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Advancing Game Translation User Research (GTUR)

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Game Translation User Research: Groundwork, New Research, and Prospects

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Abstract

In this paper, we survey selected tenets of an emerging program in video game translation studies – Game Translation User Research (GTUR). Explicitly aligned with Games User Research (GUR), GTUR seeks to capture in a systematic way how translation feeds into the experience of video game users. Drawing on examples, we probe some of the relevant conceptual and terminological distinctions that contextualize the thematic issue this article introduces, featuring papers from an international lineup of scholars who showcase new user-centric video game translation research.

Keywords: reception studies, user experience, user-centric video game translation studies, video game users

1 Introduction

With the technological breakthroughs such as generative AI (Pym 2024), translation practice is increasingly seen as at the forefront of change. From the perspective of research, this consequently heralds the importance of studying reception and perception, as it promises to elucidate the shifting paradigms of translation. This is especially true for a medium inherently reliant on users – Multimedia Interactive Entertainment Software (MIES; cf. Bernal-Merino 2020).

The study of game localization consumption and game localization users is becoming ever more tangibly potent, with mounting examples of controversies around user expectations, linguacultural tensions, and what users perceive as the quality of the globally released product. One of the recent controversies to be studied as an example of this, with the view to finding ways to try and avoid such problems in the future, may be the one surrounding *Assassin's Creed: Shadows* [AC:S] (Ubisoft 2025; Takahashi 2024). Before its release, the company behind the game was repeatedly advised to adjust or expand playable character options in order to accommodate fans' concerns about Japanese historical depiction (cf. Tassi 2024). This game from the globally popular

Assassin's Creed [AC] series was trying to capitalize on the success of *Ghost of Tsushima* (Sucker Punch, 2020). The two games can be compared on the basis of their thematic and gameplay similarities but contrasted in terms of user feedback.

Ghost of Tsushima's [GoT] team was praised for its engagement with the Japanese socio-culture (Malmquist 2022; Slyter 2024), and the leads on the game development team were even made ambassadors by Tsushima's local authorities because of the tourism boost the game brought (Scullion 2021; Tsushima Tourist Office 2021). The creators of AC were aware of this success, as commented on by its lead producer Karl Onnée, and wanted to take advantage of such surge in public attention: "That game [GoT] went on to sell over a million copies in the country [Japan], and Ubisoft will be looking at that as an indicator of what's possible" (Dring 2024).

AC:S is also set in feudal Japan, and there are two playable characters: a Black male samurai and a Japanese female shinobi (ninja), unlike *GoT*, which has the traditional male warrior as the only playable character (Lada 2020). Before the launch of AC:S, the Japanese fandom voiced concerns over the perceived insensitivities of the playable characters and their historically inaccurate gameplay (Yin-Poole 2025). This forced the company to issue an official statement attempting to reassure the fan base (AC: Shadows Dev Team 2024; Jewett & Lemay-Comtois 2024).

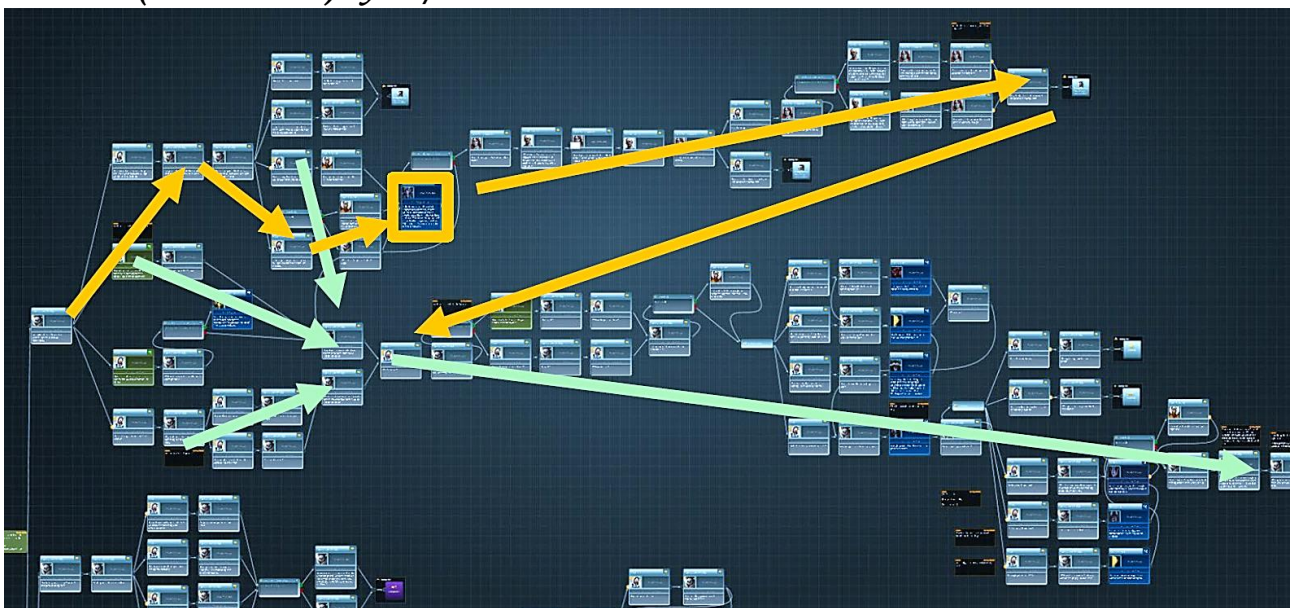
However, upon the release of AC:S, fans felt let down – both in Japan and worldwide – and were accused of politically motivated "hatred" (Totilo 2025). Players complained that, for a game about assassins, the samurai played more like a bruiser, which made the storytelling shallower and more ahistorical (Becher 2025; Steam Community Forum 2025; cf. Corless et al. 2025, minute 4:15). At the time of writing, the overall user evaluation of AC:S tends toward negative more so than in previous releases of the same series (Metacritic 2023, 2025a).

Moreover, fans felt vindicated when Sucker Punch released the more successful sequel, *Ghost of Yotei* (2025), with a female protagonist. This dispelled some of the previous allegations about bigoted criticisms of AC:S and showed that Japanese players appreciate cultural nuance. At the time of writing, the user score of *Ghost of Yotei* is 8.1 out of 10 (3,000 user ratings), whereas the user score of AC:S is 6.2 out of 10 (4,500 user ratings) (Metacritic 2025b, 2025a).

A "users-first" approach is also applicable in the context of localization. A good example is that of the Estonian studio ZA/UM and their game *Disco Elysium* (2019) [DE], a text-dense role-playing game (RPG). It "draws from a variety of influences and fields, and requires advanced literacy to be enjoyed fully" (Verdinelli 2021). Lauded for its introspective and politically loaded writing (Keenan 2021), DE posed a great challenge for localizers. They had to maintain the quirky dialogic functionality and manage localization quality assurance [LQA] amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (Verdinelli 2021).

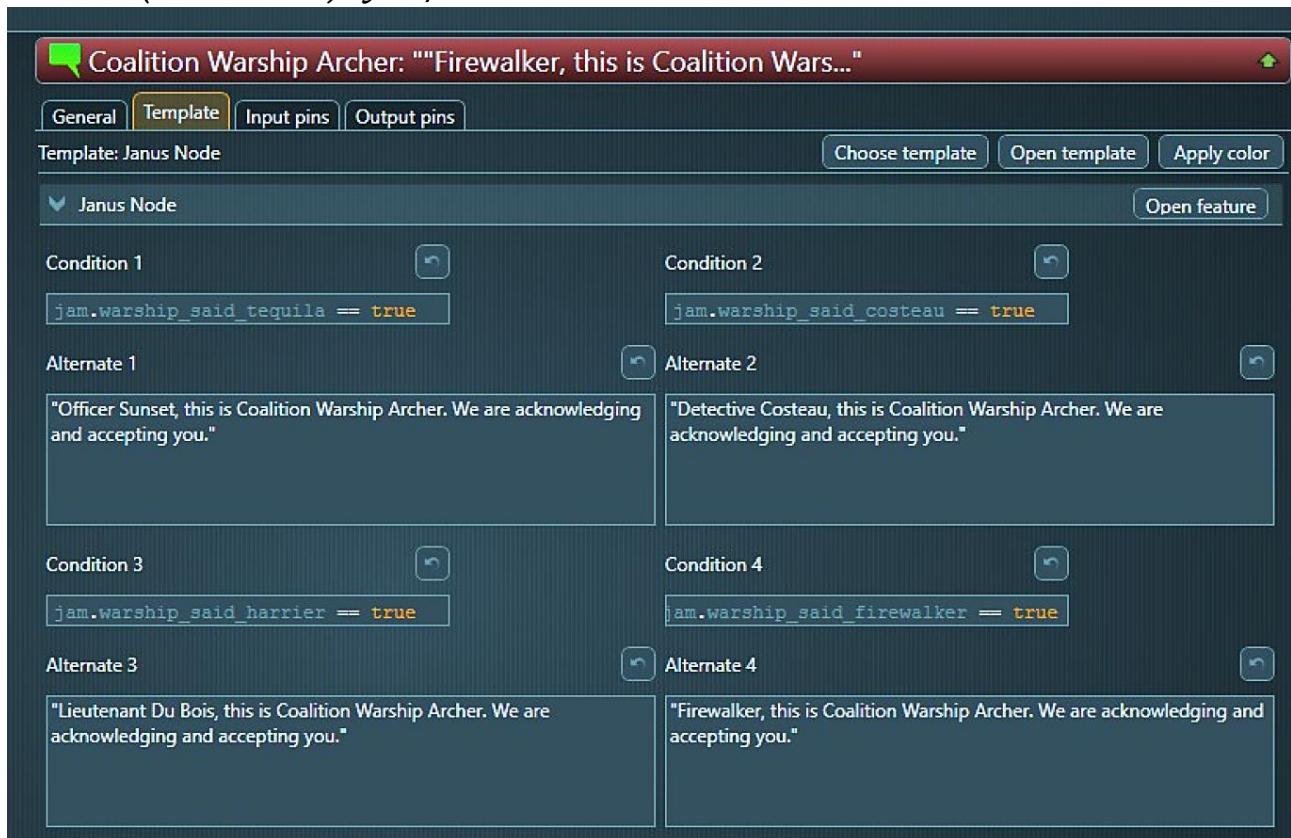
To cope with such demands, they were given access to the development tools “to see dialogues as flow diagrams, and check when or why a given string would appear” (cf. Figures 1 and 2). ZA/UM provided this access to localizers “along with lengthy and detailed reference documentation to bring forth more clarity about the game’s lore and setting”. Moreover, a process to collaborate with the LQA team was set up to playtest the results of translations (Verdinelli 2021).

Figure 1. *Intricate hypertextual structure of Disco Elysium’s narrative (ZA/UM 2019), as presented during “Disco Elysium: Meaningless Choices and Impractical Advice” (Keenan 2021) by ZA/UM at GDC 2021.*



(More information: <https://gdcvault.com/play/1027048/-Disco-Elysium-Meaningless-Choices>)

Figure 2. *Segmentation tools visualizing Disco Elysium’s dialogue options (ZA/UM 2019), as presented during “Disco Elysium: Meaningless Choices and Impractical Advice” (Keenan 2021) by ZA/UM at GDC 2021.*



(More information: <https://gdcvault.com/play/1027048/-Disco-Elysium-Meaningless-Choices>)

Most importantly, however, likely as a way to work toward – and later gauge – the international reception of the game, additional resources were allocated to solicit global audience feedback, aiming to “invite the game’s high-engaged fan community to help with the process of a) deciding which languages to localize for, and b) the actual localization work itself” (Vedinelli 2021). The shared preferences of each player community unite them across countries (Bernal-Merino 2018).

This is evidenced by a 350-page-long discussion board on Steam, opened by the game producer to ask for feedback (Dani ZA/UM 2019). On that forum, the producer also acknowledges that a small studio like theirs may have limited capabilities compared to larger studios, but they wish to try their “best to translate the game as much as possible, where possible” (Dani ZA/UM 2019).

According to the translators, it worked “brilliantly,” as “[t]he game’s community had been really engaged in communication with the developers and active on online chat boards” (Verdinelli 2021). It was promising to see developers who listen to fans’ feedback about the quality of gameplay for all locales. In other words, “the studio came across as less corporate and more approachable than other[s]” (Verdinelli 2021).

Unfortunately, the home version for Estonian players was not completed because the other 13 languages opened much larger markets (Kurvitz 2024, timestamp 40:39). Such a “Great Internationale” was promoted as something requiring “out of the box creative thinking” for this politically themed RPG (Verdinelli 2021). The best example was the Chinese versions, which replaced terms such as “communism” with the made-up word “康米主义” [kangmi zhuyi] (Messener 2020). This helped the game go under the radar of censorial forces (Zhang 2012), while still allowing players to feel immersed in its fictional setting.

The information era grants worldwide access to products and services, but also to users and behaviors in a “bidirectional” way. It is possible to harness its tools and apply them to game localization research. Within the new framework of digital humanities, this special issue stresses the new insights into translation and its users brought by live-ops metrics, metadata (cf. Corless et al. 2025, timestamp 3:00), and automatic sentiment analysis combined with traditional surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

This user-centered line of research is beneficial not only for scholars but also for developers, publishers, translators, and players. It combines the latest advances in industry and academia to bridge the so-called “skills gap” in order to create practice-based but data-focused professionals of tomorrow. With that in mind, this paper showcases possibilities and emphasizes real needs when it comes to implementing the GTUR program (Deckert et al. 2024). In doing so, we highlight the cooperative potential across disciplines to define and demonstrate applicability for industry research, mapping out plans for synergistic collaboration. In the following sections, we coalesce some of the fundamental areas in user-centric studies that can be taken up and adapted by researchers to set the course for further studies.

2 Conceptualizing GTUR

The wording in the name “Game Translation User Research,” which stems directly from “Games User Research” (cf. Drachen et al. 2018), aims to balance inclusivity and brevity. It should be reiterated that each of the conceptual containers hinted at by the name GTUR represents its ambitions to encompass a vast array of phenomena. It is common to mention players (or users, more broadly) in translation and accessibility discussions, but relatively rarely have users actually been asked for input in video game translation research.

GTUR aims to expand on the ideas proposed by Suojanen et al. (2014) and to follow research and methodological paradigms shifting toward more systematic and empirical insights across disciplines relevant to game localization: language studies (e.g., Kortmann 2021), game studies (e.g., Mekler et al. 2014), psycholinguistics (e.g., Janda 2017), and translation studies (e.g., Mellinger 2022; Wu & Chen 2021).

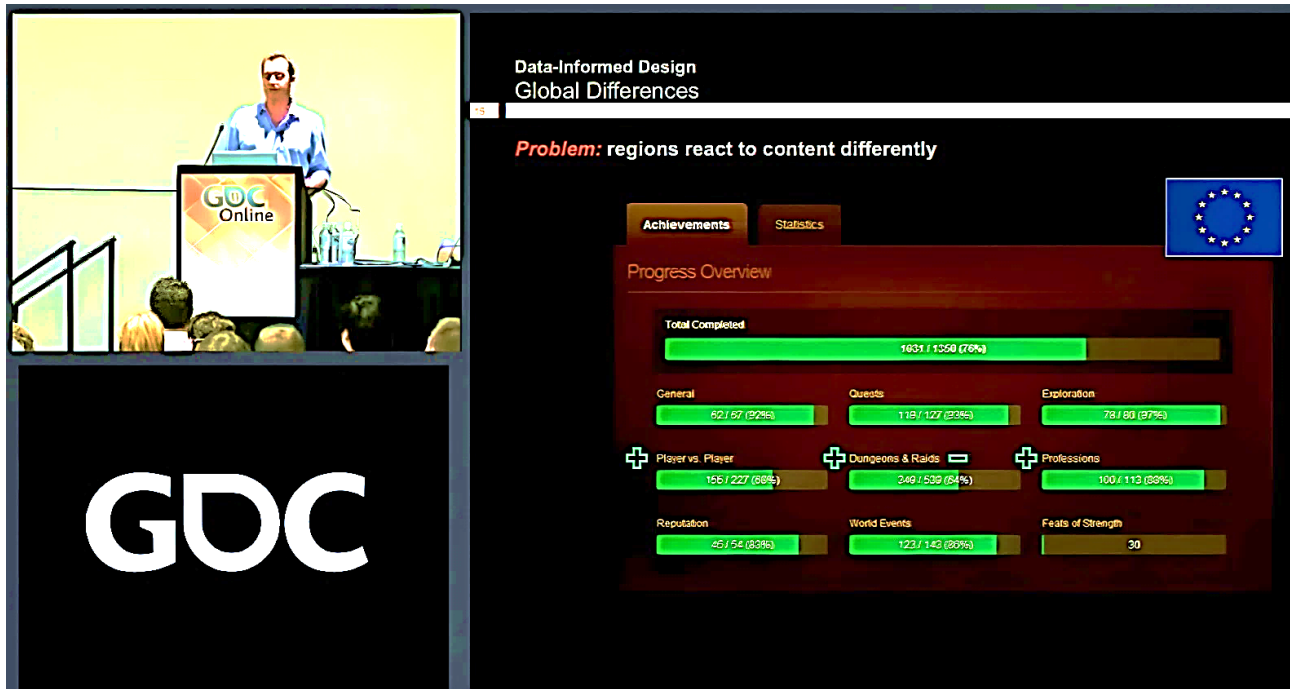
In the context of game localization research, and likely spurred by a series of important articles pointing to this niche (e.g., Mangiron 2017, 2018a, 2018b; O’Hagan 2009), the increase in data-driven work was observed as “a quantitative turn” by Ugo Ellefsen, echoing the convention of the cultural, sociological, and technological “turns” known in Translation and Interpreting Studies (cf. Pym 2009, p. 44). His observation was based on newer papers increasingly relying on interdisciplinary, measurable, and evidence-seeking sources of data, such as self-reports, biometrics, or corpora (Ellefsen, personal communication, November 24, 2025).

Evidently, this relatively loose idea of following the nascent “quantitative turn” in game localization research aligned with user-centric research and empirical reception studies. To that end, Ellefsen and Bernal-Merino (2018) explored the attitudes of gamers from different French-speaking locales (Belgium, France, Canada, and Switzerland) in relation to their language preferences and options while playing localized video games. Gathering this kind of information also benefits game industry decision-makers, who had already been incorporating it to complement return on investment (ROI) in their business analytics (cf. Figure 3; Ashe 2011, timestamp 21:56).

In that sense, GTUR refers to a far narrower and more defined program than the conceptual shifts captured within the phrase “quantitative turn”. To illustrate, initiatives quantifying information from international companies and aiming to make relevant data more publicly accessible are better described using “the quantitative turn”. Chiefly, the motivation for further popularizing this line of inquiry was indeed the drive to open and publicize data, whether large-scale or exploratory (Ellefsen, personal communication, November 24, 2025). Among other benefits, the idea was that it would allow scholars to more accurately substantiate their claims about localization practices in the gaming industry.

The same would apply to game accessibility research if end-users with sensory, cognitive, or motor needs can be conceptualized as a “locale” – not as a combination of language and country (as in, e.g., the Brazilian Portuguese locale), but of linguacultures and accessibility needs (cf. Cairns et al. 2025).

Figure 3. *Example of analytics-informed design incorporating differences among locales, as discussed during “Data Mining and Machine Learning Applications in Blizzard Online Games” (Ashe 2011) by the Director of Business Intelligence & Risk at Blizzard Entertainment at GDC 2011.*



Let us break down the concepts of “Game Translation User Research” (Deckert & Hejduk 2025, pp. 4–10) by first focusing on the “User Research” part. Studying users understood as players, while perhaps the most intuitive for an interactive medium like entertainment software, does not have to be the only focal point embraced in GTUR (Deckert & Hejduk 2025, p. 5).

While interacting with gaming products of course constitutes the play itself – i.e., influencing the playthrough structured by the rules of play (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, pp. 58–61) – the levels at which users can interact with the artifact can be appreciated at other levels as well. For one, experiencing the consequences of intra-diegetic actions does not seem to necessitate directly participating in the game (cf. Chen 2022; Ameri 2025), as evidenced by the global multibillion-dollar esports market (Market.us 2025).

Just as with any other cultural artifact, viewing or reading about a game, or hearing about it from someone else, is also an important means of interlingual and intercultural communication about the product, its overall reception, its plot, characters, genres, user-oriented innovations, etc. This dimension of collectively interacting with the medium, exemplified by the push and pull between the work and its fandom, has been observed by Salen & Zimmerman (2004, p. 61) in relation to user activities separate from just playing the game.

Similarly, materially interacting with the medium (2004, p. 59) can perhaps be illustrated by merchandising and game paratexts in general, which can also be studied on a global scale and through the lens of translation and accessibility. Each of these dimensions (user experience, localization, player profiling, and data mining methodology) can be mediated by industry practices and shaped through user input.

