Journal

Translation in Software, Software in Translation

The authors of individual articles are responsible for translating quotes from foreign languages.

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Contents

Introduction

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As the gaming industry continues to burgeon, game localization has emerged as a key element to its global success. Localization is increasingly recognized worldwide, and it is no longer a rarity to talk about video games in relation to translation. Publications on games from various approaches arise regularly, focusing on topics such as best practices, challenges, innovations in the field, and case studies centered on specific languages and territories. We are starting to learn how Chinese, Slovak or Basque players play video games and the challenges game localization to these languages encompasses: sometimes it involves using English as a pivot language.

In our special issue, focused on new insights into game localization, we look at various topics of game localization across the world. In the first article, Dody Chen talks about the visibility of Chinese game localizers on Gcores, a highly influential Chinese website that distributes news on video games and other media, and discusses the impact of such presence on the status of game localizers and localization per se. Katarína Bodišová and Milan Velecký shed light on the practice of indirect translation, exploring Japanese video games and their presence in the Slovak market. Focusing on the example of *Final Fantasy XVI*, they discuss the potential of pivot translation for Slovak gamers.

Besides the aforementioned articles, we also present the translation of Itziar Zorrakin-Goikoetxea and Maitane Junguitu Dronda's *Descriptive analysis of Basque video games from the perspective of localization*, which thoroughly examines Basque video games, their origins, localization, and the current situation in the Basque Country. In the *Interviews* section, we include the transcript of a research podcast discussing localization from English to French by Matilda Lailey, who interviewed five participants: one localizer working between English and French, two localizers working from Japanese to French, one researcher specializing in translating neologisms from English to French, and one researcher/localizer working between Japanese, Spanish, and English to clarify the "behind the scenes" processes of video game development. The issue closes with *Final Variable*, a section recommending recent publications related to video game localization.

The visibility of Chinese game localizers on Gcores: Personal branding, networking, business collaboration, and game distribution

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Abstract

The study aims to shed light on the content-sharing activities of Chinese game localizers on Gcores (机核), a Chinese game medium. Two main research questions are discussed. First, what are the characteristics of online content sharing by game localizers about game localization? Second, what implications can these sharing activities bring to the theories of the visibility of translators? On the one hand, through netnography and practice-led research, the researcher, as a content creator on Gcores, introduces the process and features of online content sharing. On the other hand, through content and discourse analysis of the shared information, as well as the comments posted by the online audience, the implications of sharing are further investigated, including personal branding, networking, business collaboration, and game distribution. The findings shed light on the interconnection between game localization, the visibility of translators, the game community, and media communication.

Keywords: Game localization, Chinese game localizers, translator's visibility, social media, Gcores

1 Introduction

In contemporary online society, an individual's presence in the virtual world seems boundless, exceeding the limitations of times and locations (Biocca & Levy 2013). Social media serves as a conduit for facilitating digital sharing and communication, enabling the dissemination of diverse expressions, information, ideas, and interests in multiple online domains (Kietzmann et al. 2011). In social media, conversations are established among members, and communities further replace audiences (Novelo et al. 2022, 20).

Culture is a complicated network of meanings (Geertz 2003). Video games are cultural artifacts, necessitating the recognition of a comprehensive framework that extends beyond the gameplay experience and encompasses the broader context of players' interactions with many stakeholders (Mäyrä 2008). Gamer culture pertains to the

occurrences within video games and their associated phenomena (Novelo et al. 2022). The opinions of game players, game streamers or commentators on social media have hugely influenced the decision-making of game developers or publishers regarding their strategic approach to game localization (O'Hagan 2022, 448). Besides, the active participation of fans, either in localizing the in-game content (e.g., O'Hagan 2017) or in disseminating, localizing, and interpreting information about video games or other related topics on social media (e.g., Chen 2024a), can significantly influence the connectivity among fandom members, or the correlation between fandom and game officials.

As the practice unfolds, there is a growing visibility of the works, roles, or personal identities of Chinese game localizers on Chinese social media such as Sina Weibo 新浪微博, Bilibili 哔哩哔哩, or Gcores 机核. It has been frequently observed that game localizers tend to express, share, and disseminate information about game localization on these media. These game localizers may be in-house workers affiliated with a game company or freelance professionals. Some align their media sharing with their respective organizations and strategically time the release of content to coincide with the game's releases or updates. Others announce that their online sharing is unrelated to the stance of a game practitioner, but it stems from a fan perspective. This statement may provoke controversy, since game localizers' unique positions, extensive experiences, and special insights will inevitably imbue their messages and distinguish the content they share from the content produced by average game fans. In some situations, even if a few game localizers refrain from directly disseminating their thoughts due to a multitude of factors such as work limitations or personal characteristics, their online activities such as forwarding or commenting can still be noticed by those devoted game enthusiasts through game localizers' unique avatars. In addition, some game localizers focus on game-related commercial collaboration or distribution rather than simply paying attention to knowledge sharing.

The game localizers' online sharing often catalyzes netizens to pay attention to the localization strategies used in the official game version. Thus, many people may discuss their respective understandings in the online comment section. Notably, some game localizers may have established a substantial group of fans through activities unrelated to localization sharing, such as game streaming or video making, so their sharing also evokes their fans' attention. This situation may further disseminate knowledge of game localization to a wider group, particularly when not all these fans are originally attracted by their localization skills. Intriguingly, game localizers' reputation, dedication, intelligence, and humor also serve as additional factors that attract more people to engage with their content sharing.

Currently, there is a dearth of research addressing the characteristics, objectives, and potential impacts associated with game localizers' sharing on Chinese social media. Although the sharing of game localization by the localizers can be theoretically linked

to the theories of (in)visibility of translators (e.g., Venuti 1986), it should be noted that the related debate on the (in)visibility of translators was probably proposed earlier than its systematic introduction. Historically, there are a large group of translators such as Dao'an, Saint Jerome, Saint Augustine, and Friedrich Schleiermacher, who exemplify the existence of the visibility of translators through their activities, involving a series of sophisticated contexts, strategies, stances, and stakeholders. Additionally, many scholars discuss translation strategies (e.g., Venuti 1993; Lane-Mercier 1997) such as foreignization versus domestication, which inherently involves the (in)visibility of translators.

In audiovisual translation, the visibility of translators/localizers has long been associated with the translation of subtitles or any other textual content. Tucao 吐槽 is a strategy widely used by (fan) translators to embed subjectivity in the translated works, which embeds the humorous comments in subtitles or as translators' notes (Wang & Zhang 2017; Lu & Lu 2021). The investigation of strategies like tucao implies an extension of research on the visibility of translators. Notably, such an academic trend that primarily focuses on the practices of translators/localizers embedded in the audiovisual products may potentially restrict the scholarly exploration into other valuable aspects, such as their online activities.

It is also significant to make explicit the reasons for the scarcity of research on game localizers' online sharing. First, online events (e.g., fansubbing groups, video sharing, live streaming, media fandom) and corresponding methodologies (e.g., netnography) have yet to establish a significant foothold in translation studies, although there are a few recent exceptional works, such as Huang (2020), Yu (2022), Karagöz (2022), Lu (2023), and Chen (2024a). Second, the decentralized structure of the game localizers' online sharing not only presents great challenges in selecting appropriate online research sites within the vast online domain but also requires proper language pairs with sufficient data. Third, to effectively introduce, elucidate, and interpret the intricate online interconnections, researchers should also develop a great familiarity with the selected online community. For instance, they should possess a thorough comprehension of the popular slang terms in the community and promptly identify the underlying causes behind online events or debates. The aforementioned criteria may lead some translation researchers to perceive that conducting research in an online translation-related community is unfamiliar and impractical.

In the Chinese digital era, game localizers' sharing on social media is both emerging and noteworthy. The convergence of online sharing activities and the characteristics of Web 2.0 poses a significant extension to existing theoretical frameworks. This article aims to introduce game localizers' online-sharing practices from an interdisciplinary perspective, thereby extending the theories of translation and game localization.

2 Literature review

The following sections introduce three theoretical foundations: game localization, the visibility of translators, and netnography in online communities, which are the fundamental theories of the research.

2.1 Game localization

Game localization emerged in the early 1980s, shortly after the birth of the game industry in the 1970s (O'Hagan & Ashworth 2002). The tasks of game localization include not only the translation of textual content into the target language but also the adaptation of non-textual elements to meet the cultural, technical, and legal requirements of the local market (Mangiron 2018; Zhang & Song 2023). Initially, game localization was a distinct and secondary process separate from game development tasks, often relegated to an "afterthought" (O'Hagan 2022, 444). Given the growing emphasis on globalization, internationalization, localization, and translation (GILT) (e.g., Mangiron 2012; O'Hagan 2022), the significance of localization and translation has been effectively addressed in managing time-sensitive product rollouts across various markets with different language targets (O'Hagan 2022, 444). Game localization has thus been increasingly recognized for its significance, with a comprehensive connection to game design, distribution, and community management (Dong & Mangiron 2018).

Currently, various models of game localization are employed worldwide, each of which is tailored to or limited by specific features such as talent availability, financial resources, and the release status of the game. The sim-ship model refers to the practice of simultaneously releasing multiple localized versions alongside the original game, aiming to maximize profit across all key regions (Bernal-Merino 2014). Notably, a few limitations such as the lack of awareness of localization, and the shortage of talent or budget may prevent many small-sized indie games from adopting the sim-ship model (Toftedahl et al. 2018), although they can enhance the variety during subsequent stages. To increase the return on investment (ROI), indie game developers or publishers may select a few key languages for localization in the initial stage, based on their product positioning and economic outcomes reduction (Toftedahl et al. 2018). English, specifically, US English, usually serves as the default pivot language for the indirect translation of video game products (O'Hagan 2022; Zhang & Song 2023).

The current game industry has witnessed notable transformations in the correlation between social media and game practitioners. An increasing number of game companies are placing greater emphasis on media engagement (Wawrowski & Otola 2020). Game developers are strongly encouraged to actively engage with online communities to foster strong connections with gamers, initiate co-creation, and boost distribution (Ruggles et al. 2005; Bernal-Merino 2016). Notably, as highlighted by Chen

(2024a, 10), "official [social media] releases" specifically pertain to content published by game companies on their official websites or authorized social media channels, which ensures a higher level of accuracy in correlation with the game updates. The fan releases, in contrast to the official ones, are sometimes embedded with fans' stances and interpretations (Chen 2024a). To a certain extent, the relationship between official and fan releases suggests that game companies should engage with the online community properly and strategically, thereby reinforcing essential communication with the fan base and fostering the creation of high-quality fan content. There is some research on video games and fan localization such as Sánchez (2009) and O'Hagan (2017), whereas limited research has been conducted within the scope of participatory fan translation practices except for Chen (2024a).

Traditionally, official game localizers, whether employed internally or outsourced, did not typically engage in targeted social media exposure and online promotions for their localization projects. The primary factor can be attributed to the lack of clarity among game officials concerning the interplay among game localizers, social media and the game community. Moreover, this can also be limited by non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) between game localizers and game companies, as well as the collaborative efforts of teamwork in localization.[1] Interestingly, in recent years, there has been an increase in social media activity conducted by Chinese game localizers. Additionally, some game companies, such as Blizzard and Riot, even incorporate localization updates or behind-the-scenes storytelling as a regular component of their official press releases. Therefore, researchers are encouraged to pay more attention to these practical breakthroughs.

2.2 Visibility of translators

The (in)visibility of translators is a historical topic in translation studies. As previously introduced, the practices of (in)visibility existed long before researchers concluded notions like "(in)visibility" or proposed the debate between the preservation of the source content and the alignment with the target culture (e.g., Nida 1964; Sechrest et al. 1972; Venuti 1993; Lane-Mercier 1997). A long time ago, activities aimed at disseminating values or cultures, such as the spread of Buddhist sutras or the distribution of the Bible, witnessed the emergence of numerous renowned translators, culturalists, social activists, and scholars. These related phenomena serve as significant indications of the prominence and influence of translators, which inevitably leads to a practice-based cognition of their substantial visibility.

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[1] By addressing "the collaborative efforts of teamwork in localization", the researcher wants to raise awareness on the debate of the owner of the shared content (e.g. the game company, the game localization group, or the game localizer), although this is not the main focus of the article.

In Venuti's (1986) landmark research, he delineates the visibility and invisibility of translators across various genres, encompassing the translator as a co-producer of the translated version, the translator's active involvement in the translation process, and translation as both a cultural practice and the outcome of an intricate procedure. The effectiveness of systematic introduction and clear categorization has enhanced the theories of (in)visibility to a level deemed acceptable not only by translators or researchers but also by the public, especially concerning the utilization of a series of coherent nomenclatures.

Crucially, it is imperative to critically acknowledge that the systemic conclusions of Venuti or other scholars who contributed to the foundational aspects of the (in)visibility theories can never comprehensively encompass the entirety of the (in)visibility phenomenon throughout history. Besides, their research cannot serve as the sole foundational starting point of the investigation on the visibility of translators. On the one hand, as highlighted previously, the activities of translators in history have embedded many enlightening hints of visibility. On the other hand, numerous parallel discussions in academia, such as those on translation strategies like foreignization versus domestication, also inevitably indicate or echo the content of the (in)visibility theories.

In recent years, an intricate, interdisciplinary study of the (in)visibility of translators/localizers has gradually appeared. The translation profession in Europe and North America is often perceived as subordinate to the writing profession (Simeoni 1998), which may be attributed to the growth and advancement of relevant industries. In contrast, the concept of "translator celebrity" remains relatively unfamiliar in some cultural contexts, such as Japan (e.g., Hadley & Akashi 2015), or China (e.g., Liu 2013; Li 2018). Some target readers or publishers in these contexts seem to focus more on the authors' contributions, thereby having less awareness of the significance of translators' efforts (Venuti 2017). Furthermore, as translators are often encouraged or inclined to adopt translation strategies focusing on fluency or domestication, the techniques they adopt have further contributed to their invisibility (Venuti 2017; Akashi, 2018).

In the last several decades, relevant theories of translators' (in)visibility have undergone significant advancements. Maier (2007) discusses the rights and obligations of translators and their prominence, suggesting that translators and translation scholars should not only advocate for these rights but also acknowledge and address conflicts inherent in translation practices. McLaughlin (2008) critically examines the dislocation in French and the voice of translators, elucidating how Venuti's theories are reworked to encompass new features. Federici (2011) expands the criticism of binary thinking and advocates for overcoming dichotomies in translation studies, extending the critique to the examination of the visibility of female translators. Liu (2013) elucidates the correlation between the visibility of Chinese translators and social variables, highlighting that visibility is rewarding in terms of social exchanges

and learning experiences. The study by Hadley and Akashi (2015) examines the translation strategies employed by Haruki Murakami, a well-known Japanese writer and translator, focusing on the implications of the visibility paradigm. Akashi (2018) also proposes an investigation into the influence of renowned Japanese celebrity translators and their impact. Freeth (2022) argues that the concept of visibility should encompass not only how translators and their work are presented to readers but also the sophisticated interplay among translator agencies, publishing requirements, and reader interests. The edited book by Freeth and Treviño (2024) further explicates the ambiguity of previous definitions of (in)visibility and provides empirical case studies related to social media, reception, institutional translation, and literary translation.

Although the theories appear extensively and encompass cross-field disciplines, the majority of them are grounded in the domain of literary translation, with limited consideration given to translation in the digital age. From the inception of cinema to the emergence of Web 2.0, there have been numerous innovative translation practices (Díaz-Cintas & Massidda 2019). The relationship between translators and the community, as well as the working modes or impact of translators, have become heated topics (e.g., Yu 2019; Lu 2023; Chen 2024a). Although some of the works do not explicitly articulate the correlation of each study with the (in)visibility theories, it is apparent that they extend the academic discussion on the (in)visibility of translators/localizers in the digital realm.

2.3 Netnography in online communities

A field is a social space, and it constitutes a microcosm that emerges within a broader society, characterized by its own set of regulations, norms, and hierarchical forms (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Online communities give rise to or embody cultural phenomena (Kozinets 2015). In the Internet era, a field is decentralized, combining many individuals and social groups with different backgrounds or stances (Belk & Kozinets 2017, 12).

Netnography is "a qualitative [anthropological] research approach for gaining cultural understanding that involves the systematic, immersive, and multimodal use of observations, digital traces, and/or elicitations" (Kozinets and Gretzel 2024, 1). Netnography is conducted on the Internet, involving participatory observation through online fieldwork and adherence to established field regulations (Kozinets 2015; Belk & Kozinets 2017). There exist four notable distinctions between conventional face-to-face ethnography and Internet-based netnography: alternation, anonymity, accessibility, and archiving (Kozinets 2010). Nethnography entails an immersive and prolonged engagement with social-community members, whose conductor should endeavor to discern and comprehend the culture through "thick, detailed, nuanced, historically-curious and culturally-grounded interpretation" (Kozinets 2010, 60).

Scholars have extensively examined netnography in translation studies. For instance, Lu and Lu (2022) investigate the relationship between researchers and participants and discuss the balance between subjectivity and objectivity. Huang et al. (2023) raise awareness of negotiating access to various fieldwork sites, obtaining participants' consent, managing data, and reflecting on researchers' positionality in relation to the community members. Li (2023) employs a combination of netnography and interviews in her investigation of crowdsourced translation and indicates the potential limitations of netnography. Chen (2024a) examines the efficacy and restrictions of netnography in catering to the specific game community that is influenced by the fandom hierarchy centered around fan localizers.

Netnographic methods in game localization studies require significant use of information from specialized websites, blogs, and internet forums (Mangiron 2017, 89). Researchers have creatively explored game localization under netnographic frameworks. To elaborate, Karagöz examines the indie game-localization Facebook group (Karagöz 2021) and fan-forum posts about war games (Karagöz 2022). Mangiron (2021a) studies SEGA's video game localization strategies and their reception. Afzali and Zahiri (2022) investigate Iranian game players' translation needs. Chen (2022) examines the localization strategies of *Overwatch* Chinese esports streaming. Additionally, Chen (2024a) researches fan-conducted localization practices on social media releases about *Overwatch* and its esports competitions. In short, netnography is progressively gaining significance in game localization studies.

3 Methodology

Based on the practical and theoretical foundation, two research questions are proposed. First, what are the characteristics of game localizers' online content sharing about game localization? Second, what implications can these sharing activities have for the theories of the visibility of translators? The following sections justify why Gcores is selected as the online research field. Furthermore, they outline the research methods used to collect specific types of data and explain how the data is connected to the research questions.

3.1 The research field: Gcores

Gcores 机核 is a comprehensive website for distributing information on video games, films, TV series, literature, science, etc.[2] It is described as "one of the most influential

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[2] For more information about Gcores, please see: https://www.gcores.com/

Chinese game media", listed by the Cultural Service of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Beijing in its Game Developer's Guide to the Chinese market.[3]

In recent years, Gcores has progressively expanded beyond social media to cover diverse associated domains such as podcasts, documentaries, and game memorabilia. Gadio (*jihe diantai* 机核电台) is the general title of Gore's podcast series, encompassing a wide range of content. G-Fusion (*hejubian* 核聚变) is the offline seasonal gathering of gamers and game practitioners, featuring game jams, game distribution talks, on-site demo play, and cosplay shows. Gcores Industries (*jikaosi gongye* 吉考斯工业) is the brand for the peripheral products series including clothing, footwear, and accessories produced by Gcores in collaboration with game companies. Gsense (*jishi* 即视) gathers a collection of interesting trailers or documentaries.

Given the diverse range of topics and themes on Gcores, it is pertinent to highlight Gcores' unique media-facilitated features that are particularly relevant to the content sharing conducted by game localizers.

First, registration for Gcores is publicly accessible, allowing any individual to obtain their unique Gcores ID. On the user's main page, *tougao* 投稿 "post and contribute" allows users to share several types of content, including news, videos, articles, game projects, and short comments. Specifically, in the *youxi xiangmu* 游戏项目 "game projects" section, game industry practitioners, such as art designers, narrative designers, social media managers, or localizers, can link their projects with their Gcores ID by providing evidence to Gcores editors. Once the application with evidence is approved, the Gcores users' homepages will display a section entitled *canyuzhizuo* 参与制作 "participating in the projects", clarifying the game projects and the users' contributions.

Furthermore, Gcores provides users with a dedicated text-editing facility, resembling an online streamlined word processing application. Before submitting content for review and publication – whether it is a video, a piece of news, or an article – users need to fill out forms at the end of the editing page regarding the keyword (*guanjianci* 关键), channel (*pindao* 频道), and theme section (*fenqu* 分区). Additionally, users need to clarify whether the content is original or not. Some of the shared content follows certain word templates pre-set in the Gcores text-editing system, such as the channel or theme templates, while other content can be customized by users, especially the keywords. Once the content is submitted, the manuscript undergoes a comprehensive evaluation by a third-party automated review software. Sometimes, a manual review by Gcores editors is required.[4]

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[3] For more information about Game Developer's Guide to the Chinese Market published by the Cultural Service of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Beijing, please see:
https://igp.org.pl/raporty/Raport_ChinskiRynekGier_2023_EN.pdf

[4] ARNwing (Gcores editor), Gcores direct message to author, 13 December 2023.

The recommendation section of Gcores encompasses a wide range of recommended posts from diverse contributors featuring exceptional content, which attempts to expose the content to a wide range of Gcores users.[5] As stated by Gcores officials, if the high-quality user-generated content has great potential for valuable discussion, aligned with current industry trends, ongoing events, or player concerns, it will be considered by editors for a recommendation.[6] On the other hand, similar to many contemporary websites, Gcores' web and mobile app facilitate the dissemination of content through links or notifications, which aims to reach a wide group of audiences who are interested in specific keywords or themes.

Last but not least, Gcores' online search and promotion techniques are undoubtedly promoting a shift in individuals' mindsets, encouraging them to transcend their original perspectives and explore more comprehensive and superior content. High-quality posts shared by game localizers on Gcores are usually displayed with a few keywords, such as *youxi bendihua* 游戏本地化 "game localization", *youxi fanyi* 游戏翻译 "game translation", *youxi lilun* 游戏理论 "game theory" or *youxi chanye* 游戏产业 "game industry".

The aforementioned Gcores' features reflect that the theories and practices of game localization are highly anticipated in the online community. Unfortunately, at this stage, the adoption of Gcores for content sharing among game localizers is still relatively limited due to factors such as localizers' schedules, work constraints, personalities, and their perceptions of using social media for content sharing. Notably, since the content sharing of game localizers on Gcores has established a certain scale in the Chinese context, what game localizers share and how they share on Gcores are worthy of academic investigation.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

As early as February 2022, the researcher started to distribute game localization theories through a series of videos and articles on Gcores, using a self-owned account named 'Dody_Desperado'.[7] Gradually, the researcher connected with some game localizers who use Gcores through interactions such as likes, comments, and research-irrelevant conversations. Notably, in the early stage of the researcher's Gcores engagement, the researcher was driven by an interest in exploring the online community rather than conducting related research.

Since June 2023, the researcher started to reacognize the significance of visibility theories, thereby consulting systematic references on related methodologies in

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[5] For more information about the Gcores content sharing and censorship regulations, please see the article posted by Gcores editors: https://www.gcores.com/articles/163391

[6] ARNwing (Gcores editor), Gcores direct message to author, 24 May 2024.

[7] For more information, please see: https://www.gcores.com/users/596864/talks

translation, game, and media studies. Then, to delve into the research topic, it became imperative to exclusively situate and select game localizers who publicly disclose their roles and identities as online-based sample providers in the public social media domain. Such public announcements of identity, roles, and tasks can be traced and regulated on social media, and thus, the data can be categorized as an open-access resource. Related methods have been widely adopted in media studies and celebrity studies (e.g., Akashi 2018; Fang et al. 2024).

