the nocturnal nature of these creatures rather than to their inherent darkness. The translators opted for a different translation in the newer books.

Alongside the parallel translations, the present author looked closely at the Slovak dubbing of the film *Warcraft: The Beginning* (Sunrise Studio 2016), which is the only official translation of *Warcraft* into Slovak. There was an interesting difference when translating names because while the existing translations localized the cities or areas for which translation can be created (note the previously mentioned example of the French translation of Zangarmarsh), this was not always the case in the film. The town of Ironforge, which was translated in all video game localizations, was not translated in the film, but areas such as Elwynn Forest (*Elwynnský les*), Frostwind Dunes (*Frostwindské duny*), Deadwind Pass (*Deadwindský priesmyk*), and Redridge Mountains (*Redridgské hory*) were, at least partially, probably because they had descriptive elements that were more transparent. It is also possible that the film translators followed the example of the Czech translation of the books, where these names appear to have been translated (or untranslated) upon the same principle. The same happened with the clan names, which Czech and Slovak translators left in the original (e.g., the Laughing Skull clan, which could have been translated into Slovak as *klan Posmešnej lebky*).<sup>6</sup>

The present author was also interested in the dubbed translation of the names of spells. Here the film producers took their own approach. Since characters in the game do not speak while casting spells, they decided to adapt it to the more traditional way of spell-casting seen in fantasy movies. They created a new language, eliminating the need for spell localization. There is a spell called Arcane Blast, which could be translated into Slovak as *Tajomný výbuch*. In the film, the relevant character uttered something unknown: “Shala’ros.” Another example from the dubbing is the translation of a flying lion which can be mounted by members of the Alliance and used for transportation. In the game and original film, it is called the English word “gryphon.” In the Slovak dubbing, they decided not to translate it even though there is a Slovak word for this mythological

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<sup>6</sup> In the translation, the approach was based on the motivation behind the term’s creation. This clan is characterized by its manic and bloodthirsty behavior and is considered the most wicked of them all. They show no respect for anyone.

animal: *gryf*.<sup>7</sup> According to Netolička (2003), the reason behind this could be the success of the localization of the *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos* video game (2002). The translators assumed that the vast majority of reader/viewers would be players who were used to the Czech localization of the game, and thus “the translation of most key names of races, units, and names is taken from the translation of the game [...]; hence they used the translations: *Duše démona, Horda, Plamenná legie, žump, peón, Řád stříbrné ruky, [and] jezdec na gryfonu*” (Netolička 2003, 1).

## 2.2 Terminology in *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm*

*World of Warcraft: Cataclysm* terminology has a lot in common with other MMORPGs. They can be divided into several categories depending on the context (e.g., whether it is typical for character creating, completing quests, playing PvP, or PvE content). They can be further specified according to the choice of lexical units. The most telling example is the choice of terminology in spells because all spells within one class have a common origin. Rogue spells, for instance, connote deceit and trickery with spells such as Cheap Shot (*Podpásovka*) and Ambush (*Prepadnutie*). The terminological areas of game elements repeated in most MMORPGs can be considered as the foundation of game localization in this genre. There was more than just a focus on specific terminology, be it what the characters wear or the weapons and items they use, even though each area is terminologically so saturated that one could focus on terminology from a specific area. The relationship between the chosen terminological areas is that they are part of what is known as “game mechanics.” These are video game elements that relate to the principle of the overall functioning of the game. Terminology is directly connected with the player experience and the rules of how the game functions (Kabát 2022b). The game features that will be discussed are races, classes, spells, item names, proper names and toponyms, and the user interface.

## 2.3 Game features and localization in *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm*

Players can create characters belonging either to the Alliance or the Horde. Each has a choice of five races, which have unique abilities (e.g., night elves can be invisible). The maximum number of characters is ten per account. The communication and interaction

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<sup>7</sup> The present author contacted the dubbing director with a request for information about the authors of the translation. After contacting one translator, it became clear that there was someone else whose identity was unknown. This only proves how difficult it can be to find information about translators and identify them.

between the factions is limited, so if a player creates one character in the Alliance and another in the Horde, they will not be able to send items between these two characters and will not be able to communicate with the guild from the opposite faction. Most players focus only on one faction. (Among players, there is also a code that says that they should be loyal to only one faction because otherwise they would be considered traitors; the main point and charm of the game would thus be lost.) The Alliance is primarily based on the Eastern Kingdoms (*Východné kráľovstvo*) and the Horde on the continent of Kalimdor (*Kalimdor*) (see Figure 7).



**Figure 7:** *The map of Azeroth in World of Warcraft: Cataclysm*

After a character is created, the player is presented with a short video (“cinematic”) with spoken commentary, introducing the environment where the character begins. These cinematics appear at different stages of the game; sometimes they are part of quests and sometimes they are simply additional audiovisual material. Part of the localization is audiovisual translation, and such scenes must be titled or dubbed or the spoken commentary needs to be translated. Within the Alliance, players can choose from the following races: Human (*Človek*), Dwarf (*Trpaslík*), Gnome (*Gnóm*), Draenei (in their own language, this word means “exiled”), Night Elf (*Nočný elf*), and Worgen (*Vlko-lak*). In the Horde, players can choose from these races: Orc (*Ork*), Troll (*Trol*), Tauren



(derived from the Minotaur), Undead (*Nemřtvy*), Blood Elf (*Krvavý elf*), and Goblin (*Škriatok*).



Figure 8: *Creating a character in World of Warcraft: Cataclysm*

Different races can play different classes; however, a Human cannot be a Shaman because Humans are tied to folklore and shamanism is associated with the elements and spiritualism, as well as voodoo, which would not fit in with the story of Humans, who follow the religion of Light. Overall, players can choose from the following classes: Mage (*Mág*), Paladin, Priest (*Kňaz*), Rogue (*Zlodej*), Warlock (*Černokňazník*),<sup>8</sup> Death Knight (*Rytier smrti*), Hunter (*Lovec*), Shaman (*Šaman*), Warrior (*Bojovník*), and Druid. The names of each spell denote the action that the character performs after pressing the keys assigned to them. When the player moves the mouse over the spell icon, they will see a brief description of its function (see Figure 9) and how many seconds or minutes it takes to recharge (cooldown).

<sup>8</sup> In *Warcraft: the Beginning* (Sunrise Studio, 2016), this class was translated as *čarodej* (sorcerer, mage). Since then, it has been characterized by the use of dark magic; therefore, it can be translated as *černokňazník*.

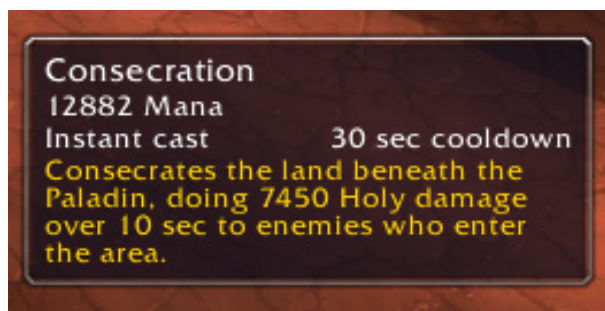


Figure 9: A description of the Consecration spell in World of Warcraft: Cataclysm

In connection with the terminology of spells, it is worth mentioning the Paladins. Since they are warriors in the service of God, and are inspired by the ideas and ideals of the Crusader Knights in the fight against the forces of evil, they can use abilities for their courage and devotion that are more typical of priests, such as healing. This is reflected in the lexical choice of spell names, which all have a Christian connotation: Crusader Strike (*Križiacký zásah*), Blessing of Protection (*Ochranné požehnanie*), and Consecration (*Posvätenie*).

The equipment that players acquire either by making, buying, or receiving as a reward after killing NPC characters is visually distinguished by the color of the name. Colors determine the rarity and quality of the item. If it is a poor quality item, it has gray text; if it is of common quality, it has white text; if it is of uncommon quality, it has green text, if it is of rare quality, it has blue text; if it is of epic quality, it has purple text; If it is of legendary quality, it has orange text; and if it is an artifact or heirloom, it has yellow text. In addition to common item names, the item title may also have information that will help the player learn more about the armor or weapon (see Figure 10). To give an example, a Crafted Dreadful Gladiator's Mail Helm (freely translatable as *Vyrobená krúžková helma desivého gladiátora*) contains four parts:

- Crafted (*Vyrobený/á*) – this means the item can be obtained by “crafting” through one of the professions (in this case, the profession of leatherworking) or by purchasing it from another player who made the item.
- Dreadful Gladiator's (*desivého gladiátora*) – this suggests that it is an item that falls under the PvP category, thus adding values that are important to the PvP environment.
- Mail (*krúžkový*) – based on this, the player knows what material the item is made of (*krúžkové brnenie*) and for who it is intended (since not all characters can wear the same armor); this item is intended for a Shaman.
- Helm (*helma*) – the last part of the name determines which part of the body the item is intended for.

Thanks to the nomenclature using class-specific terms, it is possible to quickly identify items. Players can then immediately determine if they are suitable for their character.