User-generated content, “produsage,” is the clearest example of this participatory culture, which also includes fan translation and commentary (cf. O’Hagan 2009, p. 107-108). Studying individuals and communities that come to use game translation and game accessibility can help to more holistically map out our understanding of the sociocultural, linguo-communicative, economic, and psycho-functional context.

Likewise, the use of the term “game” in GTUR pertains to many types of cultural artifacts with various mutually nonexclusive functions (cf. Bogost 2011), starting with more prototypically understood examples of multimedia interactive entertainment software – including various thematic (e.g., horror, fantasy), ludological (e.g., action JRPGs, visual novels), and industry (e.g., AAA, indie) genres (cf. Walk et al. 2017) – to more artistic interactive experiences (e.g., serious games and digital cultural heritage ludic software) or other media that border video games nomenclature or classifications (e.g., VR games, AR games, ARGs), but are connected by the medium’s poetics – formal constituents (Salen & Zimmerman 2004, p. 80), such as ludic rules (Prajzner 2019, p. 22-23), within a system of representations – leading to the emergence of gameplay consisting of an artificial agonal engagement that requires player input to be resolved in a known and finite way.

The dimension of research, as part of the characteristics of GTUR, describes ways in which scholars can inquire about individual users or specific communities utilizing translation-mediated video game software. Academics and/or practitioners, through qualitative and/or quantitative methodological means, can seek theoretical and exploratory or empirical and confirmatory findings.

For instance, aggregating feedback and seeking troubleshooting solutions through methods such as (n)ethnography could yield highly contextualized data from local game users, potentially leading to increased ecological validity of findings. The ethos of (n)ethnographic approaches is understood here as observing naturally occurring sociocultural phenomena in situ (in their autochthonous environments). This can be contrasted with bringing those studied phenomena into a more controlled setting (e.g., a laboratory), thus reducing randomness.

Laboratory research thrives at isolating a given phenomenon from some of the variables that would organically co-emerge, but it must consider whether its findings prove limited in applicability when confronted with less controlled, inherently more complex, real-world scenarios. (N)ethnographic endeavors, being typically deeply anchored in authentic contexts, could therefore be used for triangulation.

Further research should also look into providing scholars with the right tools to conduct studies, either by pointing to existing instruments (e.g., psychometrically validated questionnaires and scales), by finding ways in which their application could be improved (e.g., by developing adaptations/translations of psychometric scales into local languages), or by designing entirely new tools in the absence of adequate means to conduct certain types of GTUR.

Critically, we want to avoid shaping GTUR into just a means to an end, such as a mode for testing or assessing localizations. Of course, to an extent, it could be used for that purpose, from a functionalist perspective that “put[s] the purpose and the intended audience as the focus of the translation” (Ellefsen & Bernal-Merino 2018, p. 22). As a novel research lens, however, GTUR has the potential to fill a noticeable niche (O’Hagan 2009; Mangiron 2018b) without ambitions to redundantly rehash or untenably supplant other optics. Ideally, it could bring together related interest groups under a shared emphasis on real or prospective users.

From a study design perspective, GTUR is strategically positioned (Deckert & Hejduk 2025, p. 15) to look into the interplay between real practices (e.g., accessibility features), different users (e.g., deaf viewers of gaming livestreams), and their evaluations or practical outcomes (e.g., their cognitive load, in-game performance, representation in gaming discourses) via an organized framework.

In a user-centric study like that, the decisions, techniques, and products would be treated as independent variables or stimulus materials in a larger system of game-environmental parameters (cf. Deckert et al. 2024, p. 67). These parameters are then considered measurable through complementary methods with sufficient replicability.

Nonetheless, to situate this paper in the global ecosystem of gaming and the evolving body of research, we are intentionally assuming a broader approach. Our discussion aims to consider some aspects we speculate may be of interest to researchers. These factors include ethical considerations, industry frameworks, legal and sociopolitical constraints, and the conditions of international gamers.

This is why we highlight some research opportunities that would principally fall outside core GTUR but should contribute to its development – for example, how to systematize, streamline, and popularize our academic endeavors; how to formulate insights that are relevant and not disconnected from reality; and how to define quality in goods and services that customers can purchase.

Finally, in response to the fragmentation of research around gaming, we wish to reflect on cross-disciplinary methods for empirical and theoretical research, as well as on outlooks shared by academics and industry experts.

2.1 Concepts of Game-User communication in Academia

The choice of the term “translation” in the name for the “Research” of “Game Translation Users” has the potential to be controversial, but its superordinate nature favors the broad palette we are pointing towards. For one, accessibility is adjacent to game translation efforts while designating a set of different concepts. However, the terms are in many ways congruent with each other and difficult to separate, as exemplified in the label Audiovisual Translation & Media Accessibility (AVT & MA).

Importantly, scholars who wish to further user-centered and user base-oriented studies of games in global contexts and across linguistic or territorial-cultural boundaries might be skeptical about using the term “translation” to refer to practices that in the industry have come to be known as “localization.” The following section attempts to clarify our train of thought regarding this. In order to unpack how GTUR conceptualized the research of the linguacultural transfer of games, we first offer an overview of the available terminology.

Although the designation “audiovisual translation” (AVT) does not refer to a specific strategy of translation but rather points to the translation of multimodal content (e.g., Kress & Van Leeuwen) that can go beyond words (for a more precise overview, see, e.g., Chaume 2004), it can help frame accurate terminology referring to the linguocultural transfer of VGs as complex polysemiotic and multimodal products (Bernal-Merino 2016).

Nonetheless, as Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2014, p. 9) write, critics of AVT have considered it in a different, more specific light: “[f]or some, this activity falls short of being a case of translation proper because of all the spatial and temporal limitations imposed by the medium itself which constrain the end result. They prefer to talk about adaptation.” This term, translation proper, refers to Roman Jakobson’s 1950s typology of written text translation.

Undoubtedly, written texts (and their translations) are among the principal vessels of human communication. However, the way the written word tends to be nobilitated among other forms may, perhaps unintentionally, underpin subtle restraint toward other codes and multimedia and, by extension, interactive entertainment (and their translations). Nevertheless, the study of polysemiotic communicative artifacts (linguistic, visual, acoustic, lyrical, haptic) and their translations can ultimately demonstrate that “an a priori selective approach towards culture often contributes to the consolidation of certain cultural tendencies, rather than to an adequate analysis” of its reality (Delabastita 1989, p. 193).

Although the aforementioned quotation from Dirk Delabastita (1989, p. 193) originally referred to film translation, we use it to highlight that, after many decades, this

observation now finds reflection in new forms of AVT, such as game localization, which adds interaction to the audiovisual media paradigm (López Redondo 2014).

With the globalization of illustrated media, motion pictures, and graphic novels, the work of translators goes well beyond words on a page. Linguistically speaking, VGs are multitextual software products (Mejías-Climent 2019; Maietti 2004), as they contain different types of texts, from narrative to dialogical, legal to technical, pedagogical, and promotional (cf. Levis 1997).

But being multimedia creations, these coexist with other asset types that encompass a wider semiotic palette (cf. Mejías-Climent 2021, pp. 3–13), such as visual (graphics, textures, and animations), acoustic (voices, sound effects, and music), and haptic (tactile feedback) information (Bernal-Merino 2016, p. 241). Although there are text-only games, most are multimodal creations (cf. Frasca 2001). This means that written words displayed on-screen work with images, sounds, haptics, and user behaviors to assemble the emergent spectacles available for recipients to experience and co-create.

Due to many factors – among them the complexity of VGs as experience-generating machines, executing programmable instructions live using the user’s private hardware in multimodal conversation with human input (Bernal-Merino 2016) – the adaptation of these products for foreign markets has only recently been researched in Translation Studies, with conspicuous terminological variation. Among these terms there are adaptation, transcreation, rewriting, translation, and localization. Our description of the last of these items will be positioned in terms of its prominent use in the industry (cf. Bernal-Merino 2006, pp. 31-34).

Adaptation of media is a commonly used term to refer to a number of different practices. This poses one of the first problems encountered when using it to refer to a linguacultural transfer. So present is it in common everyday language and across a wide variety of contexts (Bastin 1993) that trying to attach a translation-related specialized meaning to it has the potential to confuse rather than clarify.

Moreover, the term adaptation seems to be preferred when the changes taking place are very pronounced, such as when a piece is transplanted from one medium into another – for example, taking inspiration from a novel to create a film or a VG, redirecting the source material through the benefits and constraints of new forms of expression.

Another term increasingly recurrent in academic and business contexts is transcreation. Transcreation was used in the advertising industry, and in that case, it involved the production of global marketing campaigns for different locales, including the casting and filming of celebrities who could be recognized in different territories (cf. Mazanko 2021; Kudła 2022, p. 136).

We note how it was initially employed in the realm of marketing, as this might partly shed light on its relation to the concepts of culturalization, domestication, and – as

some may feel the need to point out – even the subject of regional lockouts of multimedia and content revisions whereby the original authorial vision is expurgated or redacted (cf. self-censorship, a very complex topic that does not allow for simplistic answers; Merkle & Baer 2024).

Some scholars may also find the term problematic, as it could seem to presume that other translation practices tend to be less “creative” or inventive (cf. Bernal-Merino 2006, pp. 32-33), which may limit its usability in some circles. The need for creativity, one might argue, is guided by the constraints of the medium itself and limited by those financing the work, while societies and human fashions also favor some features over others, depending on the taste of the time and place.

Mangiron and O’Hagan (2006, p. 20) nevertheless defended this term by describing how well it applies to what takes place in game localization. They highlighted that localizers are often granted quasi-freedom to modify as they deem necessary to bring the game closer to players and to convey the sensations of the original gameplay. While certainly a valid point, it can beg the question of whether the same could not apply to what we still deem translations of literature in general, such as the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the Greek comedies by Aristophanes, or the Spanish comic books by Ibáñez.

Transcreation could therefore constitute a type of terminological specialization that offers a translation-like service emphasizing creativity, as localizing teams are “generally granted *carte blanche*” to change elements of the original or even introduce new target-culture references, since “the goal of game localization is not simply to translate text but to translate experience” (Mangiron 2012, p. 3, cf. Bernal-Merino 2016, pp. 246–247).

This goes to the point of translators’ invisibility, as users “enjoy a game as if it were an original designed for them” (Mangiron 2012, p. 3; cf. Kudła 2021, p. 533; cf. Bogucki 2013, p. 26). As an illustration, Mangiron and O’Hagan (2006) are credited with first proposing *transcreation* first to “conceptualize game translation as the transfer of the gameplay ‘experience’ from the source to the target text,” based on the example of the user-centric translation of item names and the use of “regional accents in [...] cut-scenes in the major Japanese RPG *Final Fantasy* series” (O’Hagan 2018, p. 152).

Chiefly, one weapon’s name, originally bearing an idiom referring to the beauty of nature, was transcreated as “Painkiller.” While lacking the original meaning, it instead functioned as an irony-driven fourth-wall break. The fourth wall is broken because users choosing to use this weapon “could skip painful grinds [‘farming’ game resources through repetition of gameplay exploits or game mechanics] and earn points more quickly” (O’Hagan 2018, p. 152).

A seemingly similar term, rewriting, is frequently found in the field of comparative literature (Lefevere 1985) and is sometimes applied to any interlingual transfer in which

major reinterpretation of a known fictional universe is involved. The idea behind it is that rewriting is not a copying act, for it adds qualities to the original that it claims to honor. Therefore, writers are not hide the fact that the source material comes from other times or places.

Rewriting may therefore suggest a reworking of the content to update it to new tastes or societal preferences. A criticism of this, however, might be that people regularly carry out this type of rewriting of foreign creations to increase local sales rather than to offer new quality. That is to say, translators are not exceptional in practicing this, especially as they strive to let customers enjoy their translated product. Examples may include animated productions based on traditional fairy tales, myths, and literary classics, as illustrated by the rewriting of *Sherlock Holmes* in Japanese games within the *Ace Attorney* series (Okabe 2019).

Arguably, as the Romans did with texts from classical Greece, a similar process has now reached an industrial, global scale. The features to be maintained or deemphasized, especially in game localization, are orchestrated by publishers, stakeholders, boards of directors, and even fans (cf. Wang & Zhang 2025), most obviously when they collectively select what to include within the numerous AVT-related procedures and technical constraints of their works.

Finally, we deduce that translation is the broadest term in scope (Munday 2009), referring to all types of linguacultural transfers, from before the Rosetta Stone to the present day, encompassing various procedures under the common aegis of disciplines such as Translation Studies or Audiovisual Translation. Although it is not as relevant a point here, and although interpreters and researchers of this professional practice might prefer not to conflate the two terms, it can also describe spoken mediation. For instance, the Polish language typically refers to interpretation as “oral translation” (*tłumaczenie ustne*).

Because of its seemingly all-encompassing nature, we can adopt translation as an inclusive demarcation. From a practical viewpoint, translation – as in GTUR – can also be understood as referring to a more abstract outlook on the relevant practices that allow the global use of multimodal interactive software, or as a more academia-oriented term, considering that game localization is already more widely adopted within the industry but not well understood in certain areas of linguistics (e.g., psycholinguistics) and translation disciplines (cf. Bernal-Merino 2006, pp. 31-32), within which GTUR also aims to gain traction.

2.2 Concepts of language access in the industry

There are potential incongruencies when it comes to naming conventions in industry and academia. The phrase *voice overs* may serve as an example of a specific matter of

contention in the dynamic between language service provision practices and AVT theory. In the industry, this term refers to audio recordings of voice acting in general, mostly to denote what might otherwise be called dubbing (cf. Strach 2023; Mrzigod 2021, p. 52).

Most games do not utilize voice-over in the film translation sense, although a few Polish localizations in the 2000s experimented with this idea. At the time, voice-over (*lektor* in Polish) was a popular choice for film translation in Poland and “other formerly communist countries that inherited voice over from the Soviet Union” (Bogucki 2010, p. 7; Szarkowska & Laskowska 2015, p. 182).

The solution whereby a single Polish non-diegetic voice was overlaid on top of the source-language diegetic dubbing was tried by a game localization distributor, CD Projekt, in several installments of the Ukrainian series *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* (GSC Game World 2007–2009) and the game *Stranglehold* (Midway & Tiger Hill 2007), an intermedial sequel to John Woo’s 1992 film *Hard Boiled*. Yet overall, this practice has remained unadopted in Poland (cf. Kudła 2021; Kudła 2022). In the international and interdisciplinary academic discourse in which GTUR is most likely to propagate, the term “voice-overs” may at times still prove less than clear compared to the industry, wherein game localizers adapted that term even in countries where the voice-over is still used in filmic media.

In the context of creating a target text from a source text, consensus over whether translation is hypernymous to localization or vice versa has yet to be reached (Bernal-Merino 2014). The term *localization*, or L10N, is mostly used in the software industry, and it comes from the French noun *locale* (brought into English in the late eighteenth century). The term thus presents a useful addition to Translation Studies, as it asserts two variables at the same time: language and territory.

During the process of creating language versions or releases, files are labeled according to the ISO Language Code Table, with, for example, *es-AR* (Spanish from Argentina) distinguished from *es-ES* (Spanish from Spain). This system is particularly relevant for the current research, as it not only acknowledges the differences between speakers in separate countries but also internationalizes the coding and design of the software application so that it can easily accommodate all variations required for the global distribution of the product.

Likewise, game localization can be used to point to a more industry-oriented perspective. In L10N, businesses create workflows to sell products to particular target populations. Similarly, the associated legal framework and technical requirements for the successful deployment of localizations are not necessarily in place for some other translational phenomena that GTUR would not wish to disqualify from study – such as fan translations. Industry concepts are borne in mind when the term “translation” is used but, meaningfully, are not the sole focus.

Certain terminological incongruencies have largely crystallized and are mostly unanimously understood by users, scholars, and industry representatives. The term “game developers” (also “dev teams,” etc.) refers to tech companies or studios creating ludic products – from the concept phase to completion and to maintenance or expansion post-launch. “Publishers,” then, refers to entities specialized in distributing the product nationally or globally, physically or digitally, and offering services relevant to the product’s intellectual property (IP), such as maintaining good relations with other companies and users.

Still, there may be some variation in how exactly the terms are used. There may be confusion regarding pieces of nomenclature that are superficially similar but have important underlying distinctions. For example, “rightsholders” may own the IP, whereas “stakeholders” are legal entities owning part of the product in shares or otherwise. There may be situations in which terminological ambiguity leads to equivocation.

Even beyond academic research contexts, it is not difficult to think of situations in which that could be undesirable. For instance, using the term “customers” or “clients” may be confusing, as they could refer either to the consumers of the gaming production (actual buyers, technology users) or, within localization pipelines, to the commissioner of translations.

Finally, there remains the question of who exactly is studied as the users of translated games – casual players, dedicated gamers, both, or a differently defined kaleidoscope of individuals? (cf. Ellefsen & Florentin 2024). Of course, in some cases, a certain level of ambiguity might be beneficial if it allows different figures to be grouped together in an adequately rationalized way.

To illustrate, the label “experts” might refer to academic researchers or scholars and authors, as well as practitioners working in industry. To that end, research inclined to descriptively elucidate the different uses of language (cf., e.g., Ellefsen & Florentin 2024; Mangiron 2018, p. 124) in relation to GTUR (and beyond it) could serve to strengthen the foundations and help manage polysemic vagueness by highlighting variability in possible ways of expression.

Equally, it would be prudent for research to take stock of the current state of video game language service provision (LSP) and the localization industry – the working conditions within LSP agencies, game publishers, and studios; the broader industry context of cooperation between LSPs, publishers, and development studios – especially in terms of the well-being and economic situation of game translation users and workers in LSP agencies, publishing companies, and game development studios.

As far as we are aware, there have been no major attempts to broadly research the economic distribution of revenue within the industry in the context of how much is

invested in and generated by LSPs, how much of that is related to ROI from game localizations, and how much of it is human-, MT-, or genAI-driven.

Moreover, shedding light on the general socio-technological situation of users across various territories, incorporating their socioeconomic situation and psychological well-being, may be useful not only for researchers but also for the industry and administrative institutions more broadly. Ultimately, to define the applicability of GTUR, researchers could also survey international user bases regarding the kinds of research questions they believe should be addressed through video game AVT research, or more broadly, which kinds of generalizable problems the community most wants to see addressed in the future.

Further defining the synergistic potential between academics and the “real world” of gaming – through studies probing the opinions of LSPs, publishers, and studios regarding GTUR, and the conditions that would make them more willing to examine the issues of game translation use(rs) – is worth considering.

Admittedly, there are at least two ways to approach this in practice. Consumers might be eager to voice their grievances with the gaming industry as a whole, possibly placing trust in researchers to address these concerns even if doing so goes beyond the capabilities of scholars studying translation specifically. One example that comes to mind is the recent success of *Stop Destroying Games*, a consumer-centered political campaign that, at the time of writing, has been formally signed by millions of concerned citizens, likely backed unofficially by many more (European Union 2025).

This campaign is an offshoot of *Stop Killing Games* (SKG 2025), a grassroots sociopolitical action spearheaded by an international kaleidoscope of online content creators, especially R. W. Scott (2021), arising from a relatively niche advocacy movement focused on game preservation, boycotting specific IP practices in the industry, and pushing toward digital ownership as a way for consumers to “start keeping games.”

Tracking changes in similar customer demands and broader ideological trends could be further investigated from the perspective of GTUR, as long as research objectivity and academic independence can be maintained. Alternatively, such inherently politicized and far-reaching systemic concerns could be sidelined as matters outside the expertise of GTUR, at least for now.

Still, scholars opening a dialogue with game translation users to poll for specific problems and sentiments might receive responses not limited specifically to AVT & MA. Is it within the responsibilities of GTUR scholarship to investigate the interrelations between transnational and cross-sectional systemic issues in global gaming? It is difficult to state conclusively.

Certainly, however, seeking ways in which our findings could alleviate or mediate these matters would find a place on the agenda of scholars, as long as the impartiality of analyses is maintained, with efforts made to safeguard data collection and analysis against possible biases.

3 Introduction of the Special Issue

Localization is a topic both notorious and inescapable when it comes to contemporary global gaming. It should not be disregarded that even core parts of international gaming communities can show hesitation toward localization practices and are, to an extent, willing to put effort into providing their community with insight or solutions (O'Hagan 2017, pp. 194–195, 197; cf. O'Hagan 2009, p. 100; Ellefsen & Bernal-Merino 2018, p. 80).

Since the precursor of game translation reception studies in the form of a single English user of a Japanese VG (O'Hagan 2009), what we are calling GTUR here is slowly emerging as an initiative that promises to address numerous concerns in areas situated between various academic disciplines and practitioners in the global gaming industry. Taken together, GTUR promises to answer a number of questions – from scholars, experts, and customers (VG end-users) – regarding VGs, game users, and global gaming.