According to the researcher's observation of content-sharing activities conducted by game localizers on Gcores, a total of 9 game localizers were selected for this project. The selection of these 9 individuals was conducted in the following manner: First, the researcher carefully observed the release of articles, podcasts, and videos on Gcores about game localization during a particular observation period. Second, the researcher employed Internet search methodologies to authenticate the professional backgrounds of the content sharers, aiming to distinguish practitioners from game enthusiasts.[8] Some of them registered their roles and projects on Gcores, with their bios indicating their tasks to the public. Even if a few did not actively disclose their responsibilities or roles regarding specific game localization projects, they could be easily identified as online transmedia celebrities due to their active presence on other platforms such as Bilibili or Sina Weibo, where they frequently disseminate thoughts on game localization. For those individuals, hints are usually given on their IDs, the shared content, as well as the users or topics they follow. Then, the researcher frequently updated the list of authenticated game localizers and followed their recent trends on Gcores. Lastly, since the final selection was more or less constrained by the researcher's insights into the project, this resulted in the number of individuals selected as sample providers being fewer than the number of eligible Gcores-based game localizers.[9]

Notably, the researcher is one of the sample providers. The inclusion of the researcher aligns with the framework of practice-led research, which emphasizes that the researcher, as the creator, can provide reflective and reflexive thoughts on the research topics (Smith & Dean 2009). Therefore, various influences, ideas, decisions, materials, technologies, events, and theories can serve as inspiration, information, constraints, or facilitators (Candy 2006). Related methodologies have been creatively adopted by translation researchers such as Lu and Lu (2022) and Chen (2024a).

In contrast, the other 8 game localizers exhibit distinctiveness in both their backgrounds and the content they share. On the one hand, the working modes they

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[8] The complexity of this verification process varies from person to person, which involves the check of the person's publicly accessible IP address or ID, and the analysis of the person's shared content released on different media.

[9] This statement elucidates that the researcher may opt for those people, whose shared content not only solely focuses on the game text translation but covers an in-depth reflection, particularly about the industry, or whose activities involve cross-platform collaboration.

adhere to and the localization projects they undertake are distinct, thereby showcasing notable diversity in comparison. On the other hand, most of them express their distinct perspectives on game localization, primarily focusing on text translation but also considering its broader implications for the industry.

Details of all sample providers' Gcores ID and Gcores homepage links are shown in Table 1, with each of the game localizers coded (referred to as 'S+Code' in later sections). Among them, S2 is the researcher.

Table 1 – *Game localizers observed on Gcores*

Code of Game Localizers	Gcores ID	Gcores Homepage Link
S1	410	https://www.gcores.com/users/52173/talks
S2	Dody_Desperado	https://www.gcores.com/users/596864/talks
S3	大食蚁兽吃大蚂蚁	https://www.gcores.com/users/589722/talks
S4	Lingomancy话术研	https://www.gcores.com/users/638475/talks
S5	谜之声	https://www.gcores.com/users/611966/talks
S6	轻语的R君	https://www.gcores.com/users/90578/talks
S7	潜入火炎地狱的间谍	https://www.gcores.com/users/523089/talks
S8	Soaper	https://www.gcores.com/users/88834/talks
S9	Wango_Abathur	https://www.gcores.com/users/382717/talks

In the next stage, the researcher conducted an extensive investigation into the content posted by these individuals on Gcores (e.g., videos, podcasts, and articles), using content analysis and discourse analysis. On the one hand, content analysis aims to derive reliable and valid inferences applicable to a specific context (Stemler 2000). On the other hand, the researcher paid special attention to the discourse of the shared content and the underlying motivations behind it, because discourse belongs to "social practice" (Gill 2000, 175), which is performed to achieve a certain purpose.

To elaborate, when one of the sample providers tried to reflect explicitly on how to translate a game line in an article, the researcher annotated the context in which this line appears in the game, the situation in which this version of the game is launched, the role of the content sharers, the overall online feedback on the game or the game localization, and any other significantly related data that can be obtained from the public resources. The purpose was to investigate whether game localizers discuss their work objectively, ensuring utmost accuracy in context restoration and placing it within a social environment. Notably, short comments posted by them were excluded from the

analysis due to their non-compliance with rigorous platform-based censorship and the randomness of the content.

Eventually, after each piece of the content underwent annotation, the researcher categorized them and analyzed their features, similarities, and differences. To this extent, the researcher consciously compiled some key points of the game localizers, such as their working mode (e.g., in-house or freelance), or the general shared content (e.g., game localization strategies). Furthermore, the researcher also devoted particular attention to certain unique details embedded in the shared content. For instance, a few game localizers were proven to reflect on the game localization work much later than the original release of the game version, and the researcher extrapolated possible causes based on game community trends and possible industrial regulations.[10]

Additionally, for questions about game localization strategies, issues, or the intentions of game localizers in sharing, the researcher attempted to use direct messages to contact relevant individuals through Gcores, WeChat, or email. The participants provided their consent to share their answers with the public for research purposes. Finally, a series of representative and relevant cases, concluded from the in-depth analysis of 49 articles and 6 episodes of podcasts, were used for an in-depth discussion to elaborate on the research questions.[11]

4 Findings

The following sections show the case analysis of game localizers' shared content, featuring what to share, how to share, and why to share. Moreover, it highlights that sharing is not only about knowledge dissemination but is also related to personal branding, networking, business collaboration, and game distribution.

4.1 An overview of game localizers as Gcores content creators

All 9 observed key game localizers share their content through publicly accessible accounts fully owned by themselves. A few of them, either as in-house workers or outsourced talents, explicitly announce that sharing is independent of their localization professions. Significantly, they appear to blur the boundary of their identities either as localization contributors or game enthusiasts. This is to say, while sharing content, they tend to both show deference to the game company and delineate localization practices

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[10] The attention to game trends and online feedback in data analysis for game localization works has been emphasized in Chen (2024a). For instance, netizens may redirect their emotions towards official content sharers during certain periods, even if these sharers are not responsible for the game's delayed release or updates. Such a situation may lead to changes in game localizers' sharing strategies.

[11] The content generated by the 9 game localizers on Gcores exceeds the content of the selected articles or podcasts for analysis in this project. Due to the great variability in the content of each article or podcast, it is not feasible to provide a specific quantification of cases in this context.

themselves. Furthermore, they tend to avoid mentioning certain sensitive aspects of their work, such as the precise communication between the game localizer and game developers or detailed teamwork processes. Presumably, this can be due to their engagement in individual online sharing, necessitating special attention to game-related policies, NDAs and associated benefits. In short, regarding the subject and content, the act of sharing usually aligns with personal dissemination, while the subsequent chapters further reveal a contentious aspect regarding this point.

Despite Gcores offering certain templates for content sharing, it is intriguing that each game localizer adopts a distinctive approach to crafting the unique design of their content-release format, writing structure, as well as shared themes. In terms of format and structure, most game localizers employ a casual writing style to articulate thoughts on game localization, in contrast to academic publications. Additionally, the absence of a predetermined release schedule renders the act of sharing more casual. Some game localizers adhere to the sharing a few days or weeks after the release of their game localization works, whereas others seem not to have established any predetermined intentions for a schedule.

The informality is also evident in the content. First, game localizers, as content sharers, may focus on their own localization projects or the works of others. Furthermore, they may sometimes produce a sophisticated discussion on localization, such as specific strategies and issues, using one or two cases, or briefly introduce the overall localization stages or thoughts. Additionally, a few game localizers may pay special attention to certain topics like linguistics, cultures, or contexts. For instance, one of the game-localization podcasts co-produced by Gcores editors and S5 specifically discusses the use of game slang terms in game localization.[12] In short, such random and diversified sharing activities indicate each piece of sharing can be attributed to game localizers' willingness to share, their stances, profits, or characteristics, as well as constraints like NDAs.

Last but not least, the utilization of a self-reflexive or informal style in the online public domain suggests the intention to enhance accessibility for a broader spectrum of audiences. Notably, there is a significant proportion of shared content that requires readers to obtain a basic underbanding of game localization before reading it. For instance, the omission of definitions or background introductions in a few articles may be attributed to the writers' assumption of readers' familiarity with certain topics. Therefore, reception studies are deemed necessary for further investigation.

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[12] For more information, please see the series of the Chinese podcast produced by Gcores editors and S5: https://www.gcores.com/radios/162482

4.2 Behind the content sharing: Complicated scopes

In particular, the reasons underlying interest-driven or interest-related activities are usually intricate and diverse. Akin to the act of watching game streaming, for instance, viewers may not always consciously maintain specific motivations, and some may remain oblivious to the stimuli that elicit their pleasure from viewing until further scholarly investigation (e.g., Cheung & Huang 2011).

Taking the case of the researcher as an example, in the initial stage, participation in Gcores was primarily to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the online game community, while subsequent activities fostered closer connections with game localizers and boosted social-media branding. This highlights the dynamic triggers of content sharing, wherein its cause and purpose may undergo subtle transformations across different temporal and spatial contexts, thereby reflecting the evolving mindsets of game localizers as content sharers.

The term "discourse" refers to the written or spoken exchange of ideas among individuals, particularly involving in-depth deliberation on a specific subject (Van Dijk 1997). The sharing of content on Gcores by game localizers can be considered as a sample of discourse between game localizers and netizens. Gill (2000, 175) assumes that people pursue diversified aims in their discourses, such as attributing responsibility, providing justifications, and strategically presenting themselves in a favorable light. Correspondingly, one suitable approach for eliciting the motivations of these game localizers is to analyze their discourses, especially at different stages. Significantly, although the primary expectation of sharing is usually acknowledged by the conductor to disseminating knowledge about game localization, below a few cases highlight specific objectives beyond this aim, encompassing a wide range of motivations such as personal branding, video game distribution, community management, and public-opinion redirection.

4.2.1 Platform-based business collaboration and content exposure

Some of the 9 game localizers are "Internet celebrities" who had established dedicated fan bases before their engagement in content sharing on Gcores. Particularly, S5 is a well-known Chinese game streamer, game localizer, and literature translator. S5, who has been consistently engaging in game streaming since 2015, has a subscriber base exceeding 435,000 on Bilibili, a popular Chinese game streaming and video-sharing platform.[13] One of the notable streaming features of S5 is that he likes to play English video games that are not localized in Chinese and produce Chinese versions of game texts using his speech. Owing to exceptional translation or interpretation skills,

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[13] For more information, please see the video sharing and game streaming channel: https://space.bilibili.com/673816

gameplay performance, and streaming interaction, S5 has earned a widespread reputation.

S5's Gcores ID, *mizhisheng* 谜之声 ("Sound of Mystery"), remains the same as his Bilibili streaming ID, which has enabled netizens to ascertain the identity of the account owner almost immediately. Since S5's introduction into Gcores in May 2022, he has released and co-produced six podcasts, which are officially commissioned and co-produced by Gcores editors and S5. Notably, five of the podcasts are categorized into a series entitled *mizhisheng liao bendihua* 谜之声聊本地化 ("Sound of Mystery's thoughts on game localization"), with each episode lasting 40 minutes to 1 hour.[14] The first episode of the game-localization series is freely accessible to all, while the subsequent 4 episodes are bundled together at a price at 40 Chinese RMB (approximately 5 EUR).

According to Gcores officials, S5 has established a strong industry reputation with lots of experience as a professional game localizer and a well-known game streamer, thereby demonstrating great potential to add ingenuity and professionalism to the Gcores collaborative podcasts.[15] As stated by S5, upon being informed about the potential collaboration with Gcores, he aimed to utilize a professional media platform to foster awareness of game localization within a broader community by sharing his experiences and stories.[16]

Additionally, as reflected in the comments of each podcast episode, it is evident that Gcores users' attitudes are twofold. On the one hand, many comments encompass Gcores users' feedback on podcast topics, such as game localization strategies or issues, echoing and extending what S5 highlights in the series. This aligns with O'Hagan (2009), who notes that the evident interest of the community in game localization is indicative of a prevailing phenomenon. On the other hand, some Gcores users express anticipation, excitement, and satisfaction regarding the collaboration between the renowned practitioner and Gcores. This reflects the translators' celebrity effect described by Hadley and Akashi (2015), Akashi (2018) and Chen (2024a), and it further integrates the theories with the online game community. According to S5, he has gained valuable insights from the communication prepared for the podcast production and obtained useful feedback in Gcores comments on game cases or localization strategies.[17]

Based on the S5 case, it is evident that inviting game localizers, especially those who have a large fandom, to participate in media events centered around video games can be mutually beneficial, resulting in increased public attention. Although this series was released under a paid model, potentially limiting its dissemination compared to freely accessible releases, it is a remarkable synergy between game media and industry

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[14] For more information, please see the podcast series: https://www.gcores.com/albums/182

[15] ARNwing (Gcores editor), Gcores direct message to author, 24 May 2024.

[16] S5, email to author, 24 May 2024.

[17] S5, email to author, 24 May 2024.

professionals that transcends mere commercial motives. Furthermore, in the digital era, diverse content-sharing activities that leverage multimodal channels (e.g. podcasts, videos, or live streaming) are frequently witnessed. These activities are widely accepted, cost-effective, and educational for individuals who seek to acquire knowledge on game localization practices and theories.

4.2.2 Personal branding and networking

Gcores provides users with the opportunity to customize their Gcores bios, a section limited to 120 Chinese characters. Among all observed game localizers, S8 has carefully crafted his bio to encourage those who are interested in establishing business collaboration with him to initiate a conversation directly through the Gcores messaging.[18] Additionally, based on observation of S8's online transmedia activities on Bilibili, he regularly organizes paid online training courses for those who have an interest in systematically learning game localization.

According to S8, from July 2022 to May 2024, he organized 10 seasons of game localization training. He offered two types of course bundles per season, including the general bundle and the simplified bundle. Each season of the training lasts approximately one month. The general course bundle contains 8-10 class hours, originally priced at 600 Chinese RMB (approximately 76 EUR), while the current price has increased to 900 Chinese RMB (approximately 114 EUR).[19]

For all trainees who purchase either the general bundle or the simplified bundle, S8 provides pre-recorded instructional videos and feedback sessions for homework. Notably, those trainees who purchase the general bundle are offered more interactive opportunities with S8 and other trainees. For instance, they can take part in interactive Q&A sessions through open-access live streaming via S8's Bilibili account called 'Soappp'.[20] Moreover, there is a group project at the end of each season, wherein three to four trainees assume the role of localizers, quality analysts, and project managers.[21]

Notably, S8 uploads recordings of some live-streaming sessions into extensive video collections accessible to all netizens on his Bilibili video-sharing channel. In addition, S8 establishes communication groups on Tencent QQ, a widely-used communication application in China, to facilitate course-related discussions and disseminate game-

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[18] S8 is the game localizer of *Demon's Souls Remake* (2020), *Returnal* (2021), *God of War Ragnarök* (2022), and *The Last of Us Part II Remastered* (2024).

[19] S8, WeChat message to author, 30 May 2024.

[20] For more information, please see S8's Bilibili channel: https://space.bilibili.com/5557573?spm_id_from=333.999.0.0

[21] S8, WeChat message to author, 1 June 2024.

related news, such as recruitment opportunities or game releases.[22] The groups often engage in intense discussions for three months following the start of the courses.[23]

These transmedia activities indicate S8's conscious efforts as a game localizer and trainer to enhance the dissemination of game localization and promote his training courses across various media. On the one hand, the transmedia activities foster the development of S8's brand-building and expand S8's influence and reputation. On the other hand, they encourage individuals interested in game localization to engage with the community. As stated by S8, the objectives of creating the training courses are threefold: first, to augment the income; second, to establish connections with professional game localizers; and third, to identify and assist like-minded individuals who have yet to venture into the game localization industry.[24]

In April 2023, the researcher (S2) attended an onsite networking event for Chinese game localizers who are based in or near Shanghai, China.[25] The event was organized by Angela (from Blizzard's Chinese localization team) and Danni (from TransPerfect).[26] The 2023 event was attended by over 50 game localizers, providing the researcher with an opportunity to meet several professional and well-known game localizers, such as S3, S5, S8, and S9. Networking offers numerous learning opportunities, which are compelling factors for game localizers to make progress (Zoraqi & Kafi 2024). Unfortunately, this significant social event in Shanghai has been conducted only three times so far (i.e., November 2019, April 2023, and April 2024). The reasons are likely associated with the interplay of industry interests, organizational vacancies, geographical location, and the localizers' schedules or personalities.

Significantly, the lack of connection between the public (e.g., gamers) and game localizers, or between game localizers and other game professionals, has resulted in an increased reliance on online social platforms. The emergence of such an elaborate form of network communication represents a novel and sophisticated approach, encompassing not only crowdsourcing (e.g., O'Hagan 2009) and game localization training (e.g., Mangiron, 2021b), but also networking opportunities for game practitioners.

The S8 case exemplifies notable issues in the Chinese game industry. First, to gain a comprehensive understanding of game localization, individuals tend to rely on industry practitioners for insights, which highlights the scarcity of professional education

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[22] S8, WeChat message to author, 20 December 2023.

[23] S8, WeChat message to author, 24 May 2024.

[24] S8, WeChat message to author, 20 December 2023.

[25] Shanghai serves as China's cosmopolitan hub, fostering numerous game companies, game localization teams, and game localizers.

[26] Although this series of events is organized by individuals, it is imperative to acknowledge the professional backgrounds and industry influence of the two main organizers and their companies may have an impact on the distribution of the events.

dedicated to nurturing talent in game localization.[27] Second, even though many well-known individuals or organizations have been increasingly organizing on-site or online networking opportunities for China-based game localization practitioners, communication among game localizers, researchers, and other game practitioners is still in its early stages.

4.2.3 Distribution strategy for game localization

Game localization is essential for effective marketing and game distribution (Mangiron 2018, 131), and it encompasses the adaptation of game-related business promotional content, such as homepage descriptions or game trailers (Zhang & Song 2023). Owing to the prevailing trend of globalization, numerous game companies have increasingly emphasized enhancing and maintaining both local and global game communities (Burger-Helmchen & Cohendet 2011). Therefore, it is significant for game officials to promptly interpret, comprehend, manage, and respond to feedback from gamers.

In the age of GILT, video game companies or indie game developers are widely encouraged to recruit professional talent to manage maintenance of the sophisticated localization tasks. Additionally, many game localizers offer services in social media management and online feedback collection across language contexts, encompassing a broader spectrum of game-related localization and management activities beyond the localization of game content. Unfortunately, the implementation of such systematic and intricate community promotion or feedback monitoring tasks necessitates substantial investment (e.g., economy, talent, and time), posing challenges for stakeholders who lack sufficient financial investment or awareness (Chen 2024b).

Many Gcores-based game localizers, through friendly relationships or business partnerships, have assisted non-Chinese game companies, especially indie game developers, by writing recommendation articles or reflective notes on Gcores, such as S2 on *Before I Forget* (2020) and S7 on *Cuphead: The Delicious Last Course* (2022).[28] These strategies present a mutually beneficial outcome, as they not only enhance the visibility of game localizers and their contributions but also amplify the promotion of non-Chinese games in the Chinese market. Notably, such promotional events are particularly helpful for those indie games with limited financial resources to distribute their games beyond their original contexts.

Significantly, these content-sharing activities may inadvertently blur the boundary between the content sharers and their profession as game localizers, assimilating them into the game community as enthusiasts. Potential reasons include the relatively

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[27] Some Chinese universities, such as Beijing Language and Culture University, have established game localization courses.

[28] For more information about the article on *Before I Forget* (2020), please see: https://www.gcores.com/articles/148735
For more information about the article on *Cuphead: The Delicious Last Course* (2022), please see:
https://www.gcores.com/articles/153227

natural click-and-view manner in which they disseminate information on Gcores and that all registered Gcores users are allowed to comment and initialize communication with the content sharers. Unfortunately, at the current stage, the lack of sufficient data hinders an in-depth investigation into the potential impact of such behaviors on game distribution and game sales, whereas the role of game localizers as intermediaries remains highly noteworthy.

Among all the game localizers observed as content sharers on Gcores, S9 presents a compelling case study that expands upon the aforementioned strategies employed in indie or niche game localization and distribution.

S9, working as the official game localizer for *Overwatch* (2016) and *Overwatch 2* (2022), is an in-house member of the Blizzard Chinese localization team.[29] S9 embarked on their localization journey in 2017 by working on the official localization of esports releases related to *Overwatch* (2016) and subsequently becoming a key contributor to the localization of *Overwatch* (2016) and *Overwatch 2* (2022).[30]

Since January 5, 2021, S9 has maintained a column on Chinese social media including Bilibili, Weibo, Gcores and NGA called *shouwang yishi* 守望译事 ("Localization Stories about *Overwatch*"), featuring the introduction of *Overwatch*-related behind-stage English-Chinese game localization stories.[31] As S9 acknowledges, content sharing serves as a valuable avenue for effective communication between the localization team and the Chinese game community.[32] Additionally, sharing stories about game localization aligns with the localization branding strategy previously highlighted by Emil Lu, the former localization manager of Blizzard's Chinese localization team.[33]

According to Emil Lu, the game localizer can be invisible, but the process and value of localization can never be invisible.[34] Notably, S9's distributed localization materials in *shouwang yishi* serve as promotional tools for fellow game departments, particularly as Chinese gamers often send messages to other departments' social media accounts requesting specific information about localization efforts.

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[29] *Overwatch* (OW) and *Overwatch 2* (OW2) are both team-based massively multiplayer online (MMO) first-person shooter (FPS) video games, developed and published by Blizzard Entertainment. OW2, released on 5 October 2022, is the updated and iterated version of OW.

[30] S9, WeChat message to author, 22 December 2023.

[31] For more information about the column, please see: https://www.gcores.com/portfolios/781

[32] S9, WeChat message to author, 22 December 2023.

[33] Emil Lu was the manager of the Blizzard Chinese localization team from June 2011 to April 2023, and the localization manager of Lilith Games from April 2023 to April 2024. The "localization branding strategy" is not strictly a business strategy, but it emphasizes the use of social media to increase the visibility of the localization works.

[34] Emil Lu, WeChat message to author, 24 May 2024. This is a translated and paraphrased version of the Chinese speech expressed by Emil Lu, and the original Chinese version is "曝光的从来就不是参与本地化的人，而是本地化的过程和价值。译者可以隐形，但是翻译本身不可以".

Chen, Dody M. H. 2024. The visibility of Chinese game localizers on Gcores: Personal branding, networking, business collaboration, and game distribution. In: L10N Journal 1(3), pp. 5–31.

In January 2023, the world witnessed the suspension of cooperation between Blizzard and NetEase, whose partnership began in 2008. This intricate matter, constrained by regulations on Chinese game censorship and game accessibility (e.g., Zhang 2012; Zhang & Chiu 2020), has further influenced the localization and distribution of the *Overwatch* series. During the suspension period, Blizzard's Chinese localization team maintained the localization of game content and important social media releases in Simplified or Traditional Chinese, whereas the official social media channels for the game, which were used to disseminate a wide range of information, were temporarily inactive (Chen 2024a, 3). Since April 2024, when the notice of the restart of the Blizzard-NetEase cooperation was released, the official *Overwatch* accounts on various Chinese media platforms resumed activity.

Intriguingly, even during the severe scenario of the Blizzard-NetEase cooperation suspension, S9 persistently disseminates content through his personally established column, *shouwang yishi*. S9's behavior represents a strategic approach to extending the localization branding strategy by continuously enhancing the visibility of localization works within the online community. As emphasized by S9 repeatedly in the serialized content, the act of sharing is inherently subjective and closely tied to personal initiative, with no requirement from the company.

Significantly, it appears that S9 does not intentionally prioritize personal achievement or exposure. Rather, a handful of references and positive comments about teamwork are frequently mentioned. Additionally, S9 personally funds digital artists to contribute to the series, thereby making the content more vivid and attractive.[35]

For instance, in an article introducing the stories on the localization of a newly-released game hero called Lifeweaver (*shengmingzhisuo* 生命之梭), he invites an illustrator to draw a picture showing how Lifeweaver, a playable character, uses the character's ability "Life Grip" to drag B.O.B, a non-playable character, in a newly-released seasonal game mode called "B.O.B. And Weave".[36] According to S9, the inclusion of illustrations stems from his desire for content perfection, as sometimes the description of game characters or game situations cannot be properly conveyed through text or game screenshots, and the cost of each illustration ranges from 80 RMB (approximately 10 EUR) to 1700 RMB (approximately 215 EUR).[37]

S9's sharing has elicited two major types of feedback. On the one hand, when Chinese gamers, under that special period of Blizzard-NetEase disputes, expressed that their previous investments of time, money, and emotions had depreciated because of the game removal and content inactivity (Chen 2024a, 3), S9's sharing may have helped restore some of the reputation of the game's Chinese localization team. On the other

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[35] S9, WeChat message to author, 30 May 2024.