Figure 10: A description of armor named *Crafted Dreadful Gladiator's Mail Helm*

Proper names and toponyms should not be translated unless it is a game designed specifically for children, where names can be naturalized and the game will continue to produce the same impression. This is because they are usually already established names in the game world, or because their translation could seem forced, or even impossible, because their origin is unknown. On the other hand, names that do not denote non-existent words, but comprise real ones that can be translated and have an embodied feature of the place they name, should be translated. Unlike other types of translation, video game translators have more freedom to decide whether to translate a name or not. This was apparent in the Czech translation of the *World of Warcraft* books. In *World of Warcraft: Chronicle (Volume II) - Kronika - Svazek II* (Kratochvíl & Komprdová, 2017), names such as Nagrand, Talador, and Ashran (see Figure 11) remain in their original form because they are invented, whereas names such as Shadowmoon Valley (*Údolí Shadowmoon*), Barrier Sea (*Hraniční moře*), and Tanaan Jungle (*Tanaanská džungle*) are either partially or completely translated. With proper names, the character of the chieftain of one of the Orc clans is called Blackhand. This name, like others, was not translated in either the books or the film even though a translation would have been possible.



In order to maintain consistency in the non-translation of proper names, there was no translation; this was the case even if descriptive elements which were related to the appearance of the character (i.e., the figure has a black hand) were incorporated.



Figure 11: A map in *World of Warcraft: Chronicle (Volume II)* (2017)

Besides the video game, there are books based on *World of Warcraft*. Translators must have an overview of how certain names have been translated in previous works. The Czech translators clarified this in the introduction of the book as follows:

Books based on games have the disadvantage that you are translating things that players have already encountered. You can then choose to simply not translate or add notes to the translations. [...] *World of Warcraft* is actually a “higher level” because there is a translation of a game that is a part of the *World of Warcraft* universe [*Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos*, which is translated into Czech]. And some books have already been translated by someone else. (Kratochvíl & Komprdová, 2017).

Czech translators also highlight the issue of translation of names for the inflective features of Czech (and Slovak). Many names cannot naturally be inflected; if they are, they may come across as strange to the reader and affect the overall impression.

The user interface (see Figure 12) displays basic information about the character. There is also additional information, as can be seen below in the case of the hunter: a

domesticated animal in the upper left corner (1), a mini-map in the upper right corner (2), a list of active quests (3), an in-game chat in the lower left corner (4), and an action bar with icons/spells/mounts/professions at the bottom of the screen (5). There are many icons for spells, which can be activated either by using the mouse or pressing the button on the keyboard assigned to the spell. More windows can be opened on the action bar, such as windows with details about the character (e.g., their equipment, attributes, and reputation with other factions), a spell book, talents, achievements, information about the guild and its members, a group finder, and settings.



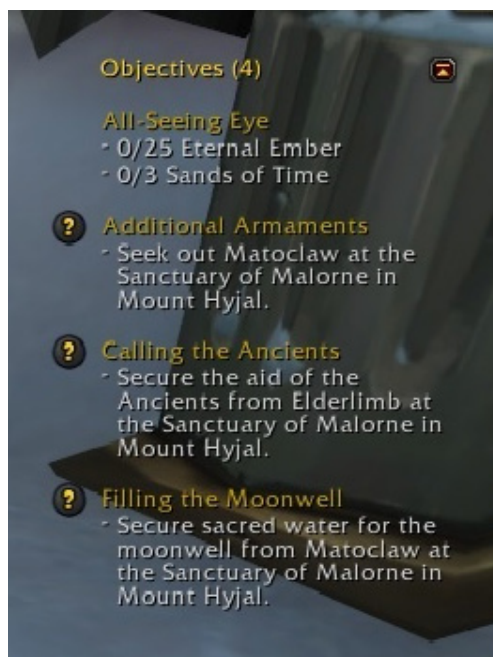
Figure 12: *The user interface in World of Warcraft: Cataclysm*

When localizing the user interface, there are two factors. The first is a limited space for text. Slovak is a language with longer sentences compared to English, especially when a term cannot be translated directly and it is necessary to describe it. In the specific case of the user interface in *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm*, single-word terms are most commonly used; Slovak names should therefore fit comfortably within the allocated space without any issues. The window with the English name “General,” which is located above the in-game chat (6) in Figure 12, could easily be translated as *Hlavné* (and, if space permits, *Všeobecné*) without having to add another word such as *správy* (messages) or *informácie* (information); it is understandable from the context. In the translation itself, translators do not know where the text will be located and what exactly it represents. By default, they will receive a document created in Word or Excel which has a list of individual text strings that may not be in the order in which they appear in the



video game (Ženíšek, in Schubert 2013). Such a simple translation task may result in several errors and inconsistencies since the translator cannot know how many characters they can use. One way to move forward is to try and not exceed the length of the source text strings.

Another factor that translators from English encounter is capitalization. Every significant word or verb is capitalized in video games in English. This applies, for example, to quest names on the right side of the user interface (see Figure 13).



**Figure 13:** *A list of quests/the Quest Log in World of Warcraft: Cataclysm*

As Bernal-Merino (2013) states, the text in the user interface must be short, clear, and accurate. Its main task is to help the player in the game without having a negative impact on their gaming experience and not wasting time with the interface. Icons are often preferred instead of words because they are generally easier to understand. In Figure 12, there are icons on the sides of the mini-map where the player can choose advanced settings; however, this internationalization strategy cannot always be applied. Indeed, some areas of the video game pose a greater challenge for the translator. In relation to other areas of MMORPGs, it can be said that video games offer a wide selection of areas that can be addressed more closely and offer space for further suggestions and creativity in translation.

## Conclusion

This article analyzed the *World of Warcraft* video games (2004 and 2010) with an extensive story that had unfolded in over twenty books and in expansions and sequels. It is one of the most well-known MMORPGs. Its main features were described and summarized based on the division of game and problematic parts, such as spells or toponyms, which may cause problems for translation. In addition to the standard characters that appear in the translation of game and non-game software (e.g., spatial constraints), translators in game localization may also encounter pre-existing book translations. Also, book translators must consider existing localizations of the game version of the story at hand. Such a procedure is also common in artistic translation. Analyzing the specifics of MMORPGs showed that such translations have many common features with artistic and audiovisual translation. At the same time, there are many special features. It is necessary in future research to point out the common specifics of MMORPG translations and that some of them can be applied in the translation of other genres.

Based on parallel Czech translations of the *World of Warcraft* books, the translation procedures and their solutions were clarified. Some may seem peculiar to an uninvolved translator, such as the (non-)translation of toponyms and proper names. This article also offered its own translation proposals. Localization is a rarely studied type of translation, but, with the development of technology, software localization is becoming more frequent. Gaming software will increasingly be localized and explored more.

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# Intertextuality and Cultural Specifics in Video Game Localization

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## Abstract

Intertextuality is a common occurrence in video games that adds to a player's experience. As games are naturally influenced by their country and culture of origin, it would be difficult to find a completely acultural video game with no cultural references whatsoever (or one that references no kind of popular culture.) Through the present author's own observations and case studies based on her own experiences as a player, this article aims to describe different kinds of intertextuality and cultural references and the ways translators have approached specific cases using transcreation. The overall idea of transcreation and issues of intertextuality in Slovakia are also discussed.

**Keywords:** video games, localization, intertextuality, culture, transcreation

## Introduction

Like fiction and audiovisual works, video games exist in a broader context and not in a vacuum. As Mangiron and O'Hagan (2013) point out, direct references, innuendos, quotes, jokes, and related interpretations of pre-existing works are common in video games. Although they may not be noticed by every player, they are an important part of the gaming experience. Video games are also directly influenced by the culture and environment of their origin, and these factors should be taken into account when localizing. Culture can also be closely related to the intertextuality used in the product (Bernal-Merino 2013). In this article, both are understood as two inseparable parts of the text. Intertextuality refers to the property or state of a text resulting from the connection of two or more texts.

Intertextuality and cultural specifics constitute just one of many problems translators face when localizing video games (Mangiron & O’Hagan 2013). Localization has many specific features such as variable units, spatial constraints, text fragmentation, and a lack of materials (Kabát 2019), but specific video games also add the issue of intertextuality. This may seem as something not very important when it comes to translation, but it is an important part of the final product for players and developers. In some games, it also functions as part of the game mechanics that affect the rest of the game. According to Mangiron (2006), a translator needs a deeper knowledge of popular and broader culture, in addition to traditional language and translation skills, creativity, and ingenuity.

This article presents a brief introduction to issues and types of intertextuality, cultural allusions, and solutions in the localization process. Most of the presented research comes from video games that the present author played in English and in Slovak as well as from her own research into the field. Notes regarding the examples were taken during gameplay and were verified in the guides to specific games when necessary. When selecting these video games, the texts of video games of different genres and origins were included in the research sample to illustrate the diversity and versatility of this issue. The solutions are approached from the perspective of the translator and from that of players and fans, who are the target group of the product. Cases where the translators have enriched the original text and added allusions will also be pointed out, and the problems that may arise in the Slovak video game market will be outlined.

## **1 Video games as part of multimedia franchises**

One feature of video games is that they are portable between different media and platforms, resulting in several interconnected texts (Mangiron & O’Hagan 2013). This is how interconnected video game series are created. A large number of video games also arise from existing series present in other genres of entertainment. They then become part of a multimedia franchise, so their content is available as books, movies, board games, and audio recordings. The target audience of these video games are fans of the series (McCarthy, Curran, & Byron 2005), who are interested in new content from their favorite series and are well acquainted with it. The *Harry Potter* book series expanded into films and video games. Unlike books and films, video games offer players the opportunity to actively engage in and change the story to a certain extent. Compared to original video games, video game adaptations of other works must also consider this aspect, which is largely determined by the original work. A translator of video games as

adaptations of a book series must consider three things in localization: the follow-up to other media from the series, coherence with existing translations of these media, and the rules laid down by this fictional world when translating new phenomena. They cannot depart from the already established rules of the fictional world. They must adhere to established names and realities, and their translation must also follow previous translations. A Slovak translator of *Harry Potter*, for instance, cannot translate Gryffindor as anything other than *Chrabromil* because this is the established translation in books and in films; however, this is not always easy if there are several translations, or if translations are difficult to access, such as in the case of older works (e.g., Slovak translations of books from Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series from 1983–2015). Another problem may be a situation where the linked texts from one series have not been translated into the target language, so there is nothing to follow up on. The translator should consider that their solutions can affect all future translations and may become the source for the rest of the series.