This special issue is oriented toward the study of individuals and communities who utilize game localization (Mejías-Climent 2021) and accessibility features (Larreina-Morales & Mangiron 2023, 2025). It specifically aims to advance AVT & MA research into the medium of Multimedia Interactive Entertainment Software (cf. Bernal-Merino 2020), incentivizing synergies with practitioners and industry representatives and taking a broadly transdisciplinary vantage point (cf., e.g., Muñoz & Halverson 2022) to connect with findings from media psychology, cognitive linguistics, information technology, communication, media and cultural studies, ergonomics and design, and law and ethics, combined with industry practices that can examine and thus coalesce into a more holistic understanding of game translation users.

This special issue seeks to actualize several aspects of game translation research that have remained underdeveloped, specifically exploring direct areas of controlled-environment user-centric research, such as laboratory reception studies, as well as netnographies, which can contrastively be used for more contextualized and naturalistic observations.

The first paper, studying how a localized version of a Chinese RPG entitled *Depersonalization* (Meow Nature 2019/2024) was received by translation users, is contributed by Jemma Louise Stafford – a PhD candidate and researcher at the University of Leeds who specializes in user reception and developer perception of

Chinese-English game localizations. Among other things, her paper explores the methodological utilities of employing two distinct types of analysis: organically occurring game reviews versus gameplay-stimulated interview data.

The contributor of this issue's second paper is Georgios Vasilikaris, a doctoral researcher at the University of Turku with a background as a translator, who works on determining the effects of developments in technology (such as GenAI and MT) on game localization from the perspective of end-users. His article analyzes *League of Legends'* Greek dialogue lines and how they are received by a number of local players. Drawing on findings from game studies, his qualitative analysis specifically examines potential interactions between translation and one of the most highly polemical facets of user experience – immersion in gameplay.

The third contribution to our issue constitutes another research advancement on both player immersion and the highest-demand contemporary game markets – English and Chinese. Authored by Dariush Robertson of Newcastle University, whose portfolio includes robust industry experience in AVT and game localization as well as academic insights into the interface between user bases and cultural exchange, this paper analyzes *Black Myth: Wukong*. The study presents users' perceptions of notable in-game texts, formulated through interviews with English-speaking players presented with a corpus of excerpts from the game's localization.

The final article in this special issue juxtaposes culturalization practices in the Persian-speaking locale with user expectations and preferences, as analyzed by Amir Arsalan Zoraqi and Movahede Sadat Mousavi – respectively from Ferdowsi University of Mashhad and Allameh Tabataba'i University. The scholars collected questionnaire data from a large sample of a few hundred participants across diverse profiles of gender and age. Importantly, additional facets of users were also accounted for to constitute an integral part of the study's correlational analysis, such as the depth of gaming experience participants had with interactive media, their attitudes toward censorship, and their preferences for non-interactive media.

The issue closes with a final section dedicated to recently published or upcoming relevant publications and projects, prepared by the *L10N Journal* Editorial Team (*L10N Journal* 2026).

The topics suggested for exploration in this special issue focused on the interplay between the experiences of users (including but not limited to players) and game translation (notably including game accessibility), while taking into account the unique characteristics of the studied users as a researchable variable in their own right. These three types of constructs – a triplet of GTUR facets (Deckert et al. 2024, p. 67) – can be studied either in isolation or in relation to one another, e.g., as three distinct categories of research variables, not unlike a design offshoot corresponding to the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework (cf., e.g., Bai et al. 2024).

This is reflected in the non-exhaustive selection of topics we prepared for this special issue (Bernal-Merino et al. 2024). Building on them in future work, research should be able to expand our understanding of the interplay between the production of localization, the users of such products, and their user experience (Deckert et al. 2024, p. 68). This would include studying the reception of real or hypothetical localizations as well as the perception of translation practices in general across diverse fan communities (cf. Ellefsen & Florentin 2024).

What can prove particularly productive is capturing various demographic and psychosocial perspectives while cooperating with practitioners to consider applicability as well as their stance and well-being. The resulting insight can help design and apply more robust and inclusive practices, for example to satisfy further personalization and accessibility needs (cf. Di Rosa et al. 2025).

Employing a greater range of methodologies would also help triangulate results across studies, and possibly even across languages, to glimpse more holistic findings about the impact of game localization on sociocultural levels (cf., e.g., Zorrakin-Goikoetxea 2024; Zhang 2012).

Finally, considering that the *Skopos* of game localization in academia has been established as the reproduction of gameplay experience in a way that would be satisfying to users regardless of their linguistic or cultural background (Bernal-Merino 2016, p. 249), “there are no large-scale studies confirming whether this hypothesis, which has become one of the pillars of game localization theory, holds true” (Mangiron 2017, p. 18).

The quality of translation itself may be operationalized by employing GTUR within studies that are not primarily oriented toward users – for example, by providing a somewhat stable functionalist basis for defining or quantifying “quality” and “reception” in translation.

The cooperative potential of studying game translation users across disciplines can also be fostered by launching user-centric research tools and resources that can be used beyond Translation Studies (cf., e.g., Hejduk et al., forthcoming), or by reaching out to psychometricians, game studies experts, and media or cultural scholars for academic collaboration or to reveal challenges that could be addressed through user-oriented studies.

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Localization playability: Users' perception in the English translation of the Chinese game "Depersonalization"

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Abstract

This article examines the role of the written word in the localization of *Depersonalization* (Meow Nature 2019/2024), a Chinese-developed role-playing game (RPG), and its broader implications for the localization of Chinese-developed RPGs from a player reception perspective. Using a novel approach of analyzing netnographic data from Steam reviews in tandem with post-hoc playtest interviews, this brief reception study explores how written elements (visual-verbal/visual-non-verbal) influence perceptions of localization. The findings indicate that while written elements contribute to player reception, it does not function independently but interacts with visual and auditory elements. Steam reviews highlight translation concerns more frequently than play tester interviews, suggesting differences between post-hoc reflection and in-actu gameplay experiences. Play testers primarily noted issues when their experience was disrupted or provoked humor, whereas Steam reviewers provided broader critiques. Applying cultural schema theory, this article argues that player expectations, shaped by prior gaming experiences and community discourse, significantly influence perceptions of localization quality. The research underscores the need for a holistic approach that considers both textual accuracy and multimodal coherence. Future research should examine how different game genres and player demographics shape localization reception and how online discourse influences perceptions of translation quality.

Keywords: GTUR, UCT, Videogames, Reception, Player experience

1 Introduction

This article introduces preliminary findings taken from a broader project that explores localization and reception in videogames and suggests potential avenues for further future investigation built upon these findings. However, the present article focuses exclusively on one of these titles, *Depersonalization* (2019/2024), as a single-case study. The other two games, while part of the larger research design, are not analyzed in detail

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here. This brief study aimed to explore the extent to which the written visual-verbal elements in the Chinese-English localization of *Depersonalization* influenced player perception of localization quality, and how in-acti playtester feedback and retrospective Steam reviews differed in reception to the localised visual-verbal, such as what it reveals about player expectations and community discourse.

Despite growing interest in Game Translation User Research (GTUR), there remains limited empirical investigation into how players perceive and receive in-game textual elements within the broader multimodal experience of gameplay, particularly in the context of Chinese-to-English (ZH-EN) localization. Reception research is scarce (Deckert & Hejduk, 2022; O'Hagan, 2016) and perception research equally so (Ellefsen & Bernal-Merino, 2018; Fernández Costales, 2016). Existing studies have relied on either retrospective user reviews (Hsu & O'Hagan, 2024) or controlled playtesting (O'Hagan, 2009), but without integrating both to compare in-acti and reflective feedback. Moreover, the impact of community-edited and machine-translated (MT) localization strategies on player reception is underexplored (Du & Liu, 2025), leaving a gap in understanding how non-professional translation practices shape user experience and expectations. This influence of translated text on player response in ZH-EN localization of video games is examined, with particular focus on the role of written text within the broader multimodal context of videogame design. By analyzing player responses to in-game textual elements, this article seeks to explore whether the written word is fundamental to the localization of the videogame *Depersonalization*, and potentially RPG genre titles more broadly, from the perspective of players engaging with ZH-EN videogames. In the context of this article, "written elements" refers to user-facing textual assets that appear during gameplay, including the content of dialogue boxes, item descriptions, menus, user-interface (UI) labels and narrative exposition. Such elements are typically visual-verbal and are central to how players interpret story, mechanics and gameworld logic.

This analysis is based on data gathered through observed videogame playtests, semi-structured post-hoc interviews, and netnographic reviews (player reviews of games on Steam online) of three Chinese-developed RPGs. While three games were included in the broader data collection process to provide contextual diversity, this article focuses specifically on *Depersonalization* as a single case study. This low budget indie game was chosen for in-depth analysis due to its unique localization trajectory, from amateur MT-assisted approach with community post-editing, to one of full professional revision, which offers a rich site for examining player reception of in-game text that changes but occurs in one consistent setting. The study presented players with the early access version of the game, presenting a unique opportunity to examine player reception to a non-professional, semi-crowd sourced translation approach to written elements in-game and its perceived impact on the players according to their feedback.

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This article focuses specifically on the written elements of *Depersonalization* (Meow Nature 2019/2024) within its introductory tutorial phase. The tutorial phase was selected to provide a relatively linear experience that introduces core mechanics and offers a representative snapshot of the broader gameplay experience. This approach aimed to give play testers an adequate introduction of the core gameplay loops and themes without requiring players to complete entire video games, thereby conserving time and reducing participant fatigue while still capturing key aspects of the overall experience.

Player feedback was analyzed both in-actu during gameplay and retrospectively through post-hoc interviews, supplemented by thematic analysis of Steam reviews. The study isolated self-reported reactions specifically related to the non-diegetic visual-verbal (such as explicit tutorial guidance) and visual-non-verbal elements (in-game lighting intended to draw player attention, cf. *game affordance signifiers* (Aslam and Brown, 2020) rather than assessing the full multimodal experience. By examining how players engage with written localization within this broader context, it seeks to determine the extent to which written elements influence their perception of perceived localization quality. While the findings presented here offer an initial exploration, they are not intended to generalize across all localised games or player demographics. Instead, they serve as a foundation for further research into the relationship between language, multimodality, and player reception. These findings do however provide an initial exploration into this question, laying the groundwork for further research into the interplay of language, culture, and multimodal elements in gaming.

Primarily a reception study, this research is positioned within GTUR. Therefore, a brief overview of existing GTUR in the context of Chinese game localization and video game localization more broadly is essential to highlight current trends in the field.

2 Key literature

2.1 Game Translation User Research (GTUR)

Game User Research (GUR) and GTUR are increasingly recognized within translation and game studies, particularly as usability is acknowledged as a key factor influencing player feedback. For a comprehensive overview of existing research in GTUR, Deckert, Hejduk, and Bernal-Merino (2024, 1-13) provide a detailed examination of current scholarship, identifying areas for further investigation. Their work explores the relationship between translation and its recipients, offering insights into methodologies for designing game reception studies. Deckert and Hejduk (2024, 2-20) further emphasize the growing significance of user-oriented research, particularly as video games continue to expand globally, engaging diverse cultural and linguistic

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audiences. GTUR aligns with UTC (Suojanen et al., 2014) as a user-centric paradigm in translation studies, as well as cognitive translation and interpreting studies (CTIS) (Muñoz-Martín, 2016; 2020) emphasizing translator and user processes that resonate with the aims of GTUR in recognizing player experience and reception-centric research. These frameworks directly inform this study, integrating observed playtesting and post-hoc interviews to capture immediate user (player) responses, linking multimodality and player norms (or schemata) to build on GTUR's emphasis on empirical user-centered methodologies to explore how localised written elements shape player perception in videogame localization.

While previous research has primarily adopted product- or process-oriented perspectives, Mangiron (2017, 85) highlights the need for participant-oriented studies that focus on the experiences of translators, developers, and localization vendors. Addressing this gap, Deckert et al. (2024, 1-2) advocate for integrating user feedback, usability studies, and empirical methodologies such as eye-tracking and biometric data collection. This aligns with Ellefsen and Bernal-Merino's (2018, 42–43) recommendations for the videogame industry, which include: (1) fostering greater community engagement by involving players in the development of best practices and establishing feedback loops to enhance localization quality; (2) standardizing localization practices in a manner similar to established film subtitling guidelines; and (3) enabling language customization (or "personalization"), allowing players to tailor their experience through options such as dubbing, subtitling, partial translation, or non-translation, in line with broader trends in game personalization.

2.2 Cultural Usability and Localization

Building on this user-centered approach, the concept of "cultural usability" further underscores the necessity of considering cultural factors in localization. While standardizing localization practices and incorporating player feedback are essential, cultural differences play a significant role in shaping user preferences and perceived usability, necessitating a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach to localization strategies. Suojanen, Koskinen, and Tuominen (2014) introduce "cultural usability", addressing the lack of cultural considerations in usability research. Drawing on Hofstede's Five Fundamental Dimensions (1980, 15–41), they argue that national culture alone is insufficient for localization, as regional, generational, and professional cultures also shape user preferences. This is supported by Frandsen-Thorlacius et al., whose study comparing Chinese ("Eastern") and Danish ("Western") players revealed cultural variations in perceived playability (as per Bernal-Merino, 2018) – Chinese players prioritized visual appeal and enjoyment, while Danish players valued efficiency and frustration-free interaction. From here, discussion refers to playability rather than usability to better reflect to nuance of videogame interactivity and shift away from the

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more general usability associated with software more broadly. Similarly, Sun (2009) highlights a disconnect between long-term localization strategies and playability, advocating for "user localization", which integrates end-users into the design process to improve localization performance and mitigate translator biases related to training, culture, and nationality. The significance of cultural playability becomes particularly evident when examining how localization choices impact player experience in practice.

2.3 Previous Studies on Player Reception and Translation

O'Hagan's (2008) exploratory study on the localised version of *Ico* (Team Ico, 2001) offers an early example of how cultural assumptions embedded in game design can shape, and at times hinder, player engagement with localised content. Adopting a situationalist perspective (Nielsen, Smith & Tosca 2008, 9-10), the study analyzed player experience, game system mechanics, and cultural influences in localization. Using play trajectory recordings, self-reported player logs, and post-hoc interviews, a single play tester - who had prior experience with the original Japanese version - identified cultural assumptions embedded in the game design that impacted the localised experience. Key issues included camera control, opening cutscenes implying unknown languages, and narrative closure techniques (O'Hagan 2008, 229). The tester initially misinterpreted subtitles as a hieroglyphic representation of Japanese audio, despite no Japanese audio being present (p. 223), indicating how prior gameplay shaped assumptions about localization choices. Conversely, haptic feedback (force feedback) features were reported as enhancing player immersion (p. 226). This study reinforces the importance of player-centered localization research.

While O'Hagan's (2008) study provided valuable insights into individual player experiences through controlled observation, its reliance on a single, familiar participant may provide rich empirical data but offers limited generalizability and may have introduced bias. More recent research addresses these constraints by using large-scale user-generated data to capture broader, more diverse perspectives. Expanding sample sizes enhances representativeness and reduces the influence of idiosyncrasies, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of localization reception across linguistic and cultural contexts.

Additionally, a larger scale, more diverse dataset allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of localization issues, reducing the influence of individual idiosyncrasies according to one or few players, instead accounting for regional, linguistic, and cultural variations in player reception. In this context, Hsu and O'Hagan (2024) examined how player feedback, particularly from online platforms, can serve as a meaningful tool for evaluating localization effectiveness. Focusing on Chinese-language games, recently Hsu and O'Hagan (2024) applied Livingston's (2018) Review Analysis methodology (RVA) and thematic analysis to examine *Detention* (Red Candle Games 2017). Analyzing

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Steam user reviews in Simplified Chinese, English, and Japanese, the study assessed player experiences and localization challenges, exploring the potential of user reviews as a player-focused localization research tool. Reviews were categorized under three themes: (1) linguistic translation, (2) cultural context, and (3) technical issues, and collected using a Python package. Findings revealed that only 68% (7,019) of the 10,342 reviews were written in the source or localised languages, indicating that review language does not necessarily reflect the game version played. Additionally, only 155 Japanese reviews were identified (Hsu et al. 2024, 10), likely due to Japan's relatively small PC gaming market.

Despite certain limitations, Steam user reviews are recognized as a highly ecologically valid data source, providing real-world insights for future game localization research within GUR. They also underscore the scarcity of research on player experiences across regions, despite GUR's aim to accommodate an increasingly diverse audience (Drachen, Mirza-Babaei & Nacke 2018, 3). Additionally, Steam review features, such as the option to select review language, remain largely underutilized in research (see Tong 2021) leaving a gap – whilst Steam offers rich, multilingual, and culturally-diverse player feedback, few studies systematically analyze this data to explore regional or linguistic variation in localization reception, a gap this article aims to begin to address.

Beyond their role in evaluating localization effectiveness, user reviews also provide insights into the broader impact of culturalization on gameplay experiences. Hsu et al. identify culturalization as a key factor influencing player reception yet note that translation-related challenges often remain ambiguous. While intended to enhance accessibility, culturalization can sometimes lead to content alterations that dilute the original artistic intent or misrepresent cultural elements (O'Hagan & Mangiron 2013, 211-215). Furthermore, Edwards (2012, 19-34) argues that excessive adaptation may result in intercultural dissonance, leading to a loss of authenticity, player disengagement, or unintended cultural bias.

O'Hagan (2016, 123-144) similarly calls attention to the lack of research on localised gameplay experiences, emphasizing the need for further empirical investigation to advance this emerging field. The progression of GUR and GTUR underscores a growing shift towards user-centered approaches in game localization. While traditional research has predominantly focused on product- and process-oriented perspectives, recent scholarship highlights the necessity of participant-focused methodologies that incorporate playability studies, cultural playability, and empirical data collection. The concept of "cultural playability" reinforces the critical role of cultural factors in localization strategies, demonstrating that national frameworks alone are insufficient in capturing the complexities of user preferences, which are also shaped by regional, generational, and professional influences. Empirical studies, such as those by O'Hagan (2008) and Hsu and O'Hagan (2024), illustrate the value of integrating player feedback

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and user-generated data to assess localization effectiveness. However, despite the increasing emphasis on community engagement, standardization, and personalization, significant challenges remain in balancing accessibility, authenticity, and cultural adaptation. The growing reliance on large-scale user data, such as Steam reviews, presents valuable opportunities for advancing research into player experiences across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. Nevertheless, further investigation is required to fully understand the implications of culturalization in game localization, particularly in relation to its impact on player engagement, authenticity, and the preservation of artistic intent. Addressing these complexities is essential for refining localization practices and ensuring that games remain both culturally resonant and functionally accessible to global audiences. Through combining analysis of netnographic user-generated reviews with playtesting and interviews, this article offers breadth and depth in the exploration and understanding of player reception which has not yet been seen in GTUR. The triangulation of this data offers a holistic view of localization is experienced and received in context within the field of ZH-EN videogames – a field still under-researched. Having established the importance of cultural playability and player perceptions in localization, this article now examines how these theories apply in practice through an analysis of three Chinese RPGs.

3 Materials and Frameworks

3.1 Selection of Games for Analysis

Building on the literature review, which underscores the significance of user-centered approaches in video game localization, this section details the methodological framework employed in the study. Given the complexities of localization strategies and their impact on player experience, the selection of games was guided by a set of criteria designed to capture a range of budgetary, linguistic, and development considerations. By examining RPGs developed in mainland China with differing localization approaches and levels of financial investment, the study aims to assess how these factors influence player perceptions and engagement. The inclusion of both developer-defined and player-generated genre classifications further allows for an exploration of potential divergences between formal categorization and user reception. The methodological choices outlined in this section form part of a broader investigation into the relationship between localization quality, player expectations, and the evolving role of user feedback in shaping game translation practices.

Three games were selected for playtesting according to the following criteria:

1. Classified as RPGs according to tags.
2. Developed by Chinese teams in mainland China.

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3. Represented different development budgets (one high-budget title and two low-budget titles).
4. Employed differing localization approaches.
5. Had positive overall reviews on Steam or the Google Play Store.

Note that only *Depersonalization* is analyzed in this article. The inclusion of the other two titles (*Honkai Impact: Star Rail* and *Eastward*) served to provide contextual diversity in the overall study design but is not discussed in detail here.

A set of inclusion criteria was established to define what qualified as an RPG according to Steam platform tags or Google Play Store categories. In addition to genre labels assigned by developers, these platforms feature supplementary tags submitted by players. The inclusion of player-defined tags alongside developer-defined tags provides insight into player perspectives on genre classification and how games are perceived by users, potentially highlighting divergences between developer intention (formal classification) and player reception (user insight).

The selected games were developed by studios based in mainland China: miHoYo, based in Shanghai (with international operations handled by the Singapore-based subsidiary HoYoverse); Pixpil, also based in Shanghai; and Meow Nature, likewise based in Shanghai.

Budget was considered a selection factor to determine whether players would cite it as influencing their perception of localization quality. Furthermore, the study aimed to explore how, if at all, different approaches to localization might affect player responses and in situ experiences. The games selected for the study were characterized by largely positive ratings on both Steam and the Google Play Store, which were operationalized as a benchmark for player-perceived quality. These ratings not only indicated overall positive user engagement but also suggested a level of technical competence contributing to a well-received player experience (Livingstone et al., 2011, 4–5).