[36] For more information, please see: https://www.gcores.com/articles/165200

[37] S9, WeChat message to author, 30 May 2024.

hand, a significant portion of online users still lack a comprehensive understanding of the precise concepts and duties of game localization, let alone interpret the objectives of S9's sharing. Thus, such consistently pertinent updates on game localization on social media by an individual, who is affiliated with the company, can exacerbate community confusion because of the dearth of information from the official Chinese channel.

The S9 case exemplifies the research significance of translators' exposure in online communities, especially when such exposure represents a highly proactive and constructive undertaking. Furthermore, further investigations could explore the subjective awareness of translators in the digital age and include the investigation of reception.

5 Conclusion

This study sheds light on the practices of Chinese game localizers' online content sharing on Gcores, a game-centered social media platform.

The analysis of sharing features is focused on the examination of what, how and why game localizers share about game localization. Revolving around these dimensions, the study delves into the potential ramifications observed in online sharing. First, game localizers' sharing is usually conducted casually, with no specific regulations regarding format, content and release schedule. Second, the significant use of cross-platform collaborations for content dissemination is also widely observed. Furthermore, sharing not only disseminates knowledge but also fosters communication, enhances personal branding, boosts collaboration, and promotes game distribution. These intricate effects, in turn, contribute to the diversification and complexity of the motivations behind content sharing, which correspondingly prompts some game localizers to pay attention to the details, like the sharing schedule or content structure. Last but not least, content sharing is also constrained by factors such as the relationship between game localizers and game projects, as well as game localizers' stances, profits, and personal characteristics.

From an industry perspective, content sharing activities indicate game localizers' eagerness to network with a wider community and receive feedback not only from industry professionals but also from the public. Additionally, the sharing also exposes some issues within the Chinese game localization industry, such as limited communication among practitioners, the imbalanced allocation of resources in certain cities or regions, or the lack of industry guidance. Notably, while sharing is overall beneficial, the act of sharing seems to underscore the importance of creating new roles in social media distribution or game community management.

Concerning the theories, although the notion of visibility in this study does not align directly with previous scholarly proposals (e.g., Venuti 1986), most cases highlight the

association between visibility and social media in the contemporary era. The utilization of nethnography and practice-led research underscores the necessity for researchers to adapt to industry advancements, particularly by actively engaging in social activities and industrial events.

The transformative power of translation, as highlighted by Venuti (2012), has a profound impact, constantly intertwining with new media forms, technical tools, user behaviors, and relationships with communication and translation (Díaz-Cintas & Massidda 2019). Accordingly, this study follows the trend of translation development and social practice and further extends the conclusion that translation is an interpretive act with far-reaching social effects.

Future research could explore the perspectives and feedback of game localizers, the reception of content sharing within game communities, and the impact of sharing on game distribution and sales.

Chen, Dody M. H. 2024. The visibility of Chinese game localizers on Gcores: Personal branding, networking, business collaboration, and game distribution. In: L10N Journal 1(3), pp. 5–31.

Gameography

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The Paradigm Shift of Indirect Translation in Contemporary Video Game Development and Localization

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Abstract

This article aims to introduce new insights into the utilization of indirect translation in video game localization by uncovering a new potential localization process unique to video games. It presents indirect translation as a pivotal way to spread language accessibility in smaller languages and markets, focusing on Japanese video games and their accessibility using English as a pivot language. It offers an overview of the Slovak gaming market and the state of Japanese-to-Slovak translation in Slovakia. It then leads to showcasing indirect translation in video game localization in the past and introduces a new way of integrating indirect translation based on the localization of *Final Fantasy XVI*.

Keywords: indirect translation, video game localization, pivot translation, game development

1 Introduction

Even though the topic of accessibility in video games has become widely discussed in recent years, more often than not, the main topic is accessibility for people with various physical special needs, and language accessibility is mentioned less frequently in this context. Product availability, or in this case video game availability in different languages, is a major factor in making games accessible to players from all around the world who may not speak English or other major languages, and therefore should be discussed as a matter of accessibility. Rather than expecting players to understand or learn a foreign language, some video game developers strive to make their products as linguistically accessible as possible. Three major obstacles in this case are finances, time constraints, and a limited number of qualified employees – translators. Although not a perfect solution, indirect translation could potentially address at least two of these issues if given the proper priority and care. This type of translation not unknown in video game localization practices but it has always been seen as "inferior" or secondary to direct translation. However, due to recent innovative strategies, this may change in

the future. This is illustrated on the example of the *Final Fantasy* series by Square Enix, with *Final Fantasy XVI* proving to be a major turning point in the potential use of indirect localization in the future. This study specifically examines this potential with Japanese video games on the Slovak market, but it is likely that the same conclusions could be drawn for other language combinations as well.

The first section examines indirect translation and its place in translation studies, as well as its significance in the context of Slovak translation. The second section explores the relationship between Japanese video games and Slovak gamers, focusing on the demand and current state of localization. The third and final section briefly discusses the history of video game localization using the example of *Final Fantasy* and introduces the process of localizing *Final Fantasy XVI* from Japanese into English, as well as its potential for other developers to follow in its footsteps and utilize this process to indirectly localize their video games into lesser-known languages.

2 Indirect translation and its status in translation studies

Indirect translation, also known as pivot translation or second-hand translation, has been loosely defined as "translation communication through already-made translation" (Popovič 1975, p. 58), "the historical process of translation from an intermediary version" (Pym 2011, p. 80) or "a mediation from source to target language in which the translational product has been realized in another language than that of the original; the defining feature is that the intermediary translation has an audience, that is consumers of its own" (Dollerup 1998, p. 3). Although these definitions seem slightly different, they all agree that there must be an existing source text for the secondary (intermediary) text. In other words, indirect translation can only start once there is a complete, unchanging source text.

Bubnášová (2011) describes indirect translation as a one-direction process with three (six) main actors – Source Text (ST) and Source Language (SL), Intermediary Text (IT) and Intermediary Language (IL), and Target Text (TT) and Target Language (TL), but for simplicity, this article will focus on the text itself. She presents the process as such:

$$\text{ST (SL)} \rightarrow \text{IT (IL)} \rightarrow \text{TT (TL)}$$

In this scheme, the ST is the "starting line," the "original", and the IT is simply what follows to reach the TT. This process, naturally occurring only in one direction, means IT cannot influence ST, must follow what ST already established, and should not deviate too much to fluently translate the meaning of ST into TT. With regard to this one-direction process, video games seem to be a rare – or perhaps even the only – exception.

Indirect translation is most commonly used when the need arises due to a lack of suitable translators, either because of a specific language combination or a specialized

genre or topic of translation (Velecký 2024). However, this statement has been somewhat disproven by Bubnášová (2011) when it comes to Slovak literature.

2.1 Indirect translation in Slovakia

The vast majority of indirect translation usage comes from the literary field, which has a long history of translating literary works in Slovakia since the 1950s, peaking between 1990 and 1999. As for the languages, Russian, Czech, and Polish were the three main intermediary languages up until the 1990s, confirming that indirect translation in literary translation is most often done through an intermediary language as closely related to the target language as possible. After the 1990s, the main intermediary languages switched to German, Czech, and English. Bubnášová (2011) notes that out of all the records from the Slovak National Bibliography, only 2% of all translated texts were translated indirectly.

We can therefore see that indirect translation has been utilized in Slovakia, but while this is true for literary translation, the same cannot be said for other sectors, such as video game localization. However, it should be noted that in the case of video game localization, the small quantity of localized products does not only concern indirectly localized ones, but also directly localized ones.

2.2 Methodology

The following section focuses on the demand (or lack thereof) for Japanese video games in Slovakia and their accessibility in the Slovak language. Gathering specific statistics proved somewhat difficult, as many e-shops specializing in video games do not have the option to sort video games based on their sales performance, and the only option close enough is the vague category of *popularity*. Furthermore, well-known platforms such as Steam, GOG, or Epic Games Store offer statistics for larger[38] countries and territories, but not for Slovakia. Console-specific stores, such as PS Store, Nintendo Store, or Xbox Store, also tend to group statistics into even larger regions, such as the US, Europe, Asia, and Africa, making it difficult to gauge a game's popularity in a specific country. However, due to the overwhelming popularity of these platforms, especially Steam, further research would be beneficial.

As such, this research was mainly conducted on platforms and e-shops considered well-known and widely used among Slovak gamers, namely:

1. Smarty (formerly Brloh)
2. PGS
3. Xzone
4. Herný svet

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[38] "Larger" in this context refers to countries with larger population and therefore more language users.

Due to the unclear sorting options on these platforms, this research does not aim to provide concrete numbers in terms of sales or genre and developer preferences, but rather a general overview of where Japanese video games stand as a whole. We collected data by browsing the selection of Japanese video games in these four online shops and analyzed whether these games are localized into the Slovak language based on the product description.

Concerning the issue of accessibility of these video games in Slovak, there are currently no Japanese video games localized into Slovak, as discussed in subsection 2.2. For this purpose, websites and communities with unofficial localizations, specifically *lokalizacie.sk*, were examined in addition to the e-shops and platforms mentioned above.

3 Japanese video games and the Slovak market

While Slovakia is inarguably a small market compared to its larger European neighbors and markets further afield, it still houses many active gamers. This section provides an overview of the Slovak gaming market focusing on Japanese video games, and addresses the question of their popularity in Slovakia and availability in Slovak.

3.1 The demand for Japanese video games

The results show that while Japanese video games tend to be left out of the top spots, they are still popular. The most notable examples come from Nintendo, with franchises such as *Super Mario, Pokémon, The Legend of Zelda, Animal Crossing*, and Su*per Smash Bros.* Another successful studio is FromSoftware, with games from the *Dark Souls* franchise, *Elden Ring*, and *Bloodborne*. Fighting games such as *Tekken* or *Street Fighter* are also often found on the top-selling pages, with the survival horror genre led by *Resident Evil* closely behind. Other franchises, such as *Sonic the Hedgehog, Metroid, Pikmin, Splatoon, Kirby,* and *Monster Hunter*, confirm that rather than stand-alone video games, Slovak gamers tend to show interest in franchises of Japanese production.

As the number of video games officially localized into Slovak is very small, the fact that none of the video games localized into Slovak were localized from Japanese or came from a Japanese developer was not surprising.

These results show that while Japanese video games are not always localized into Slovak, they are still popular enough to be actively sold on the Slovak market. It is therefore possible to conclude that the absence of Slovak localizations of these games is not due to the lack of interest among players, but rather to other factors, which will be discussed later.

3.2 The current state of Japanese video games localized into Slovak

As discussed in the previous subsection, Slovak players buy and play Japanese video games despite the lack of language availability on the market. The two other major contributors to the absence of Slovak localization of these games are:

1. Economic reasons – the high cost of investment into localization vs. low financial gain due to the small size of the target market (further developed in Velecký 2024)

2. The lack of Japanese-to-Slovak translators equipped to work in video game localization

With a population of roughly 5.4 million people, Slovakia is undoubtedly a very small market compared to many other countries, but also all its neighbors. This makes video game localization a rather difficult task, as Slovakia is the only country in the world where Slovak is officially spoken. The target audience and potential profit are thin in comparison to larger language markets and the required cost of localization. As Koscelníková also noted (2020), studios tend to prioritize Czech over Slovak due to several factors, most notably larger population, higher demand for Czech localizations, and mutual understanding of Czech and Slovak languages, making it difficult to demand Slovak localizations in the first place.

However, the research also looked into community localization, or fan-localization, specifically on the popular website *lokalizacie.sk*, where players unofficially localize selected video games into Slovak for other players. Due to the volunteer nature of this community, it can be assumed that the selection of video games is based on their popularity in the gaming community and the capabilities of the (potential) localizers. According to an interview with Mário Csaplár, one of the founding members of the website, the choice of which video games to localize is first and foremost based on the team's capabilities, but also on cooperation with Czech localization teams, so as not to work on a duplicate project (Velecký 2022). It is then worth examining whether Japanese-made video games appear in Czech localizations, so the community on *lokalizace.net* was the next point of interest. This community houses a considerable number of Japanese-made video games localized into Czech, including games from the *Resident Evil* franchise, *NieR: Automata*, and *Kingdom Hearts III*. According to the forum, all of them were likely localized indirectly from English rather than directly from Japanese. This confirms the assumption that even in Slovakia, the main reason for the absence of Japanese to Slovak localizations is not the games' unpopularity, but the low number of qualified or interested translators. An important note is that while the method of indirectly localizing video games proposed in this article is suitable for official localizations, it is not applicable to fan-localization, as its main point of success lies in the cooperation between translators and programmers, which is impossible in fan-localization, at least not on the same level.

It is then important examine the factors contributing to stagnating number of potential Japanese-to-Slovak localizers, the main factor being inadequate opportunities for higher translation education in this specific language combination. In Slovakia, it is currently only possible to study Japanese at Comenius University in Bratislava as a major called Japanese Studies. According to the information on the website of the Faculty of Arts (Filozofická fakulta UK, 2024), the main focus of this major is learning the Japanese language and studying cultural aspects of the country, such as literature, history, geography, and more. This, however, means that although students may work as translators in the future, they do not receive translation education during their studies, making jobs as specialized as video game localization difficult. Noteworthy skills and knowledge include translation theory, working with CAT tools, and experience in localizing digital products, which students of Philology Aimed at Training of Translators and Interpreters receive during their studies in other language combinations. Furthermore, Japanese Studies only opens every three years, regularly rotating with Chinese Studies and Korean Studies. All these factors contribute to a gap in the translation market, which could potentially be filled by indirect translation.

4 Indirect translation in video game localization

This section first discusses the history of indirect translation in video game localization, specifically using the example of the *Final Fantasy* series by Square Enix, and then examines the localization practices of Square Enix subdivision, Creative Business Unit III, leading to the localization of *Final Fantasy XVI* and its potential to become a precedent for future projects based on its new, innovative approach to localizing the video game directly.

4.1 A brief historical overview of the development of video game localization

The lack of video game localizers working with Japanese is not unique to smaller languages, such as Slovak, but has also been documented in relation to languages with more speakers in the past. For the purposes of this article, the main – although not sole – example, will be the Japanese studio Square Enix, not only for their long history and pioneering contributions to the field of video game localization as a whole but also for their open approach to communicating with their player base and willingness to include players in behind-the-scenes processes through interviews and live streams.

Before localization became an important process in video game development, studios often treated it as a secondary process to be done only after the product was complete or even released. This approach led to not only lower-quality localizations but also dissatisfied players who often had to wait several months to play a video game, as "translation and localization have been placed firmly in the post-production stage of the process, together with packaging" (Bernal-Merino 2014, p. 150) in their desired

language, on top of quality issues with the translations. As O'Hagan states, "as a business procedure developed in the localization industry, GILT foregrounded localization and translation as part of the globalization process, with a specific aim to manage time-sensitive product rollouts in an increasing range of target languages across different markets." (2022, p. 444), meaning localization became an integral part of video game development and subsequent release. Another important part of this strategy was the idea of "sim-ship" releases, the plan to release all language versions of a video game at once, or at dates as close as possible, to maximize profit.

5 Indirect translation in the Final Fantasy series

The main part of this article focuses on *Final Fantasy XVI* (Square Enix 2023), and as such, it is important to look back on how the localization of this series was handled in the past, although only briefly, as O'Hagan (2022) has already provided a thorough overview of this series. The most important aspects for this article are the differences and developments leading up to the release of *Final Fantasy XVI*.

When looking at the localization history of *Final Fantasy* as a whole, it is important to note some significant milestones. One of those was *Final Fantasy VII* (Square 1997), which was, up until that point, the series' first major success worldwide, as well as the first Square game to be localized into FIGS[39]. It was also a good example of issues stemming from indirect localization, as the game was first localized from Japanese to English and then into FIGS using English as a pivot language, which led to criticism from the player base. However, the company quickly addressed this, and the next two video games in the series were localized into FIGS directly from Japanese. This quick reaction to the player feedback also included finding and training teams of in-house localizers rather than relying on freelancers or external translation agencies. According to former video game localizer James Honeywood:

> "We had several projects running simultaneously, and newbies to train etc., so after the other staff and I who helped run the department selected the EFIGS translators, we handed it over to them and backed them up in whatever way was needed. (At this point we actually were translating directly from J->FIGS instead of going via English. It had taken us a lot of effort to find and train such translators so we started to bring them in-house wherever possible.)"
>
> (The Chrono Compendium 2015)

This effort to train translators and offer them in-house positions was a significant step toward ensuring quality localization, but also an apparent disdain for indirect

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[39] *French, Italian, German, Spanish* have traditionally been considered the most common target languages from English in software localization.

localization, proving that Square Enix would rather spend more resources to find and train translators properly suited for the tasks than rely on indirect translation.

Although Square Enix seems to prefer direct localization wherever possible, it is not always feasible. This has led to some more interesting approaches to localization, as was the case with *Final Fantasy X* (Square Enix 2001), where the video game was directly translated into English, and FIGS, with the exception of subtitles in cutscenes, which, in FIGS versions, were based on the English voice-over rather than the Japanese one. Similarly, *Final Fantasy XV* (Square Enix 2016) was translated directly into English, French, German, Chinese, and Korean, but for Italian, Spanish, Russian, and Portuguese, only the non-voiced text was localized directly, while the voiced text was localized indirectly through English.

If a studio as involved in localization as Square Enix still struggles to find and keep enough localizers able to work directly from Japanese, it may be more sensible to embrace indirect localization and implement ways to make it work better than considering it "inferior", and it seems this company has been taking steps toward this for some time, ultimately culminating in the unique and potentially revolutionary localization process of *Final Fantasy XVI* (Square Enix 2023).

Aside from training and keeping translators in-house, the localization process itself also changed, most importantly by providing the localization team with the option to work more closely with the developers and communicate directly with them. As Honeywood states:

> *"FFX, FFXI, FFX-2, FFXII and onwards we had the translators move to sit within the dev team at an earlier stage and there was more collaboration. For instance, over time some dev teams became very good at choosing product and character names that work in all regions by discussing them with us. That way we could release information on their games to all regions simultaneously rather than having the press coin their own working names which could confuse the international audience."*

(The Chrono Compendium 2015)

This meant the gap between localizers and the rest of the development team narrowed slightly but, interestingly, also came with its setbacks:

> *"What people probably don't realize is that, although we gained a lot more insight into the original by working closer with the dev teams, there was a flip side. The more involved they are in the translation approval, the more they would push their will on a language they don't fully understand. So we now had to make new compromises, like when you take localized names back to the original creator and he would veto ideas you'd want to put in, taking you back to the drawing board over and over."*

(ibid.)

This illustrates that despite the team's best efforts, there were still many obstacles to overcome, and these would indeed be addressed in the future installments of the series.

That is not to say these changes were not significant improvements, especially considering they took place during a time when video game localization was still relatively new and technology continued to advance at a rapid pace. According to Honeywood:

> *"... there were a lot of amazing improvements over the years. The dev teams went from being very hands off and just farming out the translations to any random vendor to working in with our Loc Dept to improve the quality of the game in all regions. They started to allow us to not just translate the text, but to do true localization by adjusting the difficulty, graphics, or other content to better match differing target audiences. So while it was never perfect, it was way better than when I first joined the company."*

<div align="right">(ibid.)</div>

The concept of "true localization" over "just translating the text" would be taken a step further in the future, reaching a stage where localization would become equally important as the source text itself, as will be shown in *Final Fantasy XVI* (FFXVI).

5.1 The localization process of Creative Business Unit III

Before taking a closer look at the development process of *Final Fantasy XVI*, it should be noted that it was handled by Creative Business Unit III, and the internal development division of Square Enix, also responsible for *Final Fantasy XI, Final Fantasy XIV*, and the *Dragon Quest Builders* series. As such, there are many similarities between the localization processes of *FFXIV* and *FFXVI*, arguably due to the involvement of the localization director Michael-Christopher Koji Fox, who has also worked on numerous *Final Fantasy* localizations before. However, the most notable one is the direct involvement of the localization team in the development and creative freedom that stems from it. Kathryn Cwynar, one of the translators working on *FFXIV* at that time, stated:

> *"We translators are very fortunate to have an ongoing dialogue with the devs regarding the lore, UI, cutscenes, and more. This allows us to spot potential localization pitfalls, but also helps us have a more sound understanding of what we're translating, and allows the dev team to ask us questions in turn."*

<div align="right">(Final Fantasy Portal Site 2021)</div>

Even outside of CBU3, this practice of close collaboration between Japanese writers and English localizers is not new to Square Enix. Richard Honeywood, who has worked on several titles by Square Enix, stated:

> *"We had to rework all the spell names in both English and Japanese to have a compromise that worked in both languages. I sat next to the Japanese name planner for 4 years and we worked together to name everything rather than simply translating what*

> *the Japanese team came up with.", and that "...there were great benefits of having the translators sit within each dev team and work side-by-side with the original writers."*

<div align="right">(The Chrono Compendium 2015)</div>

From this, it is evident that such close collaboration between the developers and localizers is highly beneficial for ensuring a high-quality localization and a smoother development process. That being said, this was taken a step further with the development of *FFXVI*, creating a shift in the video game localization, and changing the possibilities of indirect localization as a whole.

Final Fantasy XVI, released in 2023 under Square Enix, takes a somewhat unique approach to localization. The game's pre-release livestream, where the team presented the game's development to players, revealed some interesting facts from the Localization Director himself. According to him, the English version of the game was given the same priority as the Japanese source text, and the Japanese writers collaborated closely with the localization team. However, this collaboration was so close that not only did the localization team get to ask questions and discuss their solutions with the writers, but they also to sat down to go over the two scripts line by line and even mutually exchanged ideas, as described in the interviews.

As discussed in the previous section, localizers' work with writers has slowly become a more common practice in recent years, but this is still largely a one-direction process, where the localizers can ask questions or comment on culturally (in)appropriate parts of the text but only rarely directly influence the source script themselves, as is the case with *FFXIV*, where "the English team is actively involved in naming of skills and location names, etc. and the wider localization team is invited to provide ideas and concepts for new creatures from their various cultures" (Final Fantasy Portal Site 2021). In the case of *FFXVI*, however, the source text was written concurrently with the target text, and both influenced each other – in other words, just as the target text changed to accommodate the source text, the source text also changed based on the target text. It should be noted that this was not the first time this happened, as Honeywood stated:

> *"Interestingly there were times where the dev team took our translator's ideas and re-applied them into the Japanese original. Alex and Joe who translated FFX coined the term "machina" to refer to the machinery in that game's world. In the sequel, FFX-2, the dev team thought the word cool and used it elsewhere in their new game. While our translators were chuffed at the team borrowing back the idea, they now had to come up with new ideas for translating around two different "machina" terms."*

<div align="right">(The Chrono Compendium 2015)</div>

In the case of *FFXVI*, the motivation for this kind of creative freedom and importance placed on English localization may be, at least partially, due to the fact that FFXVI was inspired by Western fantasy, such as *Game of Thrones* and the developers wanted to match this feeling and atmosphere as closely as possible. According to the localization

director Michael-Christopher Koji Fox, "the team chose to record dialogue and complete facial capture in English first." (Gameinformer 2023), and the localization director worked directly with the motion capture team and the voice cast. Fox mentions that this decision to record in English first was why "normal" localization – waiting for the Japanese script to be finalized and then localizing it – was not possible with this game.