If the translator does not notice the allusions, or is unaware of them, perhaps insignificant yet funny moments that the developers put into the game can be lost. This is the case in the *Pokémon Diamond* (2006), *Pokémon Pearl* (2006), and *Pokémon Platinum* (2008) video games. In the Japanese original of *Pokémon Platinum*, there were several characters named after the characters from the *Pokémon* films; however, the English localization gave them new names that did not match their film equivalent. One such character is Hitomi, who in *Pokémon: Destiny Deoxys* (2004) was named Rebecca in the English version of the film. In the video games in English, she appeared as Jamie, even though the Japanese version of the game used Hitomi instead and mentioned her signature tactic of using a computer to analyze battles just like in the film. In the remade versions of the video games (*Pokémon Brilliant Diamond* and *Pokémon Shining Pearl* [2021]), she reappears as Jamie; the translators preferred to follow up on earlier games rather than allude to the movie. Fans noticed this discrepancy after the release of the original video games and called it a mistake on online forums. Similar “sins” in the eyes of fans can have a negative impact on the overall reception of the resulting product, and translators should avoid them.

## 2 Video games and allusions to other types of texts

As games can refer to other genres belonging to one series, they can also have innuendos that at first glance appear to be random and unrelated (Mangiron & O'Hagan 2013). Many video games also refer to media other than movies, series, or books. These

references are called “Easter eggs,” and they are various jokes or utterances that the player must carefully look for in the game world because they are not always obvious. As a term, “Easter eggs” refer to the tradition of looking for hidden eggs during Easter. The term was then used in the video game community, including in Slovakia. In other cases, however, these links are more straightforward and complement the colorfulness of the game or help a knowledgeable player understand the subtext of the storyline, i.e., ideas that are not explicitly expressed in the text of the video game. The presented discussion of the *NieR* (2010) and *Assassin’s Creed II* (2009) video games is mostly based on the present author’s observations during gameplay and from the related films and books.

Intertextual allusions can be found in some games from the *NieR* series (2010–present). *NieR* originally came out in Japan as a video game in two versions: *NieR Replicant* (2010) on the PlayStation 3 and *NieR Gestalt* (2010) on the Xbox 360. In addition to the title, the versions differ in certain details of the characters, but the story is the same. In the United States and Europe, only the *NieR Gestalt* version was released (under the name *NieR*). In 2021, a remake of *Replicant* was released under the name *NieR Replicant ver.1.22474487139*. The name *NieR Replicant* refers to the popular sci-fi movie *Blade Runner* (1982). *Blade Runner* originated as the film adaptation of the book *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), but the term “replicant” was first used in the film. A replicant is a type of a humanoid android which is indistinguishable from a living person. One of the main ideas of the film is the question of humanity and when the artificial humanoid becomes human. Indeed, where is the boundary between man and artificial intelligence? The film depicts a detective who is introduced to the viewer as a human, but during the film both the character himself and the viewer begin to doubt this. The film ends inconclusively, leaving it up to the viewer whether they think that the main character is a person or a replicant.

*NieR* was inspired by the idea of the replicant as well as the film more broadly. In the *NieR* video game, replicants are artificially created clones of people; the culmination of the game shows that the main character, who is first introduced as a human, is actually a replicant, as are pretty much all the other characters. The video game also deals with the idea of humanity and existence. A player who has seen *Blade Runner* will not miss either the allusion in the title or the similar theme, so the intertextual innuendo in the title becomes an important link to another series with which the game shares the ideas and themes present in the storyline. When localizing this video game, it would be useful to discover whether and how the term “replicant” in the film has been translated into



the target language and to adjust the text in the game so it matches the translation used in the film. In story-driven games, the connection of these two series can also help the player form an idea of certain details that the video game will place in the subtext instead of showing or explaining directly.

A less striking reference to *Blade Runner* is found in the book *NieR: Automata* (2017), which was created as a retelling of the *NieR* sequel; it came out in Japanese and in English. While the video game itself does not directly refer to the *Blade Runner* movie, the book *NieR: Automata: Long Story Short* in the Japanese online store Square Enix uses a subtitle that can be translated into English as *While Androids Dream of the Glory of Mankind, Do Machines Dream of Mankind?* This blatant allusion to the book *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), however, disappeared from all foreign stores in English, thus breaking the link of the new part of the *NieR* series with *Blade Runner*.

Another less important intertextual reference is a line of Shaun's character in *Assassin's Creed III* (2012), where he directly quotes the phrase "In another moment, down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again" from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll 1865). This is just a funny allusion, which is not strictly necessary to preserve in translation; however, the French localization preserved the allusion and used the already existing translation of the replica from the book: "Un instant après, Alice était à la poursuite du Lapin dans le terrier, sans songer comment elle en sortirait." This also fits into the context in the game, as the character tells this replica at the entrance to a temple from which he may no longer return.

Allusions to other types of texts from books, films, or other works are common, but many times they act only as hidden jokes to amuse players. Sometimes, however, they are an important part of the video game, and if the translator does not transfer it in the localization, the work would be substantially impoverished. Many such allusions are specific to the country or language area where the video game originally came out, like the folklore characters in the *Chocobo Racing* (1999) game. In the original Japanese version, and on the track "Hungry Land," heroes disguise themselves as the boy folklore character Momotaró and his companion Kidji (literally translatable as Pheasant). Children are the target audience of the game, so it was necessary to localize this allusion, which would only be clear to Japanese fans. In the United States, the video game was released a few months later with the name "Hungry Land" changed to "Gingerbread Land" and Momotaró and Kidji changed to Hansel and Gretel (Mangiron & O'Hagan 2013) from the well-known fairy tale. (It is known in Slovak as *Perníková chalúpka* with the main characters being Janko and Marienka.) Thanks to the gingerbread house, the

connection with food has been preserved; the fairy tale is so well-known that the allusion can be understood by American and European players. The connection with the fairytale theme has also been preserved, so the video game can keep the attention of the child player.

### **3 Intertextuality within a single video game series**

A lot of video games are part of larger long-running series, so it is fairly common for individual games to refer to each other. It can be seen that consistency can be preserved in the source language, probably because each part of a particular video game series is often published by the same studio; developers have the background and the ability to communicate with other team members. Problems can arise with localization because the translator needs to be familiar with the other video games in the series, and their localization in the target language, in order to capture all these links and correctly transfer them to the resulting product. A good example is *The Elder Scrolls* series (1994–present), where references to previous games often appear in the form of characters, objects, dialogues, and task names. In *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011), Lucien Lechance returns as a ghost; originally, he was an unplayable character in *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (2006). The game also mentions the Keening dagger, which was used in the main storyline of *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* (2002). During one task, a character mentions a king named Lysandus, who appeared in *The Elder Scrolls II: Daggerfall* (1996). These are just a few of the huge number of allusions *The Elder Scrolls* has been using since the second game of the series. None of them directly affect the storyline or gameplay, but it is important to keep the translation consistent during localization so that intertextuality remains preserved. A player who played the video games in their original version would notice discrepancies in localization, and those playing the games for the first time would miss the allusions that are intertwined in the timeline and storyline of all video games of the series.

### **4 Transcreation as part of video game localization**

There is no universal consensus on the definition of transcreation, especially in the context of the localization of video games. Although someone may consider it to be a synonym for translation as such, it is not another kind of translation but rather a procedure that may or may not occur in translation. Bernal-Merino (2013) states that the concept of transcreation directly permits a complete replacement of text or innuendos which

are too culturally specific to the target market; with these fundamental changes, the final product becomes more approachable for the target audience. This process of a complete creative rewriting of the text in order to preserve its original intent is a frequent and necessary phenomenon in video game localization. It is fairly common for video games to create new ideas and sometimes new fictional languages. Occasionally, this newly emerged terminology refers to pre-existing cultural phenomena. It is then necessary to be creative and far-sighted enough to ensure that in the localized (or transcreated) product, the player understands what the new fictitious term means and is not confused.

Such a case of necessary transcreation can be recorded in the video game *Final Fantasy X-2* (2003), where translators changed the original Japanese name of the Kaminari Heigen Live concert (in English, “a live concert on thunder plains”; loosely in Slovak, *koncert na hromových planinách*) to Yunapalooza. While in Japan the word “live” is commonly used to refer to a musical performance or a concert, such a name is rare in the United States. Yunapalooza creates a whole new term that combines the famous Lollapalooza music festival and the name of the main character Yuna (Mangiron & O’Hagan 2013). The translators have creatively kept the original association with a musical performance while linking it with the familiar name of a character from the world of video games that fits into the plot.

## 5 Intertextuality and cultural specifics as part of video game mechanics

While in many video games, allusions and innuendos work as funny jokes that will not impactfully affect the storyline and progress of the game, there are also video games that require the player to be familiar with various literary works and cultural facts. The obvious genre of these video games are educational and puzzle video games. For this article, the *Persona* (1996–2020) video game series can serve as an example. All the games mentioned in this section were played in both Japanese and English, and the specific examples mentioned were recorded directly during gameplay. Some specific Japanese examples were also drawn from two guidebooks to these games: *Persona 3 Official Perfect Guide* (Author Collective 2006) and *Persona 4 Official Perfect Guide* (Author Collective 2008).