Honkai Impact: Star Rail (miHoYo, 2023) was selected as the high-budget title for analysis and featured full professional in-house translation, whereas the first low-budget indie title selected was *Eastward* (Pixpil, 2021), which handled localization through an agency using a contextual (WYSIWYG) tool. The second indie title chosen for the reception study was *Depersonalization* (Meow Nature, 2021/2024), which is the focus of this article. Initially, its localization approach relied primarily on amateur translation assisted by MT with minimal post-editing. The use of MT was later expanded to involve the player community through the Steam and Discord platforms, enabling players to suggest edits and translation corrections that developers could implement through crowdsourced efforts. However, this MT-based approach was eventually overhauled, with a localization professional hired through an agency

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reworking the textual elements. *Depersonalization* is available in two languages and includes audio-verbal dialogue options, although these are not enabled by default.

3.2 The primary material analyzed: *Depersonalization*

While the selected games provide a diverse basis for exploring localization strategies, understanding how various modes interact in shaping player experience is equally crucial. To fully assess the impact of localization, it is essential to consider not only linguistic strategies but also the broader multimodal nature of video games. Although this article primarily focuses on player responses to written elements, it is important to acknowledge that localization extends beyond textual translation, interacting with multiple semiotic modes that contribute to meaning-making and immersion (see Bernal-Merino, 2016, for more on semiotics and pragmatics in video game localization). Consequently, a multimodal analytical framework is necessary to account for how these elements function collectively within the game environment, shaping both comprehension and engagement (see Taylor, 2020, for a robust overview).

For the purposes of this brief article, the emphasis is placed on the indie game *Depersonalization*. This game is particularly well suited for investigating player reception due to its evolving translation history and its reliance on written elements to convey narrative, mechanics, and atmosphere. *Depersonalization* is an RPG with tabletop RPG elements, themed around the lore of twentieth-century Gothic author H. P. Lovecraft, and features motifs familiar to readers of Lovecraft and players of games such as *Call of Cthulhu* (e.g., the occult, ancient gods, and place names such as Innsmouth). By incorporating the Lovecraftian universe, the game's genre conventions and cultural references pose challenges for cross-cultural interpretation.

Developed by the Chinese indie studio Meow Nature, the game was initially released in early access in 2019. It was made available for purchase and play prior to being a fully finished product and was translated largely by a single amateur translator on the development team with MT assistance. Subsequently, players and members of the fan community were invited, via the Discord and Steam platforms, to suggest translations, edits, and corrections. However, as of early 2024, the translation was largely replaced by the work of a professional translator, and in August 2024 the game exited early access and was released as a complete title. According to a developer update shared on Steam on December 3, 2024, the English translation is still undergoing revisions (Meow Nature, 2024). This transition from crowdsourcing to full professional rewriting offers a rare opportunity to examine whether changes in localization strategy affect player reception, perception, and experience over time.

With its distinctive localization trajectory, heavy reliance on written elements, and thematic complexity, *Depersonalization* presents an ideal case study, aligning with the

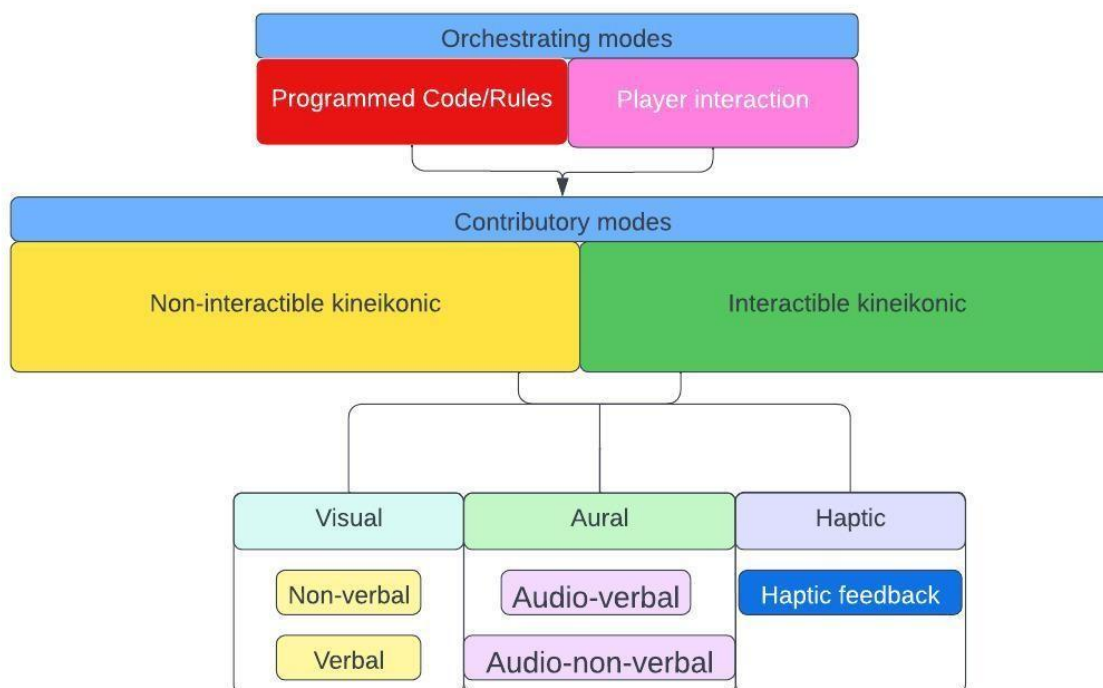
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broader aim of this research to contribute to GTUR through the combined use of netnography and interviews.

3.3. Multimodal Analytical Framework

As a text, videogames feature multiple semiotic modes that work together to make meaning. To undertake a multimodal approach to analysis, Burn's kineikonic mode (Burn & Parker 2003) was adapted in light of Zabalbeascoa (2008), Bolanos Garcia-Esribano (2024), O'Hagan & Mangiron's theory (2013) and terminology (Fig. 1). The kineikonic mode refers to the interplay of various modes, such as visuals, sound, and movement, working cohesively within a film, video, or, in this case, a video game, to construct meaning.

Figure 1. *Adapted kineikonic model implementing Zabalbeascoa, Bolanos Garcia-Esribano, O'Hagan & Mangiron's theory and terminology.*



To clarify the categorized modes in brief, see the provided summarizing Table 1.

Table 1. *Categorisation of audio-visual-haptic modes.*

	Audio	Visual	Haptic
Verbal	Words heard	Words read	
Non-verbal	Music, non-spoken sound (e.g. combat SFX, menu blips)	Non-dialogue words, pictures, screen image	

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Visual-nonverbal elements include user interface (UI) text, item names and descriptions, and narrative text that is descriptive rather than spoken by a character. The visualization of spoken dialogue and vocal sounds, such as laughter or screams, typically falls under visual-verbal elements. Audio-nonverbal elements describe sound effects, such as those occurring in combat scenarios, as well as music that plays throughout the game. Audio-verbal elements refer specifically to spoken sounds, such as dialogue exchanges or other verbal cues, including laughter or screams. Visual-verbal elements often accompany audio-verbal elements in the form of on-screen subtitles during dialogue exchanges that occur either in interactive gameplay scenes (such as speaking to an NPC) or in non-interactive cutscenes.

The haptic mode, sometimes referred to as "force feedback" or "rumble," is included to demonstrate its place within the model but was optional and did not factor into the playtesting, as playing the games on PC using a mouse and keyboard did not support this feature. *Depersonalization* was played without the AI voice option enabled and does not feature any haptic feedback system; therefore, the modes of interest are limited to visual-verbal, visual-nonverbal, and audio-nonverbal elements. This paper focuses exclusively on written text, namely visual-verbal and visual-nonverbal elements.

4 Methods

4.1 The Netnographic Data

While the adapted kineikonic model provides a structured framework for analyzing the multimodal nature of video games, it is equally important to examine how players engage with these elements in practice. Given that player perceptions are shaped not only by direct gameplay experiences but also by broader community discourse, netnographic data offer valuable insight into how localization choices influence player reception. By analyzing user-generated reviews from platforms such as Steam and the Google Play Store, it is possible to identify emergent themes in player feedback, shedding light on how localization strategies impact accessibility, immersion, and overall satisfaction.

Netnographic data offer insight into player experiences from the perspective of players advising other potential players, sharing information they consider relevant to prospective players' interests. Review data were scraped using Octoparse from publicly available reviews on Steam and the Google Play Store. From the available material, the most recent 500 reviews published between January 1, 2021, and December 31, 2024, were collected. From this dataset, 75 reviews from each game were selected using a random number generator to determine which data rows would be coded in NVivo for inductive reflexive thematic analysis, following the six-phase process outlined by

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Braun and Clarke (2006/2025, 77–101): familiarization, coding, initial theme development, theme review, theme refinement and definition, and write-up (originally introduced in 2006 and revised online at <https://www.thematicanalysis.net/doing-reflexive-ta>). Emergent themes are discussed in Section 5.2. Random sampling was used to account for significant differences in the number of available reviews across the three games. As *Depersonalization* is exclusively available on Steam, all reviews for this title were sourced from that platform.

4.2 The Play Tests

To further contextualize the findings from the netnographic analysis, it is essential to complement player-generated reviews with direct observations of player engagement during gameplay. All playtesters were provided with information sheets and signed consent forms in accordance with University of Leeds policy, and ethical approval to conduct the playtests was obtained in 2023. All data were anonymized using pseudonyms, and no participants' faces appear in any recordings.

While reviews offer retrospective reflections on localization quality and overall experience, playtesting provides an opportunity to examine immediate, in situ reactions to written elements within a controlled setting. By integrating these two approaches, this study seeks to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how localization strategies influence player immersion, comprehension, and satisfaction.

The games were playtested on a laptop using a keyboard and mouse by 11 anonymized volunteers (N = 11) who self-identified as fans of the RPG genre. Participants exhibited varying levels of familiarity with RPGs, ranging from those who primarily engaged with visual novel (VN) games – characterized by interactive storytelling with limited gameplay mechanics – to those with broader experience across RPG subgenres, including Japanese RPGs, Western RPGs, action RPGs, and computer RPGs. All playtesters were recruited from the Leeds area and comprised university students and local residents, all of whom were adults over the age of 18.

To ensure meaningful engagement with the written elements of the games, participants were required to declare their age, nationality, gender identity, and primary gaming language through a series of eight pre-play questions that initiated the interview process. While participants could indicate proficiency in additional languages, it was imperative that they possessed sufficient comprehension of English, particularly for engaging with dialogue and descriptive in-game text. Once play commenced, each participant was observed until reaching the end of the tutorial phase, at which point they were asked five standardized questions before moving on to the next game to be playtested. After completing play sessions for all games, participants were asked a further five questions, with opportunities for elaboration where the

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interviewer deemed additional exploration warranted. Upon completion of the playtest interviews, participants were debriefed on the full purpose of the study. Once all data were collected, they were coded in NVivo, first for general sentiment using NVivo's automatic sentiment coding tool and subsequently using an inductive reflexive approach to identify emerging trends, following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework (2006/2025).

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection methods included direct observation, audio and gameplay recordings, and laptop screen recordings captured during play sessions. Following gameplay, participants took part in semi-structured interviews to further explore their experiences. Interview questions were designed based on principles observed in GUR approaches (Kramarzewski & De Nucci, 2023, 305–321) and in line with established interview guidance (Gerson & Damask, 2020), and were initially piloted with two University of Leeds postgraduate student volunteers. Following the pilot, the interview content was refined to reduce length and streamline the process, enabling more meaningful responses that yielded richer and more insightful data. Interview audio recordings, captured using an external microphone, were transcribed with minimal cleanup in MS Word.

Additionally, instances of spontaneous verbal reactions were noted, as well as occurrences of incidental think-aloud protocols, in which players expressed thoughts, reactions, or opinions without researcher prompting. Think-aloud data were treated as in-act feedback and coded accordingly, with pre-play, in-act, and post hoc data separated into individual top-level codes. All collected data were inductively coded in NVivo, facilitating the identification of emergent themes for comparison with those derived from the netnographic data. Notably, emergent codes both diverged and converged across temporal stages, with playtesters and netnographic reviewers emphasizing largely shared issues alongside distinct idiosyncrasies. These patterns are discussed in detail in Section 5.

5 Results

5.1 Preliminary Data Overview

While playtesting provided insights into real-time player engagement with written elements, netnographic analysis offered a broader perspective through player reflections found in online reviews. These reviews highlight recurring themes and concerns that may not be captured in controlled gameplay sessions. By combining both

approaches, this study aims to identify patterns in how localization influences player perception, encompassing both immediate in-game reactions and retrospective assessments. The following section outlines the preliminary netnographic findings, with a focus on translation and localization-related discussions within player discourse. The netnographic data provide valuable insight into how existing players perceive the game and what information they believe potential players should be aware of.

An initial sentiment analysis conducted using NVivo's automatic sentiment coding tool identified 270 coded references: 52 were categorized as "very negative," 70 as "moderately negative," 96 as "moderately positive," and 52 as "very positive." This distribution offers a general overview of reviewer sentiment. For simplification, these categories were consolidated into "positive" and "negative" references, resulting in 148 positive comments and 122 negative comments, indicating a mixed overall sentiment. To illustrate key themes and contextualize the sentiment classification, and to ground theoretical claims in player language, selected excerpts from both playtests and Steam review feedback are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *A selection of brief verbatim statements from the interviews and steam reviews.*

Excerpt	Description
[chuckle] Right, bread, I feel like that's the joy of life as well.	Interview excerpt (P8, Code: Amused by text)
I do remember now there was one part where the Chinese was still there and I was like 'oh, wow' [laugh].	Interview excerpt (P7, Code: Untranslated)
Text is flying all over the screen now. Going top left here, bottom right, it's, yeah.	Interview excerpt (P5, Code: Text presentation)
Is this really the joy of life? I do like food but like, that looks like bread he literally just picked off the ground, if it was fresh nice warm bread, that's entirely different.	Interview excerpt (P6, Code: Amused by text)
A "bandager"? What's a bandager? Is that supposed to be somebody with bandages on?	Interview excerpt (P3, Code: Coherency issues)
I wish I could recommend this game, but it's just difficult to get through in English.	Steam review excerpt (Code: Translation)

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While the word cloud visualization offers a useful snapshot of frequently mentioned terms, it also presents limitations. Isolated words, when removed from their original context, can obscure the nuance and intent behind player feedback. For example, terms such as "translation" or "fluency" may reflect praise, criticism, or neutral commentary, but this cannot be determined without examining the surrounding text, leading to a reductionist approach that risks oversimplification and misinterpretation. However, the word cloud remains a valuable tool for initial exploration, especially in large datasets. It helps quickly identify recurrent themes or focal points in user discourse, acting as a guide that draws attention to topics warranting further investigation and analysis. Future iterations of this study could benefit from analyzing larger segments of text to yield richer data with greater contextual salience.

Reviewers reported varying levels of impact on their gameplay experience due to issues with translation and the use of English. Some described the game as "difficult to get through in English" (sample ref. 6), while others considered the translation "rough at best, but passable" (sample ref. 7).

To categorize the impact of translation or English usage, player reviews were analyzed thematically, as shown in the table below. In some cases, players did not specify the exact issues with the translation, offering general comments such as "poor translation" or "translation needs work," leaving the nature of the problem implicit. These reviews were classified as "unspecified inadequate" for the purposes of analysis. In all cases, the codes were developed inductively and reflected the content of both the reviews and playtester comments.

The top three codes to emerge were Unspecified inadequate (21), Untranslated (11), and Coherency issues (11). Under "unspecified inadequate," players remarked on the translation in negative terms without providing specific justification, such as identifiable translation errors or text clipping that impeded readability. Based on feedback from other reviewers, it is plausible that these "unspecified inadequate" remarks reflect a sense of player frustration resulting from one or more issues with the written elements that were articulated more clearly by other reviewers, including unnatural phrasing, incoherent sentences, or narrative dissonance caused by written elements that conflicted with the wider in-game context.

These findings support GTUR's emphasis on the importance of user feedback in the evaluation of localization, highlighting how aggregated player sentiment, particularly regarding translation, can reveal recurrent playability concerns and cultural expectations. By foregrounding these patterns, the data reinforce the need for user-centered, empirical approaches to localization research that account for both the linguistic and experiential dimensions of gameplay.

5.3 Preliminary Interview Data

Data collected from player remarks, both during and after gameplay, provided valuable insights into in-act player experiences as well as post hoc reception feedback. Interviews conducted after gameplay included a set of standard questions, with additional clarifying questions posed when responses were vague or required further elaboration. Players were encouraged to speak freely, whether in a detailed or more focused manner, during the interviews. Observations of physical reactions, such as laughter, sighs, or gestures, were noted; however, the present analysis focuses exclusively on remarks related to written visual-verbal and visual-nonverbal content.

Preliminary data from playtesters' experiences of *Depersonalization* contrast with those of Steam reviewers. Notably, players interviewed after the tutorial phase of the game rarely mentioned issues related to English usage or the translation of written textual elements. Sentiment analysis of the interview data (excluding interviewer content), conducted in NVivo, revealed 61 "very negative" sentiments, 80 "moderately negative," 69 "moderately positive," and 41 "very positive." When simplified into broader categories of negative and positive sentiment, this yielded a total of 141 negative references and 110 positive references, indicating slightly more negative sentiment overall compared to the Steam review data.

However, comments specifically addressing language, English usage, or translation were less prevalent in the interviews. These issues were raised only 27 times, a marked decrease from the 51 mentions in the Steam review data. This resulted in a more diffuse set of terms for visualization. A word cloud derived from these 27 instances highlighted the following five most frequent terms: (1) Bread, (2) Life, (3) Chinese, (4) Dialogue, and (5) Feel (Fig. 3). Due to the limited number of instances, several terms appeared with equal frequency, including "Bread" and "Feel" (five occurrences each), and "Chinese," "Dialogue," and "Feel" (four occurrences each). An additional six terms also appeared four times: "Human," "Interactions," "Key," "Name," "Star," and "Translation." For the purposes of this article, the first five terms, as weighted by NVivo, are treated as the most prominent.

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deliberately, often in relation to expectations shaped by other games or by community discourse. This highlights a methodological limitation of playtesting: while it captures immediate, embodied responses, it may overlook evaluative or comparative insights that emerge in asynchronous online spaces that allow time for reflection.

Alternatively, this pattern may reflect the influence of community dynamics, whereby discussion within review spaces establishes translation as a salient issue. Once a reviewer comments on translation quality, subsequent reviewers may echo or expand upon this concern, perceiving it as expected or relevant. Playtesters, by contrast, lack this shared discursive context and therefore may not foreground translation issues prior to interview prompting. This possibility warrants further investigation in future research.

6 Discussion

6.1 Cultural Schema Theory and Player Expectations

While the role of written text in localization is context-dependent, the findings suggest that it becomes particularly salient when it disrupts immersion, causes confusion, or deviates from genre expectations, indicating that the written word does matter, especially when it fails to meet player assumptions. To explore this further, this article adopts a cultural schema approach. At first glance, Steam reviews contain more discussion of translation and the use of English in the game, with 51 mentions compared to just 27 in the playtester interviews. If importance is measured by the frequency of these mentions, one might conclude that playtesters are less inclined to comment on written text unless it provokes an immediate emotional response, such as laughter, or conflicts with their expectations, as observed in situ.

A notable finding is the classification of 23 instances as "unspecified inadequate," with 21 of these originating from Steam reviews and only two from post hoc interviews. The lack of clarification in these reviews regarding why the translation is deemed inadequate suggests that reviewers are likely guided by implicit expectations shaped by prior experience and cultural schemas. However, this vagueness may also reflect a broader lack of awareness among players regarding what translation or localization actually entails. Many players may not distinguish between linguistic, cultural, or technical issues, instead collapsing them into a generalized sense of "bad translation," as reflected in the "unspecified inadequate" code. This has implications for how non-expert users assess localization, as they often rely on surface-level cues such as awkward phrasing or perceived fluency rather than informed criteria. As a result, community norms surrounding what constitutes "good" or "bad" localization may be shaped more by expectation than by an understanding of the translation process. These

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implications warrant greater attention in GTUR, both to foreground player perception and to highlight the need for increased clarity and literacy around localization and its processes within gaming communities.

This observation invites an exploration of cultural schema theory as a framework for understanding these responses. Cultural schema theory posits that individuals' expectations and habits are shaped by the environments in which they were raised or influenced. DiMaggio (1997) refers to these as "default assumptions," unconscious beliefs that shape perceptions and interactions.

Originally proposed by Nishida (1999) in the context of intercultural communication, cultural schema theory is particularly useful for examining how players interpret written elements in video games. In this context, "culture" is not defined by national or racial identity, but by shared cultural frameworks within specific gaming genres or fan communities. This approach is especially applicable to Steam reviews, where critiques are often not elaborated upon, but where the content of the review serves an informative purpose, namely to guide or advise potential new players. In contrast, in-depth post hoc interviews provide an opportunity to probe participants' reasoning, offering richer detail and a more nuanced perspective.