He then states that Kazutoyo Maehiro, who first wrote the main screenplay, told him that he could "translate it however he likes and do whatever he wants", checking with each other every day and changing each script based on mutual agreement, taking into consideration aspects such as line length, the overall atmosphere, or impression on the players. For example, if something sounded better in the English script, the Japanese would be changed to match it more closely, or if a specific line was important in the Japanese script, the English one would be changed to match. This kind of teamwork meant that one language wasn't "superior" and one was not an afterthought, but that any language felt natural to play in.

5.2 Implications in the context of indirect translation and FFXVI

As previously discussed, developers try to use indirect translation only when necessary, mostly due to a lack of manpower, since it can lead to issues and negative feedback from players. However, the localization process used in *FFXVI* changes the established scheme when it comes to indirect translation.

In this context, there are three ways to illustrate the process of indirect translation:

$$ST\ (SL) \rightarrow IT\ (IL) \rightarrow TT\ (TL)$$

Classic indirect translation, as seen in FFVII

$$\begin{matrix} ST\ (SL) \\ IT\ (IL) \end{matrix} \rightarrow TT\ (TL)$$

Combined indirect translation, as seen in FFX

$$\begin{matrix} ST\ (SL) \\ = \\ IT\ (IL) \end{matrix} \longrightarrow TT\ (TL)$$

Collaborative indirect translation, as possible in FFXVI

In the case of classic indirect translation, the source text is always created first. It is deemed the original and therefore superior. The intermediary text only bridges the gap between the source text and the target text, but it does not influence the source text in any way. Meanwhile, the target text rarely interacts with the source text and has to rely on the intermediary text to be fully realized. This is where most translation issues stem from, and why companies try to avoid it as much as possible, because this is the cause

of most misunderstandings, mistranslations, and omissions due to the lack of context and insight into the source text.

The combined case is more specific and cannot be used in every medium but has found its use in video game localization. Here, the ST and the IT both directly influence the TT, with the main difference being the area where they are used (written text vs. voiced lines in FFX). The main issues stemming from this approach are differences between the various versions of the product, leading to potential criticism from the recipients, as well as possible inconsistencies between the written text and subtitles, as they were localized from two different languages – therefore two different cultures, linguistic bases, etc. Mangiron (2004) states that "if the translators had worked from the original Japanese script instead of the English version when producing the subtitles, there would have been considerable differences between the English dialogues and the target language subtitles," which "would have been picked up as translation errors by the users of the localized versions with good knowledge of English" (ibid.). In fact, such was the case with another Japanese-made video game sold on the Slovak market, *Dark Souls 3* (FromSoftware 2016).

The Japanese video game, similar to *FFXVI*, is set in a world resembling classic European fantasy, and has placed importance on English localization. The various localizations were done both directly and indirectly, with English, Chinese, and Korean being done directly, and FIGS, Portuguese, Polish, and Russian being done indirectly from English. The problem arose due to the fact that the voice-over was only done in English, but not Japanese. Players who played in a language other than English only heard English audio, despite it not being the original text of the game. This became problematic in the Chinese community, as:

> "*Although simplified Chinese and English are both direct translations from Japanese, there are noticeable discrepancies between them. Different translation approaches are taken in the localization of the simplified Chinese and the English versions. The Chinese version is translated more closely to the Japanese source text than the way the voiced-over game text in English is rendered. Meanwhile, the pivot translations via English, taking French as an example, are conveyed more faithfully to English than to Japanese.*"

(Zhang, Song 2023)

The third case is somewhat unique in the industry, and while the English localization of *Dark Souls 3* was done in collaboration with the lead writer, and even influenced the source script in some ways, as is the case with FFXIV, the extent to which this happened is limited, often only to names of fictional places or items found in the games. The collaborative effort of localizing FFXVI, however, affects the source text to such a degree that it is possible to talk about having two source texts – the Japanese one and the English one. Here, instead of having one source text superior to the pivot text, the pivot text becomes equal to the source text, and can serve as a whole new source text for other translations. This could lead to a completely new kind of indirect translation that

eliminates all the negative aspects of indirect translation and not only increases the quality of the process but also makes it more accessible to smaller markets or languages. By elevating English from its position as a pivot language to a completely new source language equal to the original, studios could rely on "indirect" translation to further extend their market to other language areas, where translators skilled in video game localization from languages other than English are scarce.

6 Conclusion

Although indirect translation has a rich history of use in video game localization, it has mainly been used in larger[40] languages, and even there it is slowly disappearing due to companies preferring direct translation whenever possible. The gap in smaller markets still remains, and while this research only dealt with a relatively small Slovak market, it is clear that players in this small country enjoy these video games and that, if they were localized, they would sell. As one of the main reasons for the lack of Japanese to Slovak localizations on the market is the unavailability of Japanese-to-Slovak translators, indirect translation could offer a solution not only for this market, but also for all other markets facing a similar issue. It should be noted, however, that one of the most prominent factors is likely economic, which requires further research on whether localizing video games into smaller languages would be profitable, even with the presumed lowered costs of localization thanks to indirect translation.

Strictly speaking in terms of language accessibility, however, indirect translation offers a great opportunity for players around the world to enjoy video games in their native or preferred language. With the localization model of *FFXVI*, it would be possible to avoid some of the potential negative aspects of indirect translation.

The use of "collaborative translation", where the localization team was not only offered a high degree of freedom, but also worked closely with the rest of the developers – even given priority in terms of motion capture – managed to elevate what would normally be considered localized text to what can be called a whole new source text, making it more than suitable to be used as a source text to be localized further. By replacing the intermediary text with a new source text, the English version of the video game is more detached from the Japanese version, and new target texts do not have to consider possible mistranslations, omissions, or misunderstandings that can normally stem from translating through a pivotal (intermediary) text.

Whether implementation of this type of localization is possible or sustainable for other video game developers is still questionable, as Square Enix has the advantage of employing in-house translators, which allows them not only to train them from the ground up, but also keep their workflow and style consistent, making communication

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[40] Languages with more speakers than the Slovak language.

between each team easier. This would presumably be much more difficult if they outsourced their localization to external agencies. Independent developers would also face more issues, as they often do not have the option to employ in-house translators. However, even considering all these obstacles, utilizing this kind of collaborative translation would be beneficial to everyone involved where possible.

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Descriptive analysis of Basque video games from the perspective of localization

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The following article is an English translation of a paper originally published in Basque in Fontes Linguae Vasconum. The original paper can be found here:
https://www.culturanavarra.es/uploads/files/FLV135_10.pdf

Abstract

There are increasingly more video games available in Basque, but academic research in this field is still very limited. To start filling this gap, we conducted the present study in two phases and reflected on the Basque translation and localization of video games. First, we created a catalog from Game Erauntsia Elkartea's list of Basque video games. Then, we have distributed a survey among developers to gather information about the translation process. The results show that we can distinguish four different types of localization, and that free fan translations, as well as translations performed by a team member of the development company are the most common in Basque.

Keywords: video games, localization, Basque, catalogue, survey

1 Introduction

The number of developed video games and their sales has been steadily increasing in recent years. Newzoo, a company that analyzes the international video game market, indicates that in 2021, video game sales reached $180 billion worldwide (Wijman 2021). In Spain, the AEVI (Asociación Española de Videojuegos) notes that the sales of video games reached €1,795 million in 2021, 2.75% more than in 2020 (AEVI 2022, 16) In the Basque Country,[41] video game consumption also stands out. According to the Basque Observatory of Culture (2019, 97), more than half of 15–24-year-olds (56.7%) play video

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[41] Note from the translator: the Basque Country may refer to "Euskal Herria", the greater region where Basque has been traditionally spoken and which is made up of seven provinces (four in Spain and three in France), or it may refer to "Euskadi", which is made up of only three of the Spanish provinces. This article uses the term Basque Country to refer to Euskal Herria.

games daily or occasionally. As the age range increases, video game consumption decreases. For example, only 9.2% of people over 65 years old play video games.

The age gaps and the novelty of video games compared to other audiovisual products are the main reasons why their research and social support are less developed, especially when these are related to Basque (Junguitu 2020, 47). This means that video games have rarely been researched when it comes to the development, translation, or consumption of Basque video games. The purpose of this research is to analyze the reality of Basque in the video game industry. Specifically, research of leisure video games from the point of view of translation: how many exist, how many have been translated, who made those translations, who made those translation requests, etc.

The number of video games developed in the Basque Country is very small compared to the rest of the world. Consequently, localization is necessary to increase the availability. Localization is the linguistic, graphic, technical and legal adaptation that is needed to sell a video game developed in one locale into another locale (Bernal-Merino 2015; O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013). A translation is a linguistic adaptation, but other adaptations can be made, for example, in the cultural context.

Basque is a minority language and stores usually do not indicate which games are available in it. Therefore, players don't know whether the game they are buying is in Basque or not. Companies prioritize the most profitable languages, and the bilingual sociolinguistic situation of minority languages makes their presence harder (Fernández-Costales 2017, 131; Mangiron 2016, 23).

The starting point of our study is a nonprofit project that aims to fight these deficiencies: Game Erauntsia Elkartea's list of Basque video games (Game Erauntsia 2022). The association of Basque video game players Game Erauntsia Elkartea (hereinafter Game Erauntsia) is a non-profit association created in 2016 (before that, it was an initiative by a group of friends). Its main objective is to combine the Basque language and video games, and to create a community for Basque video game players. Since its creation, it has been managed by volunteers. However, starting in 2020, with the support of the Department of Culture and Linguistic Policy of the Basque Government, its professionalism and coordination has greatly increased. To achieve these objectives, they carry out several actions, such as the localization of video games to Basque. However, Game Erauntsia's list does not include all the games published in Basque. Some games, for example, cannot be installed on current operating systems. The game *Sei Baietz!* (Gestionet 2008) requires a CD-ROM reader and Windows 98, Millennium, 2000, or XP. Other examples are those by the company 3DNews TV, *Estropadak* (2000a), *Mendizaleak* (2000b) and *Jai Alai* (2001). However, as of 2022, this was still the most complete list of Basque video games available.

In this article, we will create a catalog based on Game Erauntsia's list and analyze the information in it. We will look at the localization authors to determine if the translations are official or amateur. Translations by amateurs or fan translations are a

known phenomenon in minority languages (Junguitu 2020, 21; Oromen 2021; Santamaria 2022, 157). In the case of Spanish video games, for example, it has been found that there are more professional translators than fans and that automatic translation was used very little until 2016 (Zorrakin -Goikoetxea 2021, 14; Zorrakin-Goikoetxea 2022, 101). Since Basque is a minority language, though, it is expected to find more amateur works and greater use of automatic translators, as they are cheaper options and because developers don't make large investments in minority languages. We will also look at the time gap between the original release and translation release dates to see if fans choose to localize older or newer video games.

We will be investigating video game platforms for trends. According to data collected by Newzoo, globally, 45% of billing is for mobile games, 28% for consoles, 19% for computers, 7% for tablets, and 1% for computer browser games (Wijman 2021). Some games can only be played on one particular platform, while others can be played on several platforms. We expect to find in the list by Game Erauntsia a larger amount of games for computers, as this platform includes high- and low-budget games (Zorrakin-Goikoetxea 2022, 66). In fact, when developers don't incorporate fan localizations into their games, games are usually played using mods and ROMs. From a technological point of view, this is easier on a computer than on a console.

A mod (abbreviation of *modification*) is a transformation that is installed in a video game. It can be a small cosmetic change or it can deeply affect the original game, for example, by adding a language that did not exist before (O'Hagan 2009, 106). These transformations are made through a process called modding and usually require significant technical knowledge to be performed. Mods must be installed in original games, so it is commonly necessary to purchase the game.

A ROM (Read Only Memory) is the digital image of an original game. ROMSs are the digital copies created by fans of old console games, also called retro games. Once fans have acquired the original ROM, they can modify the text and images of the video game through a coding process, for example to localize it into other languages (Muñoz 2009, 170). To carry out this process, it is necessary to have knowledge of informatics. Once the localization is done, it can be played on an emulator. Emulators are programs that imitate legacy hardware, which are normally, but not always, installed on computers (Ordorika 2021b, 26). The process is not legal, but developers don't usually file complaints because these games are old and it doesn't affect sales (Muñoz, 2009, 180; O'Hagan 2009, 101).

The analysis of the catalog is completed with a survey distributed to a sample of development companies that officially published a video game in Basque between 2017 and the first six months of 2022. When we say that a video game has officially been released in Basque, we mean that developers have introduced Basque into the game. We don't include fan work that was added to the game without the developers' consent. The survey asked about the number of video games published in Basque, the original

language, why they were translated, and the compensation for the translation. Our hypothesis suggests that industry professionals are not willing to pay for translating the game into Basque; as it is a minority language, it is not economically profitable, and companies are looking at the profitability of languages.

In the Basque Country, there are several higher education schools that teach video game development, such as DigiPen Europe-Bilbao, Harrobia Ikastola, Crea Navarra, and Tartanga Integrated School for Professional Training. We should consider the guided work that these schools carry out with their students' projects. For instance, DigiPen Europe-Bilbao is an American university located in Bizkaia that teaches video game development. Students are required to create a small video game as a final project, and some students take this project as an opportunity to enhance their portfolios and publish their games. DigiPen Europe-Bilbao advises its students to write the games in three languages for maximum impact. In these cases, as it happens with games in Spanish (Zorrakin-Goikoetxea 2022, 43), we think that we will find self-translations or games translated by the person who created the original text, as the students themselves will be the ones translating their own games. Our survey will therefore serve to differentiate the types of translation that have not been identified in the catalog.

2 Methodology

Our research is set within the methodology of descriptive translation studies (Toury 1995). This method describes the translation procedures without evaluating their suitability or results. Our work is divided into two parts. We have created a catalog from Game Erauntsia's list of Basque video games to identify the different games that can be played in Basque and describe their localization, officiality, release year, translation, platform, and type of software. We also sent a questionnaire to video game developers that officially translated one of their games into Basque to get more information about the translations. The methodology of each section is presented below.

2.1 Catalog

The creation of the catalog is based on the methodology by the TRACE research group. The aim of this methodology is to describe the translation practices in Spain during the 20th century. For this purpose, they worked for more than twenty years creating catalogs and writings (Merino-Álvarez 2017, 141). The research group TRALIMA-ITZULIK (Translation, Literature and Audiovisual Media) also used the methodology developed by TRACE to analyze audiovisual translations (Merino-Álvarez 2017, 149). Along with this methodology, we use a macroscopic approach to explore contextual factors that influence text production (Gutiérrez-Lanza 2005). The starting point of our research is Game Erauntsia's list of Basque video games.

This list was created in 2016 and it has been updated over time.[42] It is an essential resource for identifying video games that can be played in Basque, and although it does not include all games, there is no other analogous resource. The most similar one is the database Minimap (Medialab Tabakalera 2022), which is supposed to collect video games created in the Basque Country but also includes games developed abroad that can be played in Basque. At the time of this investigation (June 2022), Minimap did not offer the possibility to filter games by language. Recently (February 2023), they added this feature.

This database is managed by the citizen creation and experimentation centre Medialab of Tabakalera (The International Centre for Contemporary Culture in San Sebastián-Donostia), and any user can provide new files to it. The Minimap database is not as accurate as the one by Game Erauntsia, as it does not indicate whether the game needs a ROM or a mod to be played in Basque. Therefore, users don't know if the games on the list can be officially played in Basque or if additional emulators and facilities are needed. We decided not to use the Minimap database because the information it offers is not as accurate as that by Game Erauntsia. On the other hand, the well-known video game sales platform Steam started to identify the video games that include Basque in September 2022. Despite being an important step for Basque, not many games are identified as playable in Basque yet, as developers need to update their Steam web pages to share that their video game is in this language.

Once contextual factors have been explored, the TRACE group proposes the creation of a catalog that provides enough information to identify original texts and translations (Gutiérrez-Lanza 2005). In Annex 1, at the end of the paper, we offer the catalog we built for this study. Our catalog didn't expand the list of games from Game Erauntsia but contributed to completing, adding, correcting, and reorganizing the information about the games. We divided this information into nine columns:

a. Identification: Game identification number.

b. Title: Game title, as listed in Game Erauntsia.

c. Developers: Name of the person or company that developed the game. Information from Wikipedia or Game Erauntsia's list of Basque video games.

d. Localization type: Game Erauntsia distinguishes three localization types (Game Erauntsia 2022): translations managed by the developers (translated by the developers in the list); official translations made by the fans in community services offered by the developers (online); and unofficial translations known by Game Erauntsia (completed file). However, after talking to several developers, we developed a classification of four categories that may be more useful for users:

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[42] Game Erauntsia redesigned the list on 2022 September 26, to complete and specify the data. The information below corresponds to the structure that was available in June 2022.

    i. Developer localization: Developers managed the translation and chose the translator (a partner, a hired external service, a fan, or other kind of translator).

    ii. Localization offered by the developers to the community: Developers, knowing the willingness of the fans, directly request the community for help. To do this, developers offer the localization files to fans to translate into their language. In this way, they provide the resources for the localization process, guarantee control over the contents, and install the new text in their video game.

    iii.Fan localization accepted by the developers: Video game players offered the localization to the developer before or after completing the localization. Later, the fan work was incorporated into the official version.

    iv.Fan localization: Unofficial localization via ROM or mod installation.

e. Officiality: Continuing with the previous item, it can be very useful for video game players to know if the Basque version of the game is official or not. Therefore, we propose three categories:

    i. Official version: The game can be directly acquired and played in Basque. It's the game originally released by the developers, and you can simply change the language.

    ii. ROM/mod: In order to play in Basque, you need an emulator or an additional installation. The developers didn't officially add the Basque translation to the game, and in some cases, they are unaware of the existence of that version.

    iii.Adaptation: You can buy the game and play it directly in Basque. Compared to the official version, in this case, besides adding Basque as a language, some content adaptation has been done.

f. Year of release: Wikipedia is the source for the first released year data. If the game has been released on multiple platforms, we may find several release dates. In that scenario, we have chosen the oldest date.

g. Year of Basque translation: The date when the Basque version became available. This information has been copied from each game's page in Game Erauntsia's database.

h. Platform: We determine the original platform of the game (some original platforms are no longer available, and the games must be played on an emulator).

i. Type of software: We distinguish two categories: free or open-source software (which anyone can use or modify) and proprietary software (which limits uses

and changes). We analyzed this item in relation to the type of community open localization and the officiality of the localization.

In the event of not finding any data on Game Erauntsia's website or Wikipedia, we've consulted Game Erauntsia members, newspaper archives, or contacted the developers. In three cases, we have not been able to obtain information about the year when the Basque localization was released, and we have left this column empty.

The catalog only includes the games that were in the 2022 Game Erauntsia's list of Basque video games. We didn't catalog the games that had an incomplete translation (four cases). As already mentioned, Game Erauntsia's website does not include all games in Basque. The aim of our research is not to create a catalog with all the games in Basque but to analyze the most complete catalog possible and make proposals to improve it.

The catalog has three aims. First, as we will see in this article, year after year, the number of Basque video games increases, and we want to describe the situation from 2022, as has been done with Basque cinematography (Manterola 2019). Secondly, we want to provide Game Erauntsia with tools that allow them to keep updating their catalog. This may also help the industry by offering an academic point of view on the information available, which may help to improve it. Finally, we want to know the reasons and conditions for translating video games into Basque to understand the market and, consequently, to be able to make decisions in the future. In addition to meeting these three objectives and describing the factors that influence the production of texts, the catalog will allow us to create a corpus (Gutiérrez-Lanza 2005).

2.2 Survey

The purpose of the survey is to identify the conditions of the localization process that cannot be deduced from the catalog. Among the kinds of interactive research for data collection – that is, those carried out with the participation of the subject (Gile 1998, 74) – we distinguish surveys and interviews. We have prioritized the survey due to it being more temporally efficient. A survey can be used as a research method or as a data collection instrument (Alaminos & Castejón 2006, 7). Following the example of Hechavarría (2012), we will call the research method *survey* and the data collection instrument *questionnaire*.

With the survey, we will figure out the reasons creators have for engaging in Basque translations and analyze the conditions in which they have been carried out. In the case of video games that have not been officially localized, the developers do not have information about the motivations of the translators or the possible payments they received. It is difficult or impossible to contact the translators for these scenarios. Only officially translated video games have been taken into account in the survey (unofficial versions made by fans are not included in the population). We have only analyzed

games published in the last five years because we want to reflect the current situation, and it is more difficult to obtain information about old games. Thus, the survey population consists of 36 games that have been published since 2017. We derived this population in June 2022 from Game Erauntsia's database. The games were filtered by the categories of *translated by developers* or *online* in the database. These 36 games do not fully match those officially localized according to our catalog in Annex 1, as this study corrected some data included in Game Erauntsia's list (see Section 3.1).

The purpose of a survey is to generalize the results through the analysis of a sample (Alaminos & Castejón 2006, 8). To do this, the level of confidence and the margin of error must be taken into account (Alaminos & Castejón 2006; Gómez-Escalonilla 2002; Vivanco 2005). Given the small population size to investigate, we would have needed to work with a sample almost the same size as the population (to work with 95% confidence and 5% margin of error, the sample would need to include 33 games). Therefore, we rejected the probabilistic sample and chose to contact the developers of all the games. The responses cannot be extrapolated to the population as a whole, but the responses gathered give us information for 30 games (83.33% of the population).

The questionnaire has been developed through the service Encuestafacil, whose configuration offers multiple possibilities. For example, it allows the preparation of multilingual questionnaires, the modification of questions based on previous answers, and the downloading of answers in an Excel file. We were able to use this service due to the fact that it is one of the services offered to professors and researchers by the Information and Communication Technologies Service of the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU).

The questionnaire consists of three sections and a total of 16 questions (available in Annex 2). The first page offers the option to answer the questionnaire in Basque, Spanish, or English. On the second page, there is a small presentation (in the language already chosen) where we offer respondents the option to share their email address, and we ask two questions about the localization experience of the respondent. The third page contains questions about the localization of a particular game. If the person who is filling out the survey has participated in more than one game in Basque, they can indicate this in the last question. In that case, they are returned to the third page and can answer questions about the second game. As we can see in Annex 2, all questions contain suggested answers, but respondents can also add their own. Before sending the questionnaire to the developers, we asked members of Game Erauntsia to read it, and they confirmed that everything was clear and easy to understand.

The questionnaire was sent by email to developers on August 23, 2022. Those who did not respond within a week received a reminder to participate. In the case of companies that were permanently closed, we contacted the former employees of the company. As for the developer DigiPen Europe-Bilbao, as explained in Section 3.1, the developer is a university where several groups of students participated in the development of the

games. We visited Digipen's website (DigiPen Europe-Bilbao 2022) and checked the names of the students. Then, we contacted these students via social networks.

The questionnaire responses were downloaded into an Excel file and processed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 19 program for quantitative statistical analysis. In addition to quantitative analyses, qualitative analyses were also conducted on the open-ended questions and in cases where more than one respondent answered about the same game.

3 Results

The results were divided into two sections: the analysis of the catalog of games in Basque and the results obtained through the survey.

3.1 Catalog

According to the data from the June 2022 list of video games by Game Erauntsia, there were a total of 78 games translated into Basque between 2009 and 2022. As shown in the graph in Figure 1, the oldest translations in the catalogue are from 2009. Until 2014 there are no additional translations, and in 2016 there is a notable increase. Over the next four years, the number of translations remains low until it doubles in 2021. It should not be forgotten that the number of games in 2022 is not reliable, as we only take into account the data until June.