*Persona* is a Japanese series that originated as a by-product of the *Shin Megami Tensei* (1987–present) video game series. In these video games, the player gets acquainted with

the characters in a high school environment and can progress the storyline and fight with the help of creatures called “persona.” Since the third video game in the series, *Persona 3*, a new school exam system has also emerged. A player in the role of a pupil must answer questions from teachers and get points for his character’s parameters. The teachers decide how well a player can get to know specific characters, which helps them fight or change the end of the story line. In addition to general questions from geography, biology, or history, questions about specific works or authors appear. In *Persona 3* (2006), translators had to change several questions because in the Japanese version there were questions regarding the meaning of English expressions. The question “What kind of idiom means ‘good luck!’?” (the answer is “Break a leg!”) was localized as the question “How would you translate the word ‘pan’ into English?” (the answer is “bread”). Here it may seem that it was simply enough to exchange the languages used, but the translators also had to come up with a question for the same character which would be simple enough for an ordinary player who probably does not know Japanese. The translators decided not to replace some questions related to certain cultural elements or people with English or globally known equivalents, but rather keep them targeted specifically at Japanese culture. One such question was “How is Murasaki Shikibu recognized in the world?” (the answer is “the Global Heritage Pavilion”), but an average player probably does not even know that Murasaki Shikibu was a Japanese writer. The question in the game is preceded by a brief speech by the teacher who mentions her literary work and that she is depicted on a Japanese banknote, giving the player at least some idea that she was an important writer. Thanks to these short explanations, it is unnecessary to change these questions for the player; since the game takes place in Japan, the original version is more natural.

The translators of *Persona 4* (2008) loosened the localization up even more and left most of the questions in these tests unchanged. Where necessary, they came up with new questions that brought the aspect of intertextuality into the game. Some linguistic questions like “Which bird is used in English to call someone a ‘coward?’” (the answer is “chicken”), which are banal for English-speaking players, remained unchanged, but a question regarding polite Japanese language was altered. They inserted a reference to a particular work of a Japanese author with the question “How many parts does Murakami’s *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* have?” (the answer is “Three”), thus changing the focus of the question from language to literature while keeping a connection with Japan and simplifying the question for an ordinary player, given that Murakami is a world-famous writer.

The present author compared these examples of localization in *Persona 3* (2006) and *Persona 4* (2008) with the localization of the *Final Fantasy X-2* (2003). It can be seen that the localization of intertextual allusions, and localization overall, depends very much on the context. Naming the concert in *Final Fantasy X-2* did not work as an important part of the world or the story, and it was unnecessary to leave it in its original version, but it gave translators enough freedom to create a new term. In the *Persona* series, questions aimed at Japanese culture make sense in the context of a Japanese high school, completing the atmosphere and the reality where the video game takes place. The tests in the *Persona* series form an important part of the plot and game mechanics, so it was necessary to find a balance between a general knowledge of Japan and specific matters that were unsuitable for players without a deeper knowledge of Japan and that needed to be replaced.

## 6 Adding intertextuality in localization

During the localization of a game, there may be cases when developers do not include allusions or innuendos into the original text but where the translator may add them thanks to the context and thus enrich the text. One example is the *Super Mario Bros. 3* video game (1988). The fourth video game from the *Super Mario* series (1985–present) in the Japanese original only offered the player a simple thanks for rebuilding peace in the world after completing the game. During localization into English, the translators used the opportunity to add a funny innuendo with the line “Thank you! But our princess is in another castle! ... Just kidding. Ha ha! Bye bye.” The joke refers to previous *Super Mario* video games which often used the quote “The princess is in another castle” (Mangiron & O’Hagan 2013). This makes the end of the game in the English localization funnier and more personal for fans of the series and more creative than the generic replica about saving the world. It adds character to the video game, enriches it with intertextuality, and consolidates its status as a continuation of the series.

This phenomenon can be seen to a much greater extent in the *Final Fantasy XIV* video game (2013), which is specific because it belongs to the MMORPG genre and thus means it is an online game for many players and with its own community, jargon, customs, and etiquette (Jøn 2010). It regularly receives updates and new content, increasing the amount of text and storylines that follow each other. The translators are also given more opportunities for the intertextual enrichment of the video game. This is also specific because, although it is a Japanese video game, its English version is developed alongside the Japanese one (simultaneous shipment). Also, the localization team is

actively involved in the development of the video game. Translators have a unique opportunity to influence the world and storyline of the video game directly in development and creatively change their language versions to sound richer while not disturbing the player by violating the rules of the environment or creating inappropriate allusions that would drastically change the storyline or the personalities of the characters. *Final Fantasy XIV* is a video game from a series with a long tradition (1987–present), and it often refers to previous *Final Fantasy* editions through the storyline, characters, and places. Translators need to be well acquainted with the other video games in the series and their localizations to remain coherent. These links can also be found in the Japanese version. The English version is often much looser regarding references to popular culture, which the Japanese version uses to a much lesser extent. These are mainly the names of major and minor tasks, items, and the FATE system, which represent the timed battles that players find in the video game world. They do not drastically interfere with the main storyline, nor are they needed to advance it, and they do not cause an interference even when referring to modern popular culture in this fantasy world. They often refer to films, TV series, other video games, books, music, online jokes, and idioms. Examples from several quests include *It's Always Sunny in Vylbrand*, with the title referring to the TV series *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* (2005); *Grapevine of Wrath*, which refers to the novel *Grapes of Wrath* (1939); *An Offer We Can't Refuse*, which refers to a well-known quote from the film *The Godfather* (1972): “I’m gonna make him an offer he can’t refuse.” There is also a quest titled *How to Feed Your Dragon*, which refers to the TV series *How to Train Your Dragon* (2003).

In the Japanese text, none of these quests had these references to popular culture, or they only included wordplay without using intertextuality. In localization, all of them fit into the context and make the text more interesting for people who know and understand the allusions. They do not feel too forced either; in the video game’s tasks, such names are the exception rather than the rule. According to a list made by fans on the *Gamer Escape* page, there are 198 side quests that use pop culture allusions. Occasionally, such allusions can be found in the names of characters or in dialogue; in a battle with worms, one character shouts “Tonight we dine on worm!” This refers to a scene from the film *300* (2006) where the main character shouts “Tonight we dine in hell!” There is also a character named Hearth Maul, who parodies Darth Maul from the *Star Wars* series (1977). The text of the video game is then much more vivid and original than if it were only directly localized, and the English version gets an identity which is not directly dependent on the Japanese one.

## 7 Intertextuality in the Slovak context

The examples mentioned above confirm that intertextuality is a frequently used element in video games, be it done by developers or translators. But what does this mean in Slovakia? This is a country where only a small number of video games are localized and the science of video game localization is at its very beginning (Koscelníková 2019). What if translators do not have enough material to lean on? Allusions to historical and folklore characters and movies and series should be handled by a professional translator without impoverishing the text. This can be done by transcreating, using an existing translation, or inventing a new innuendo in another part of the video game. Clearly, video games often refer to other video games, or video games from their own series, and that is where a problem arises. Because of the low number of video games officially localized in Slovakia (Koscelníková 2019), the translator does not have enough auxiliary materials and must rely either on their own knowledge or undertake time-consuming research on the internet. In extreme cases, they could be inspired by fan translations that dominate the unofficial Slovak market (Koscelníková 2019), but these may have errors. Literal translations should be avoided because the resulting product would not seem professional.

If the translator invents a new intertextual allusion because the referenced video game has not been translated for the Slovak market, this will set a localization precedent. The video game *Super Lucky's Tale* (2017) refers to the *Super Mario* series with a quote “This clover is in another castle,” which is a reference to the well-known phrase “The princess is in another castle.” Not a single video game from the *Super Mario* series has been officially localized into Slovak, and therefore there is no equivalent to this replica. Here, the translator has a choice: either create their own localization (and potentially indirectly influence the future translation of another game series) or use an unofficial localization from fans. In the official Slovak localization of the game, the replica is localized as *Štvorlístok, ktorý hľadáš, je v inom hrade ...* (The clover you are looking for is in another castle.) Another problem could be allusions that the translator does not know about because the mentioned work never came out in Slovakia and they did not hear about it. Here fan forums and sites like *Fandom*, where players often collect and create lists of all allusions, be it to other works or cultural allusions, can help. This is often possible only with well-known video games with a large fan base, and not for smaller, lesser-known games from independent developers. In Slovakia, there are not enough academic resources, manuals, or textbooks to offer help; however, the first and only Slovak textbook to deal with localization does mention video games (Kabát 2022) and could help the

translator. By contrast, there are many scholars involved in video game localization research abroad, such as Bernal-Merino, O’Hagan, and Mangiron. If a Slovak translator is given the opportunity to localize a video game into Slovak, they will have a more difficult time doing so compared to colleagues abroad due to the lack of credible materials in the form of already localized video games or academic texts. They could miss or unconsciously incorrectly translate the cases mentioned in this article.

## Conclusion

Intertextuality in video games can be diverse. Several types of intertextuality have been summarized alongside cultural specifics and their solutions; however, this is a small sample compared to the total number of examples in video games in general. This article has presented some allusions to other types of texts that might be culturally specific and allusions within one series; it has also discussed possible problems and solutions. Transcreation is an important procedure for video game localization. Its importance was highlighted in terms of how it affects progress in the game; however, transcreation itself still requires further research and discussion because of its unclear definition, which is where there is potential in the context of video game localization.