Feedback from both reviewers and playtesters, particularly vague complaints about translation inadequacies, can be linked to these default assumptions, expectations that may seem self-evident to players, such as an implied expectation of native-level fluency in written elements, and that often serve as a catalyst for remarks on translation. For example, one playtester remarked that the dialogue "was a bit stilted", while another commented on a character name, "Star Key", stating that it was "a name that got translated literally, and probably shouldn't have been". These comments suggest that expectations regarding dialogue style and character-naming conventions were not met. Such responses reflect implicit expectations shaped by prior exposure to professionally localized RPGs.

However, playtesters often did not dwell on translation issues unless prompted. While some participants clearly recognized awkward phrasing and described it as "jarring", "machine translated", or "doesn't flow well", they frequently treated such moments as incidental. One playtester remarked post hoc that "some parts were perfectly fine, but then you have sometimes when they're like 'ah yes, it looks like we've been ambushed but they're being besieged', that doesn't sound right in English". Yet playtesters did not elaborate further unless prompted to do so. Another playtester stated that the written elements sometimes "felt a little stumbly [...] but it's just so normal in these kinds of things", indicating a degree of genre-based tolerance or desensitization. These responses suggest that while translation issues were noticed by playtesters, they were not always prioritized in act, particularly when gameplay or narrative remained engaging.

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In contrast, the Steam reviews, which were written retrospectively and with the intent of informing other potential players, were more likely to foreground localization concerns. Vague critiques such as "translation needs work" and "poor translation" likely stem from unmet genre-based assumptions about fluency and narrative immersion rooted in internalized genre norms. These norms inform players' assessments of localization, even when they cannot articulate specific issues.

The survey data further support this interpretation. While not directly related to visual-verbal elements, respondents asked to identify themes they associate with JRPGs repeatedly cited "massive swords," "exaggerated dialogue," and "anime-style character designs," demonstrating the presence of ingrained genre norms. Similarly, perceived localization failures were described in terms such as "awkward phrasing" and "clunky dialogue." These genre-informed schemata shape how players interpret and evaluate translated content, sometimes leading to negative assessments when localization strategies deviate from established norms.

Cultural schema theory underscores the significance of shared understanding within a cultural group. In this article, players' implicit expectations are informed by their prior experiences with video games. Players familiar with a particular genre or specific game mechanics will, according to cultural schema theory, naturally expect similar experiences. However, schemata are not static; they are flexible and can be reshaped through exposure to new experiences or differing perspectives (Shahghasemi, 2017).

6.2 The Role of Written Text in Localization Reception

How does this apply to the written word and the use of English in *Depersonalization*? In short, when players hold expectations shaped by prior genre experience, they are likely to react when those expectations are not met. These expectations may concern mechanics, user interfaces, aesthetic styles, or other elements aligned with established genre norms (Juul, 2005). When such expectations are violated, players may discontinue the game, refrain from recommending it, or share their dissatisfaction with others. These reactions, particularly prevalent in reviews, can influence potential players and shape their own cultural schemata. For example, although this remains a speculative hypothesis for future research, it is conceivable that a review highlighting issues with English usage may prompt other reviewers to comment on language themselves, creating a domino effect driven by perceived social norms. Similarly, players who encounter reviews mentioning language issues may become more sensitive to these concerns, thereby altering their own experience of the game.

This phenomenon is not merely descriptive but points to a broader mechanism: community discourse actively constructs and reinforces shared norms surrounding perceived localization "quality." In the playtest data, one participant discussing their

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taste in games noted awareness of character traits and localization quirks "mainly because a lot of my friends also play [...] I just get tempted and like, ah well, may as well join in." Another participant admitted that despite not playing certain video games themselves, they were familiar with characters and content through the opinions of other players. This suggests that expectations of video games in general, and localization in particular, are not formed in isolation but are shaped by community influence, both offline and online. In some cases, localization critique thus appears to be self-reinforcing. Once an issue is publicly raised, such as in a Steam review, it may gain traction not necessarily because it is inherently problematic, but because it resonates with shared genre-based assumptions. In this way, community feedback loops can amplify perceptions of localization problems (or praise), even when the underlying translation is technically accomplished.

Whilst not measuring the commercial impact of such discourse explicitly, there is precedent in the industry for community-driven backlash affecting game reception and sales. The Atlus title *Persona 5* is one example that faced significant criticism, so much so an entire website devoted to critique of the localization was published (but now defunct, *Persona Problems*, 2017) and videogame news websites shared critical articles (Lee, 2017; O'Donnell & O'Donnell, 2017) that actively shaped public perception and opinion. The case of *Persona 5* highlights how community-defined norms of localization can influence not only the individual player, but the wider market as a whole. In such a context, written elements transcend pure function, but become a site of cultural negotiation, where genre expectations, community discourse and localization approaches meet. Navigating this dynamic is essential to localization specialists, both in practical and research fields, if one is to meet the challenge of localization with the required sensitivity and finesse expected of both the player community and the broader videogame market.

7 Limitations

It is important to acknowledge certain limitations of this study.

7.1 Differences Between Steam Reviews and Play Testers

Unlike Steam reviewers, playtesters did not have the freedom to choose the games they played. As a result, the selected titles may not have aligned with their personal preferences. While playtesters self-identified as fans of RPGs, the genre itself encompasses a wide range of subcategories. Had participants been provided with descriptions of the games prior to the playtest, it is conceivable that some may have chosen not to engage with certain titles.

7.2 Sample Size Considerations

Additionally, the quantity of data collected from the two groups is not entirely comparable, an acknowledged limitation of this study. The dataset comprises 75 reviews in contrast to only 11 interview datasets. However, the interview data are arguably richer, offering deeper qualitative insights that, when fully explored, can yield more meaningful and nuanced findings.

7.3 Study Scope and Generalizability

Finally, this paper represents only a small portion of a broader PhD project, within which the role of language is just one facet of a much larger framework. This framework includes the consideration of situational context, in-game context, the impact of multimodal elements on player feedback, and the recognition of tropes and culture-specific nuances. As such, this article should be regarded as an initial exploration, providing a foundation for future research rather than a comprehensive study in itself.

8 Concluding Remarks

8.1 Summary of Key Findings

This article set out to examine whether the written word is fundamental to the localization of *Depersonalization*, and potentially to RPG titles more broadly, from the perspective of players engaging with ZH–EN video games. The findings suggest that while written elements (visual-verbal) contribute to player reception, they do not function in isolation, but rather as part of a broader multimodal framework informed by prior experience. Their salience increases when they disrupt immersion, elicit humor, or deviate from genre-based expectations and norms.

A key insight emerging from this study is the relevance of cultural schema theory in explaining how players interpret localization and, more specifically, how they evaluate its perceived "quality." Player expectations, shaped by prior exposure to established genre conventions and community discourse, serve as interpretive frameworks through which translation is judged. When localization aligns with these schemata, it often goes unnoticed. When it deviates, even subtly, it can become a focal point of critique. This is particularly evident in the prevalence of vague but negative feedback in Steam reviews, such as "poor localization" and "translation needs work." Such comments do not necessarily reflect erroneous translation, but rather a misalignment between player expectations and localization tone, fluency, or readability.

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Importantly, this article highlights how community discourse actively constructs and reinforces norms of perceived localization quality. Steam reviews, written retrospectively and shaped by social dynamics, appear to amplify concerns about language use, creating a feedback loop in which certain critiques become self-reinforcing. Playtesters, by contrast, rarely remarked on translation issues unless these directly interfered with their experience. Their feedback tended to be more specific and contextually grounded, for example when the description of bread as "the joy of life" elicited laughter. This contrast underscores the value of methodological triangulation. By combining netnography with in-acti and post hoc interviews, both the breadth and depth of player reception can be captured.

Methodologically, this study contributes to GTUR by demonstrating the value of integrating multiple data sources to explore how localization is received and evaluated. Theoretically, it advances the application of cultural schema theory within video game localization, illustrating how genre-informed expectations shape not only individual player responses but also broader collective norms within the gaming community. Although preliminary, this study offers a foundation for future reception research in video game localization, opening avenues for exploration across different genres, platforms of play, player demographics, and communities. Additionally, it raises questions that warrant further investigation into the role of community feedback as a mechanism for guiding localization practice and shaping perception. In conclusion, this article has presented one analytical approach and identified potential directions for further research through the lens of cultural schema theory. It ultimately suggests that the reception of written elements in video games is not merely a matter of linguistic accuracy, but a culturally and socially situated process embedded in the norms and discourses of the video gaming community.

8.2 Future Research Directions

This preliminary analysis has highlighted several critical questions: Do reviews contribute to reinforcing standards within the gaming community? Are playtesters' reactions to English usage shaped by their cultural schemata as video game enthusiasts? To what extent is the implicit expectation of the gaming experience influenced by knowledge of a game being a localized product? Finally, to what extent do mentions of translation in reviews perpetuate a self-reinforcing cycle?

Future research addressing these questions, particularly within the context of ZH-EN localized video games, is eagerly anticipated. As this field continues to gain academic attention, it remains rich with unresolved issues and untapped potential that warrant further exploration.

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Translating the Player Experience: Exploring Immersion in the Context of Videogame Localization

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, video games have established themselves as a par excellence medium of immersive storytelling, aiming to provide unique experiences to players around the globe. Although video game localization has only relatively recently been recognized as a distinct translation modality, the field has matured rapidly since the early 2010s (Mangiron, 2018). Research to date has largely focused on its defining features and on the analysis of localization models and processes, while, more recently, a limited number of user-centered approaches have emerged, elucidating how localization shapes gaming experiences across cultures (e.g., Bernal-Merino, 2014; Bernal-Merino et al., 2023; Deckert & Hejduk, 2024; O'Hagan, 2019). By contrast, research on both video games and video game localization within the Greek context remains largely unexplored, creating a significant research gap. In light of this, the present paper seeks to shed light on the landscape of video game localization in Greece and to examine whether translators' choices can hinder or enhance player experience and the sense of immersion. Specifically, this paper reports on a qualitative study of immersion involving 10 *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009–present) players, who volunteered their perspectives by providing feedback on selected in-game quotations through semi-structured interviews.

Keywords: videogame localization, immersion, player experience, localization in Greece, League of Legends

1 Introduction

Despite their reputation as *media non grata*, video games have established themselves as one of the most widely enjoyed forms of transmedia storytelling (Jenkins, 2007; O'Hagan, 2019; Stone, 2021). The sheer size of the gaming industry has inevitably created a need for the translation of related products. This has proven to be a daunting task, as translators are required to combine and adapt techniques from multiple translation modalities, harness technology, and refine existing translation workflows

in order to deliver engaging experiences to wider audiences (Bernal-Merino, 2014; O'Hagan, 2019).

The present paper seeks to explore video game localization in Greece and examine whether translators' choices can hinder or enhance player experience and the sense of immersion, drawing on examples from the Greek version of *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009–present). To this end, the paper reports on a qualitative study involving 10 *League of Legends* players, who volunteered their views through semi-structured interviews, providing feedback on selected in-game quotations presented in both written and audio formats.

2 The Landscape of Localization in Greece

An overarching consensus on what constitutes a video game has yet to be reached. While the pursuit of strict video game definitions has largely been abandoned by contemporary scholarship – as it is often regarded as a trivial exercise by both scholars and the wider public – the absence of a widely accepted definition has posed significant challenges for the Greek gaming industry (Arjoranta, 2019; Bergonse, 2017; Bogost, 2009). Tracing the roots of gaming – and, consequently, localization – in Greece is no easy task, as the scarcity of relevant bibliography makes it difficult to pinpoint the advent of arcades, although estimates place it around the 1980s.

Arcades quickly became social hubs for people of all ages. However, perceived similarities between arcade cabinets and slot machines in the eyes of the government – on the grounds that both were coin-operated – led first to the implementation of an age restriction for arcade-goers (17+) and later to their prohibition in 2002. In an effort to combat gambling, the government enacted Law 3037/2002, which effectively banned any form of “mechanical, electrical, electromechanical, electronic, and recreational/technical games” in public spaces, thus bringing the arcade era to an end (Νόμος 3037/2002; my translation). Unsurprisingly, this highly expansive definition of “games” had a significant impact on arcade owners and retailers alike, as even display consoles were deemed illegal.

Public and political outrage was considerable, emphasizing the distinction between gaming and gambling and calling for the amendment of the law on the grounds that it was unconstitutional. The controversial legislation was amended in 2003 by Ministerial Decision (ΦΕΚ Β/1827/8-12-2003), without addressing the ban on “electronic games,” and was eventually repealed in 2011 following intervention by the European Council.

It would be reasonable to suggest that the situation outlined above, combined with the Greek financial crisis, hampered the development of a domestic gaming industry to some extent, as potential investors and developers were likely deterred from

committing to an increasingly volatile market. To this day, most video games developed in Greece originate from independent studios or developers, with notable examples including the *Darkfall* series (Aventurine, 2009) and the *World Basketball Manager* series (Icehole Games, 1998). According to Panos Kouanis, former President and Chief Executive Officer of the National Centre of Audiovisual Media and Communication (EKOME), Greece was home to approximately 30 studios and 150 teams involved in video game development in 2020 (Ketsietzis, 2020). Moreover, since 2019, digital game projects have become eligible for cash rebates aimed at supporting and promoting domestic video game production, and Greek indie companies have been recurrently featured at Nordic Game, one of the leading game conferences in Europe (EKOME, 2018).

Much like the steadily growing number of players worldwide, academic research on both video games and video game localization has gained momentum in recent years (Mangiron, 2018; O'Hagan, 2019). Nevertheless, research focusing on Greek contexts remains markedly scarce. In particular, video game studies in Greece have tended to emphasize semiotic analysis, with notable contributions from Kokonis (2010) and Vasilikaris (2019), while video game localization remains relatively unexplored, with the exception of two MA dissertations by Almpala (2017) and Vasilikaris (2020). Moreover, the absence of a centralized database for domestically developed or localized video games makes tracing the first officially localized title nearly impossible. Nevertheless, it can be estimated that early attempts at full localization into Greek occurred in the early 2000s with titles such as the *FIFA* series (EA Sports, 1999) and *Ghosthunter* (Sony Computer Entertainment, 2003).

It should also be noted that during the same period, locally developed video games intended to be played in Greek, such as *World Basketball Manager* (Icehole Games, 1998) and *Conspiracies* (Anima Interactive, 2003), were being internationalized, with the latter featuring both English audio and subtitles. Although the Greek market remains relatively small, numerous products have been localized into Greek over the years, with games such as the *Pro Evolution Soccer/eFootball* series (Konami, 2008–present), *League of Legends* (Riot Games, 2009–present), and *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog, 2013) serving as concrete examples. Today, it can be argued that an increasing number of companies are localizing their games into Greek, with prominent recent examples including the latest entries in the *God of War* series (Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2013; 2018; 2022), *Hades II* (Supergiant Games, 2025), and the *Bokura* series (Tokoronyori, 2023; 2025).

3 The Multimodality of Videogame Localization

Video game localization is a context-sensitive process that inevitably raises questions regarding the strategies and approaches adopted throughout the task. In addition to

the different text types that video games include (e.g., manuals, legal texts, and UI elements), video game genre must also be taken into account. For example, genres such as role-playing games (RPGs) often feature a wider and more diverse cast of characters and a greater number of translatable assets, particularly in the form of descriptions or menus, and consequently involve more complex localization implications (Bernal-Merino, 2011; Mangiron, 2016). By contrast, simulation games tend to place greater emphasis on specialized language and scientific jargon in order to enhance immersion. It should be noted, however, that while attempts have been made to address this issue through the creation of genre-based taxonomies, the hybridity of the medium renders such approaches largely ineffective, given that new genres are frequently created as developers combine gameplay and aesthetic elements in increasingly creative ways (Bernal-Merino, 2007).

Given that it would be virtually impossible to develop a one-size-fits-all solution for video game localization, a functionalist approach was introduced by Bernal-Merino (2006) and O'Hagan (2009), emphasizing the preservation of the game experience across all localized versions. This approach is accompanied by a wide range of challenges, ranging from the classic distinction between foreignization and domestication (Venuti, 1995) to more technical considerations, such as methods for compensating for meaning loss in the translation of metatextual references or humor through functional equivalence (Di Marco, 2007). Taking into account cultural differences and the linguistic particularities of each title, locale, and target language, localizers often resort to transcreation, a concept closely linked to Venuti's notion of domestication that enhances translator agency, in order to preserve the overall feel of the game (Mangiron & O'Hagan, 2006; Van Oers, 2014).

As technological advancements allow more elements to be integrated into video games, localizers are increasingly required to work across multiple semiotic layers and a growing number of translatable assets (Bernal-Merino, 2007). The introduction of sound significantly altered the localization landscape and, today, video game studios frequently hire professional voice actors to bring characters to life (Chandler, 2005). Although this aspect is crucial for localization and, consequently, for immersion, even seminal works have suffered from poor localization practices, with *Resident Evil 4* (Capcom, 2005) serving as a notable example. As noted by players, the game contains several localization inconsistencies, with audio identified as the primary point of criticism. More specifically, although the game is set in rural Spain, much of the ambient NPC dialogue incorporates features of Latin American Spanish and is delivered by non-native speakers, thereby undermining immersion in an otherwise atmospheric horror game (Reddit, 2020; 2023; Steam, 2018).

As multimedia products, video games present numerous challenges which, combined with extensive metatextual and intertextual references, render video game localization

a particularly demanding task. *Undertale* (Toby Fox, 2015) and *High on Life* (Squanch Games, 2022) provide clear examples, as they incorporate a wide range of self-referential elements (e.g., the Execution/Experience Points system or Kenny's reaction to shooting Slumsley), alongside allusions to other video games (e.g., *Touhou Project*, *God of War*) and to popular culture (e.g., Doge, *Rick and Morty*). Ultimately, given the inherent hybridity of the medium, a case-by-case approach is required, with strong emphasis placed on preserving the game experience across cultures.

4 Immersion in Gaming

Having surveyed the landscape of video game studies and localization in Greece, this section shifts focus to an aspect central to video games and long debated by scholars and practitioners worldwide: immersion. Much like video games themselves, a concrete definition of immersion has yet to be established, largely due to the variety of theoretical approaches adopted by researchers (Agrawal et al., 2020). This section provides an overview of theoretical frameworks considered particularly suitable for the purposes of this paper.

One of the earliest and most influential approaches was proposed by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who sought to measure positive experiences through the concept of "flow." Flow is defined as a state of deep engagement and concentration, typically experienced when individuals perform tasks that are optimally challenging relative to their abilities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This balance between challenge and enjoyment, often described as the optimal experience, comprises several components: (1) tasks with a reasonable chance of completion; (2) clear goals; (3) immediate feedback; (4) deep but effortless involvement; (5) a sense of control over one's actions; (6) reduced self-consciousness; and (7) an altered perception of time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 3–4). Moreover, achieving such optimal experience depends not only on external conditions, such as the balance between challenge and skill, but also on internal factors. In this respect, Csikszentmihalyi draws attention to personal characteristics and practices, including the body and the mind, memory, philosophy, writing, lifelong learning, work, solitude, and coping with stress (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 4–6).

A different approach was adopted by Ermi and Mäyrä (2005), who examined immersion specifically within the context of gaming experiences. Drawing on the distinctive features of video games, they propose three forms of immersion: sensory immersion, challenge-based immersion, and imaginative immersion (101). Sensory immersion relates to the audiovisual components of video games, including elements such as screen size and graphical quality. Challenge-based immersion is associated with the balance between game difficulty and the player's mechanical skills, problem-solving abilities, and strategic thinking. Imaginative immersion, by contrast, is linked

to narrative elements, lore, and the presence of characters with whom players can identify (Ermi & Mäyrä, 2005, 101). An important contribution of this framework is the observation that strong immersion does not necessarily result in a “good game experience,” but rather in what the authors term a “powerful game experience” (Ermi & Mäyrä, 2005, 89).

In this paper, immersion is understood as the degree to which a game engages players, makes them feel part of the virtual world, and enables empathy with their avatars. This conceptualization draws primarily on sensory and imaginative immersion (Ermi & Mäyrä, 2005), as well as on the reduction of self-consciousness described in Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of flow (1990).

In light of the above, immersion emerges as an intrinsic element of the gaming experience, and one that localization aims to preserve across linguistic and cultural contexts. In line with the functionalist approaches to video game localization proposed by Bernal-Merino (2006) and O’Hagan (2009), Riot Games (2017) further emphasize the importance of managing the distance between source and target languages so that games resonate with local players. By foregrounding users’ experiential, cultural, and emotional alignment, immersion – as defined in this paper – becomes a key criterion for evaluating translational adequacy and the extent to which a translation fulfills its Skopos.