Figure 1. ***Basque video games by the year they were translated, as per Game Erauntsia's list of Basque video games (source: own study).***
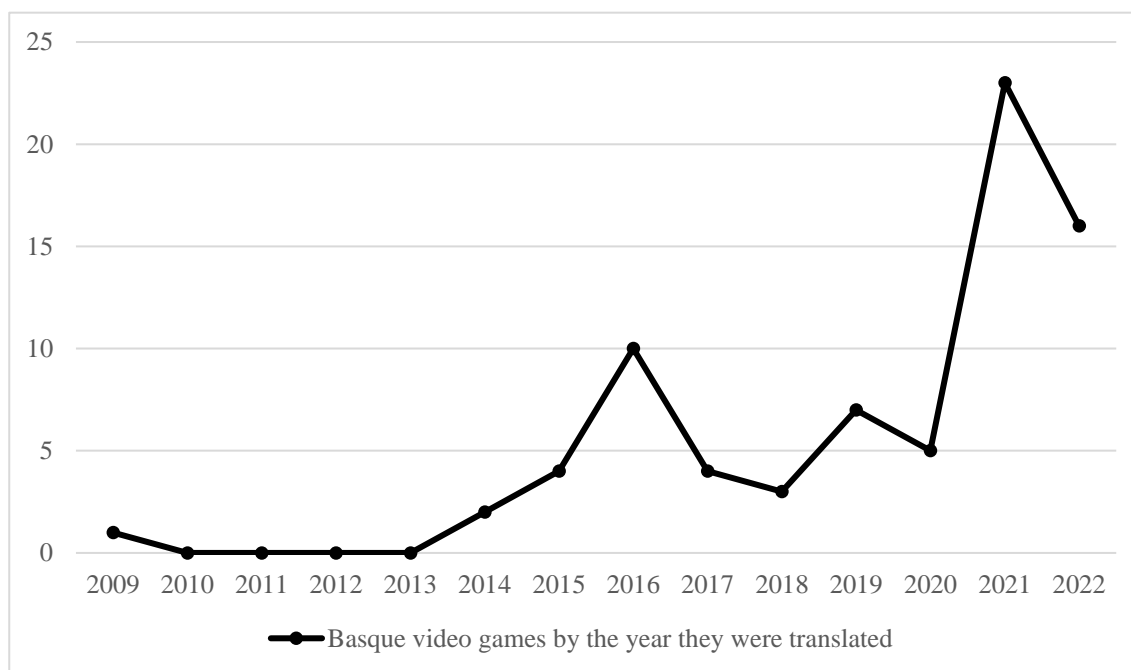
The 78 games included in the catalogue have been developed by 58 developers, as some of them have published more than one game. In Game Erauntsia's list, there are games localized both by fans and by the studios. This means that some studios are umaware that their game has a Basque translation. Noteworthy examples include DigiPen Europe-Bilbao and Nintendo, with the former having eight games and the latter seven.

The catalog contains eight video games developed by DigiPen Europe-Bilbao, which are actually video games developed by students. These eight games, published between 2020 and 2022, were all translated into Basque by the developers themselves. In the case of Nintendo, however, the seven games were translated into Basque by fans through ROMs or mods. Four of these games were published before 2000, and the remaining three were published in 2004, 2008, and 2014. As we can see, the cases of these two developers are differ significantly.

There are also differences based on the year of publication. The translations of the oldest games were made by fans, while the most recent were translated by developers. Figure 2 shows the time elapsed between the release year and the localization. This graph (like the previous one) indicates that more games are being published recently (darker circles) and that games published in recent years are localized almost immediately (bottom circles).

Figure 2. *Years elapsed between a video game's release and its translation into Basque (source: own study).*
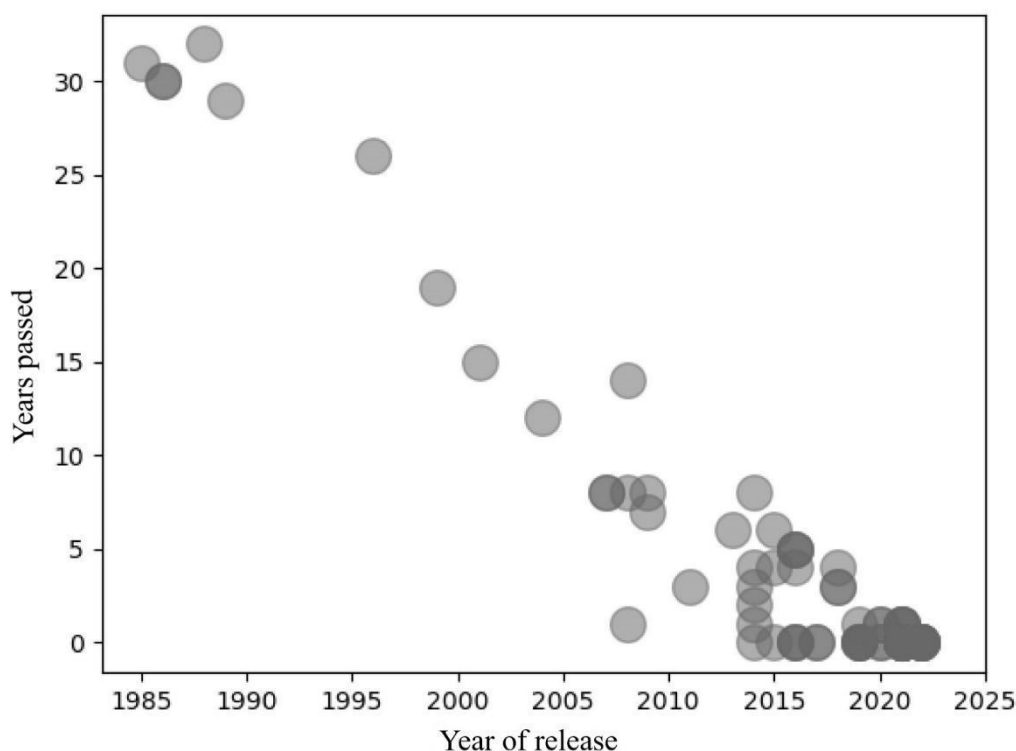
If we analyze the platform, the catalogue is dominated by computer and console games (PlayStation, Nintendo, and Xbox), which make up 93.59% of the list (see graph in

Figure 3). In total, 38 computer games were published, and 23 other games were simultaneously released for both computer and other platforms. In addition, 6.41% of the games are exclusive to mobile devices (smartphones and tablets). It should be noted that 29.49% of the games are available on more than one platform, such as both computer and smartphone. If the video game is available on more than one platform, each platform has been counted once in Figure 3.

Figure 3. *Video games by platform, as per Game Erauntsia's list of Basque video games (source: own study).*
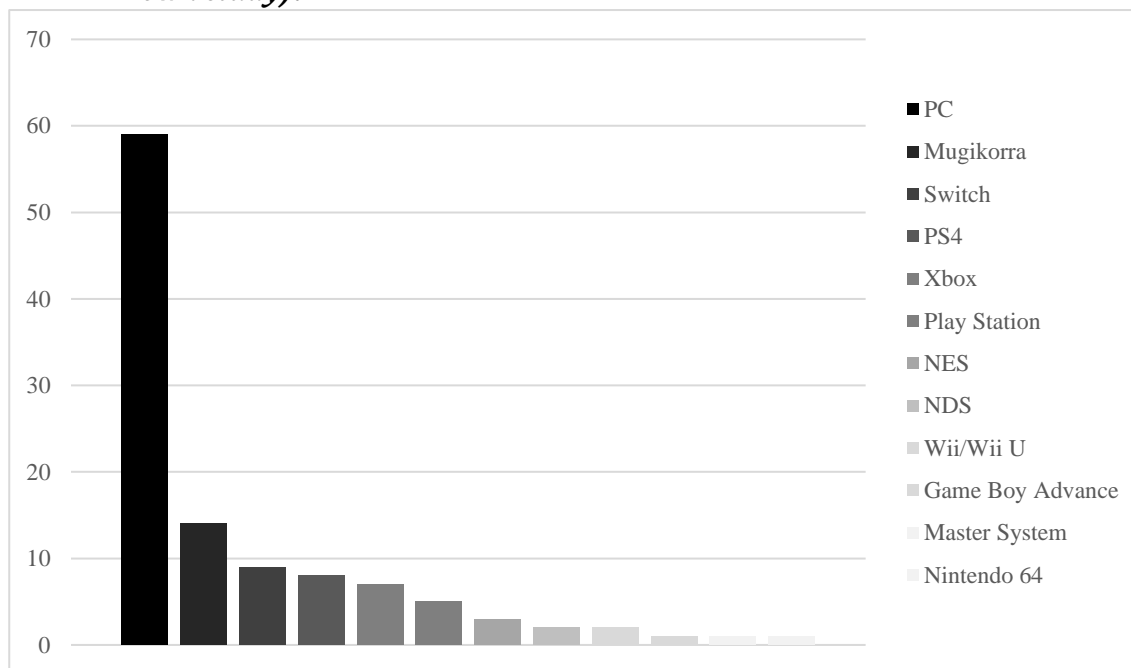
The reasons for the differences between platforms are varied, but we need to highlight the two factors that we already mentioned in the introduction: computers combine AAA games (large productions) with small indie games (independent) (Zorrakin-Goikoetxea 2022, 66), and computers offer more flexibility than consoles for adding mods.

We believe that Game Erauntsia's list is not clear about platforms. This database indicates the original platform of the video game and not the one that supports playing in Basque. Accurate analysis shows that many games on the list must be played on a computer using console emulators or mods. In the case of Game Boy Advance and NES (Nintendo Entertainment System), these consoles are so old that their original platforms are no longer available. In such cases, there is the option of using a ROM with retrotechnology (Ordorika 2021a, 64). In our catalog, we corrected the data associated with the platform and, instead of listing the original platform of the video game, we added the platform that allows the video game to be played in Basque.

The list of video games in Basque by Game Erauntsia separates the information about the type of translation into two categories. First, it provides general information about the translation and, if the game is fully translated, specifies whether it was translated

by developers, translated online, or if it is a completed translation. Then, it details how to play the game in Basque, indicating whether Basque can be selected in the game menu or requires an additional installation. The list shows that 38 games were localized by developers (48.72%), 26 online (33.33%), and 14 with completed translation (17.95%). This categorization is not always accurate. For example, the developers of *Bad End Theater* (NomnomNami, 2021) hired an external company to translate the game, but it appears under the category 'online' instead of in the category 'translated by the developers'. The opposite happens with the game *Berbaxerka* (Izha97 2022 [translators: M. Font & G. Salces]), which states that it was translated by developers, even if it is an adaptation made by two fans.

After reviewing all the collected data (including information obtained from Game Erauntsia, the developers, and the survey), we corrected the inaccuracies and defined the four types of localizations presented in Section 2.1:

1) Developer localization;

2) localization offered by the developers to the community;

3) fan localization accepted by the developers;

4) fan localization.

As shown in Figure 4, the categories we propose for localization types are different from the ones in Game Erauntsia's list. Correcting the inaccuracies led us to use four categories instead of the original three. Among the four proposed localization types, localization made by developers are the most abundant with 41.03% (32 games). The next largest category is unofficial localization made by fans, with 30.77% (24 games). Conversely, the least common type of translation corresponds to fan localization accepted by developers, with only 7.69%, for a total of six games.

Figure 4. *Video games according to Game Erauntsia's list of Basque video games, divided into the types of localization proposed by the authors of this article (source: own study).*
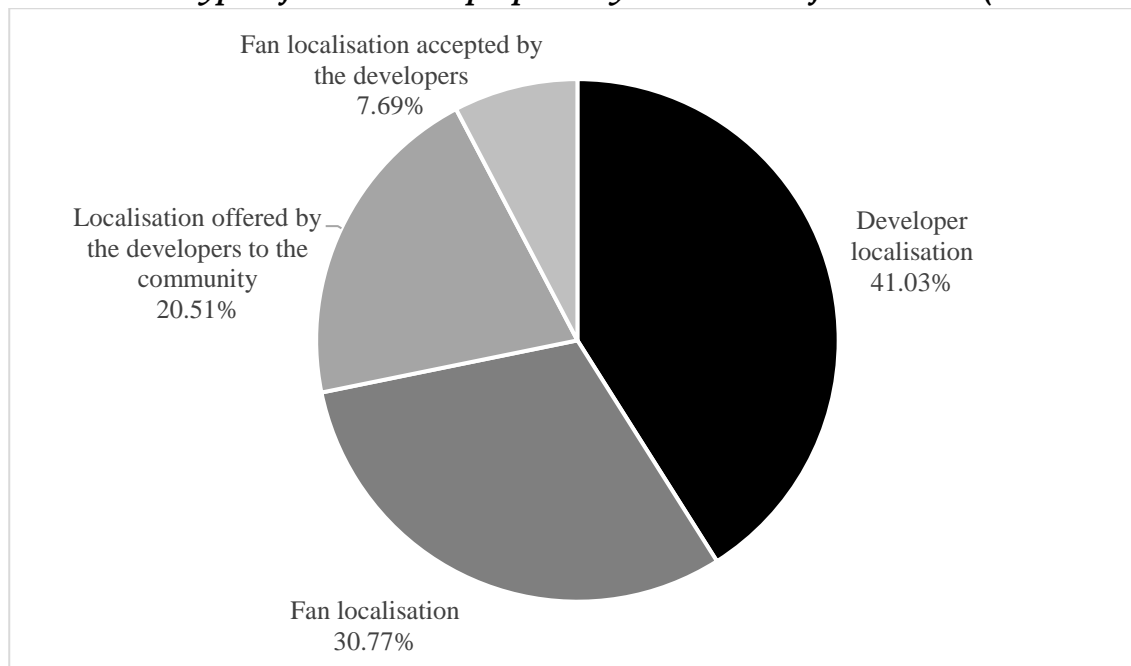
We identified 16 games (20.51%) that underwent a localization process open to the community by the developers. These include the listed open-source games, accounting for a total of 10 games (62.50% of the games open to the community), which represent 12.82% of the entire catalog.

We confirmed that there are three types of localization processes opened to the community by the developers. This information was gathered thanks to Game Erauntsia, the developers, and the survey. Some developers use localization platforms. Other developers have opened their source code, allowing fans to access the text (e.g., *SuperStarFighter* [Notapixel Studio 2019]). Finally, there is the case of the game *Townscaper* (Oskar Stålberg 2021), which used social media. Developer Oskar Stålberg shared a survey via Google services with the terms that needed to be localized, and an anonymous Basque speaker submitted an answer.

The category of localization opened to the community by developers includes four video game adaptations: *Berbaxerka* (Izha97 2022 [translators: M. Font & G. Salces]), *Wikitribia* (Watson 2022 [translator: Talaios Koop.]) *Wordle* (Wardle 2021/2022a [translator: Talaios Koop.) and *WordleEH* (Wardle, 2022b [translator: Talaios Koop.]). These are all Basque clones from the original open-source versions. Talaios Cooperative and Marc Font informed us by email that the original developers shared the code of the games so anyone could localize them. Since these games are closely linked to culture, translation alone was insufficient. In the Basque Country, few people would play a game about the names of towns from the United States of America. In addition to translation, it was also necessary to adapt the game programming to modify the

dictionary and databases. These examples show that the localization of a game extends beyond translation.

Game Erauntsia informed us that some of their members participated in at least 22 games localized by fans, which represents 28.21% of the total catalog and 47.83% of the fan localizations. This 47.83% includes unofficial translations, fan localizations accepted by developers, and localizations offered by developers to the community. However, this data is not accurate because there is not a clear distinction between members of the association and those from the association's community.

For these reasons, we have divided the video games from the list into three categories based on how they can be played in Basque (see Figure 5). There are 50 video games available in Basque in the official version (64.10%) and only four adaptations (5.13%) that can be officially played in Basque but that are Basque versions of another game (*Berbaxerka*, *Wikitribia*, *Wordle* and *WordleEH*). These two make up 69.23% of the catalog. Finally, 24 video games (30.77%) require the installation of a ROM or a mod.

Figure 5. ***Officiality of the video games from Game Erauntsia's list of Basque video games (source: own study)***.
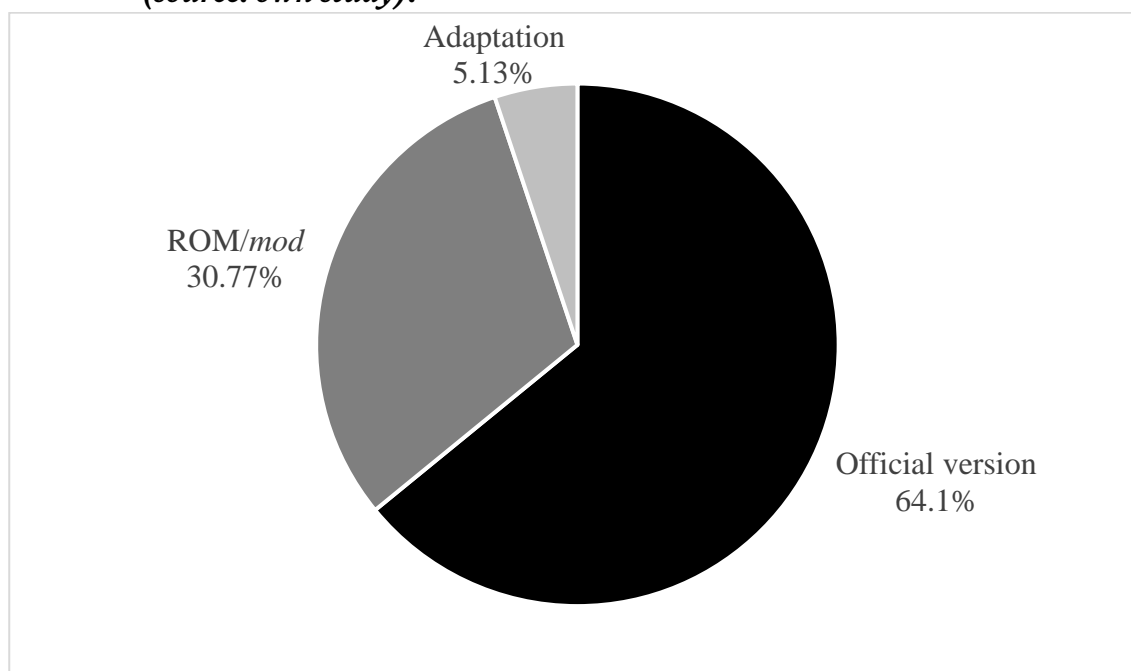
3.2 Survey

As mentioned in the methodology section, the survey was distributed to the developers of the 36 video games released between 2017 and June 2022. These games are listed in Game Erauntsia's database in the categories of 'translated by the developers' and 'online'. This represents 41.03% of the video games included in the list, i.e., those that have been officially translated into Basque. Therefore, the following results refer exclusively to this subset and cannot be extrapolated to all video games.

We received 30 responses to the survey, which represent 83.33% of the population. These include responses from both closed and open companies (e.g., Delirium Studios is closed, while Lince Works is open), individual developers (Eneko Azedo), and student groups (DigiPen Europe-Bilbao). According to the type of localization, 73.33% of the translations were managed by developers, 16.67% were fan translations accepted by developers, and 10% were translations opened to the community by developers. Despite being a non-probabilistic sample, it is a broad representation with many points of view (all survey responses are included in Annex 3).

We offered the questionnaire in three languages (Basque, Spanish, and English). The results showed that 20% of respondents chose to answer in Basque, 60% in Spanish and 20% in English. These percentages may suggest the language in which developers feel most comfortable.

When asked about their professional experience, 36.66% of respondents claimed to have developed ten or more games, while 23.33% reported to have developed just one game (left column in Figure 6). If we compare this information to the data shared by Spanish developers on Steam's website (DEV 2021, 41; Zorrakin-Goikoetxea 2022, 96), it becomes apparent that companies from our sample have more extensive experience. However, when asked how many of their games were developed in Basque, 70% of the developers said that they have developed only one (right column in Figure 6). This data shows that the commercialization of a game in Basque does not necessarily imply that the other video games of the same developer are also available in Basque. Below, we will explain the reasons why developers may choose to translate so few games into Basque.

Figure 6. *Experience of the developers (source: own study).*
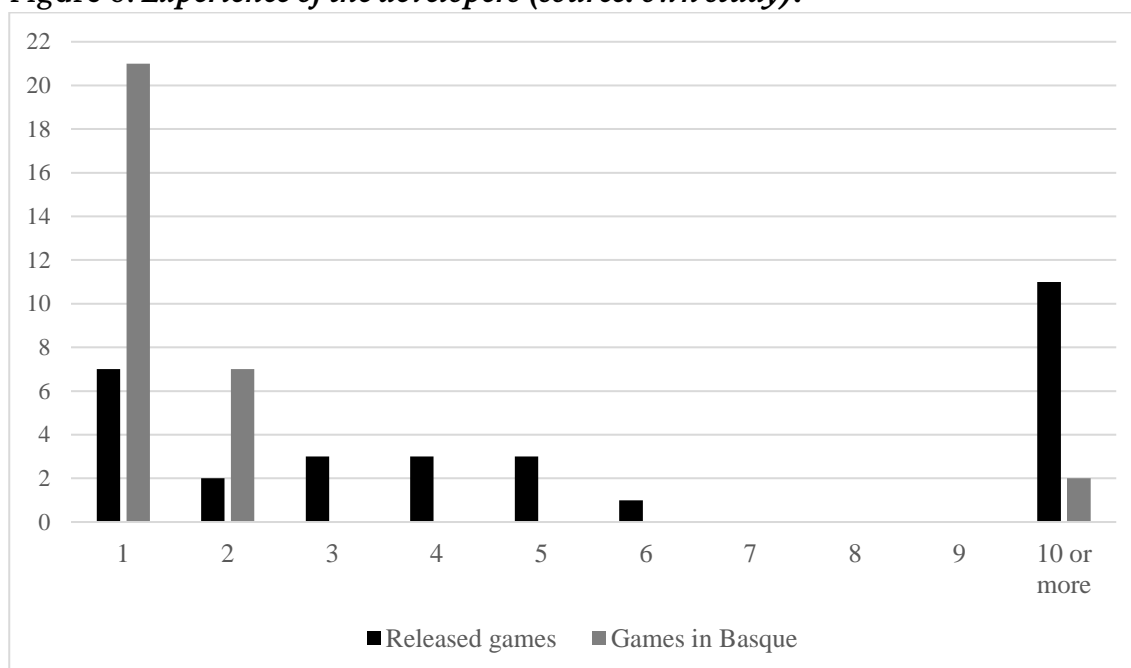
As shown in the following graph, 66.66% of the 36 Basque video games in our sample were originally developed in English, 16.66% in Basque, and 10% in Spanish. We also

received responses regarding one video game originally developed in French and another developed simultaneously in Spanish and Catalan. In Spain, only 9% of video games are available in Basque (DEV 2022, 47). Furthermore, according to a survey based on Steam's data, (Zorrakin-Goikoetxea 2022, 97), 82.6% of video games are developed in English, which is 15.94% higher than in this research.