During localization, translation procedures and solutions depend on the context. There is no single universal solution for every problem, but it can be seen from the examples presented here that a clever team of translators can find a good solution for different situations and enrich the text with intertextuality when given the opportunity to do so. It would be beneficial to observe these and other solutions in other language combinations and compare them. Slovakia is lagging far behind in video game localization compared to many other countries. Slovak translators also have a disadvantage in the case of intertextuality; they can deal with it only if the tradition of video game localization in both theory and practice is gradually expanded domestically so that they can have the necessary background and knowledge for their work.

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# The Localization and Translation of *Habitica*

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## Abstract

The present article deals with the *Habitica* website and offers an look into the process of the localization and translation of the website from the viewpoint of a volunteer translator. The article discusses a localizer's steps in the localization process and the content specifics of translation from English into Slovak. For this article, the part of the website entitled "quests" was translated; it includes game elements from the role-playing genre, and it is one of the integral parts of the website.

**Keywords:** localization, websites, game elements, RPG, gamification

## Introduction

*Habitica* (2013), previously called *HabitRPG*, was one of the first websites mentioned in various productivity-focused communities as a means of motivating players. *Habitica* develops the concept of gamification, which forms an integral part of the website. What does this mean for a localizer or translator? What are the specifics of translating a website with a focus on game features? This article focuses primarily on the specifics of localization and translation that were encountered while researching the website. The article is based on professional literature and personal experience.

Websites generally differ from each other in the amount of text for translation. Texts will differ for the websites of commercial, governmental, academic, and other organizations and for the set of subsites collected under a single website (Ardelean 2014). Websites may differ from other software by a set of different types of texts within a single site (Sandrini 2008). Websites are mostly used for active communication with the user. They contain information that relates directly to things like the website, product, services, and legal information. Also, the competences of the translator depend on the content of the website (Kabát 2020; Kabát & Koscelníková 2021). When localizing and

translating the *Habitica* website, the present author took into consideration and then applied the general and typical localization elements presented by Kabát (2019). The selected and analyzed elements are fragmentation, blind translation, spatial constraints, testing, and updates (Kabát 2019).

According to Kabát (2019), fragmentation means that the text will be split into smaller units (strings) in the CAT tool. A blind translation is a situation where the localizer does not know the context of the translated strings. The translated text may be limited by the space in which it will be displayed, such as when translating the title page, tables, and menus. Using the monitoring method, it was found that the *Habitica* website is used to communicate between developers and users in the online space in real time. Updates are therefore important to maintain the user community. Developers regularly add new content that can affect an existing translation because the localizer could opt for alternative translation solutions when presented with access to new information. After translation, testing will determine the adequacy of the translated strings. In the case of the monitored site, updates take place at least once a month. After an update, the original text is replaced with a translation which can be found and reviewed by the localizer in the Slovak version of the website. The downside is that it is necessary to wait for the update; in the case of volunteer translation, the localizer can return to their own translation at any time (Ardelean 2014; Kabát 2019).

*Habitica* is created according to the classic genre of the roleplaying game (RPG). This genre is typical for many dialogues, descriptions, and general text that develops the plot line of the game world and the personality of the hero. The RPG is set in a fantasy world, and magic is no stranger to this realm (Bernal-Merino 2015; Búry 2015). After reaching a certain level, the player can choose from several classes. On the *Habitica* website, there are four specific classes: warrior, wizard, thief, and healer. *Habitica* is a task planner set in the game world. It creates monsters in the game world out of ordinary life tasks, and the player defeats them by completing the tasks in the real world. Completing the task is then transferred to the game world as damage caused to the game monsters, and experience, gold, and other items are awarded. The to-do list is divided into habits, daily tasks, and one-time tasks.

Gamification has been dealt with in recent years by Yu-kai Chou (2014–2019). Its goal is to connect the game world with the real world and apply the game elements to real tasks. Game company developers have figured out ways to keep the player's attention for a long time, and other organizations are trying to apply these mechanisms and techniques in other areas of life to motivate employees and attract customers. Gamification addresses the question of how to use this knowledge and apply it to tasks so that the

recipient can keep their attention in the time required to fulfill them; also, interesting tasks are created out of boring or difficult ones so that they are easier to accomplish (Chou 2019). In this way, *Habitica* tries to overcome the initial resistance of doing the given tasks and create enough motivation to turn the tasks into habits.

The present research was conducted in 2020 upon the basis of volunteer translation. The *Habitica* website is a continuously updated entity, so some presented information may not be current at the time of the publication of this article. The aim of the article is to show which aspects of localization can be encountered when translating a game-themed website and to practically show the progress of localization and translation on a selected example of quests, which are one of the main components of the game mechanics of this website.

## **1 Basic information about the *Habitica* website**

The *Habitica* website is specific for gameplay features from the RPG genre and gamification. It looks like a video game simplified into written form and transferred to a website, but it retains the mechanism of video games. Video games have their own world and their own rules. One important aspect of the video game is interactivity (Bernal-Merino 2015), be it interactivity between the player and the game, the player and the game characters, the player and other players, or all types of interaction combined. The player is transferred to the video game world via their own avatar (a game character that represents the player) through which they communicate with the video game. Thanks to this, the player subconsciously learns how the video game works, what they can and cannot do, and what consequences their actions have in this world. The video game responds to the player and adapts programmatically, using language and textual changes (Bernal-Merino 2015).

After registering on the *Habitica* website, the first step is to create your own avatar. The player appears in the video game world and can interact with video game elements of the website, such as characters, items, and other users. The avatar has its own life, magical energy, and experience, and it acquires levels, various objects, and animals. In the *Habitica* video game world, the player first interacts with the video game by earning rewards after completing tasks and by meeting characters (other users) in different parts of the website (stores and taverns) as a part of quests. Active quests are in the Party section, where it is possible to create your own group, be it alone or with other users with whom it is possible to complete quests. It is possible to create challenges on different topics according to your own needs. Both the challenges and guilds are divided

into official, public, and private ones. The community is based on creating a safe environment for all users indiscriminately, and this is how the part of the website that was translated and analyzed herein works.

For research purposes, quests were translated; since the present author has experience in translating other parts of the website, it was easier to find correlations to the overall philosophy of the website and other information hidden in the game world. While some texts and expressions that have already been translated by other volunteers have been retained, others have been edited. In the world of the *Habitica* website, the user receives quests as a reward for reaching a certain level, or they can buy them in the store. Quests are tasks in which the user and their party has to collect items, defeat monsters, and the like. The quest is activated in the Party section, and there is a waiting period for other users in the group to accept the quest. After the quest starts, the number of completed personal tasks for each user is added at the end of each day. This activity is then converted into progress in completing the quest. For a translator, this means that one quest will be divided into several strings in the CAT tool while only some parts are provided on the website when buying and when completing the quest. There are the names of the quests in the store, and the same strings with the names of the quests will also be displayed when the quest starts. Another group of strings will appear during the quest and then after the quest is completed. Not all strings that appear after quest completion are in the same group of quest strings in the CAT tool. Reward strings can be found in different groups of strings, the equipment name can be found in a group of strings with items and experience, and gold can be found in a string group with a different name. If the given equipment is in the reward list, it can also be mentioned directly in the quest text. This means that it is necessary to check whether the translation of given equipment is the same across different groups of strings, either by searching in the CAT tool or by subsequent testing on the website. Testing will only take place after the website has been updated, which can take several days or even weeks.

## **2 *Habitica* – localization and used software**

In the pre-translation analysis, information about the website was gathered, including what it contains, how its video game mechanism works, and where help and information can be found about possible localization and translation. Based on personal experience, the monitoring method, and responses from moderators on the forum, it was found that localization to other languages already existed and that translations were being actively (or inactively, depending on the specific language) worked on by

volunteers. Localization to Slovak exists, but, even if it did not exist, it would be possible to apply for it in the Commonwealth of i18n, which on the forum of the website is presented as the official guild for linguists. Additional information is available in this guild to help the localizer translate, such as where to translate (Weblate translation software), how to translate (a translation style guide), where to ask questions (a website forum, GitHub), and what translation reward (a game reward in the form of a badge and gems) they receive.

Developers localize the website and make content available to volunteers for translation using Weblate translation software. This is free and open-source software under the GNU General Public License, which means that the software can be freely distributed and modified but remains protected by copyright. For the localizer, this means that they can use it to translate without a fee and only need to register. Translation and quality control are provided by the community. For larger languages such as German (as well as Czech), it is more likely to find an editor within the community than for smaller languages, where volunteers work sporadically. The software itself contains many functions that other translation software also possesses. It is possible to download a text for translation in various formats, translate it directly in the software, create a glossary, and find translations of similar strings. The content of the website is divided into thematic groups in the software. These thematic groups can be searched on the website based on the strings they contain. In doing so, it is necessary to have at least some programming knowledge in order for the localizer to be able to decipher the names of the thematic groups.

### **3 An analysis of quests in terms of content**

The goal of quests is to captivate, create an experience, keep the user's attention, and teach them something in a playful way. The quests selected in the research sample are divided into several groups. The first group comprises quest series, mostly three scrolls per group, which are further divided into series that unlock when the game starts and when a higher level is reached. These quests have a storyline that is specialized in gamifying real tasks in the game world; the player combats materialized stress, bad habits, and household chores, which are presented as monsters. In addition to gold and experience, rewards include another quest in the series, regular eggs, "hatching potions," and pieces of equipment. The other two groups of quests are aimed at obtaining special hatching potions and animal eggs. These quests consist of one scroll, and the player usually combats an angry animal, which they defeat and then loot eggs or hatching

potions. The following table shows the string division and several specifics, such as quest names, fights with angry animals, the start and the end of the quest, rewards, HTML formatting, and the names of the users who participated in the quest creation, who are tagged with the @ sign.