5 Case study

Based on the aforementioned theories, the present qualitative study seeks to explore whether localization can enhance or hinder players’ gaming experience and immersion. In this context, 10 players provided feedback on examples drawn from the Greek version of *League of Legends* (hereafter also referred to as LoL), drawing on their empirical experience through semi-structured interviews. *League of Legends* is an ongoing free-to-play MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) released in 2009 by Riot Games. At the time of writing (early 2025), the Riot Client, a unified launcher for Riot Games, has been translated into 27 languages, while LoL itself has been fully localized into no fewer than 19, with the Greek version released in late 2012 (Riot Games, 2020). With an estimated player base exceeding 120 million (Esguerra, 2022) and one of the largest and most competitive esports scenes to date, LoL is arguably among the most profitable gaming franchises, with products related to its universe ranging from dedicated clothing lines and makeup collections to an award-winning Netflix series.

Within Greece, *League of Legends* occupies a distinctive position in the gaming landscape. Its vibrant community, local teams, and the Hellenic Legends League, a regional professional league, underscore its cultural resonance, an impact formally acknowledged by Riot Games through a dedicated documentary.

Given that Greece is not, at least in terms of number of speakers, players, or sales, comparable to the E-FIGS markets, the selection of localized video games remains relatively limited. The primary criterion for selecting the material for this study was the identification of a game that reflects both historical and contemporary localization methods and strategies used in the industry. Furthermore, selecting a title that is easily accessible and allows interested readers to independently examine the examples discussed, without technical barriers, is advantageous for future research. *League of Legends* fulfills these criteria: it has had, and arguably continues to have, a significant impact on popular culture and resonates strongly with the Greek gaming community; it is free to play and has low hardware requirements, making it broadly accessible; and it continues to evolve more than a decade after its release, while also featuring characters introduced as early as 2009. To conclude, LoL represents a compelling case study for examining the evolution of translation and localization practices within the Greek video game industry, encompassing a wide range of localization- and locale-specific challenges.

6 Methodology

The qualitative study was conducted between July and September 2020 in order to investigate the ways, if any, in which localization can influence the sense of immersion among a sample of 10 *League of Legends* players. As discussed in Section 4, the goal of localizers is to create an immersive gaming experience for players by adapting characters so that they resonate with a specific locale (Bernal-Merino, 2006; O'Hagan, 2009; Riot Games, 2017). In this context, immersion – as defined in this paper – may serve as a criterion for assessing translation quality and the extent to which a translation fulfills its Skopos. Based on this premise, player feedback can be seen as a cornerstone for future improvements in localization practices. Given that immersion is a highly personal experience and that localization as a practice places players at the forefront, the study was designed to align with this player-centered perspective.

The hypotheses formulated to investigate how localization may influence the immersive experience of *League of Legends* players were as follows. Hypothesis 1 posits that the sense of immersion, as defined in this paper, is either enhanced or hindered by the quality of selected localized quotes, in line with Riot Games' developer post emphasizing the importance of creating characters that resonate with local players (2017). Hypothesis 2 posits the existence of an underlying negative bias toward Greek versions of video games. This hypothesis was informed by prior discussions concerning the perceived poor localization of video games into Greek, which reportedly led some players to avoid playing games in Greek altogether. Supporting this observation, further research identified a Steam group discussing the Greek version of *League of Legends*, in

which many users expressed dissatisfaction with the final product, describing it as “ridiculous” (Steam, 2012).

In order to allow players to express their views freely, the study sought to encourage spontaneous and genuine responses by avoiding closed questions and potentially leading statements. To this end, semi-structured interviews were employed as the data elicitation method, as they allow for greater flexibility through open-ended questions and support validity and credibility (Saldanha & O’Brien, 2013). This approach aimed to create a safe environment in which participants could express their opinions without fear of judgment, thereby shifting “the balance of power away from the researcher and towards the research participant, allowing for the co-construction of knowledge” (Saldanha & O’Brien, 2013). In a similar vein, research materials were distributed via email, and interviews were conducted in the game’s lobby (Phase 1) and via Skype and Messenger (Phase 2), both of which are discussed in greater detail in the following section.

The 10 participants were active players who began playing the game as early as 2009 and as late as 2012. They were recruited through convenience sampling from my own and my friends’ in-game friend lists, a strategy intended to ensure familiarity with the game and its community. All participants were male, aged between 23 and 32, had no background in translation or language studies, and were interviewed in three different focus groups. All were native speakers of Greek, with varying educational and occupational backgrounds, levels of competence in English, and degrees of in-game skill. The participants were long-term players, ranging from casual to formerly competitive. The rationale behind this selection was to capture perspectives from players of different profiles and to determine whether localization influenced both casual players and those at the upper echelons of the competitive ladder. Recruiting participants through convenience sampling constitutes a limitation of the present study, as it may reduce the representativeness and generalizability of the findings. Accordingly, future research should involve a larger and more diverse participant pool to strengthen the external validity of the results.

The material provided to participants consisted of 25 in-game character quotes, as well as corresponding audio cues available on YouTube. To reflect the range of localization methods used in *League of Legends*, the quotes were selected according to the following criteria: (1) the release date of each Champion; (2) the localization method used; and (3) the extent to which character-defining traits were conveyed in each quote, with priority given to examples that had been transcreated or contained emotionally charged language. The Champions (the in-game term for characters) from which examples were drawn were released over a span of 10 years, ranging from Corki (2009) to Sett (2020). The following examples illustrate these character-defining traits and provide an overview of some of the translation techniques applied in the localized sample. The first

character selected for the study was Corki, who pilots a flying contraption across the battlefield and casually employs military jargon such as “Lima Oscar Lima!” or “Delta Sierra at 12 o’clock!” Similarly, Sett is a former pit fighter who has risen to become “The Boss” of a fictional region’s criminal underworld. One of his defining characteristics is pronounced self-confidence, combined with the use of a low-register, informal speech style, as seen in quotes such as: “When you’re on top, there’s always some chump trying to drag you down. Pullin’ at your feet, scuffin’ up your nice shoes.” Examples of this kind were considered particularly suitable for the purposes of the study, as preserving character individuality aligns with the stated goal of Riot Games’ localization team “to [create characters that] better resonate with local players” (Riot Games, 2017).

One of the most distinctive characters included in the study was Kled, an unhinged yet surprisingly self-aware war veteran. In discussing *League of Legends*’ localization strategy, Riot Games (2017) describe him as “an interesting and very challenging champion” (emphasis in the original) to localize (para. 13). This difficulty is attributed to his highly idiomatic speech, which blends several linguistic features, including specialized military terminology and expressive onomatopoeia, as well as the fact that he “spits a lot of hot-headed phrases that might not be as well known outside of North America” (Riot Games, 2017, para. 13). The quotes examined below serve as examples of instances that were heavily adapted in order to resonate with Greek cultural expectations.

Table 1. *Sample quotes from Kled – The Cantankerous Cavalier*

	Source Text	Localised Text	Back Translation
1	Tried to bushwhack a bushwhacker!	Προσπάθησε να τσιφτήσει τον τσίφτη!	Tried to outhotshot a hotshot!
2	After we finish murdering these folks, what do you think? Tacos? Yeah, tacos!	Αφού τελειώσουμε με όλο αυτό το θανατικό, τι λες... σουβλάκια; Α, ναι... σουβλάκια!	After we finish with spreading carnage, what do you say... souvlaki? Oh yeah, souvlaki!

As is evident, the first line was completely altered through the introduction of the new verb *τσιφτήσει*, derived from the noun *τσιφτης* (“a clever and seemingly flawless person”), in accordance with Newmark’s (1988) technique of creating new lexical items when translating culture-specific concepts. Although this word had not previously existed, it complements Kled’s sense of superiority and highlights his deranged mentality, while remaining consistent with his use of slang, his lore, and his tendency to disregard rules, including grammatical ones.

The second quote is particularly noteworthy due to the use of a cultural equivalent for the word “tacos” (Newmark, 1988). While on his way to an in-game fight, Kled

frequently suggests getting something to eat after the fray, and since tacos are not particularly popular in Greece, the localized version replaces the term with *σουβλάκια*, a cultural equivalent and arguably the most popular street food in Greece. Although the localized version resonates more strongly with a Greek audience – thus aligning with Riot Games’ stated goals – it may also be problematic, as it is highly improbable that this type of food exists within the *League of Legends* universe, unlike ramen, for example, which appears in Akali’s joke animation.

Another set of examples can be drawn from Twisted Fate, a cardsharp whose profession, suavity, and cutthroat mentality are conveyed through the use of gambling jargon and a semi-formal register.

Table 2. *Sample quotes from Twisted Fate – The Card Master*

	Source Text	Localised Text	Back Translation
1	Only two Jokers in the deck, and I get dealt you.	Η μπάνκα κερδίζει πάντα.	The house always wins.
2	Nothin' better than a fool playin' tough.	Ο χαμένος τα παίρνει όλα... ή όχι;	The loser takes it all... or not?

Before proceeding with the analysis, it is important to note that each character has at least one taunt quote, such as those shown in the table. The first quote (Η μπάνκα κερδίζει πάντα, “The house always wins”) is a common saying associated with the dangers of gambling across various cultures. Although this could be interpreted as a form of transcreation (Mangiron & O’Hagan, 2006) and as a reference to Twisted Fate’s original lines, it can be argued that it lacks the brashness of its English counterpart. Similarly, the second quote was heavily transcreated to read “the loser takes it all... or not?”, which may function as an intertextual reference to the song *Ο Χαμένος Τα Παίρνει Όλα* (“The Loser Takes It All”) by Greek artist Giannis Aggelakas. The addition of the tag “or not?” serves to signal Twisted Fate’s willingness to do anything to win, thereby reinforcing his personality traits. However, it is safe to conclude that not all quotes were handled with equal success.

Table 3. *Sample quote from Fiddlesticks – The Ancient Fear*

	Source Text	Localised Text	Back Translation
1	Fiddlesticks End of Men, Fiddlesticks First of Ten.	Φίντλστιξ, έρχεται για εσένα, Φίντλστιξ, γόνατα κομμένα.	Fiddlesticks is coming for you, cower in fear.

In the Greek version of Fiddlesticks’ quotes featured in the table above, for instance, the lyrical quality of the original line was preserved through alliteration, albeit at the

expense of meaning in the second part of the sentence (Newmark, 1988). Although this degree of transcreation may be justified, prioritizing form over function in this case can create problems further down the line, particularly given that *League of Legends* is an ongoing game and that developers frequently embed hints about content that may be released at a later date. These so-called “easter eggs” serve to maintain community engagement by encouraging players to delve into the lore and construct theories in an effort to anticipate future Champions or Skins introduced into the game.

In this instance, the reference to Fiddlesticks as “the first of ten” was completely omitted, and with it the implicit hints toward the introduction of a new set of related Champions or Skins. Numerous other translation methods and techniques were employed in the sample, as well as throughout the game as a whole. While creativity is of paramount importance for localizers, it must be balanced with the need to deliver an engaging experience that resonates with the player audience while preserving the distinctive traits of the game’s characters.

7 Conducting the Interviews

For the purposes of this qualitative study, 10 players were asked to express their honest, experience-based opinions regarding the Greek version of the game through semi-structured interviews. To foster a sense of safety among participants and avoid overwhelming them, the interviews were conducted in two phases. Phase 1 was carried out in two groups of five participants and one group of three, with the researcher acting as a coordinator of the discussion flow in the game lobby during matchmaking. Phase 2 consisted of one-on-one online interviews with each participant.

The primary goal of Phase 1 was to establish a friendly and informal environment, given that most participants were unlikely to have had prior experience with research interviews. For this reason, the first phase took place in the game lobby, a familiar setting intended to help participants feel more at ease.

The interviews began with three warm-up questions: (1) participants’ preferred position(s); (2) their favorite Champion(s); and (3) the Champion(s) they selected most frequently. As the discussion progressed, additional topic-related questions were introduced, including: (4) whether they played *League of Legends* in English or Greek; (5) the rationale behind their preference; and (6) their favorite quotes and/or audio cues. While these questions formed the core of the study, additional questions and discussions emerged organically due to the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews (Saldanha & O’Brien, 2013).

Phase 2 consisted of individual online interviews with each participant. Following an initial, informal discussion related to the topic, participants were presented with the sample material, first in written form and subsequently in audio form. They were asked

to identify each Champion based solely on the quotes, thereby assessing whether key character traits had been preserved in the localized versions. Participants were then shown the correct answers and invited to provide feedback on both the written quotes and their audio counterparts, with particular emphasis on how natural each rendition felt. They were subsequently asked whether they would choose to switch to the localized version of the game and to elaborate on their decision. Finally, participants were debriefed regarding the aims and nature of the study.

It should be reiterated that none of the participants had any background in translation or language studies. As such, the findings are intended to reflect player perspectives rather than those of translation professionals, who may apply different evaluative criteria. Participants were given unlimited time during the interviews and, afterward, were offered the opportunity to contact the researcher should they wish to provide additional commentary or discuss the material in greater detail.

7.1 Findings of Phase 1

Greek was the preferred language for 2 out of 10 participants, although all had played both versions in the past. Most participants stated that they considered the localized version to be inferior, thus partially confirming Hypothesis 2. When asked to elaborate, all emphasized the substantial impact of voice acting and argued that the Greek version lacked gravitas, primarily due to what they perceived as weak vocal performances. Participants 6 and 8 were particularly vocal about the quality of the Greek version, noting that “the Greek version lacks a certain ‘oomph’” (Participant 6) and citing characters such as Twisted Fate as examples of underwhelming and lackluster voice acting when compared to their English counterparts.

For 6 out of 10 participants, poor voice acting was the primary reason for playing in English. They claimed that the localized version sounded “particularly awkward and unnatural” at times, which disrupted their sensory immersion and prevented a high level of concentration. Furthermore, 2 out of 10 participants continued playing in English because Greek was not available at the time of release, meaning that switching languages would require additional time and effort to become familiar with terminology and menu navigation. One participant played the English version in order to practice the language (Participant 5). By contrast, 2 out of 10 participants preferred playing *League of Legends* in Greek, stating that it was more entertaining and expressing interest in seeing how specific quotes had been translated.

When asked to name their favorite quotes, three participants did not have any or could not immediately recall one, four selected English quotes (Participants 2, 5, 6, and 9), and three selected Greek ones (Participants 3, 7, and 10). Notably, Participant 3 identified a favorite quote from the Greek version of the game despite preferring to play

in English, suggesting that the localized version had made a lasting impression. When asked to explain his choice, he laughed and commented on how humorous the quote was in terms of both translation and voice acting.

Based on these responses, a tentative link can be established between the localized product and the sense of immersion as defined in this paper. Taking into account the arguments offered to justify language preferences, as well as comments on voice acting quality, it becomes evident that players pay close attention to the final localized product, which can significantly influence their overall gaming experience.

7.2 Findings of Phase 2

The results of Phase 2 of the interviews were thought-provoking, as they offered a perspective distinct from that of professionals, largely due to participants' lack of linguistic training. Of the 10 participants, three correctly recognized all six characters from the quotes, four recognized five out of six characters, and the remaining participants recognized four out of six characters. The majority of participants (Participants 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, and 9) stated that the localized text was satisfactory overall, although they reported difficulty understanding quotes that contained specialized vocabulary or terminology.

In addition, most participants evaluated translation quality based on the absence of word-for-word accuracy, yet they found transcreated and highly domesticated quotes to be more entertaining than their English counterparts. When asked to comment on Kled's quotes, Participant 9 stated while laughing, "I don't know why or how it is done, but these are some S-tier lines." This response contrasts sharply with the views expressed by Participants 3, 5, and 7, who emphasized the lack of word-for-word equivalence. These reactions suggest a limited familiarity with translation theory, which aligns with the well-documented bias against the translation profession and the common assumption that proficiency in the source language alone qualifies one as a professional translator (Malmkjær, 2009; Chodkiewics, 2012).

Another noteworthy finding is that 7 out of 10 participants reported enjoying quotes with a lower register or those that had been culturally adapted (Nord, 2018). A particularly revealing comment was made by Participant 4 in response to Kled's suggestion to eat *σουβλάκια* instead of tacos. For this participant, the lack of word-for-word accuracy raised concerns that the localized quote might not be well received in northern Greece, where the term *σουβλάκι* is part of a long-standing regional debate and may refer to different types of food depending on locale. Even some of the more skeptical participants, including Participant 6, who had previously stated that the localized version lacked "oomph," appeared to enjoy the localized quotes and praised the work of the localizers.

One especially striking reaction came from Participant 8, who became visibly upset upon encountering the final set of quotes. When asked to elaborate, he exclaimed, “I lost three games to Draven players today, I can see him mocking me.” While this reaction may be considered exaggerated, it suggests that the localized version succeeded in resonating with the local player base and in eliciting a strong emotional response toward a fictional character.

Furthermore, 5 out of 10 participants stated that they would play characters from the sample specifically in order to hear more of the localized quotes. On this basis, it can be argued that the Greek version of the quotes may enhance sensory immersion and fulfill an entertainment function, particularly for players who are less familiar with the source material, thus partially supporting Hypothesis 1 for this sample. Finally, all participants stated that they would consider switching their preferred language settings to Greek in order to listen to the localized versions of their favorite characters and expressed interest in learning more about translation and localization techniques in the future, primarily for entertainment purposes.

B Discussion

Based on the interview results, a link can be established between localization and immersion, as defined in the present paper. As previously noted, the aim of localization is to provide a more immersive gaming experience and to create characters that resonate with local audiences (Bernal-Merino, 2006; O’Hagan, 2009; Riot Games, 2017). Within the sample, most participants preferred the English version of the game due to their familiarity with game terminology and their previous negative experiences with localized versions. Interestingly, following the interviews, all participants expressed interest in changing their language settings to determine whether this might enhance their gaming experience. In this respect, Hypothesis 2 can be considered confirmed, given that most participants who preferred the English version had only played the Greek version briefly upon release and were therefore unable to form a well-informed opinion.

With regard to feedback on the selected Champion quotes, all participants agreed that the quotes could be entertaining, although some were perceived as difficult to understand without relevant background knowledge. Expanding on this point, 50 percent of participants appeared to prefer certain culturally adapted and transcreated quotes, finding them more entertaining than their English counterparts. Considerable emphasis was also placed on voice acting, as some performances were perceived as influencing immersion, as illustrated by reactions to Twisted Fate. It should be noted, however, that these reactions may also stem from personal preferences and players’ familiarity with the original English voices, rather than from the intrinsic quality of the Greek voice acting alone. A similar explanation may apply to perceptions of terminology

or phrasing, which may feel less impactful simply because players are accustomed to experiencing the game in English.

Comments concerning the accuracy of the target text made by some participants can be attributed to the fact that the source text was provided during the interviews, as well as to their limited familiarity with translation theory and practice. Although the findings partially support Hypothesis 1, no definitive conclusions can be drawn given the small sample size. Additional evidence is therefore required to establish a stronger link between immersion and localization. Overall, the data suggest a tentative relationship between localization and immersion in the case of *League of Legends*, a relationship that could be further examined through a larger sample and or by focusing on a more narrative-driven game.

One of the most unexpected, yet encouraging, outcomes of the study was that all participants expressed interest in learning more about video game localization theory and practice. This interest may be beneficial for both research and practice, and may also contribute to educating a wider audience. Notably, two participants contacted the researcher several weeks after the interviews to provide further comments on the sample quotes, while another submitted a more extensive written analysis of his responses using a self-developed evaluation scale. Participant engagement with the study highlights the extent to which players feel connected to the games they play and underscores their willingness to contribute to the ongoing development of the medium.

9 Conclusions

Translators and localizers must consider a wide range of elements when undertaking the task of localizing a video game, with customer satisfaction being of primary importance. It is also necessary to bear in mind that the inherent hybridity of video games, combined with the case-by-case approach adopted by professionals, can result in discrepancies, particularly with regard to terminology. At the same time, the final product depends to a large extent on localizers' creativity and their familiarity with video games. However, based on the interview data, reception of the final product may also be influenced by factors that fall outside the translator's direct control, such as voice acting, which can either enhance or undermine the intended sense of immersion. Despite the steadily growing number of players worldwide and the increasing sophistication of video game design, Greek researchers often appear reluctant to engage with video games as an object of study. This reluctance stands in stark contrast to the willingness of the players who participated in this study to learn more about their hobby and the practices associated with it, including localization.

While the present study offers meaningful insights into player perspectives on video game localization, several methodological limitations must be acknowledged. The

Vasilikaris, George. 2025. Translating the Player Experience: Exploring Immersion in the Context of Videogame Localization. In: L10N Journal. 2(4), pp. 55-76.

analysis is based on a small convenience sample which, although suitable for exploratory qualitative research, does not permit generalizable conclusions. Accordingly, caution is required when interpreting the findings or attempting to replicate the study with a different participant group, as such replication could yield divergent results. Future research should therefore aim to expand the participant pool and adopt randomized recruitment procedures in order to increase representativeness and strengthen the validity of the findings. Despite these limitations, the present study provides a valuable foundation for future research on video game localization, particularly in the Greek context, and its findings contribute to the ongoing development of game translation user research.