Figure 7. *Original language of video games officially translated into Basque (source: own study).*
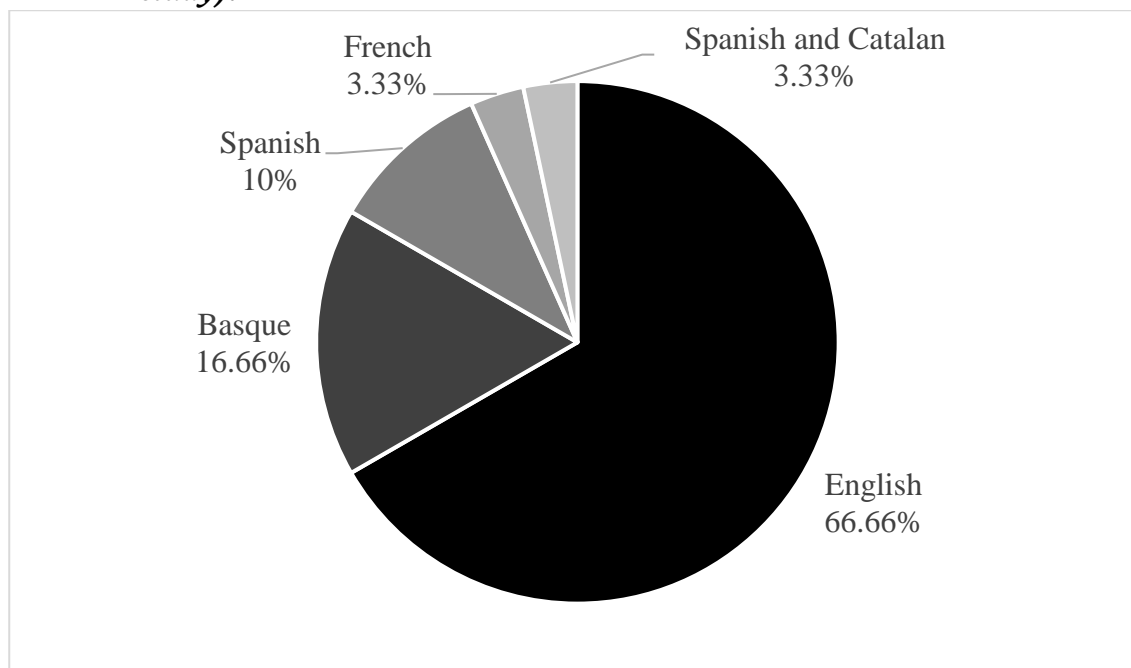
Many games are developed in English despite it not being the developer's mother tongue because English is the largest gaming market (Zorrakin-Goikoetxea 2022, 98). Although most of the sample follows this trend of video games being developed in English, 43.33% of the developers also translate their games into Basque because they live in the Basque Country, and 60% because they want to promote the language. Both reasons show the developers' connection to the Basque language. On the other hand, 36.66% of the developers translated their games because the translation was free. In such cases, the developers had no relationship with the Basque Country. It seems they translated their games simply to add another language to their game without much effort. The graph in Figure 8 indicates that Basque is the original language of the game in 16.66% of cases. The sum of the results exceeds 100% because respondents could select more than one answer in the questionnaire.

Figure 8. *Reasons to translate video games into Basque (source: own study).*
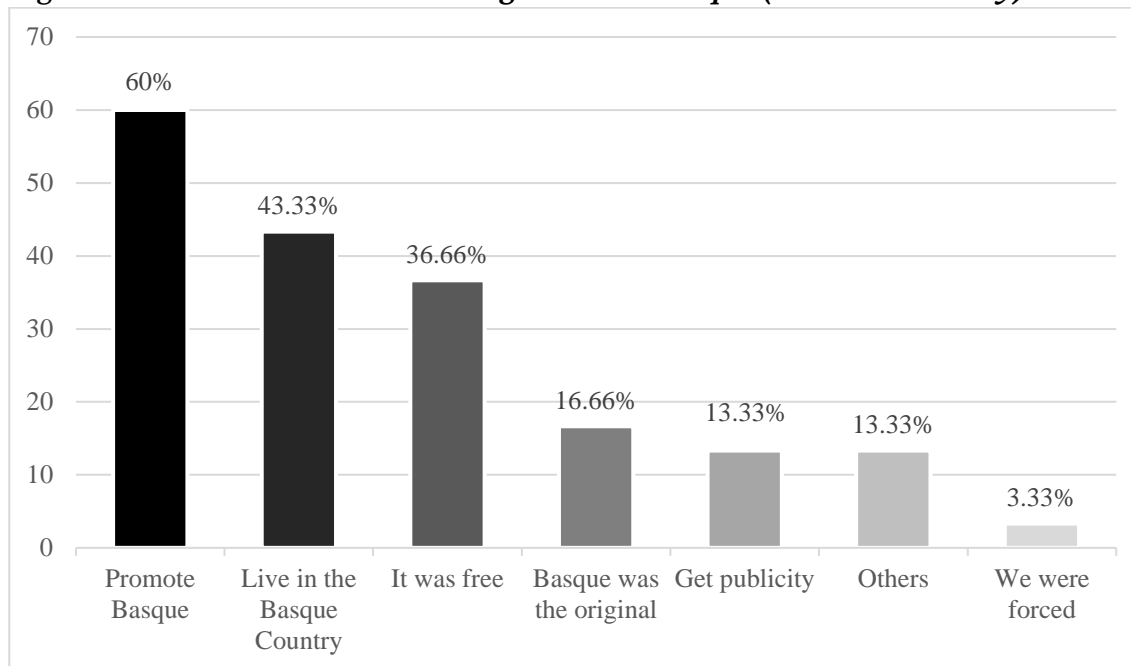
There are cases (13.33%) where developers provided other reasons. In two instances, they said that a colleague translated the game into Basque because they knew the language. Another developer stated that they wanted the game to be available in all the official languages of Spain's Autonomous Communities (Basque, Catalan, and Galician). Yet another developer said that they wanted to promote minority languages and, since they were offered a free translation, found it to be a viable option.

Figure 9 shows that 26.66% of the video games were translated into Basque by one of the developers. Adding to this percentage video games originally developed in Basque, we can conclude that 43.32% of video games were directly translated by the company. Another third of the video games were translated into Basque by fans (20% by an individual fan and 13.33% by a group of fans). The percentage of games translated by professionals is 20.33% (13.33% by a single translator and 10% by an agency). According to the developers, no games were translated exclusively using automatic translation software.

Figure 9. *Type of translator used for the translation into Basque (source: own study).*
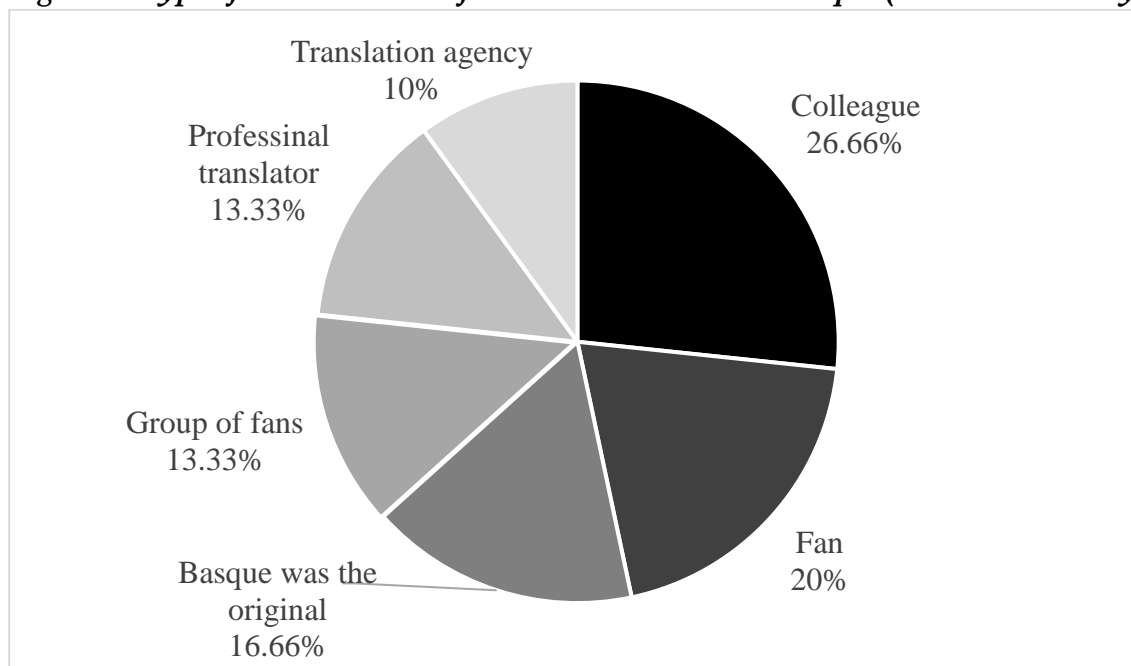
Developers stated that the translator did not receive money in exchange for translating the game into Basque in 76% of the cases. Another 16% reported paying the translator, and the remaining 8% were unsure. In addition to the monetary payment, we asked the developers whether the translator received other forms of compensation: 40% said yes, and 52% said no. According to Fisher's exact test, which is used to compare two qualitative variables, we found that these responses are interdependent (p = 0.004). This indicates that three-quarters of the translators who received monetary payment did not receive any additional compensation, but 47.36% of the translators who didn't receive the monetary payment have received another form of payment. In eight cases, this payment was a free copy of the game. In situations where translators received no compensation at all, developers explained that the game was free for everyone or that the translator was a colleague, so they had already received some of the profits.

Table 1. *Payment received by the translator (source: own study).*

		Another type of payment			Total
		Yes	No	I don't know	
Economic payment	Yes	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	0	4 (100%)
	No	9 (47.36%)	10 (52.63%)	0	19 (100%)
	I don't know	0	0	2 (100%)	2 (100%)
Total		10 (40.0%)	13 (52.0%)	2 (8.0%)	25 (100%)

We observed patterns between the type of translator and payments, as these two variables are also interdependent (p = 0.007). Among the seven games translated by professionals (either an agency or a professional translator), 42.85% of these received a

payment, while in 28.57% of cases, the developer was unsure if the translator had been paid. Among the ten games translated by a fan or a group of fans, 90% did not receive any monetary compensation.

When asked whether they wanted their next game to be available in Basque, 70% of developers said yes, 26.66% did not care whether the game is in Basque or not, and one developer did not want their next game to be in Basque. Among the reasons for not translating games into Basque, six developers have pointed out that the Basque audience is very small, that it does not influence sales, and that it takes too long to implement the localization for such a low return.

The reasons given for translating video games into Basque were varied. Basque is the language of at least seven developers, and that has been the main reason they had for translating the game (they did not specify whether Basque was their mother tongue or their daily spoken language). Nine developers expressed a desire to promote the language, while four indicated that having more languages in their game was inherently better. Three developers want to make it possible for players to play in the co-official languages of their region, while the remaining four believe that localization to Basque is a good promotional tool. One developer explained that they would try to translate video games with minimal text into Basque but noted that they are now working on a game with 100,000 words and that, as a professional translator is needed, they do not know if they will be able to localize the game because they have no resources for it.

We asked developers about the human resources needed to localize a video game (the answers are shown in the graph in Figure 10). The data shows that 30% of the developers would translate the game within the company, as Basque is their mother tongue. On the other hand, there are developers who would be willing to pay for translating the game (20%). Some of them answered that they would accept it only if the translation was free (13.33%). Another 13.33% of the developers said they would decide according to other factors, such as economic profitability. Another 13.33% would translate the game within the company because they know the language, even if their mother tongue is not Basque. The remaining 10% do not want their work to be in Basque. It must be said, however, that two of the three answers that make up these 10% are provided by the same developer, because he has answered the questionnaire for two games.

Figure 10. *Conditions to translate more games into Basque in the future (source: own study).*
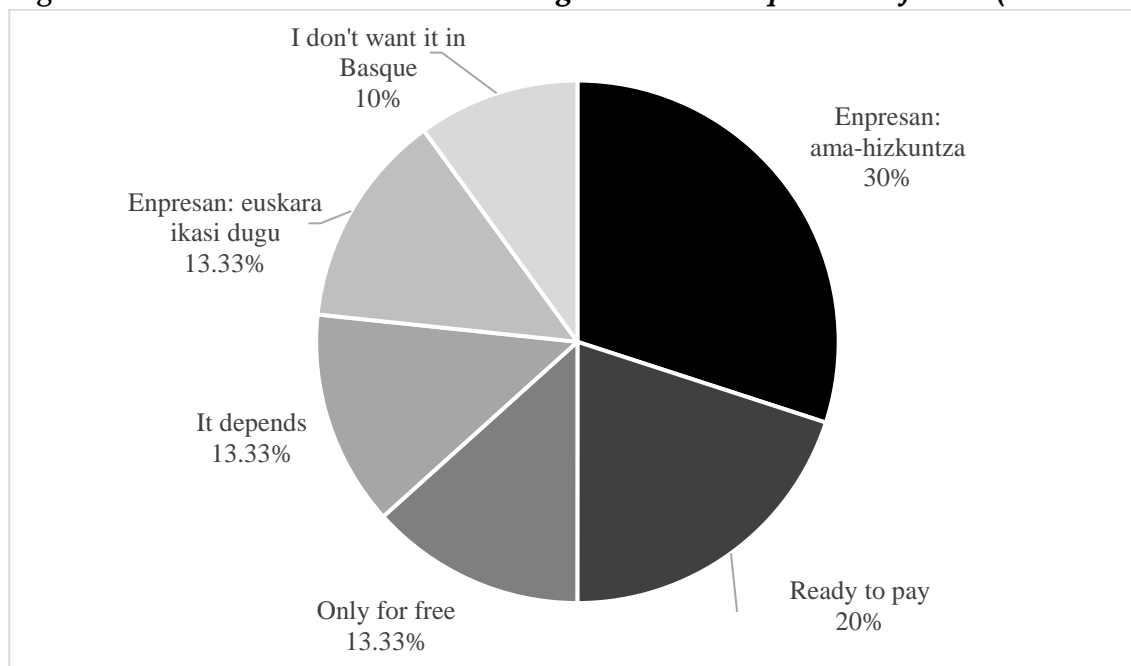
Next, we will explain the information excluded from the survey. Two students from DigiPen Europe-Bilbao responded regarding the games *Skywolf* (DigiPen Europe-Bilbao 2019) and *Arclight 2* (DigiPen Europe-Bilbao 2021a). These two games were not included in our sample because they were not in Game Erauntsia's list of Basque video games as of June 2022. We also received responses about two other games that were not in the catalog: *Live Cycling Manager 2022* (Xagu Studios S.L. 2022a) and *Live Cycling Race* (Xagu Studios S.L. no date). The games listed in the catalog were *Live Cycling Manager 2* (Xagu Studios S.L. 2019) and *Live Cycling Manager 2021* (Xagu Studios S.L. 2021). As their titles are so similar, we contacted the developer, who explained that they had developed six cycling games: *Live Cycling Manager* (no date), *Live Cycling Manager 2* (2019), *Live Cycling Manager 2021* (2021), *Live Cycling Manager 2022 (*2022a), *Live Cycling Race* (no date), and *Vélo Tour Swiss Life* (2022b). The first two are no longer available to play, and *Vélo Tour Swiss Life* does not have a Basque version. The developer confirmed that the localization process for the other three games was identical to the ones in our catalog. As such, we used the answers for the games we analyzed.

It is also noteworthy that for four games, we received more than one response, as the questionnaire was sent to several developers. We received two responses for *Pile Up!* (Seed by Seed 2021) and three responses for *Arruyo* (DigiPen Europe-Bilbao 2022), *Forgotten Journey* (DigiPen Europe-Bilbao 2021b), and *Mirlo: Above the Sun* (DigiPen Europe-Bilbao 2021c). In these cases, while the type of translator remained the same, the opinions and arguments provided – such as the reasons for translating the game into Basque – were not always identical. For quantitative and statistical analysis, we considered the first answer we obtained for each game, and for qualitative analysis (open-ended questions), we compared all responses, including the answers of the repeated games.

4 Conclusions

This study has shown the need for cooperation between academia and the industry in order to analyze the situation of the localization of video games in Basque, as direct contact with developers is essential to obtain the necessary information. The difficulties in contacting the developers are evident, especially when dealing with companies that are out of business, such as Delirium Studios from Bilbao, student groups like DigiPen Europe-Bilbao, or foreign developers such as Oskar Stålberg. However, the number of responses we received from the surveyed developers was very high, with 83.33% responses. Therefore, we can state that the developers are interested in the research topic.

In general, we were able to collect information about the localization of each video game through the survey based on Game Erauntsia's list of Basque video games and our bibliographical work. The results reveal the diversity of localization types that exist for Basque among the games in our catalogue. We also have defined four types of localization (from highest to lowest games quantity): those made by the developers themselves, unofficial localization made by fans that are played using ROMs and mods, those made by fans after the request for help from the developers, and the localizations made by the fans and offered to the developers.

Although the total number of games is modest (there are 78 games between 1985 and June 2022), it is notable that at least half of them can be officially purchased in Basque, without the need to use ROMs or mods. The high number of games with ROMs or mods directly affect the player's experience, as the extra installation process differs greatly from the ease of directly purchasing and playing a game. It would be interesting to measure the willingness of Basque video game players to perform such installations in future research.

The diversity of localization types encourages consideration of the quality of the translation. As seen in this study, developers incorporate fan-made localizations into their games, and as it is voluntary work, the quality and professionalism is questionable (Beens 2016; Díaz-Cintas & Muñoz 2006, 46; Zorrakin-Goikoetxea 2022, 192). It should also be noted that some developers consider themselves capable of translating. This is a phenomenon that has not been studied to date. An important observation is how free software works in favour of Basque, as 12.82% of the complete catalogue is an open localization based on free software. In this category, we include the four video game adaptations (*Berbaxerka*, *Wikitribia*, *Wordle* and *WorldlEH*), which required modifications in programming and color changes. These examples demonstrate that localization may require not only the work of a translator, but also that of engineers and designers.

We should also address platforms. As indicated in the results, Game Erauntsia's list of Basque video games mentions the original platform of the game. However, in the case

of ROMs and mods, these usually need to be played on a computer. The lack of clarity in this information can lead to misunderstanding among players. For example, someone may think that the game can actually be played in Basque on the NES platform. Furthermore, it is clear that Game Erauntsia's list of Basque video games does not include all the games that can be played in Basque (as we mentioned in the introduction, there are some missing video games, such as *Sei Baietz!* and *Mendizaleak*).

On September 28, 2022, after learning the results of our research, the Association Game Erauntsia updated their list of Basque video games. In this updated version, games can be filtered according to the following criteria: platforms, genres, license (paid, free or open), official translation (yes or no), and type of translation (original in Basque, developer translation, or fan translation). Although the list does not include the four types of localizations identified in our research, the list now distinguishes whether video games can be officially played in Basque or require ROMs/mods. Games originally developed in Basque and those translated by fans or developers are now distinguishable. This addresses some of the shortcomings from the previous list. We also informed Game Erauntsia about the missing games, and they answered, stating they would consider including them. At the time the article was written (early February 2023), Game Erauntsia's list of Basque video games contained 111 games, 29 more than in June 2022.

The questionnaire responses reveal that most developers have only published one game in Basque, even though they have participated in multiple games overall. The reason for that may be related to the number of words in each game. Some developers pointed out that it is easier to translate games with less text. Also, translators usually charge based on word count. Fans are willing to translate some words voluntarily, but not exceptionally large quantities of text.

Regarding the original language, we confirmed that 66.66% of the video games were developed in English. At the same time, 60% of developers chose to answer the questionnaire in Spanish, despite having the option to respond in English. This suggests that developers feel more comfortable in Spanish and have written the game in English for other reasons, such as economic considerations. In addition to the low sales in Basque, two developers also mention low sales in Spanish. These developers think that sometimes the Spanish localization is not economically profitable, and it is not the first time that someone expressed similar opinions (Klimov 2017; Zorrakin-Goikoetxea 2022, 43). This fact should also be considered when researching or promoting the localization for minority languages. If languages with larger speaker bases are not economically profitable, non-economic benefits in minority languages must be promoted. This data shows the importance of English in the industry and suggests that some games are developed directly in English even when it is not the developer's mother tongue.

Localizations in Basque are primarily carried out to promote the language and because the developers live in the Basque Country. With this in mind, we can only hope that the number of video games in Basque will continue to grow, and that the gaming industry in the Basque Country will strenghten. To a large extent, the games have been translated into Basque because the translation has been free. This shows that many developers are not willing to pay for Basque localizations. Only 23.33% of the games in our sample were translated by a professional, and as far as the respondents are aware, only 16% of the translators received payment for their work. The rest of the translations were performed by fans (33.33%) or colleagues (26.66%). We found cases of self-translation, but according to the developers' answers, no game was translated by an automatic translation software. However, someone may have used an automatic translation software without the developers knowledge, or the results of the automatic translation may have been used as a reference. When it comes to video games in Basque, free translations made by fans and collaborators are currently predominant.

Encouragingly, 70% of developers expressed that they would like their next game to be available in Basque. Many of these potential translations (43.33%) would be done by their colleagues, 30% by developers themselves because their mother tongue is Basque, and 13.33% because they have learned the language. Following this trajectory, future research could explore video game self-translations and translations into a second language, similar to studies conducted on Basque literature (Manterola 2013, 2015, 2018). Such research would complement the findings of this study and highlight similarities and differences with other fields.

In summary, we have collected promising data for players who wish to play in Basque: the number of games in Basque is steadily increasing. Some developers helped to complete our catalog or participated in our survey, and a fifth of the developers are willing to pay for translating the games into Basque. We have also confirmed it is common to find unofficial translations, free translations accepted by developers, and translations carried out by fans. Thanks to this research we have obtained data that was previously unavailable. We hope to be able to promote projects that delve into the research of video games and the Basque language and contribute to the spreading of the language within the gaming industry. From a practical point of view, the findings of this work have also contributed to improving the design of Game Erauntsia's list of Basque video games. Game Erauntsia's list will now offer more detailed information to guide Basque players, while also offering greater visibility to the work of localizers.

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ANNEX 1. Catalogue of Basque Video Games

Id.	Title	Developers	Type of localisation	Officiality	Release year	Basque version	Platform	Type of software
1	0 A.D.	Wildfire Games	Opened to the community	Official version	2009	2017	PC	Free
2	Adur, azken erronka	Eneko Azedo	Managed by developers	Official version	2022	2022	PC, Phone (Tele-gram)	Proprietary
3	Alex Kidd in Miracle World	Sega	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	1986	2016	Master System	Proprietary
4	Aliceren Ibaiak	Delirium Studios	Managed by developers	Official version	2015	2015	PC, Phone, Wii U	Proprietary
5	Amaiera Tragikoen Antzokia	Nomnom-Nami	Managed by developers	Official version	2021	2022	PC, Phone	Proprietary
6	American Truck Simulator	SCS Software	Managed by developers	Official version	2016	2016	PC	Proprietary
7	Among Us	Innersloth	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	2018	2021	PC, Phone	Proprietary
8	Aragami 2	Lince Works	Fan localisation accepted by the developers	Official version	2021	2022	PC, Xbox	Proprietary
9	Arclight Beat	DigiPen Europe-Bilbao	Managed by developers	Official version	2022	2022	PC	Proprietary
10	ARK: Survival Evolved	Studio Wildcard	Opened to the community	Official version	2016	2016	PC	Proprietary
11	ARK: Survival Of The Fittest	Studio Wildcard	Opened to the community	Official version	2016	2016	PC	Proprietary
12	Arruyo	DigiPen Europe-Bilbao	Managed by developers	Official version	2022	2022	PC	Proprietary
13	Batu ta Batu	EZSD	Managed by developers	Official version	2020	2020	PC, Xbox, PS4, Switch	Proprietary
14	Berbaxerka	Izha97 (Euskal adaptazioa: Marc Font & Gorka Salces)	Opened to the community	Adaptation	2022	2022	PC, Phone	Free
15	Braid	Number None	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	2009	2016	PC	Proprietary
16	Delta Squad	Eskema-Games	Managed by developers	Official version	2019	2020	PC	Proprietary
17	Dementium: The Ward	Renegade Kid	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	2007	2015	NDS	Proprietary
18	Dynasty Feud	Kaia Studios	Managed by developers	Official version	2017	2017	PC	Proprietary
19	Egunean Behin	Codesyntax	Managed by developers	Official version	2019	2019	Phone	Proprietary
20	Eurotruck Simulator 2	SCS Software	Managed by developers	Official version	2012		PC	Proprietary

Zorrakin-Goikoetxea, Itziar and Junguitu Dronda, Maitane. 2024. Descriptive analysis of Basque video games from the perspective of localization. In: L10N Journal 1(3), pp. 48–91.