The Fowl Frost	Operený mráz
Although it's a hot summer day in the southernmost tip of Habitica, an unnatural chill has fallen upon Lively Lake. Strong, frigid winds rush around as the shore begins to freeze over. Ice spikes jut up from the ground, pushing grass and dirt away. @Melynnrose and @Breadstrings run up to you.   “Help!” says @Melynnrose. “We brought a giant penguin in to freeze the lake so we could all go ice skating, but we ran out of fish to feed him!”   “He got angry and is using his freeze breath on everything he sees!” says @Breadstrings. “Please, you have to subdue him before all of us are covered in ice!” Looks like you need this penguin to... <em>cool down.</em>	Na Svieže jazero padol neprirodený chlad, hoci na najjužnejšom konci Habitici bol horúci letný deň. Pobrežie začalo zamrzáť pod silným ľadovým vetrom. Ľadové ostne vyrastajú zo zeme a prerážajú trávnu. @Melynnrose a @Breadstrings bežia za tebou.   „Pomoc!“ prosí @Melynnrose, „priviedli sme sem obrieho tučniaka, aby zmrazil jazero a mohli sme sa korčuľovať, ale minuli sa nám ryby, s ktorými sme ho krmili.“   „Nahneval sa a teraz fúka svoj mrazivý dych na všetko, čo vidí,“ povie @Breadstrings, „Prosím, musíš ho premôcť skôr, než nás všetkých zmrazí!“ Vyzerá to, že tento tučniak potrebuje... <em>schladiť.</em>
Upon the penguin's defeat, the ice melts away. The giant penguin settles down in the sunshine, slurping up an extra bucket of fish you found. He skates off across the lake, blowing gently downwards to create smooth, sparkling ice. What an odd bird! “It appears he left behind a few eggs, as well,” says @Painter de Cluster.   @Rattify laughs. “Maybe these penguins will be a little more... chill?”	Ľad sa po tučnikovej porážke rozmrazí. Obrí tučniak sa usadí na slnku a zje dodatočné vedro rýb, ktoré si preňho našiel. Potom sa preklže po jazere, pričom jemne pod seba fúka, aby vytvoril hladkú vrstvu trblietavého ľadu. Aký zvláštny vták! „Vyzerá to, že za sebou nechal aj zopár vajíčok,“ hovorí @Painter de Cluster.   @Rattify sa zasmieje, „Možno tieto tučniaky majú o niečo... chladnejší úsudok?“
Frost Penguin	Mrazivý tučniak
Penguin (Egg)	Tučniak (vajíčko)
Unlocks Penguin Eggs for purchase in the Market	Odomkne vajíčka tučniakov na predaj na trhu

These quests are an artistic text with specific puns and other artistic devices. These are assignments of tasks or short story texts that occur in RPGs. The first text contains information intended to introduce the issue, and the other text aims to reflect how the struggle has turned out, with these texts being segmented through strings with scroll names, quests, and monsters.

### 3.1 Names, video game elements, and gamification

*Habitica* covers both the name of the website and the name of the game world. There is also the eponymous Mt. Habitica, which is a notable topographical feature. The biggest problem in translation was the preferred non-inflection of this name, which sounds unnatural in Slovak. While this problem can be addressed in other parts of the website by inflecting the noun “website” before “Habitica,” the texts in the story have the frequent use of “the land of Habitica,” which sounds intrusive; therefore, this rule was violated with permission. Other names are often associated with something that is related to the game world, to real-world tasks, or to both of these.

The “Vice the Shadow Wyrm” quest is a typical example of what can be expected, and, together with the other series of quests in the Unlockable Quests section, it is an example of gamification in practice. The direct addressing of individual users and whole groups in the second person singular and plural and in the present tense are typical specifics. The first part of the quest invites the user to defeat the Shadow Wyrm, which is a personified bad habit or vice, and informs the user of ways to defeat it. Here there is an interconnection between the game and the real world. There is a reference to game rules, which state that by completing the tasks entered in the to-do list on the website, the monsters will receive damage inflicted by the users, or that a certain number of essential items can be collected for the completion of the quest.

<p>&lt;p&gt;They say there lies a terrible evil in the caverns of Mt. Habitica. A monster whose presence twists the wills of the strong heroes of the land, turning them towards bad habits and laziness! The beast is a grand dragon of immense power and comprised of the shadows themselves: Vice, the treacherous Shadow Wyrm. Brave Habiteers, stand up and defeat this foul beast once and for all, but only if you believe you can stand against its immense power.&lt;/p&gt;</p> <p>&lt;h3&gt;Vice Part 1: &lt;/h3&gt;</p> <p>&lt;p&gt;How can you expect to fight the beast if it already has control over you? Don't fall victim to laziness and vice! Work hard to fight against the dragon's dark influence and dispel his hold on you!&lt;/p&gt;</p>	<p>&lt;p&gt;Vraví sa, že v jaskyniach na vrchu Habitica sa nachádza strašné zlo – príšera, ktorá si podmaňuje vôľu tých najsilnejších hrdinov v kraji a obracia ich k zlovykom a lenivosti! Je to veľká dračica s obrovskou silou, ktorá má podobu samotného tieňa: temná dračica Nerest'. Odvážny Habitier, postav sa tejto zlovestnej príšere a poraz ju raz a navždy, ale len ak veríš, že to dokážeš.&lt;/p&gt;</p> <p>&lt;h3&gt;Nerest', 1. časť: &lt;/h3&gt;</p> <p>&lt;p&gt;Ako máš bojovať proti príšere, ktorá ťa ovláda? Vyvaruj sa lenivosti a zlovykom! Poctivo pracuj, aby si odolal temnému dračiemu vplyvu a dostal sa spod jeho kúzla.&lt;/p&gt;</p>
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When translating the name of the quest, the grammatical gender of the dragon was considered, as was the noun *nerest'*, which is a literal translation of “vice.” This is



knowingly personifying a bad habit. As is known with another series of quests (Recidivate Rising), Recidivate the Necromancer will be magically connected to the dragon. According to the way the dragon speaks, the name Nerestí was thus chosen.

Vice's Shade	Tieň Neresti
With Vice's influence over you dispelled, you feel a surge of strength you didn't know you had return to you. Congratulations! But a more frightening foe awaits...	Keď sa kúzlo nad tebou zlomí, vráti sa ti sila, o ktorej si ani netušil, že si ju mal. Gratulujeme! Avšak teraz ťa čaká ešte hrozivejší nepriateľ...
Vice Part 2 (Scroll)	Nerestí, 2. časť (zvitok)

Other strings include the name of the monster, the text that is shown when the dragon is defeated, and a scroll with the next part of the quest, which is one reward for completing the first part of the quest. In these strings, the formatting in HTML code is also present. This needs to be kept when translating so that the website shows everything as it does in the original. The vocabulary connects the game world with the real one: “dragon's influence,” “twists the wills,” “turning toward bad habits and laziness,” don't fall victim to laziness and vice,” “work hard,” and “dispel his hold.” In various quests, various themes, such as magic, fashion, and law, are encountered. Bad habits with specific undesirable properties, household chores, and the like are combated.

The Recidivate Rising quest is a free continuation of the previous series of quests, where *Habitica* points out the repeatability of bad habits. Throughout the quest, there are references to fashion and necromancy (magic in which dead beings are revived). There was an attempt to preserve the double meaning of the word “fashion,” which in context means “remaking.”

Recidivate, Part 1: The Moonstone Chain	Recidiva, 1. časť: Retiazka z mesačného kameňa
A terrible affliction has struck Habiticans. Bad Habits thought long-dead are rising back up with a vengeance. Dishes lie unwashed, textbooks linger unread, and procrastination runs rampant!   You track some of your own returning Bad Habits to the Swamps of Stagnation and discover the culprit: the ghostly Necromancer, Recidivate. You rush in, weapons swinging, but they slide through her specter uselessly.   “Don't bother,” she hisses with a dry rasp. “Without a chain of moonstones, nothing can harm me — and master jeweler @aurakami scattered all the moonstones across Habitica long ago!” Panting, you retreat... but you know what you must do.	Habitičanov postihla strašná nákaza. Zlé návyky, o ktorých sme si mysleli, že sú dávno mŕtve, sa znovu prebúdzajú k životu, aby sa pomstili. Riady ležia neumyté, knihy sa potulujú neprečítané a prokrastinácia behá ako šialená!   Vystopuješ niektoré zo svojich vlastných zlozvykov až do Močiara stagnácie a nájdeš vinníka: ducha nekromancerky Recidivy. Vrhneš sa na ňu mávajúc zbraňami, no tie cez ňu neškodne prejdú.   „Neunúvaj sa,“ nepříjemne zasípí, „Bez retiazky z mesačného kameňa mi nič neublíži – a majster klenotník @aurakami už veľmi dávno porozhadzoval všetky mesačné kamene po celej Habitice!“ Zadýchane ustúpiš... vieš, čo musíš urobiť.

Moonstones	Mesačné kamene
At last, you manage to pull the final moonstone from the swampy sludge. It's time to go fashion your collection into a weapon that can finally defeat Recidivate!	Z močaristého bahna sa ti podarí vyloviť posledný mesačný kameň. Prišiel čas na módu, teda, prerobiť tvoju kolekciu kameňov na zbraň, ktorá konečne premôže Recidivu!