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Appendix A

Warmup questions

- 1) Which are your preferred positions?
- 2) Which are your favourite champions?
- 3) Which champions do you main?

Topic-related questions

- 4) Do you play LoL in English or Greek?
- 5) Why did you pick that language?
- 6) Do you have any favourite quotes or cues?

Material Used in Phase 2

Character 1 (Corki)

Source Text	Target Text	Back Translation
That just goes to show you you're nothin' but a Whiskey Delta!	Golf Tango Papa! Επαναλαμβάνω, Golf Tango Papa!	Golf Tango Papa! I repeat, Golf Tango Papa!
Lima Oscar Lima!	Lima Oscar Lima!	Lima Oscar Lima!
Consider yourself spanked, nugget!	Τις έφαγες για τα καλά, σκουλήκι!	You got beat up real good, maggot!
Delta Sierra at 12 o'clock!	Μπελάδες εν όψη!/Χαμός! Επαναλαμβάνω, γίνεται χαμός!	Trouble up ahead!/Mayhem! I repeat, mayhem going down!

Character 2 (Sett)

Source Text	Target Text	Back Translation
When you're on top, there's always some chump trying to drag you down. Pullin' at your feet, scuffin' up your nice shoes.	Όταν είσαι ο καλύτερος, πάντα υπάρχει ένας βλάκας που προσπαθεί να σε ρίξει, μπλέκεται στα πόδια σου και σου χαλάει τα ωραία σου πατούμενα.	When you're the best, there's always some moron trying to topple you, they get in your way and mess your nice kicks.

Bustin' heads!/Facebreaker!	Σπαζοκεφαλιά!/Σπασμένη μούρη!	Breaking heads!/Broken face!
The crackin' of bones is the clinkin' of coins.	Τσακίζεις τον εχθρούλη, γεμίζει το σακούλι.	Crush the enemy, fill the bag.
They called me X the "Beast-Boy Bastard". Hah. Now it's X "the Beast-Man Bastard."	Κάποτε με φώναζαν X, «το μπάσταρδο κτήνος-αγοράκι», τώρα πια λένε X «το μπάσταρδο κτήνος μαναράκι».	They used to call me X the "Beast-Boy Bastard," now they call me X "the Beast-Hunk bastard."
Wait, hold up. Are we gettin' paid for this?	Ωπα, στάκα... πληρωνόμαστε για αυτό;	Woah, hold up... are we getting paid for that?

Character 3 (Caitlyn)

Source Text	Target Text	Back Translation
Me, miss? Not by a long shot.	Εγώ να αστοχήσω; Ούτε κατά διάνοια.	Me, miss? Not by any stretch of the imagination.
Want another shot? I wouldn't want to leave things up in the air.	Ψηλά τα χέρια τις δαγκάνες, τα πτερύγια και ό,τι άλλο έχετε!	Hands, claws, fins or whatever else you got up!
Who doesn't like being under the gun?	Σε ποιόν δεν αρέσει να είναι με το πιστόλι στον κρόταφο;	Who doesn't like being under the gun?

Character 4 (Kled)

Source Text	Target Text	Back Translation
Tried to bushwhack a bushwhacker.	Προσπάθησε να τσιφτήσει τον τσίφτη!	He tried to outhotshot the hotshot!
My brain is full of weasels!	Το κεφάλι μου είναι γεμάτο νυφίτσες!	My head is full of weasels!
After we finish murdering these folks, what do you think? Tacos? Yeah, tacos.	Αφού τελειώσουμε με όλο αυτό το θανατικό... σουβλάκια; Ναι... σουβλάκια!	After we finish murdering these folks... souvlaki? Yeah... souvlaki!

Y'all made a nice stabbing bag.	Όλοι εσείς κάνετε ένα ωραίο μαξιλαράκι για καρφίτσες!	All of you are nice pincushions!
Pure Noxian girl. Almost liked her. Almost.	Καθαρός νοξιανός κορίτσaros.	Pure Noxian lassie!
Who sent you?	Εσύ τίνος είσαι;	Whose are you?

Character 5 (Twisted Fate)

Source Text	Target Text	Back Translation
Lady luck is smiling.	Η τύχη σου χαμογελά.	Luck smiles upon you.
Only two Jokers in the deck, and I get dealt you.	Η μπάνκα κερδίζει πάντα.	The house always wins.
\\	Ο χαμένος τα παίρνει όλα... ή όχι;	The loser takes it all... or not?
Just the luck of the draw.	Όλα είναι θέμα τύχης.	Everything is a matter of luck.

Character 6 (Draven)

Source Text	Target Text	Back Translation
No followin' these footsteps.	Δεν ακολουθώ τα βήματα κανενός.	I am not following anyone's footsteps.
Got axes, need victims.	Βάζω τσεκούρια, βάζεις τα θύματα;	I get the axes. You get the victims?
Seems to be blood everywhere I go.	Έχουμε γεμίσει αίματα παντού.	We have got blood all over the place.

A Player Reception Study of Black Myth: Wukong: The Translation of Culturally Specific In-game Items

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Abstract

The English and Chinese video game markets are the largest worldwide, resulting in high demand for localization between these languages. In the Chinese-to-English direction, this has traditionally involved highly culture-specific video games based on Chinese history or inspired by Chinese literature, which were often approached through text-only, lower-budget partial localizations. These practices have gained increasing academic attention in recent years. More recently, however, several higher-budget titles have been localized into English and widely publicized on the global stage, the most prominent being *Black Myth: Wukong*, an action role-playing game (ARPG) inspired by the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West*. This study investigates the approaches used to translate culturally specific in-game items with interactive properties and examines how players have received these translations. By integrating elements of corpus design with player reception research, the study demonstrates that foreignizing strategies can enhance a sense of cultural immersion, while domesticating strategies can facilitate a smoother interactive gaming experience. It also shows that attempting to achieve both simultaneously presents significant challenges. Moreover, the strong tendency toward foreignizing approaches challenges the notion that such games have been localized in a traditional sense and instead points to a more hesitant “journey west.”

Keywords: *Black Myth: Wukong*, Chinese video game localization, player reception, action role playing game (ARPG), CSIs, immersion, interactivity.

1 Introduction

This article involves a corpus-based study contextualized with reception-based data. It focuses on the popular Chinese action role-playing game (ARPG) *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024), which boasts the most concurrent players at launch (over 37 million) in a single-player game on Steam of all time (Dinsdale, 2024), and won awards for Best Action and Player’s Voice at The Game Awards (King, 2024). Moreover, it

investigates the approaches used to translate interactive culturally specific in-game items. It also seeks to reveal how players in a target Anglophone locale have received these translations, and whether the translations helped or hindered immersion and the interactive experience. The research aims to address these questions:

1. What translation approaches have been used for culturally specific in-game items?
2. How were the translation approaches received by the players?
3. Did the approaches help or hinder the sense of immersion or interactive experience?

Chinese-to-English is a major language pair in video game localization, and it is fraught with challenges. As Robertson (2025, 6–7) observes, not only is there a large linguistic difference between Chinese and English, but many Chinese video games are highly culturally specific and take inspiration from Chinese history, literature, or both. This means such video game texts contain many culture-specific items (CSIs), which Aixelá (1996, 58) describes as source-culture text items that are problematic to translate because of their non-existence in the target culture, or because they generate a different intertextual status between source and target cultures.

In research conducted on the translation of highly culturally specific Chinese RPGs, Robertson (2024, 2025) discovered that CSIs in video games can have different interactive properties not present in traditional text translation or audiovisual translation (AVT). Furthermore, this research revealed that four teams of experienced professional translators approached CSIs differently based on their interactive properties. In general, less interactive CSIs, such as quest items that can only be used in crafting, were translated using strategies that more closely conveyed the source culture, whereas more interactive CSIs, such as usable items that have a direct impact on gameplay, were translated using strategies more aligned with target-culture norms and expectations. Much can therefore be learned by observing the translation of CSIs that are also in-game items with different interactive properties.

In addition to developing highly culturally specific video games, China also has the largest video game market in the world, valued at \$48.7 bn with 710.1 million gamers, followed by the US, worth \$47.6 bn with 219.8 million gamers (Newzoo, 2025). When considering that other Anglophone locales, such as the UK and Canada, also feature in the top ten video game markets (Newzoo, 2025), it follows that there is a high demand for localization between Chinese and English video games. This has been more apparent over the past decade, with titles such as *Arena of Valor* (TiMi Studio Group 2018, Tencent Games), *Genshin Impact* (miHoYo 2020, HoYoverse), *Where Winds Meet* (Everstone Studio, NetEase Inc. 2024), and *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science 2024).

Owing to its popularity, cultural specificity, and recent release, *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024) was selected as the focus of this study. It was inspired by the Chinese classic novel *Journey to the West* (Wu Cheng'en, 1592), set in the Tang Dynasty

Robertson, Dariush. 2025. A Player Reception Study of *Black Myth: Wukong*: The Translation of Culturally Specific In-game Items. In: L10N Journal. 2(4), pp. 77-100.

(619–907 CE). As Robertson (2025, 21) writes, “The tale is rich with Chinese folklore, as well as Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian ideology,” and therefore it follows that the game is highly culturally specific. The original novel has been translated into English by various translators, including Arthur Waley (1958) and Anthony C. Yu (1983). Additionally, it was loosely adapted into a popular television series in Japan that was released in the UK as *Monkey* (1978), which gained status as a cult classic and spread to other Anglophone locales (Croot, 2021). Indeed, these would have been more useful reference materials for translators if *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024) had been a faithful adaptation of the novel; however, it is set after *Journey to the West* and contains both existing and many new CSIs.

2 Cultural Specificity in the Translation of Chinese to English Video Games

Fung (2014, 56–58) explains that the emergence of highly culturally specific Chinese video games is not solely a phenomenon that can be attributed to China’s creative sector, but also a product of the relationship between it and the Chinese government. This has resulted in the development of video games with themes containing educational values that can promote a sense of patriotism among players. As such, this unique blend of cultural specificity has drawn the attention of several researchers.

Hsu (2020), as well as Wu and Chen (2020), have conducted research in this area. They all utilized elements of Venuti’s (1995) theory of domestication and foreignization, which represent two culturally dichotic approaches to translation facilitated through different translation strategies. In Venuti’s words, domestication entails “an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to receiving cultural values, bringing the author back home,” and foreignization places “an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad” (2018, 15). Moreover, Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997, 59) remark that domestication results in translations that are transparent and fluent, minimizing the strangeness of the foreign text for TL readers, whereas foreignization entails a deliberate break from target-culture conventions by preserving foreign elements of the source text. Previous research focusing on localizations between Japanese and English has pointed toward a tendency for domesticating approaches, as Mangiron (2018, 129) writes:

The localisation industry has largely tended towards adaptation and domestication, particularly when localising Japanese games, but without really asking players whether they prefer such strategies or if they would rather enjoy playing games that preserve some of their original flavour.

Robertson, Dariush. 2025. A Player Reception Study of *Black Myth: Wukong*: The Translation of Culturally Specific In-game Items. In: *L10N Journal*. 2(4), pp. 77-100.

However, this has not been the general case in localizations between Chinese and English. For example, Hsu (2020) states that a domesticating approach can be problematic when translating highly culturally specific content in Chinese games related to historical events. Additionally, Wu and Chen (2020) observe that players of games in English in Southeast Asian locales, such as Indonesia, prefer foreignizing approaches, especially when it comes to the translation of character names. Furthermore, the author of this research has worked as a Chinese-to-English video game translator for over a decade and has often read client briefs advocating more foreignizing approaches.

Robertson (2024, 2025) delved further into the translation of CSIs in Chinese-to-English video game localization by using a quasi-experimental case study approach. This involved analyzing the work of four translation teams from Keywords Studios (2025), an international technical and creative service provider to the global video game industry. The teams localized a simulated Chinese wuxia (meaning martial hero) RPG text via the partial localization model. As explained by Robertson (2025, 58–61), this model is typically used in lower-budget projects and primarily involves working with text only, which can mean no access to audio content such as voiceovers, visual content such as screenshots, or any interactive content from the full game. The ST was created by a game text writer based on categories of CSIs, as well as genre-specific narratives found in the first chapters of five popular wuxia RPG games: *Jianwang 3 Fingertip Jianghu* (Tencent 2019), *Justice Online* (NetEase Inc. 2019), *A Dream of Jianghu* (NetEase 2019), *Moonlight Blade Mobile* (Tencent Games 2019), and *Gujian 3* (Aurogon Info & Tech 2018; Wangyuan Shengtang). The games were selected based on the highest number of recorded downloads and ranged from 1.3 million to 20 million (Robertson 2025, 64). This resulted in a game text of 1,650 words that simulated the first chapter of a wuxia RPG. The teams were also provided with a simulated client brief, created by Keywords Studios based on projects for similar games, which encouraged approaches that preserved elements of the source culture. The game text contained forty-four culturally specific terms (fitting within 13 categories of CSIs), and each was translated by four teams, resulting in a total of 176 CSI translations. Robertson (2024, 2025) found that foreignizing approaches were used 54% of the time, while domesticating approaches were used 30% of the time. Moreover, a hybrid approach using both foreignizing and domesticating strategies was used in 8% of CSIs, and another 8% of CSIs were translated equally using either domesticating or foreignizing approaches.

This foreignizing tendency mostly adhered to the client brief and was most noticeable for CSIs such as the names of historical figures or historical organizations, as well as the names of fictional characters and fictional martial arts sects. During interviews, the linguists indicated that they primarily used these approaches based on transmedial knowledge, shaped by the way CSIs have been translated in various other forms of media, such as novels, video games, and TV shows. This closer adherence to the client

brief (or commission) resulted in a tendency toward foreignizing approaches, which echoed the trends identified by Hao Hsu (2020) and Zhiwei Wu and Zuoja Chen (2020).

From a functionalist perspective, close adherence to the commission directly corresponds with skopos theory (Vermeer, 1998/2002), in which the purpose of the translation, as defined in the commission, is placed above other considerations, such as coherence or fidelity. However, 30% of the CSIs were rendered using domesticating approaches, which represented a step away from the client brief. This occurred more frequently with categories of CSIs that had interactive functions, such as usable items, and this discovery marked the genesis of the concept of interactive CSIs. In such cases, the linguists consistently pointed out that these CSIs had functional or interactive properties and that they needed to be translated clearly to aid player comprehension and facilitate a smoother experience.

This seemingly contradicts the importance of the commission in skopos theory, but it makes sense when considering how Bernal-Merino (2015, 98) reconceptualized video game translation as the translation of multimedia interactive entertainment software (TMIES), in which the “I” stands for interactive. Bernal-Merino (2018, 130) refers to the way in which textual, audio, graphical, and interactive elements can work in unison for an optimal gaming experience and describes this as polysemiotic consistency. This reflects how each semiotic layer is carefully considered to prevent what Bernal-Merino (2016, 34) refers to as polysemiotic dissonance, which disrupts gameplay. In terms of functionalist theory, this move away from the commission to give players what they need resonates with UCT (user-centered translation), as proposed by Suojanen, Koskinen, and Tuominen (2015, 1), in which “the central role of the user, or reader, in the translation process” is prioritized. Accordingly, the translation of more interactive CSIs in Robertson (2024, 2025) was shaped more by function and interactive properties than by what was stipulated in the client brief.

This phenomenon was described as *windows of interaction* (Robertson 2025, 183–185) and refers to the action of simultaneously rendering elements of a game with more foreignizing approaches, as per the client brief, to maintain the authenticity of the source culture in as many areas as possible, while utilizing domesticating approaches for elements relating to interactivity to facilitate a smoother gaming experience. This meets most of the criteria of the commission but also strongly resonates with the concept of UCT (Suojanen, Koskinen, and Tuominen, 2015) and therefore presents a more nuanced perspective on how translators mediate such cultural decisions. It also echoes Bernal-Merino (2020, 298): “the concept of playability becomes essential when determining whether a translation is fit-for-purpose.” Under such circumstances, players are transported to a faraway land with unfamiliar surroundings but can still understand the names of abilities and how to use items.

The translation of CSIs in Chinese-to-English video game localization has been explored in the aforementioned studies but could be further contextualized with a player reception-based study. Deckert and Hejduk (2024, 2) reason that the collection and analysis of user data could be highly productive, especially in the case of multimodal products such as video games. Moreover, Deckert and Hejduk (2024, 3) also explain that while studies have explored the challenges of video game translation, researchers have mainly hypothesized about the effects of translation decisions. There have nevertheless been some player reception-based studies. The first was undertaken by O'Hagan (2009), conducted on a small scale with only one participant, and focused on how overall player experience can enhance cross-cultural game design. O'Hagan saw potential in conducting such studies on a larger scale and did so with Flanagan (O'Hagan, 2016). This approach was also adopted by Mangiron (2014), who focused on the quality of localized versions of games. These studies established player reception as a rich ground for research. However, aside from an ongoing research project focusing on the reception of Chinese-to-English video game localization (Stafford, 2025), there are no existing studies on the reception of CSIs translated in Chinese-to-English localization. Therefore, this study provides valuable feedback on how different approaches to the translation of highly culturally specific Chinese video games can impact immersion and the interactive experience.

3 Methodology

The research design includes two main stages: (1) a targeted corpus study, which involved the selection of CSIs, and (2) the identification of translation approaches and strategies (3.1). This was followed by a reception study component involving interviews regarding the selected CSIs (3.2). After the data were presented in the results, a discussion followed that constructed a narrative around the main trends.

3.1 Corpus Component: Collection and Analysis of CSIs

While there are six chapters in the game, this task focused on CSIs occurring in chapter one. The first stage involved the selection of CSIs from chapter one of the game, which were analyzed in terms of general cultural approach (domesticating or foreignizing) and specific translation strategies. This directly addressed the first research question. The analysis of all six chapters would not be feasible in a smaller study, but Robertson (2025, 65) reflects that the first chapter of an RPG tends to include many elements present throughout the rest of the game, including an introduction to key non-playable characters (NPCs), essential game functions, and the general plot (cf. Kramarzewski & Nucci 2023, 188, 299). Indeed, as stated by Suckling and Walton (2017, 138–139), a beginning chapter of a video game should feature environmental storytelling, in which

elements of the story unfold through play, which can “seamlessly enhance both our understanding of the story and requirements of gameplay.” Therefore, much can be revealed by exploring an opening game chapter. The Chinese source text and English translations of CSIs were gathered from chapter one by switching between the English and Chinese language options.

While the game is based on Chinese literature and mythology, not every term can be considered culturally specific; therefore, focus was placed on items that were culturally specific to areas such as Chinese literature, mythology, cosmology, ideology, martial arts, and traditional Chinese medicine. For instance, items such as yarn, which can be used to craft other items in the game, are more ubiquitous across many cultures worldwide and are not culturally specific or the target of this study, whereas items such as a Celestial Taiyi Pill, referring to the Chinese concept of the primordial unity of yin and yang, were selected. Moreover, this study focuses on CSIs that are in-game items. This engages with the work of Robertson (2024, 2025), who demonstrated how professional translators used different strategies in the translation of in-game items depending on their interactive properties, with less interactive items mainly being translated using foreignizing strategies, and more interactive items being intentionally translated using more domesticating strategies to facilitate a smoother gaming experience. A comparison of the translation of in-game items with different interactive properties therefore provides a useful site of comparison. Indeed, *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024) contains many in-game items, and in a playthrough conducted by the author, a total of 14 in-game items were found in chapter one that were CSIs with different interactive properties.

3.2 Reception Component: Player Interviews

The second stage involved interviewing players who had completed Chapter One and therefore encountered the relevant CSIs. Before the interviews, this project received ethical approval from the Research Policy and Ethics Team of Newcastle University. The main linguistic criterion for the selection of players was that their first language was English and that they had played the English localization. Participants were then given a personal information sheet about the goals of this research and asked to carefully read and sign the consent form before the interviews took place.

Semi-structured interviews were used to ascertain the players’ opinions about each of the in-game items featured in this study. Participants were first asked why they played the game, whether they had any knowledge of the Chinese language and culture, and which age group they belonged to, after which the questions moved to more specific areas. Players were asked how they felt about the names of the items in terms of how well they fit the environment of the game world, using a Likert-like scale of 1–10, where one represented a poor fit, a mid-range score of 5–6 was more neutral, and ten

represented a perfect fit. A scale of 1–10 was selected over a scale of 1–5, as it can result in a more nuanced spread of data. Players were then asked whether this helped or hindered the sense of immersion, to promote further relevant discussion and justify the scores. Next, they were asked how clearly the names of the items corresponded with their functions, again using a scale of 1–10, followed by a similar question regarding whether this helped or hindered the gaming experience. In this sense, the first score related to cultural immersion within a mythological Chinese setting, and the second focused on the interactive gameplay experience. These addressed the second research question. The questions for each CSI entry were as follows:

- How well did the name fit the environment of the gaming world, from 1–10, with 1 being a poor fit, and 10 being a perfect fit?
- Did this help or hinder your sense of immersion? If so, how?
- How clearly did the name fit its function in the game, from 1–10, with 1 being completely unclear, and 10 being perfectly clear?
- Did this help or hinder your experience of playing the game?