21	Everhood	Chris Nordgren eta Jordi Roca	Opened to the community	Official version	2021	2021	PC, Switch	Proprietary
22	Fobos	Albert Sarlé	Fan localisation accepted by the developers	Official version	2021	2022	PC	Proprietary
23	Forgotten Journey	DigiPen Europe-Bilbao	Managed by developers	Official version	2021	2021	PC	Proprietary
24	Foundation	Polymorph Games	Opened to the community	Official version	2019	2019	PC	Proprietary
25	Fronton	Pulsar Concept, Bainet	Managed by developers	Official version	2014	2014	Phone	Proprietary
26	George of the Jungle	Papaya Studios, 7 Studios	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	2008	2016	NDS	Proprietary
27	Han'yo	DigiPen Europe-Bilbao	Managed by developers	Official version	2022	2022	PC	Proprietary
28	Hyper Light Drifter	Heart Machine	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	2016	2021	PC	Proprietary
29	Inside	Playdead	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	2016	2021	PC	Proprietary
30	Itadaki Smash	Main Loop videogames S.L	Managed by developers	Official version	2021	2021	PC, PS4	Proprietary
31	Keep Talking and Nobody Explodes	Steel Crate Games	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	2015	2019	PC, Play Station, Xbox, Phone, Switch	Proprietary
32	Kopanito All-Stars Soccer	Merix-games	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	2016	2020	PC	Proprietary
33	Live Cycling Manager 2	Xagu Studios	Managed by developers	Official version	2019	2019	Phone	Proprietary
34	Live Cycling Manager 2021	Xagu Studios	Managed by developers	Official version	2021	2021	Phone	Proprietary
35	Magic Twins	Flying Beast Labs	Managed by developers	Official version	2021	2021	PC, Switch	Proprietary
36	Mario Kart 8 Deluxe	Nintendo	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	2014	2022	PC, Switch	Proprietary
37	Mario Kart Wii	Nintendo	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	2008	2022	Wii	Proprietary
38	Metroid Zero Mission	Nintendo	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	2004	2016	Game Boy Advance	Proprietary
39	MIND: Path to Thalamus	Pantumaca Barcelona (Carlos Coronado)	Managed by developers	Official version	2014	2015	PC	Proprietary
40	Minecraft	Mojang	Opened to the community	Official version	2011	2014	PC	Proprietary
41	Mirlo: Above The Sun	DigiPen Europe-Bilbao	Managed by developers	Official version	2021	2021	PC	Proprietary
42	Nuclear Blaze	Deepnight Games	Fan localisation accepted by the developers	Official version	2021	2021	PC	Proprietary

43	Nuclear Corps	Ibar Ezkerra Ikastola S. Coop., Jokoga Interactive	Managed by developers	Official version	2021	2021	PS4	Proprietary
44	Oddworld: New 'n' Tasty PC	Just Add Water (Development), Ltd.	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	2015	2021	PC	Proprietary
45	OpenTTD	OpenTTD Team	Opened to the community	Official version	2004		PC	Free
46	Outer Wilds	Mobius Digital	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	2018	2022	PC	Proprietary
47	Owlboy	D-Pad Studio	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	2016	2021	PC	Proprietary
48	Papers, pleas	Lucas Pope	Fan localisation accepted by the developers	Official version	2013	2019	PC	Proprietary
49	Pile Up!	Seed by Seed	Managed by developers	Official version	2021	2021	PC, Xbox, PS4, Switch	Proprietary
50	Project Senko	DigiPen Europe-Bilbao	Managed by developers	Official version	2020	2021	PC	Proprietary
51	Quest 4 Papa Reloaded	DigiPen Europe-Bilbao	Managed by developers	Official version	2020	2020	PC	Proprietary
52	Re-Volt	Acclaim Studios London, Iguana Entertainment, Inc., Acclaim Studios Teesside, Iguana Entertainment London	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	1999	2018	PC, Play Station	Proprietary
53	Return of the Obra Dinn	Lucas Pope	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	2018	2021	PC	Proprietary
54	Shadow Race	DigiPen Europe-Bilbao	Managed by developers	Official version	2022	2022	PC	Proprietary
55	Shattered Pixel Dungeon	Shattered Pixel	Opened to the community	Official version	2014	2018	Phone	Free
56	Sorginen Kondaira	Binary Soul	Managed by developers	Official version	2017	2017	PC	Proprietary
57	Space Revenge	Eskema-Games	Fan localisation accepted by the developers	Official version	2021	2021	PC, Play Station, Xbox, Switch	Proprietary
58	Submersed	Main Loop videogames S.L.	Managed by developers	Official version	2019	2019	PC, PS4	Proprietary
59	Super Mario 64	Nintendo	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	1996	2022	Nintendo 64	Proprietary
60	Super Mario Bros.	Nintendo	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	1985	2016	NES	Proprietary

61	Super Mario Bros. 2	Nintendo	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	1988	2020	NES	Proprietary
62	Super Woder GP	ViJuDa	Managed by developers	Official version	2021	2021	PC	Proprietary
63	SuperStar-Fighter 0.4.1	Notapixel studio	Opened to the community	Official version	2019	2019	PC	Free
64	SuperTux	The SuperTux Team	Opened to the community	Official version	2004		PC	Free
65	SuperTux-Kart	"Benau", "Alayan", Marianne Gagnon "Auria", Jean-Manuel Clemençon "Samuncle"	Opened to the community	Official version	2007	2015	PC, Phone	Free
66	Sword of the Necro-mancer	Grimorio of Games	Fan localisation accepted by the developers	Official version	2020	2021	PC, Play Station, Xbox, Switch	Proprietary
67	Takatekla	Ion Lizarazu	Managed by developers	Official version	2021	2021	PC	Proprietary
68	The Binding of Isaac: Rebirth	Nicalis, Inc.	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	2014	2017	PC	Proprietary
69	The Five Covens	rBornGames	Managed by developers	Official version	2021	2021	PS4	Proprietary
70	The Legend of Zelda	Nintendo	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	1986	2016	NES	Proprietary
71	The Vanishing of Ethan Carter eta Redux	The Astronauts	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	2014	2016	PC, Play Station	Proprietary
72	Town-scaper	Oskar Stålberg	Opened to the community	Official version	2021	2021	PC	Proprietary
73	Waves Out!	Crevice Games	Managed by developers	Official version	2021	2021	PS4	Proprietary
74	Wikitribia	Tom J. Watson (Basque adaptation: Talaios Koop.)	Opened to the community	Adaptation	2022	2022	PC, Phone	Free
75	Wonder Boy: The Dragon's trap	Lizardcube	Fan localisation	ROM / mod	1989	2018	PC, Xbox, PS4, Switch	Proprietary
76	Wordle	Josh Wardle (Basque adaptation: Talaios Koop.)	Opened to the community	Adaptation	2021	2022	PC, Phone	Free
77	WorldlEH	Josh Wardle (Basque adaptation: Talaios Koop.)	Opened to the community	Adaptation	2022	2022	PC, Phone	Free
78	Yo Frankie!	Blender Institute	Managed by developers	Official version	2008	2009	PC	Proprietary

Zorrakin-Goikoetxea, Itziar and Junguitu Dronda, Maitane. 2024. Descriptive analysis of Basque video games from the perspective of localization. In: L10N Journal 1(3), pp. 48–91.

ANNEX 2. Survey

Survey: Basque video game localisation

Page 1. - Hizkuntza / Idioma / Language

Question 1.
☐ Inkesta euskaraz bete nahi dut (* Jarraitu 2. orrialdean)
☐ Quiero rellenar la encuesta en español (* Jarraitu 6. orrialdean)
☐ I want to fill the survey in English (* Jarraitu 10. orrialdean)

Page 2. - Survey about Basque video game localisation

Itziar Zorrakin-Goikoetxea and Maitane Jungitu Drondak invite you to participate in a survey about Basque video game localisation.
The results of the survey will be published in a book and will help to understand and improve the possibilities of the Basque language in video game localisation. If you proceed with the survey, you agree to your participation in this study.
You will only need 3-5 minutes to complete the survey.
If you have developed more than one game that is available in Basque, please choose one to answer the questions. At the end of the survey, you will be able to answer for another game as well.
If you have any questions, you can find send us an email to:
Itziar: zogotranslations@gmail.com
Maitane: mjunguitu@gamerauntsia.eus

Question 2 - If you want to receive the results of the survey, please leave your email and we will contact you within a few months.

_____

Question 3 – In how many video games have you participated?
☐ 0
☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5
☐ 6
☐ 7
☐ 8
☐ 9

□ 10 or more

Question 4 – How many of them are available in Basque?

□ 0
□ 1
□ 2
□ 3
□ 4
□ 5
□ 6
□ 7
□ 8
□ 9
□ 10 or more

Page 3. – Questions about the game

Question 5 – What is the title of the game?

_____

Question 6 – What is the name of the company/developer?

_____

Question 7 – What is the original language of the video game?

□ Basque
□ French
□ Spanish
□ English
□ Other (Which one?) _____

Question 8 - What were the reasons to localise this game into Basque?

□ We live in the Basque Country
□ To promote Basque
□ To get more publicity
□ The Basque localisation was offered for free
□ We were forced to localise it
□ Basque was the original language
□ Others (Please explain) _____

Question 9 – Who translated the game?

□ A translation agency
□ A professional translator
□ A fan
□ A group of fans
□ A colleague of my company

☐ An automatic translation software

☐ Others (Which one?) _____

Question 10 – Was the translator paid for the translation?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't know

Question 11 - Did the translator receive any other form of compensation? For example, a free copy of the game.

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't know

Please specify.

(* To fill only if the answer to the previous question is Yes)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Question 12 - Would you like your next video game to be available in Basque?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't care

Question 13 - Why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Question 14 - In what conditions would you localise your game into Basque?

☐ I would like the game to be localised into Basque and I am ready to pay for it.

☐ Only if someone translated it for free.

☐ We would translate it internally because it is a colleague's or my mother language.

☐ We would translate it internally because a colleague or I have studied Basque.

☐ I don't want the game to be in Basque.

☐ Others (Please explain) _____

Question 15 – Would you like to add anything?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Question 16 - Have you developed any other game that is also in Basque?

☐ Yes (* Repeat the questionnaire)

☐ No (* Go to page 4)

Page 4. – Thank you

Thank you very much for participating in the survey.

Zorrakin-Goikoetxea, Itziar and Junguitu Dronda, Maitane. 2024. Descriptive analysis of Basque video games from the perspective of localization. In: L10N Journal 1(3), pp. 48–91.

ANNEX 3. Answers to the survey

Id.	Language	How many video games have you developed?	How many are there in Basque?	What is the title of the game?	What is the name of the studio / developer?	What is the original language of the game?
1	Basque	10 or more	10 or more	Live Cycling Manager 2022	Xagu Studios S.L.	Basque
2				Live Cycling Race	Xagu Studios S.L.	Basque
3	Spanish	4	1	The Five Covens	rBorn Games	English
4	Basque	1	1	Pile up!	Seed by Seed	English
5	English	2	1	Pile Up!	Seed by Seed	English
6	Basque	1	1	ADUR - Azken Erronka	Eneko Azedo	Basque
7	Spanish	10 or more	2	Delta squad y Space Revenge	EskemaGames	English
8				Delta squad y Space Revenge	EskemaGames	English
9	Basque	10 or more	1	Dynasty Feud	Kaia Studios	English
10	Spanish	10 or more	2	Submersed	Main Loop Videogames S.L.	English
11				Itadaki Smash	Main Loop Videogames S.L.	English
12	Spanish	2	1	Aragami 2	Lince Works	Spanish
13	English	3	1	Superstarfighter (Starship Olympics)	notapixelstudio	English
14	Spanish	10 or more	1	Magic Twins	Cateffects SL (Flying Beast Labs)	English
15	Basque	1	1	Takatekla	Ion Lizarazu	Basque
16	English	1	1	Everhood	Foreign gnomes	English
17	Basque	1	1	Batu ta Batu	EZSD	Basque
18	Spanish	5	1	Arruyo	Digipen	Spanish
19	Spanish	3	1	Quest 4 Papà: Reloaded	El juego era un proyecto de la universidad	English

20	English	4	1	Arruyo	Blank Canvas Studio	English
21	Spanish	4	2	Mirlo: Above the Sun	Kaiju in the baijoo	English
22	Spanish	3	1	Shadow Racer	DigiPen Institute of Technology Europe Bilbao	English
23	Basque	3	1	Mirlo Above the Sun	Kaiju in the Bayou (Digipen Bilbao)	English
24	Spanish	5	2	Forgotten Journey	DigiPen Institute of Technology	English
25	English	6	2	Arclight Beat	DigiPen Institute of Technology Europe - Bilbao	English
26	Spanish	2	1	Arruyo	DigiPen Institute of Technology	English
27	Spanish	3	1	Mirlo Above The Sun	Kaiju in the Bayou	English
28	Spanish	4	1	Super Woden GP	ViJuDa	Spanish
29	Spanish	3	1	Forgotten Journey	Digipen-Europe Bilbao	English
30	Spanish	5	1	Sword of the Necromancer	Grimorio of Games	English
31	English	10 or more	1	BAD END THEATER	NomnomNami	English
32	Spanish	1	1	Fobos	Es un juego creado por mí.	Spanish and Catalana
33	Spanish	10 or more	1	Los Ríos de Alice	Delirium Studios	English
34	Basque	2	1	Forgotten Journey	Asvaq	English
35	Spanish	1	1	Han'yō	Hangover Studios de Digipen Bilbao	English
36	English	10 or more	1	Nuclear Blaze	Deepnight Games	French
37	Spanish	1	1	Berbaxerka	Gorka Salcess eta Marc Font	English

Id.	What were the reasons to localise the game into Basque?	Who translated the game?	Was the translator paid for the translation?	Did the translator receive any other form of compensation	What were the reasons to localise the game into Basque?	Who translated the game?
1	To promote Basque; Basque was the original language	A colleague	No	No	1	To promote Basque; Basque was the original language
2	To promote Basque; Basque was the original language	A colleague	No	No	2	To promote Basque; Basque was the original language
3	The Basque localisation was offered for free	A colleague	No	Yes	3	The Basque localisation was offered for free
4	To promote Basque; Garatzaileetariko bat euskalduna delako	A colleague	No	Yes	4	To promote Basque; Garatzaileetariko bat euskalduna delako
5	To promote Basque; A team member is Basque and did the localization by himself.	A colleague	No	Yes	5	To promote Basque; A team member is Basque and did the localization by himself.
6	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque; Basque was the original language	A colleague	No	I don't know	6	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque; Basque was the original language
7	The Basque localisation was offered for free	A professional translator	No	Yes	7	The Basque localisation was offered for free
8	The Basque localisation was offered for free	A professional translator	No	Yes	8	The Basque localisation was offered for free
9	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque	Azkue Fundazioa	No	No	9	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque
10	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque	A translation company	Yes	No	10	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque
11	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque	A translation company	Yes	No	11	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque
12	The Basque localisation was offered for free	A translation company	I don't know	I don't know	12	The Basque localisation was offered for free
13	The Basque localisation was offered for free	A fan	No	Yes	13	The Basque localisation was offered for free

14	The Basque localisation was offered for free	A fan group	No	Yes	14	The Basque localisation was offered for free
15	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque; Basque was the original language	A colleague	No	No	15	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque; Basque was the original language
16	The Basque localisation was offered for free	A fan	No	No	16	The Basque localisation was offered for free
17	Basque was the original language	A colleague	No	No	17	Basque was the original language
18	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque, To get more publicity	A colleague	No	No	18	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque, To get more publicity
19	Algunos de los desarrolladores hablan euskera, y se han ofrecido para localizar los diálogos	A colleague	No	No	19	Algunos de los desarrolladores hablan euskera, y se han ofrecido para localizar los diálogos
20	We live in the Basque Country	A colleague	No	Yes	20	We live in the Basque Country
21	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque	A colleague	No	No	21	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque
22	We live in the Basque Country	A colleague	No	No	22	We live in the Basque Country
23	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque	A fan group	No	No	23	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque
24	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque	A fan group	No	No	24	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque
25	We live in the Basque Country; We were forced to localise it	A colleague	No	No	25	We live in the Basque Country; We were forced to localise it
26	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque; The Basque localisation was offered for free	A colleague	No	No	26	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque; The Basque localisation was offered for free
27	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque	Unos compañeros del equipo	No	No	27	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque
28	To get more publicity; The Basque localisation was offered for free	A fan	No	Yes	28	To get more publicity; The Basque localisation was offered for free

29	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque	Nosotros, los desarrolladores	No	No	29	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque
30	To promote Basque; The Basque localisation was offered for free; El juego ya estaba en catalán y gallego y queríamos que estuviera en euskera para tener todos los idiomas cooficiales	Game Erauntsia	No	Yes	30	To promote Basque; The Basque localisation was offered for free; El juego ya estaba en catalán y gallego y queríamos que estuviera en euskera para tener todos los idiomas cooficiales
31	To promote Basque; The Basque localisation was offered for free	A fan	Yes	Yes	31	To promote Basque; The Basque localisation was offered for free
32	To promote Basque; The Basque localisation was offered for free; Me interesa mucho promover lenguas más minoritarias y apoyar iniciativas que trabajen con ellas. Me ofrecieron la traducción y me pareció una buena oportunidad de que mi trabajo contribuya a ello.	A professional translator	I don't know	I don't know	32	To promote Basque; The Basque localisation was offered for free; Me interesa mucho promover lenguas más minoritarias y apoyar iniciativas que trabajen con ellas. Me ofrecieron la traducción y me pareció una buena oportunidad de que mi trabajo contribuya a ello.
33	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque	A professional translator	Yes	No	33	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque
34	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque	Ni eta beste bi lankide	No	Yes	34	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque
35	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque; To get more publicity	A colleague	No	No	35	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque; To get more publicity
36	To promote Basque; To get more publicity	A fan	No	Yes	36	To promote Basque; To get more publicity
37	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque	A fan	No	No	37	We live in the Basque Country; To promote Basque

Id.	Please specify.	Would you like your next game to be available in Basque?	Why?
1		Yes	Euskaldunak garelako.
2		Yes	Euskaldunak garelako.
3	Como miembro del equipo recibió su parte proporcional, al margen del tema del euskera.	No	Resulta totalmente irrelevante en esta industria.
4	Jokoa	No	Jej
5	Steam / Console Keys, yes? But he also has equity shares in the company, as a team member and founder.	Yes	As much as possible, we'll try to localize our future game in Basque. However, narrative games, like the one we're making at the moment, are scoring more than 100 000 words. For that quantity, paying a translator would be mandatory and we do not know if we can afford it yet. However, if we're making new games with a low word count, we would try to translate them to Basque again.
6		Yes	Gure hizkuntza da.
7	Delta Squad y Space Revenge	I don't care	Sinceramente y según cifras de ventas, euskera, catalán e incluso español dan unas cifras muy bajas. Es por eso que no es nada atractivo traducir, y además lleva un coste de tiempo difícil de asumir por cualquier estudio indie.
8	Delta Squad y Space Revenge	I don't care	
9		Yes	Ahal den neurrian eta nire eskutan egotekotan, euskaraz egotea gustatuko litzaidake. Euskaldun batek hizkuntza aukeratzerakoan euskara hor ikustean badu, jokatuko duelakoan. Nik behintzat hori egiten dut. To promote Basque eta hizkuntza erabili eta maite dugunon artean presentzia hori mantentzeko ahaleginak egiten direla erakusteko gehien bat.
10		I don't care	La localización en euskera es algo que no aporta ventas al juego y aumenta el presupuesto y el tiempo de desarrollo, por lo que no es eficiente para nosotros.
11		I don't care	La localización en euskera es algo que no aporta ventas al juego y aumenta el presupuesto y el tiempo de desarrollo, por lo que no es eficiente para nosotros.
12		Yes	Nos gusta que los diferentes idiomas existentes en el territorio español estén presentes en el juego.

13	The game is free	Yes	Localisation is a great additional feature to a game. Accessibility is important both to preserve and to let people know the culture / language.
14	varios de nuestros juegos	Yes	Entendemos que la diversidad mejora el contenido cultural.
15		Yes	To promote Basque.
16		I don't care	We are a small company.
17		Yes	Gustatu egiten zait gauzak nire ama hizkuntzara itzulita daudela ikustea.
18		Yes	Porque nunca está de más que la gente pueda disfrutar de videojuegos en el idioma que quieran.
19		I don't care	No hablo euskera, no podría jugar la versión localizada en euskera.
20	It is free, and we worked on the game	Yes	If I developed a game myself (or worked in a company located in the Basque country), it would be cool to have a language option in Basque, as it would be a nice way to expand the language.
21		Yes	Son varias razones. Yo, como euskaldun, creo que el euskera es algo que habría que utilizar más a menudo. También creo que a la gente que utiliza el euskera en su día a día le gustaría poder jugar a videojuegos en euskera también.
22		I don't care	Estaría bien, pero yo no me encargo de nada de localización y dudo que el próximo juego en el que trabaje se traduzca al euskera porque muy poca gente que lo hable lo jugaría.
23		Yes	Industria barruan euskara noizbehinka agertzea gustatuko litzaidake.
24		Yes	Promover el euskera como lengua en un medio digital como los videojuegos o la animación es una puesta en valor para la conservación de la lengua y la impulsión de la misma para que más público pueda disfrutar de contenido.
25		I don't care	For larger projects a Basque translation makes little impact on the reachable audience.
26		Yes	Tener juegos disponibles en más idiomas ayuda tanto a promover esa lengua como a atraer jugadores.
27		Yes	Porque es un idioma cooficial y para que la gente que habla euskera tenga la opción de poder elegir consumir contenido en su lengua materna.
28	Juego de forma gratuita.	Yes	Cuantos más idiomas mejor.

29		Yes	Para fomentar y dar a conocer de forma más amplia el euskera.
30	Clave del juego	Yes	Por la misma razón que el anterior.
31	steam key	Yes	I'd like to localize my games in every language possible!
32		Yes	Por lo dicho más arriba. Creo que es muy valioso fomentar que el arte y la cultura estén disponibles en cualquier lengua, y creo que es importante apoyar cualquier iniciativa en esa línea.
33		Yes	Fomentar el euskera.
34	Jokoa guztiontzat debalde da	Yes	Euskararen egoera hobetzeko aukera ona delako.
35		Yes	Porque me parece que, como desarrolladores, nos abre más puertas al incluir el euskera, sobre todo estando en Euskadi, además de que es interesante que la industria de los videojuegos también cuente con el euskera.
36	Free keys for the game	Yes	Because I like the idea of having games in this language, and because as an indie, I can ^^
37		Yes	El catalán es mi lengua materna y por lo tanto respeto mucho las otras lenguas. Por eso me parece muy importante que haya contenido en lenguas como el euskera.