The English verb “recidivate” contains the word “diva,” which the present author wanted to preserve in combination with an ancient necromancer in the name of Recidiva. Next, the tunic gained from Baconsaur (Jean Chalard’s Noble Tunic) is a reward in the final part of the quest, but this has to be found in another group of strings in the CAT tool.

Your breath comes hard and sweat stings your eyes as the undead Wyrms collapse. The remains of Recidivate dissipate into a thin grey mist that clears quickly under the onslaught of a refreshing breeze, and you hear the distant, rallying cries of Habiticans defeating their Bad Habits for once and for all.   @Baconsaur the beast master swoops down on a gryphon. “I saw the end of your battle from the sky, and I was greatly moved. Please, take this enchanted tunic — your bravery speaks of a noble heart, and I believe you were meant to have it.”	Ťažko dýchaš a pot ťa štípe v očiach, keď nemŕtva dračica konečne padá k zemi. Pozostatky Recidivy sa rozplynú v riedkej šedej hmle, ktorá sa rýchlo vyparí v závane čerstvého vzduchu. V dialke začuješ ozvenu boja, v ktorom Habiticiania porážajú svoje zlé návyky raz a navždy.   Krotiteľ šeliem @Baconsaur zletí k tebe na gryfovi. „Videl som koniec tvojho boja z oblohy a hlboko ma to dojalo. Vezmi si, prosím, túto čarovnú tuniku. Tvoja odvaha svedčí o šľachetnom srdci a ja verím, že bola stvorená práve pre teba.“
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In the quest, the user is addressed in the second person singular. The present tense is used, indicating that the action takes place in the moment when the user is presented the text. The present tense in the texts of the RPG genre serves to bring the player into the storyline and make them feel that the story will develop based on the choices made by them, thereby stimulating the interactivity of the player with the game world (Bernal-Merino 2015).

The last series of quests within the research sample is Attack of the Mundane. This series is humorous and includes three quests. In the first quest, the task is to wash the dishes; the second quest sees a new version of the mythical Loch Ness monster, which was created from food leftovers and waste; and the last quest sees the user combat a wizard who hates washing and the sight of clean clothes.

Attack of the Mundane	Útok monotónnosti
Attack of the Mundane, Part 1: Dish Disaster!	Útok monotónnosti, 1. časť: Neporiadok z riadov!
You reach the shores of Washed-Up Lake for some well-earned relaxation... But the lake is polluted with unwashed dishes! How did this happen? Well, you simply cannot allow the lake to be in this state. There is only one thing you can do: clean the dishes and save your vacation spot! Better find some soap to clean up this mess. A lot of soap...	Dorazíš k brehom Umytého jazera, aby si si konečne oddýchol... Lenže jazero je znečistené neumytými riadmi! Ako sa to mohlo stať? Nuž, nemôžeš predsa dovoliť, aby jazero ostalo v tomto stave. Je len jedna vec, ktorú môžeš urobiť: umy všetky riady a zachráň svoje dovolenkové miesto! Najskôr by si mal nájsť mydlo na riad, ktoré ti pomôže s týmto neporiadkom. Veľa mydla...
Bars of Soap	Mydlo na riad
The SnackLess Monster (Scroll)	Nenažraná príšera (zvitok)
After some thorough scrubbing, all the dishes are stacked safely on the shore! You stand back and proudly survey your hard work.	Všetky riady si po dôkladnom poumývaní bezpečne porozkladal po pobreží! Ustúpiš o pár krokov a hrdo obdivuješ výsledky svojej námahy.

The text includes funny names such as Washed-Up Lake, the SnackLess Monster, the Laundromancer, and anti-laundry magic. A colloquial expressive style was used throughout the quest in the attempt to preserve the humorous style of the entire quest series. In some cases, such as with the translation of the Bars of Soap string, it was necessary to find out what illustrations accompany the quest so that the translation would not create associations with objects different to those shown in the quests. This section has the task of collecting bars of soap, and the given string will be displayed under the image of a bar of blue soap. For this reason, *mydlo* (soap) was chosen instead of *jar* (a Slovak word for dishwashing liquid based on the name of a particular brand), which would more likely be used to wash dishes.

### 3.2 Features specific to the localization of the *Habitica* website

The *Habitica* website offers users the possibility of assistance associated with its development. Nearly every month, new content comes out in the form of new gear, a quest, or an event with associated rewards and challenges. As with translation, the community is involved in this content. In the translated text, this is shown in written names such as @aurakami, @InspectorCaracal, @Baconsair, and others. These are the usernames of the people who helped with the creation of the quests. Their names were tagged using the @ sign as they would appear in a group chat if one wanted to address one of them. At the same time, their names were not inflected so that the system would recognize them. It can be concluded that the website is being worked on by a collective of authors.

As already mentioned, the text contains formatting in the form of HTML code (e.g., `<p>...</p>` and `<h3>...</h3>`) that are shown on the website in the form of a paragraph separation, a larger font for the heading, italics, a bold font, and so on. If the code is not written correctly, the correct formatting will not appear on the website and the translation software will report that the string has an error. There was also an occasional problem of inflection, although this is not very common in the quests. In the Egg Hunt quest, there is a string that contains the phrase “Plain Eggs,” but during testing it turned out that this string did not indicate the reward but rather a part of the quest description under the full name “Collect: 40 Plain Eggs.” Here, it was necessary to inflect this string so that the whole phrase made sense: i.e., *Zozbieraj: 40 bezfarebných vajíčok*. The Plain Eggs string can be translated as *bezfarebných vajíčok* instead of *bezfarebné vajička*. This is a case of fragmentation and blind translation (Kabát 2019).

There were no spatial constraints when translating quests, but they are present when translating the menu, task headers, and other parts of the website. In these cases, it is necessary to use a word of the same length and of the same or similar meaning so that it does not break the constraints of the defined space even though some expressions would be more appropriate to translate using a description. Three columns on the main page state which tasks belong to which column. In the third column, titled Tasks, there are three more filters: active, scheduled, and finished tasks. “Scheduled” stands for the tasks that are put in the calendar on the website. Finally, it is necessary to wait for the website update and check if the translated text matches the context of other texts and elements of the website.

## Conclusion

This article highlights how the localization and translation of the *Habitica* website takes place. This website has its own specifics, which were examined in separate parts of the work. The research sample was subject to the following localization specifics: fragmentation, blind translation, spatial constraints, testing, and updates. The website examined contains game elements and a system was presented in more detail, focusing on quests as one of the essential components of the game system alongside their characteristics, role, functioning, and their translatability. The *Habitica* website is an imaginary intermediate point between the fun and the useful and between a simple website and a game.

Although the scope of the article did not allow for an expansion of the research sample, the *Habitica* website has potential and contains other elements that can be analyzed or

Daňová, Nikol. 2022. The Localization and Translation of *Habitica* In: L10N Journal. 1(2), pp. 41–52.

compared with other websites or games. The research offers an insight into localization problems and the translation of websites with gamification elements. It is hoped that it will serve as a stepping stone for novice translators or translators who have no experience with website localization.

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## Gameography

Habitica. 2013. USA: HabitRPG, Inc.

# An Interview about Community Localization in Slovakia

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This interview was originally conducted in order to have a closer look at the situation in Slovakia regarding community localization – fan translation of video games – in a bachelor’s thesis in the spring of 2022. It was conducted by Milan Velecký, a student of the Translation Studies program at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava. The respondent was Mário Csaplár, who is also known under the nickname “MixerX” on the [www.lokalizacie.sk](http://www.lokalizacie.sk) website and who has dedicated many years to community localization. His community localization of the Grand Theft Auto III video game by Rockstar Games was the subject of research.

How did you get into the localization of computer games?

I was playing a video game, specifically Grand Theft Auto III, and I was wondering if I could play it in a language that I completely understood. At that time, I didn’t know there was something like the localization of video games, so I googled to see if GTA could be played in another language. A Czech fan translation came up, so I tried it out. I didn’t like the fact that it was a Czech localization without diacritics. It was flawed; for instance, female characters spoke using the masculine gender and vice versa. It had errors resulting from inadequate testing, apparently with no proofreading. When I was looking for a better version, I found a Slovak localization. That was back in 2005 or 2006. I tried it out and discovered that it was a literal translation of the same Czech localization. I was outraged as it was quite lousy too. For example, the Czech version had this sentence: “*Čau, kotě!*”<sup>1</sup>. The Slovak version had this one: “*Čau, koťa!*” And yet

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<sup>1</sup> i.e., “Hey, baby!” in English

Velecký, Milan. 2022. Interview about community localization in Slovakia. In: L10N Journal. 1(2), p. 53–58.

the word “koťa” does not even exist in Slovak. Back then, the existence of such an activity caught my attention, and I thought that it could be done better and must be done better – with diacritics and in such way that would make sense. I also became interested in technical aspects, i.e., how could I add those diacritics there.

Did you study anything about translation theory or localization at the time?

Not at the time. When I completed my localization, I searched for a place where I could publish it. I found many online portals with unofficial video game localizations, where there was some kind of trend that “kids” who wanted to improve their language skills could work on these community localizations; for example, on the [www.slovinciny.com](http://www.slovinciny.com) website the age range of community localizers<sup>2</sup> ranged from fourteen to nineteen years around 2005. That was the situation, and so the translations reflected that. Over time, however, I became profoundly interested in the topic because I saw that what was being published on these websites at the time had the same drawbacks as the faulty fan translations that had prompted me to localize GTA III in the first place – they had a lot of semantic or grammatical errors. It was back then that I started to show that while fan translation is work that is done in one’s free time and in an amateur environment, it is still up to the author how much effort they put into it and what level of quality they want to achieve. I personally believe that a person can get to a certain level just by practice and carefully thinking about what they are doing, and having someone showing them the mistakes. As for a manual on how to do it, we have a core one. Then we also have term bases for each project, and we try to work systematically. It’s certainly on a higher level than before.

When you talk about “we”, who do you mean?

I speak for the entire team of the [www.lokalizacie.sk](http://www.lokalizacie.sk) website. There are currently about fifteen active members, and we now coordinate on project management and fulfillment.

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<sup>2</sup> i.e., a person who localizes software

Back when you started, was this job done only by community localizers such as yourself?

There were also professional game localizations, but they were often on the same level as the community localizations – they were improviseded. A Košice-based company named Kon Tiki released about twenty Slovak game localizations, and they even did the dubbing, but it was really on the same level as those amateur translations that I did not like. There were all sorts of mistakes. But this company did it officially. They had a license to make an official Slovak translation, and after that they exclusively distributed these video games in Slovakia.

How do video game publishers react to your activities? Have you ever contacted them directly?

Many just add the language to the game in some following update; others praise it by saying something like: “Alright, you can do it.” Nowadays some publishers even have signed contracts with these community localizers, I know that has happened in the Czech Republic. We cannot say that the publishers would try to stop us, but there have been cases where the company has spoken out against fan translation. They were not bothered by any other game modifications; it was literally only the translation that they prohibited. In this case, it’s tough luck for the localizer, they have to pull down their work. Fortunately, no one has ever contacted me with such a problem. There have also been attempts from our side to contact the publisher, but this usually ends up with the publisher telling us to publish it but that we should not expect any support from them. We have tried to ask several publishers for their support, at least in the form of some tool so that we would not have to produce localization tools ourselves, but they did not oblige. It’s an extra job for them. If someone can do it on their own, then they agree; but if they need to invest some extra time in it, the publishers would rather not do it. Most of the time, they just let us work.

Do you also have feedback from players?

Yes, it is quite frequent. It is desirable actually because the players are the consumers. And since this is not a revenue-producing activity, it is the recognition from the players which motivates the community localizers in their work. Most of the time, it’s something like: “Thank you very much. Thanks to you, I could fully understand the game and enjoy it.” Every time we get a message like that, I forward it to my colleagues in the team



and we're all very happy. I also try to ask the players if they could let us know how they like it. Any feedback is useful to us. Players also often contact us directly with a request of what to translate. But it doesn't always work that way, because for me to be motivated and to find time to localize a game, I need to enjoy the game too. If we receive many requests for a particular game, then it is noted and considered, but mostly we decide according to what we enjoy anyway.

Have you thought about becoming a professional localizer and making a living out of it?

That is not the goal of our group right now. It's not realistic for us to be doing this for a living. I have a job in the IT industry, so I don't think translating could earn me as much as what I'm doing now. We have people from many industries on the team: we have a chemist, a middle manager, and even a professional translator, who currently proof-reads for us. We also have a hotel manager. This is a wide range of people with their own careers who have a certain life, and this is basically just a hobby. But we do it professionally, at least from the perspective of project management and our own approach.

What other factors influence the choice of projects you localize?

First, it's the capacity we have as a team. However, it is very limited, so we must always think carefully if it's reasonable to go for it. We need to coordinate with the Czech localizers to see if by any chance they want to do it too. We cooperate with them because a duplicate project in such an environment makes no sense at all. We can have the ambition to translate anything, but primarily we have capacity limitations.

How challenging is the work of a community localizer from a technical perspective?

This is what discourages many from doing it in the first place. Back then it was necessary to look for various editing software: a different one for each game, and sometimes a game would require multiple ones. The localizer had to know what to open and how, and where to put what. When it comes to diacritics, Slovak diacritical signs were written into the game using other special characters, which the localizer often did not even have on their keyboard, so the whole thing was quite complicated. I have always been interested in this technical side. And since I saw that other colleagues had problems with it, I gradually invented various tools. It began with creating our own localization

tools, and today we're at a point where our localizers only work with Google Sheets. And that's it. All the projects we have are in Google Sheets – a separate one for each project. I prepare each game like this: a matching identifier so that I can pair the texts back into the game in the first column, then the column with the original language, and then the column (or columns) with translations. We then color cells after proofreading in green. Additionally, it's sorted by whether it's a text from a dialogue or a menu. I'm mostly doing the technical part today. This technical activity usually differs depending on the engine in which the game is programmed. Sometimes a problem might pop up, like in the sorting of the texts. The texts of the games that ran on Unreal Engine 4 were sorted in English alphabetically, without any key. That's a great obstacle for the localizer because they don't know the context and have no idea what means what. But even there, I managed to create a program that could sort the texts according to the background of the video, e.g., from a recording of the game on YouTube.

Do you think there would be enough work for a game localizer in Slovakia?

Unfortunately, I do not think that one could live off this work in Slovakia.

Would Slovak players prefer Slovak localizations instead of the original or English version?

I think so, but it needs to be achieved gradually, slowly, and patiently. Once Slovaks have the mindset, they want to play video games in Slovak and they want to consume audiovisual and multimedia software in Slovak too – and by that, I mean movies, books, and TV shows. At least with Slovak subtitles. If Slovaks could manage to raise this consciousness so that they would like something like this, then there would be more pressure and a larger demand for video game localizations in Slovak. More people would join our team, and we would translate more video games. People would have more opportunities to play video games in Slovak, and they would get more used to it. It's all very connected; people can't play in Slovak because Slovak localizations are unavailable, so they get used to playing in English or Czech. It then becomes a habit that is hard to get rid of. But if they had the opportunity to choose Slovak in each game, and if they have a good experience with Slovak localizations that are not disruptive, are contextually good, and fit well into the game, then they would desire to play more video games in Slovak. What we can see today is that many Slovak players prefer Czech localization

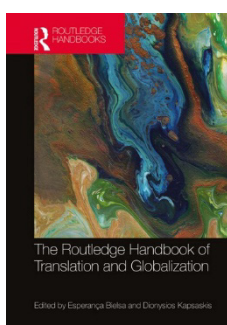
Velecký, Milan. 2022. Interview about community localization in Slovakia. In: L10N Journal. 1(2), p. 53–58.

over Slovak localization because of their own experience. That's why we are trying to show them what we do. We upload it to YouTube, and we want to show them that our localizations are good. Some players still wait for the Czech localization to come out either way, even if the Slovak version comes out earlier. Just out of habit.

The present author agrees with the respondent. At the end of the interview, we both saw that the situation in Slovakia concerning the localizations of video games was unsatisfactory and that both supply and demand were too small. At the same time, the solution to this situation may be to raise awareness about the existence of good Slovak community localizations. This was confirmed in the abovementioned thesis. The thesis included statistics which showed that Slovaks play video games no less often than Czechs or Poles, who often have their own language localization available on an official level. The only difference is the market size, which is much smaller in Slovakia than in the Czech Republic and Poland. A straightforward way to reverse the trend of not offering official localizations in Slovak is to increase the demand for Slovak localizations; however, this is a task for the community and players in discovering good Slovak localizations and demanding more of them.

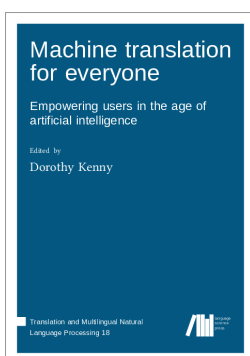
## Final variable

The second issue of the *L10N Journal* brings stimulating contributions from the area of localization. It also has the ambition to regularly inform about current publications in localization studies and in interdisciplinary overlaps which deserve special attention. The Final Variable section will be a space for highlighting selected publications and for short reviews.



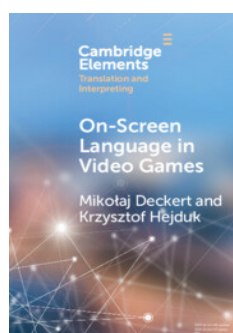
One of the latest generally conceived publications on translation and localization is *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Globalization* (2020). It features a chapter on localization by Miguel A. Jiménez-Crespo. The chapter focuses on the connectivity of localization with globalization, it puts localization into context, and it analyzes its perception within the GILT process, internationalization, glocalization, and reverse localization.

<http://doi.org/10.4324/9781003121848-31>



One valuable publication in the field of machine translation is the edited volume *Machine Translation for Everyone: Empowering Users in the Age of Artificial Intelligence* (2022), which was compiled by Dorothy Kenny. Over nine chapters, the authors analyze machine translation in comparison with human translation, the ethics of machine translation, and the importance of machine translation in language learning.

<https://langsci-press.org/catalog/book/342>



*On-screen Language in Video Games* (2022) by Mikołaj Deckert and Krzysztof Hejduk takes readers to the world of video games. Over nine chapters, the authors take a look at the “language on screen” present in video games, its various understanding by players using examples of selected video games, and the challenges it poses for localization.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009042321>



*About Games and People* (2022) is written by a team of authors and presents interviews by the editors of *Level* (a gaming magazine) with thirty-seven game developers from around the world. The publication is a probe into the world of game development and has a collection of interviews offering a comprehensive overview of thinking about video game creation.

<https://www.xzone.sk/kniha-level-o-hrach-a-lidech>