1.	In what conditions would you localise your game into Basque?	Would you like to add anything?	Have you developed any other game that it is also in Basque?
1	We would translate it internally because it is a colleague's or my mother language.		Yes
2	We would translate it internally because it is a colleague's or my mother language.		No
3	I don't want the game to be in Basque		No
4	I don't want the game to be in Basque		Yes
5	We would translate it internally because a colleague or I have studied Basque.	Anize Amestoy gave all the efforts and work for the Pile Up translation and we're very grateful to him for that.	No
6	We would translate it internally because it is a colleague's or my mother language.		No
7	Como he dicho antes no, aun si me lo traducen gratis dudo que lo haga	Lo dicho, cifras de ventas muy bajas como plantearte siquiera traducir nada.	No
8	Como he dicho antes no, aun si me lo traducen gratis dudo que lo haga	Lo dicho, cifras de ventas muy bajas como plantearte siquiera traducir nada.	No
9	I would like the game to be in Basque and I am ready to pay for it	Arazo larriena euskaraz jokatuko duten jokalari kopurua beste hizkuntzekin konparatuta, ekonomikoki bideragarria ez dela erakutsiko duela da.	No
10	Puede que lo localicemos o puede que no, se verá en función del proyecto		Yes
11	Puede que se localice o puede que no		No
12	Only if someone translated it for free		No
13	Only if someone translated it for free		No
14	We would translate it internally because a colleague or I have studied Basque.		No
15	We would translate it internally because it is a colleague's or my mother language.		No
16	Only if someone translated it for free		No
17	I would like the game to be in Basque and I am ready to pay for it.		No
18	We would translate it internally because it is a colleague's or my mother language.		No
19	Only if someone translated it for free		No
20	If it's profitable to localize the game into Basque		No

21	We would translate it internally because it is a colleague's or my mother language.		Yes
22	Idealmente lo traduciría alguien profesional, externo a la compañía, pero yo no tengo palabra en los idiomas del juego.		No
23	We would translate it internally because a colleague or I have studied Basque..		No
24	We would translate it internally because it is a colleague's or my mother language.		Yes
25	We would translate it internally because it is a colleague's or my mother language.		Yes
26	We would translate it internally because it is a colleague's or my mother language.		No
27	I would like the game to be in Basque and I am ready to pay for it		No
28	I would like the game to be in Basque and I am ready to pay for it		No
29	Si hubiese tiempo suficiente para ello		No
30	I would like the game to be in Basque and I am ready to pay for it		No
31	I would like the game to be in Basque and I am ready to pay for it		No
32	Es diferente un juego creado sin ánimo de lucro (como Fobos) con el que no podría permitirme pagar activamente una traducción. Pero de ser un juego creado desde una empresa o asociación, y con rédito económico, de tener yo poder de decisión sí me gustaría que desde el equipo se pagara ka traducción (aunque sea en parcialmente).		No
33	We would translate it internally because a colleague or I have studied Basque..	La razón es puramente económica. En ocasiones no compensa ni el castellano. Se piensa siempre en inglés y en el mercado global. Sólo hacenos euskera cuando las líneas de texto no son muy extensas y vamos bien en la producción.	No
34	We would translate it internally because it is a colleague's or my mother language.		No
35	We would translate it internally because it is a colleague's or my mother language.		No
36	I would like the game to be in Basque and I am ready to pay for it		No
37	We would translate it internally because a colleague or I have studied Basque..		No

Translation Challenges in English to French Video Game Localization

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Research Podcast Script

Short Biography of Interview Participants

Carme Mangiron

Carme is a leading researcher in the field of video game localization. She holds a PhD in Translation Studies, has years of experience localizing games, and has authored several works on the topic. She is currently a lecturer at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

Alice Ray

Alice is an English-to-French translator and a Translation Studies researcher, focusing on the translation of science fiction terminology. She has a doctorate in Translation Studies and currently works at the Université d'Orléans.

Lucie Prunier

Lucie has over a decade of experience in the video game industry. She has translated numerous games from Japanese and English into French and later worked as a localization project manager. She is currently the Executive Technical Producer at DON'T NOD.

Lucile Danilov

Lucile has been a freelance English-to-French game translator and localization consultant for several years. As well as translating and consulting, she has also built a strong audience through her website *Loc'd and Loaded*, where she frequently writes about topics related to localization and translation.

Anonymous Localizer

The Anonymous Localizer has extensive experience localizing games into French. Additional information has been omitted to protect their identity.

KEY

N: Narrator (Matilda Lailey)

LD: Lucile Danilov

AR: Alice Ray

LP: Lucie Prunier

CM: Carme Mangiron

Z: Anonymous participant

N: games. Maybe you've spent hours getting lost in the experiences they offer. If not, you definitely know someone who has. The video game industry is booming and becoming increasingly global, with games being developed in countries all over the world. But when someone picks up a video game that was initially created in a different country, how often do they think about the effort that went into adapting the game into their language? Not many have heard of video game localizers, but so many of us benefit from their work every day.

N: My name is Matilda Lailey, and with the help of some interviewees, I'll be critically exploring the specific challenges that come with localizing video games, with a focus on localizing games from English to French. We'll also consider potential solutions to these difficulties, and how the relationship between localization, academia, and the gaming industry could help (or hinder) video game localizers' efforts.

N: So, what exactly is video game localization? Localization is the process of taking software produced in one region of the world and adapting it for use elsewhere. This is a contentious term, as many question whether localization is a sub-type of translation, whether translation is one part of localization, or whether the two are completely interchangeable.

N: Many of the interviewees see the two as synonyms. Even those working as 'localizers', such as Lucile Danilov, may not consider this separate to the role of 'translator':

LD: As far as I'm concerned, localization *is* translation. You can't translate without localizing. Well, you can if you want to produce shoddy work… And you can't localize without translating.

N: However, there is value in using 'localization' as a unique term to show the specificities of working with software, as opposed to another medium, as researcher Alice Ray explains:

AR: Personally, I use localization. I think it's a great term, a great concept to describe the fact that you need to adapt all the linguistic, the language assets of the game. So, not

only the content of the game, but also the menus, the documentation, the guidelines, etc.

N: That said, localizer-turned-producer Lucie Prunier makes an interesting point about how separating the two terms may be misinterpreting what 'translation' really encompasses:

LP: I think people make a difference between translation and localization 'cause they think that translation is just word to word and localization is adapting. But there is no such thing as translating word to word without adapting to the culture. So, it seems very redundant that the word localization was created, to me. To me, it's a business word, to be honest. It's an unnecessary specification of translation.

N: Taking all sides into consideration, I'll be referring to the process of adapting games for other regions as 'localization', to emphasise the particularities of working with software, and will use 'translation' when speaking more generally about adapting text. The interviewees use terms as they wish to, based on the distinctions they personally draw between the two.

N: This debate around terminology has existed for as long as research into localization has. Why has academia still not settled on clear definitions of these terms? It may be because video game localization as an academic area doesn't really receive much attention. Let's dive into our first topic.

N: The quest to facilitate the process of video game localization in the gaming industry has been hindered by an unfortunate lack of research. Researcher Carme Mangiron touched upon the stigmatization of video games in academia, and how this prevents game localization from receiving as much analysis as it should:

CM: I've got it through my career, is this a serious research topic? It's because of that and because it's quite new and because it's associated with children, with nerds, with people who waste their time playing games as opposed to reading high literature. Basically, it's like lowbrow culture.

N: This stigma is particularly visible in Translation Studies. Articles only began appearing on the topic in the early 2000s, despite games having been popular for many years at that point. Even today, game localization takes up a small percentage of journal articles and conference talks. I searched the database of *Meta*, a well-known scholarly journal about translation, and in the 214 issues available, I could find only two articles on game localization.

N: Those who *do* wish to research it face many hurdles, such as spending their own time and money playing and transcribing a game if they wish to use it as a primary source. They are also hampered by a lack of transparency from others in the industry:

CM: It's a very cagey industry. It's very difficult to get data. It's very difficult to get corpus to analyze. It's very difficult to talk to developers, the NDAs and all that.

N: It is surprising that the gaming industry doesn't actively facilitate further research, given that they would only benefit from improved localization practice:

CM: If you talk money and figures, it generates, y'know, much more revenue than the box office, the music, the book industries. The more research we have, the better for the industry as well. Even if it's just in, y'know, pure economic terms, which is what the video game industry is more interested in.

N: Alice shares a different perspective on the value of studying game localization:

AR: Yeah, I think Translations Studies can really help understand the connection between language and technology and highlight the subtleties of the media, and it'll be a great approach also to understand our relationship, the role of video games in our life. You know, how we translate something tells a lot about how we consider the thing in our daily life.

N: Thankfully, there finally seems to be a shift happening, with more people growing interested in the topic. Carme shares her experience at a recent conference:

CM: I was in the scientific committee, and I proofread, y'know, I reviewed eight papers, and I think this is extraordinary for a mainstream conference.

N: Hopefully this trend continues, and we'll see the position of video game localization, and video games in general, further legitimized in academia.

N: Let's now explore some specific challenges when localizing video games.

N: Video games, as coded pieces of software, are bound by space restrictions in ways other media are not. If a translator translates a 1,000-page English novel into French, the final result doesn't have to also be 1,000 pages. In a game, there's a set number of characters allocated to displaying a line of dialogue, or text in a menu, for example. The localizer can't go over this limit. Anything larger won't fit the game's coding. This means localizers often must abandon their first-choice translation for something shorter:

CM: You have to sacrifice naturalness. Maybe use an abbreviation or something like that, or more telegraphic language. So sometimes they have to translate, y'know, battle messages. And I tell them, "36 characters" and they say, "have 38, is it… because it's really nice, is that okay?" I say, "no, 36, because if you use 38 it might, y'know, come off screen". Y'know, you have to respect the character limitations. So often you have to choose the second best.

N: Space restrictions also make certain translation techniques harder to employ, such as translation by addition; if something implicit in the source text wouldn't be clear to someone from the target culture, a translator can expand on the text in their translation to provide clarification. One localizer explains how this can be done easily in a novel, but not a game:

Z: The Harry Potter series – in France, we don't have the concept of a head boy or prefect. So, in the books, the original translator, he made up a whole dialogue about this. Ron's telling Harry "My brother's a prefect," and in French Harry was like, "What's that?" and Ron's like "Don't you know? It's blah blah blah." Because it's a book, he had the luxury of doing that. Whereas in a game, it really needs to be coded that at *this* point *this* character talks. If you wanted to do something like this, you'd really have to do it in the same speech bubble from the start.

N: How does this specifically affect English and French? French often needs more words than English to communicate the same idea. For instance, something that English can convey with adjectives may need a relative clause in French:

AR: For example, I think it's in the Dead Space menu. You've got this expression 'Single Press Quicktime Event'. In French, it's a nightmare to translate, because we can't say the same thing with so many modifiers. We will use, y'know, relative clauses for example. So, it extends the sentence so much. You've got to reduce the text.

N: Researchers have explored how space restrictions limit a localizer's translation choices, such as Annelies Van Oers, who wrote that game menus particularly limit creativity, even excluding menus from her research material as they wouldn't be interesting. However, space restrictions in menus actually allowed Carme to be extremely creative:

CM: I think we had that in Final Fantasy 8, the icons etc. We didn't have enough room to explain everything that we had to explain, so then we asked them, could we use icons, for example? Cause that would be visually... So sometimes, y'know, you might need to look for different strategies or resources to make sure that the players know what they have to do and they can play seamlessly.

N: Localizers must contend with time restrictions too, for example, due to 'sim-ship' or 'simultaneous shipping', which refers to the release of all localized versions of a game at the same time as the original version. There are two ways to achieve this: the first involves localizers beginning their work at the end of the development phase, when most of the original text is basically finalized.

N: In this situation, the localizer may have little time between receiving the text and the deadline for submitting their translation, as if the original text has been mostly finalized, it's likely the game's release date is near. This quick turnaround is less than ideal:

AR: In an ideal world translation takes time. And I think in video game localization, translators don't have enough time to translate. When you translate video games, you need to be creative because unique words, imaginary words. It takes time.

N: However, Lucie suggests why studios may hold back on giving localizers the text until late in the development process:

LP: Making games is very difficult. They're very time-consuming. They're very expensive, and so you have to be careful with, y'know, how you use your time and prioritize things. You can't send to localization text that's not finished, 'cause it's money wasted, essentially. You need to be sure that the text's not gonna change anymore. So, y'know, you need to send it quite late in the game essentially, 'cause it's more important to you that the actual original text is finished than having it localized.

N: The second way to achieve sim-ship involves localizers working alongside the development, translating text as and when they are given it. This comes with downsides:

CM: It just implies that it's much harder to localize it because it's subject to constant change. Now, this bit that was so hard to translate, they take it, they change it, sometimes they forget to send you the new update.

N: As mentioned, this approach isn't cost-effective, however major companies continue using it. Blizzard, in a talk about *StarCraft II*'s localization, stated there are about 650,000 words in the final game, but they estimate over twice as many were translated in total, because around half of that content was altered during development. This isn't a productive use of the company's money or the localizer's time. It's demoralizing to work hard on a translation just for it to not make the final game:

LP: I actually translated a pirate game, in fact, from English to French. I was very proud of what I did, 'cause it was a very funny game, and I really spent a long time to try and do it justice. And I remember out of curiosity, I looked at the French reviews of the game, and all of them said some of the French makes no sense. And I was so disheartened, and I thought, how is that possible? But I saw the sentence, and the sentence was not something I wrote. I knew the game by heart, I was like, this is not me. They've probably lost some of the translation, and they used Google Translate, or they did something that means that now the sentence makes no sense.

N: This is a major risk of not dedicating enough time to localization in the overall development-to-release timeline; should an error happen that corrupts the localized text, there's no time left to have the localizer redo their work, leading to shoehorned solutions such as using Google Translate. Bearing in mind the drawbacks of both localizing at the end of development and localizing alongside development, game companies would benefit from ensuring they allocate dedicated localization time to the development process rather than tacking it on at the end or making localizers work alongside a changing text. This dedicated time would ideally be late enough that the majority of the text is finished but early enough that there is adequate time for the localizer to do their job to a high degree of quality.

N: When I asked what the main challenges in video game localization were, the same thing kept coming up:

CM: The lack of context.

LD: The lack of context.

AR: A lack of context.

N: Common practice in the industry has localizers receive spreadsheets containing 'strings', which are decontextualized phrases or words to be translated. It could be a line of dialogue, a menu option, a weapon name, or in the worst case, just a word:

LD: Then you end up with a single cell that says "Will," and you wonder if it's referring to a verb, a name, or a testament.

N: Localizers often have no idea where in the game this string appears, whose dialogue it is, what it's referring to, which poses major problems, particularly when localizing from English to French:

LD: Another challenge comes from the fact that English has no distinction between imperative and infinitive forms: so, you'll end up with strings like "clear the area 5 times," and you're not always sure which form is most appropriate depending on where this string appears.

N: Another issue is deciding whether to translate the pronoun 'you' as 'tu,' the singular and informal form, or 'vous,' the plural and formal form. In the series *Mass Effect*, all characters address each other with 'vous,' which seems inappropriate for dialogue between lovers or close friends. This alienated some francophone fans, such as one particularly agitated fan who wrote a forum post entitled "stop calling me 'vous'!" But the localizer likely had no information about dynamics between characters, and erred on the side of caution, using the formal 'vous' by default.

N: Homonyms are also particularly susceptible to mistranslation due to lack of context:

Z: You had this video game called *Sea of Thieves*, and a lot of people talked about that because on the very first screen, you would see 'Microsoft presents *Sea of Thieves*', but in French it said 'Microsoft' and then *presents*, the word for, like, a gift. So, it was 'Microsoft Cadeaux *Sea of Thieves*'. I think it's quite likely that the person who translated that didn't have any context. So, you'd just have one cell which says 'presents.' And if you don't know, you're like 'oh, is it like a birthday thing?'

N: Despite string-based translation risking a loss of context, the interactivity inherent in video games makes it near impossible to provide localizers with one cohesive, chronological text to translate. In many games the player chooses in what order to do missions or has conversations with multiple possible outcomes. Often there is no way to know when the player will encounter a certain part of the text, and which other strings they have/haven't encountered up to that point. As scholar Anthony Pym said, "When texts are regularly *produced* in a non-linear way, and *used* in a non-linear way, it comes as no surprise that they are *translated* in a non-linear way." Here we see the merit of using spreadsheets and strings as a system by which localizers and developers alike can access and organize specific sections of a branching, fluctuating text.

N: So, what should the solution be, if providing a chronological and complete text is impossible, but the lack of context in string-based translation is unideal? Lucie provides a suggestion:

LP: Every time someone asks me, what do you think we should do to help localization it's, and it sounds so basic, it's please give the translators the build of your games.

N: It's vital the localizer can experience the game's mechanics, so they can understand exactly where in the game their translated text will go, be it as a part of a menu, a status effect, or a dialogue option:

LP: So, y'know, because you only translate the text that you see. You can just imagine what you're, what the world and the images that will be, y'know, seen while you actually have the text shown will be. Then if I have the build, I can, y'know, make my own, make my own opinion as to what's best in French.

N: Often larger game studios do communicate openly with their in-house localizers and make pre-release builds available. However, freelance localizers usually only get the decontextualized strings. Despite many expressing a need for build access, Lucie sheds light on why studios may not provide them:

LP: A lot of money and interest could be lost if that build was actually hacked. So, you're very precious about sending builds outside of your studio, so that I completely understand. Working right now at a game studio, I can tell you we do not send builds to people on their personal computers, it's just so dangerous, you can't do that.

N: So, current practice regarding builds isn't suitable for freelance localizers' needs, however the reason behind said practice is understandable. Lucie suggests a possible middle ground:

LP: I have sometimes gotten videos, which is quite helpful. I think it's a nice little, y'know, compromise, if you will. And I've had cases like that where I had snippets of videos and devs were really good about, y'know, answering questions.

N: Moving to more linguistic issues, Lucile highlights a potential pitfall when working with French:

LD: Unlike English, French is a highly gendered language: everything from nouns to adjectives to verbs are either feminine or masculine, which makes translation extra difficult in games that tend to use placeholders to save up on space and resources.

N: The 'placeholders' Lucile is referring to are often called 'variables.' Lucie gives a typical example of a variable:

LP: Say, for example, in an RPG, you open a treasure chest and it says, 'you got X.' Y'know, there's no harmonized way of translating that into French. It's a difficult thing to translate, contrary to what you might think, because 'you got X,' it depends on the gender and the plural, and it's horrible to translate.

N: Variables aren't just an issue for gender and plurality, but also for other syntactical features of French. For instance, to show possession, you use the word 'de,' such as 'la robe de Marie' for 'Marie's dress.' However, when the following noun begins with a vowel, 'de' becomes 'd,' such as 'la robe d'Amélie.' This is called elision. Lucile shared one way localizers can problem-solve around this issue:

LD: I once had to deal with possessive markers that wouldn't work in French, so I decided to change the nouns altogether.

N: Lucile sent me a Twitter thread where she discussed localizing a game, *Meow Tower*, from English to French. In the original English, the variable string to denote the cat characters' bedrooms was 'O's room,' where 'O' is replaced by the cat's name. However, Lucile couldn't translate this as 'la chambre de O,' because some cats' names began with vowels, so required 'd' rather than 'de.' To solve this, Lucile renamed cats whose names began with vowels, taking the opportunity to be creative while retaining the spirit of the original as much as possible; for example, renaming the cat 'Arthur' as 'Sherlock,' keeping the Arthur Conan Doyle reference.

N: Recently, French has been welcoming more anglicisms into its repertoire. However, the increased use of English words in French can create confusion for a localizer:

LP: I think it can be very deceiving in the sense that sometimes you might actually rely too much on the fact that they're sister languages, and I think the fact they're so close makes it harder because sometimes you, y'know, when you translate you get into both mindsets of, y'know, English and French at the same time and you start writing in French, but actually, it looks literally like English and so it doesn't look like natural French.

N: But anglicisms cannot always be completely avoided. Sometimes the English is genuinely the most frequently used word in French for that concept:

AR: Blaster, for example, the term 'blaster' was used for the first time, I don't know when, long time ago. It's now used in many, many science-fiction works. So, when you're a translator, you need to know, y'know, the megatexts, macrotexts. We use blaster in French, and it'll be weird not to use blaster.

N: This 'megatext' is hugely important. The localizer must be aware of terms consistently used across a particular genre, such as 'blaster' in science-fiction, or 'poultice' in fantasy. Even if a French equivalent exists, a francophone familiar with that genre may find it strange to see the French instead of the English they are used to. In fact, a good localizer must understand common gaming terminology, regardless of genre:

LP: I actually remember because I discussed with my mother, who's not a gamer, and she didn't understand the word 'party'. I said, no, it's not a party as in somewhere, an event where you go to have drinks with friends. In the context of an RPG, a party means a group of characters that are going on an adventure.

N: Many games are sci-fi or fantasy, which means they contain many neologisms, or 'invented words,' such as the name of a fictional chemical or species. Sometimes the localizer literally translates these, such as the region 'Skyrim' from the *Elder Scrolls* series becoming 'Bordeciel' in French, literally 'rimsky.' Often, the simplest solution is to keep the term the same, as when invented words have little to no etymological/cultural ties they can work passably in most languages. The localizer must be careful to do their research if opting for this method:

Z: Sometimes the creators want a fantasy word to be the same in all languages. But again, what sounds good in one language can sound like an insult in another one. So, like, you have to see with the other languages if that's okay or not.

N: In the *Mass Effect* series, most alien species' names are identical in both English and French, with one exception: the Salarians were renamed 'Galariens' in French. Why? Salarian in French could be understood as either 'dirty to nothing' or 'dirty Aryan.' Both are potentially offensive, which is probably why it was changed.

N: As for scientific neologisms, to sound realistic, they must be anchored in the players' knowledge of what makes a scientific term. Alice researches the translation of sci-fi neologisms:

AR: You need to create a plausible term, which can be, y'know, incorporated in our lexicon, in our future lexicon, or in an alien lexicon. Because you've got this link between our knowledge, our planets, our cultures, and the world of science-fiction.

N: To achieve this, the localizer must respect the etymology of both cultures' scientific terms to create a plausible translation:

AR: If you translate the words, y'know, in entomology you will need to use a lot of Latin and Greek elements, for example. So, you need to understand, well, this is a term from that field, so I'll be using that kind of pattern.

N: Now that we've discussed some of the challenges video game localizers face, we can see while many are linguistic, some occur because others in the industry don't give enough context, time, or consideration to localizers. Game companies *must* pay attention when localizers express their needs. After all, it's thanks to localizers that companies can profit in multiple countries. They must engage in dialogue with localizers, so at the very least compromises can be found, whether it be providing videos instead of builds, more transparency during development, or investing in Quality Assurance to catch errors that slip through.

N: These are hardly new suggestions, however. Academics have been discussing how the industry can facilitate localization since the mid-2000s, yet it appears nothing has changed. It seems many game companies aren't paying attention to existing research, which hammers home the need for video game localization to receive more academic attention. If there's more concrete research, the industry may be more likely to take

note. Now that we're finally seeing more interest in the topic, let's hope things continue in the same direction.

N: With that, we come to the end. We've spoken lots about challenges, but more than anything I hope we've shed light on these talented, creative, underappreciated individuals who persevere against those challenges just to ensure video games, ensure *art*, is accessible around the world. The adventures in games are created by the writers, but localizers open the door for us all to experience them.

N: Thank you to the interviewees. And thank *you* for listening.

Final Variable

Final Variable is a space for highlighting selected publications and for short reviews. This time, we would like to draw your attention to a couple of new books and magazine that game localization researchers might find useful.
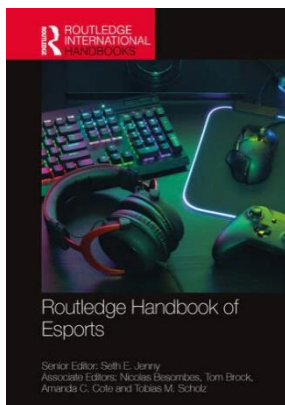
Routledge Handbook of Esports, edited by Seth E. Jenny, Nicolas Besombes, Tom Brock, Amanda C. Cote, and Tobias M. Scholz is a complex book looking at esports from various aspects and clarifies all you need to know in ten thorough sections, introducing esports, its origins, definitions, stakeholders, and many more. Each section is accompanied by interviews with the relevant figures in the industry and questions for discussion.

https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003410591

December's Issue of *Multilingual*, a journal focused on localization strategy, automated translation, language access and preservation, interpreting, linguistics, and international marketing, has been publishing issues since 1987, and reflecting on the events, trends, business deals, and technological advancements that shaped 2024. Each issue provides a fruitful insight into the industry and is worth exploring.
The newest issue can be found here:
https://multilingual.com/magazine/december-2024/.
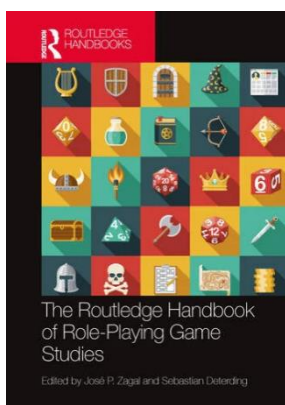
The second edition of *The Routledge Handbook of Role-Playing Game Studies*, edited by José P. Zagal and Sebastian Deterding, is another complex book focusing on role-playing game studies. It explores all the role-playing games from tabletop, live action or single-player computer games to massively multiplayer online and text-based RPGs. The book takes a multidisciplinary approach, from the viewpoint of sociology, psychology, or economics. Even though the book does not include the aspects of localization or translation, it provides a foundation for understanding role-playing games that can later be studied by translation studies and localization researchers.

https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003298045