Once the CSI data and the interview data were collected and analyzed in the results (section 4), there was scope for a deeper discussion of aspects of immersion and interactivity through play. The third research question was explored in greater depth in the discussion (section 5) through in-depth examples and comments taken from the interviews.

4 Results

Section 4.1 reveals the cultural approaches and translation strategies used to localize the categories of CSIs in the opening chapter of *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024). Section 4.2 then establishes the basic background information of the anonymized participants. Finally, section 4.3 presents the results of both the corpus analysis and the player reception interviews. In sum, both the first and second research questions have been addressed.

4.1 Cultural Approaches, and Translation Strategies

The individual translation strategies observed in the translation of the opening chapter of the game can be listed under domesticating approaches and foreignizing approaches. Many of these common translation strategies were also present in the results of Robertson (2025, 80–82). The strategies are presented in the table below.

Table 1. *Translation Strategies*

Strategies belonging to the domesticating approach	
Omission	when elements of the source text are omitted.
Addition	something new is added to the translation that was not included or implied in the source text.
Substitution	a problematic element of a CSI is replaced. This results in a general transfer of sense, but with some change and cultural loss.
Generalisation	a more specific term (hyponym) is translated as a more general term (hypernym).
Concretisation	a less specific term (hypernym) is translated as a more specific term (hyponym).
Strategies belonging to the foreignizing approach	
Literal translation	a direct translation of a full CSIs, or a component of it, without any changes.
Transliteration by pinyin	the transliteration of Chinese into pinyin – the phonetic representation of Chinese in English. This retains the original pronunciation.
Explicitation	conveying the meaning of a CSI, that is implicit in the source language into something explicit in the target language.

As in Robertson (2025), some singular CSIs with several Chinese characters were subject to complex translation processes, in which some characters were rendered using different cultural approaches and strategies. As a result, there were several dual-strategy approaches; sometimes both strategies were domesticating or foreignizing. For example, in Robertson (2025, 82), there was a usable food item 四神粥 (literally: Four Gods Porridge), which was translated in one instance as *Herbal Congee*. While the first two characters literally mean “four gods,” they refer to four types of herbs used in the dish, and thus “four gods” was rendered as “herbal,” which is a substitution. Moreover, the third character literally means “porridge,” but was translated into the more specific target-culture term “congee.” Therefore, this singular CSI, composed of three characters, was subject to two different domesticating strategies.

There were also instances of CSIs being translated using two different foreignizing strategies. As in Robertson (2025, 81), the medicinal quest item 僵蚕 (literally: stiff silkworm) was translated as *Medicinal Silkworm*. The character for “stiff” was translated as “medicinal,” which rendered the medicinal context more explicit and was therefore an explicitation, whereas “silkworm” was translated literally. In some cases, the same

CSIs were subject to both domesticating and foreignizing approaches. For example, in Robertson (2025, 83), the CSI 回春堂 (literally: rejuvenation hall) was translated as *Huichun Pharmacy*. This involved transliterating the first two characters meaning “rejuvenation” as “huichun,” which is a foreignizing strategy, while rendering the third character “hall” as “pharmacy,” which is a more specific term than “hall” and can be linked to the domesticating strategy of concretization.

However, in the present study, this combination of strategies was taken one step further. As presented in section 4.2, some single CSI entries were subject to three different strategies, which often included both domestication and foreignization.

4.2 Background Information about Participants

The players were recruited by advertising the study on social media, including LinkedIn, and on fan pages for *Black Myth: Wukong* on Facebook. As compensation for the interviews, which ran for approximately 40 minutes each, participants were given £20 Amazon vouchers. The purpose of the interviews was both to gather the participants’ opinions and to provide a more objective numerical measure of player reception of immersion and interactivity, using the 1–10 scale established in section 3.2. Furthermore, the players’ elaborations were also used in the discussion (section 6) to better underline key arguments. While it was stipulated that participants needed to have played the game in English, with English as a first language, no other restrictions relating to age or gender were imposed. However, to better contextualize the backgrounds of the players, Table 1 provides anonymized essential background data. The data include age group, gender, and the locale in which the game was played. Furthermore, the table also indicates whether the players have any background knowledge of Chinese culture or language, which might impact the way in which they assess the terms, and their reason for playing the game.

Table 2. *Player Information: Age, Gender, Locale, Cultural and Linguistic Knowledge, and Reasons for Playing*

Player	Age group	Gender	Locale	Knowledge of Chinese language and culture	Reason for playing
1	35–44	Male	England	No Chinese, but familiar with Chinese martial arts movies.	Online reviews, personal recommendations, graphics, like <i>Assassin’s Creed</i> (Ubisoft 2007–)
2	45–54	Male	England	Fluent Chinese and deep cultural knowledge.	Interested in Chinese culture, knew about the main character, and a family member had a copy.

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3	18–24	Male	England	Basic Chinese, and some cultural understanding.	It seemed like <i>Dark Souls</i> (FromSoftware, 2011) and had good reviews.
4	45–54	Male	England	No Chinese, but basic cultural understanding.	Trailers, reviews, and a fan of the genre.
5	35–44	Male	England	No knowledge of Chinese, and basic awareness of culture in movies.	Likes action games, and family member had a copy.
6	35–44	Female	England	No Chinese, but good cultural understanding.	A fan of action and adventure games, and Chinese martial arts movies.
7	35–44	Male	England	No Chinese, and very little cultural knowledge.	Family member had a copy, graphics are good and likes action games.
8	35–44	Male	England	No Chinese, and very little cultural knowledge.	Likes narrative driven action and RPGs games like <i>Red Dead Redemption 2</i> (Rockstar, 2018). Also had good reviews.

As the table shows, most players were aged 35–44 and were male; only one female player responded to the advertisement on social media. All eight players were from England (n = 8). In terms of Chinese language proficiency, one player indicated being fluent in Chinese, one reported having basic knowledge of Chinese, and the others reported having no knowledge of Chinese. Six players reported having some cultural knowledge, mainly stemming from movies. When it came to reasons for playing, four players indicated that the game had received good reviews, three stated that it looked like similar games they liked, three reported playing it because it was already owned by a family member, two listed cultural reasons, and two stated that they were attracted by the game’s graphics.

4.3 Results: cultural approaches and player reception

Table 3 displays individual CSI category entries in the Chinese source text (ST), with a literal translation where it differs from the actual translation, alongside the English target text (TT) translation, contextual information, and the cultural approach and translation strategies used. Each table also shows the average results of the player reception interviews, which rate translation quality in terms of immersion and interactivity on a scale of one to ten.

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Table 3. *Items: Chinese ST, English TT, Function, Cultural Approach and Translation Strategy, Immersion Rating, and Interactivity Rating*

Chinese (& literal)	English	Function	Approach and strategy	Immersion (1–10)	Inter-activity (1–10)
落伽香藤	Luojia Fragrant Vine	Upgrades gourd	Foreignization (transliteration by pinyin, and literal)	7.5	2.7
三冬虫 (Three winter insect)	Awaken Wine Worm	Upgrades the gourd for more healing	Domestication (Omission, addition, and concretisation)	4.5	4.1
老葫芦	Old Gourd	Refills health	Foreignization (literal)	7.4	7.2
椰子酒	Coconut Wine	Restores 33% of max health	Foreignization (literal)	5.1	7.1
避凶药	Evil Repelling Medicament	Increases damage reduction for a duration	Foreignization (literal)	6.4	4.4
度瘴散	Anti Miasma Powder	Removes poisoned status and increases poison resistance for a duration	Foreignization (literal)	6.2	4.3
太乙小还丹 Taiyi (phonetic, but meaning primordial unity of yin and yang) small cyclical elixir	Celestial Taiyi Pill	Increases max mana	Domestication (generalisation), and foreignization (transliteration by pinyin, and omission)	8.9	4.2
延寿膏 (Longevity ointment)	Longevity Decoction	Increases maximum health for a duration	Foreignization (literal), and domestication (substitution)	6	6.8
伏虎丸	Tiger Subduing Pellets	Increases damage for a duration	Foreignization (literal)	6.6	3.4
清凉散 (Cool powder)	Body Cooling Powder	Removes burn and increases burn resistance	Domestication (addition), and foreignization (literal)	3.9	8.5

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缩地青符 (Shrink earth green talisman)	Incense Trail Talisman	Teleports to nearest Keeper's Shrine and fully restores conditions.	Domestication (substitution, and omission), and foreignization (literal)	8.5	7.1
老山参	Aged Ginseng	Ingredient for crafting	Foreignization (literal)	8.2	5.7
紫芝	Purple Linzhi	Ingredient for crafting	Foreignization (literal, transliteration by pinyin, and explicitation)	8.6	4.4
碧藕 (Jade lotus root)	Jade Lotus	Ingredient for crafting	Foreignization (literal), and domestication (generalisation)	9	4.25

A total of 14 items were found in the playthrough of chapter one. Foreignization alone was used eight times (57%), domestication and foreignization together were used five times (36%), and domestication alone was used only once (7%). This represents a strong tendency toward foreignization, as 93% of entries were either fully or partly translated using foreignizing strategies. In terms of immersion and interactivity, there is a trend in which players received most items favorably in terms of immersion, but not interactivity. There was, however, a secondary trend in which the few items that were received favorably for interactivity also scored poorly for immersion. There were few instances in which an item was received positively for both.

Most of the usable items received much higher averages in terms of immersion. The highest score was for *Jade Lotus*, with an average of 9 out of 10. It was rendered using literal translation and generalization. This was closely followed by *Celestial Taiyi Pill*, at 8.9, which was rendered using generalization, transliteration by pinyin, and literal translation. There was a trend in which most of the items with higher immersion scores tended to include either literal translation, transliteration by pinyin, or both. While foreignizing approaches were more prevalent, many also included elements of domestication. However, in some instances, this combination of domestication and foreignization resulted in poor scores for immersion. For example, the lowest average score of 3.9 was for *Body Cooling Powder*, a result of addition and literal translation. The results simultaneously showed that a heavy reliance on more foreignizing approaches with some domestication can create terms that receive either the highest or lowest scores for immersion. This indicates that when the two cultural approaches are balanced in an optimal way, they can better facilitate a more user-centered translation that aligns with the concept of polysemiotic consistency, but when these approaches are not balanced, they can result in less user-centered polysemiotic dissonance. This

suggests that analyzing cultural approaches alone cannot account for the scores that were received.

Items with higher immersion scores tended to have the lowest scores for interactivity. *Celestial Taiyi Pill*, which had scored well for immersion, only scored 4.2 for interactivity. The lowest mark for interactivity was *Luojia Fragrant Vine*, at 2.7. As with *Celestial Taiyi Pill*, it also included an element of pinyin, which sounds very Chinese but does not convey any specific meaning in English. Conversely, *Body Cooling Powder*, rendered with addition and literal translation, was rated the worst for immersion but the best for interactivity, with an average score of 8.5. *Longevity Decoction* received a better-than-average score of 6 for immersion but received a higher score of 6.8 for interactivity. It was rendered via literal translation and substitution.

This indicates that the inclusion of the foreignizing strategy of using transliteration by pinyin may have a detrimental impact on player reception in terms of interactivity, as it only conveys a Chinese sound but no English meaning. Conversely, the foreignizing strategy of literal translation has been linked to items that were poorly received in terms of immersion, as well as others that were well received. This suggests that the application of the strategy is as relevant as the strategy itself. Similarly, domesticating strategies such as substitution and addition appeared to improve player reception in terms of interactivity; however, in the case of *Awaken Wine Worm*, a tri-part domesticating approach, including addition, resulted in a very low score of 4.1 for interactivity.

There were, however, some exceptions, which either performed well for both immersion and interactivity or poorly for both. For example, *Incense Trail Talisman* received 8.5 for immersion and 7.1 for interactivity. It was translated using a tri-part approach including substitution, omission, and literal translation. In stark contrast, *Awaken Wine Worm*, which also utilized a tri-part domesticating strategy including omission, addition, and concretization, received only 4.5 for immersion and 4.1 for interactivity. This suggests that it is possible to meet player expectations for both immersion and interactivity, but it is also possible to meet neither. Success or failure therefore seems dependent on the careful balancing of translation strategies. While much can be gleaned by observing the cultural approaches and individual strategies, there is clearly something beyond these factors influencing the reception of these terms, and this will be explored in the discussion below.

5 Discussion

This section seeks to construct a narrative around key examples that focus on how the translation of culturally specific in-game items can impact immersion and interactive experience. These will be contextualized with anonymized comments from the

interviewees. It begins with the most common trend, comprising examples in which player reception indicated a better sense of immersion, but at the cost of interactivity (5.1). It then shifts to the second most prominent trend, consisting of examples where player reception indicated a better interactive experience, but at the cost of immersion (5.2). The focus then moves to exceptional examples where immersion and interactivity were both enhanced (5.3), as well as instances in which the translation was detrimental in both respects (5.4).

5.1 Helping Immersion - Hindering Interaction

Many items were positively received in terms of immersion, and this was often a result of more foreignizing strategies. However, in some instances, the domesticating strategy of generalization was also included in multi-strategy approaches, such as the item with the highest rating, *Jade Lotus* (碧藕), with an average score of 9. The first Chinese character was translated literally as “jade,” and the second was generalized from “lotus root” to “lotus.” This dual-cultural approach was received positively by all players. For instance, when asked to give this a score for immersion, Player Two stated, “That’s a 10. It sounds very Chinese!” Similarly, Player Six remarked, “Very Chinese sounding, we’ll give it a 10. It fits better than all the rest!” The other players gave it similar scores and often mentioned the word “Chinese” in connection to immersion. However, it only received an average score of 4.25 for interactivity. When asked why, players correctly identified it as an ingredient but often stated that they could not remember its specific function. When asked to give it a score for how well the name matched the function, Player Eight reflected, “Give it a 3. You make something with it, but I can’t remember what.” In general, the players gave it a low score for interactivity but did not seem to attach much importance to this and dismissed it as simply being an ingredient for crafting.

For another ingredient, *Aged Ginseng* (老山参), which was literally translated, it received an average score of 8.2 for immersion and 5.7 for interactivity. As with *Jade Lotus*, most players commented on the fact that it sounded like it belonged to the game world environment, that it was a crafting item, but that they could not remember its specific function. This general sentiment was summarized by Player Four:

I remember what it looks like, but even now I can’t remember what it does. So, it was in keeping with immersion, yes absolutely, it’s a 10 out of 10! Can’t remember what it does though, so on that basis 1 out of 10 for function. I think it was a crafting ingredient, but there are loads of them that I can’t remember, or what you crafted them into.

Thus, a trend emerged in which players reflected on how ingredients were simply items to be collected and used at some point during crafting. This corresponds with the observations of Robertson (2025, 93), in which similar items, referred to as quest items,

were often translated literally. Moreover, Robertson (2025, 164) reported that translators justified the use of more foreignizing strategies, such as literal translation, for quest items by stating that they were simply to be collected or given to NPCs, but not directly used like health potions, which have immediate in-game effects and therefore require different translation approaches.

Similar comments were made about another ingredient, *Purple Lingzhi* (紫芝), which received an average score of 8.6 for immersion but only 4.4 for interactivity. Its first character was rendered via literal translation as “purple,” while the second character was transliterated as “zhi,” with the transliteration expanded to the full form “lingzhi,” which is the name of a mushroom and can therefore be considered an explicitation. As with this example, there was a tendency for players to remark that terms containing pinyin sounded Chinese and obtained higher scores for immersion. For example, Player Seven remarked, “I think it sounds Chinese. Yeah, I’ll go 10”; however, they then added, “But I remember it wasn’t even purple.” Player Four also picked up on this and stated, “When you’re in the midst of the game and trying to defeat bosses and stuff, you’re just picking stuff up and not analyzing it, and it’s not even purple, so I’d say 1 out of ten for that.” This disconnect between the text and the graphics links back to the concept of polysemiotic dissonance, which is disruptive to the interactive experience. Thus, even though players provided low scores for these items in terms of interactivity because they sounded vague and were not memorable, they did remember how the name of an ingredient was misleading, highlighting the importance of polysemiotic consistency.

Moving on to items that had more immediate impacts on gameplay, *Celestial Taiyi Pill* (太乙小还丹) similarly performed well in terms of immersion, with an average score of 8.9, but poorly in terms of interactivity, with an average of 4.2. Its translation approach was complex and unusual. It involved translating the first two characters twice, but in two different ways. First, the general meaning of 太乙 was rendered as “celestial,” which is a generalization, as the full meaning can be interpreted as the primordial unity of yin and yang. Indeed, if this had been included in the translation, it would have resulted in something even more unwieldy that may have impacted the textual limitations of the user interface (UI). However, the same two characters were then also transliterated as “Taiyi,” which sounds Chinese but means nothing to most players in Anglophone locales. The third character, meaning “small,” was omitted, and the final two characters, meaning “cyclical elixir,” were generalized as “pill.” Despite this complex, tri-part strategy, the function of the item (to increase the character’s magic) was not revealed by its foreign-sounding name.

As a result, Player Five scored it a 9 for immersion and stated, “It definitely sounded Chinese.” However, they then gave it a 2 for interactivity, in terms of how well the name fits the function, and reflected, “Well, it’s a pill, so you know you take it, but yet again you still have to pause the game to actually read the description.” The other players also

scored it highly in terms of immersion because it “sounded Chinese,” despite not knowing what it meant. They mostly reflected that beyond “pill,” there was no indication of what it would do. As Player Two, who gave it a 5 for interactivity, explained, “From the name it sounds like it’s going to have a very positive effect on your character, but you can’t really tell what it does based on the name.” These comments reflected the general sentiment regarding other usable items that sounded both magical and mysterious, such as *Evil Repelling Medicament* and *Anti-Miasma Powder*, and how the names did not clearly relate to their functions. In such cases of polysemiotic dissonance, players expressed frustration at the need to frequently pause the game to open the inventory screen and read item descriptions before using them during challenging sections of play. This disrupted the flow of the gaming experience.

This starkly contrasts with observations in Robertson (2025, 168), in which eight experienced, professional Chinese-to-English translators and reviewers, who were also avid video gamers, applied more user-centric approaches for usable in-game items. This tended to result in item names that corresponded more closely with their functions. Despite working on a partial localisation with text only, the linguists were still able to distinguish between quest items that could not be directly used by the player, such as ingredients, and items that could be immediately used, such as health potions. As there was no game to play and no supporting visuals, translators could only make educated guesses based on their extensive practical experience. All four translation teams were able to do this and detect different types of interactive properties from the text alone.

This ability was referred to as *game sense*, and it was hypothesised that it developed from both extensive knowledge of gaming and frequent experience localising similar games using the partial localisation model. Consequently, the names of items closely corresponded with their intended functions. During interviews, the linguists explained that it was necessary for items to make sense to gamers. Moreover, they stated that transliteration of Chinese into pinyin, which has been frequently used in the translation of items in *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science 2024), was not suitable for items with clear functions, such as medicinal items (Robertson 2025, 133) or consumable food (Robertson 2025, 134).

When considering both the comments of the translators in Robertson’s quasi-experiment (2024, 2025) and the player reception data in this study, a more compelling argument can be made against the frequent use of transliteration via pinyin in the naming of items or other CSIs with interactive properties. While transliteration can retain closer cultural proximity to the Chinese source material and enhance the sense of immersion, overuse can hinder interactivity, increase cognitive load, and ultimately result in a suboptimal gaming experience.

It is not clear why transliteration was used so frequently in *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science 2024). The examples discussed here have shown that players can be more accepting of mysterious-sounding names for crafting ingredients, which can be attributed to more foreignizing approaches. However, they were less receptive to the same approaches being applied to items with immediate in-game effects. The examples above highlight disconnections between text and graphics, as well as between text and interaction, resulting in polysemiotic dissonance and less favorable player reception.

Crucially, these practices raise an important question: has this game and all its textual features been fully localised for the target Anglophone locales? While many definitions of localisation exist, there is a shared understanding that it involves cultural adaptation for the target locale. There is no doubt that the game text has been translated into English, but there is a strong argument that some content falls short of the broader spirit of localisation.

5.2 Helping Interaction - Hindering Immersion

Conversely, there were also instances in which interactivity received a higher average player reception rating than immersion. A general pattern thus emerged, where translations mostly either performed well in terms of immersion, by sounding more Chinese and mysterious, or in terms of interactivity, by dialing down the Chineseness and mystery while increasing clarity. However, there were fewer instances (just three) in which interactivity received a higher player reception rating than immersion.

The item with the greatest discrepancy was *Body Cooling Powder* (清凉散). This received a remarkably high average of 8.5 for interactivity. The word *body* did not occur in the Chinese and is therefore an addition; however, the remaining characters were literally translated as *cooling powder*. Considering the name, it would be unusual if the item did not have a cooling function. Consequently, Player Three gave it a 7 for interactivity and observed, “If you got a fire debuff, it would remove it.” Player Four further remarked, “Yes, it’s extremely obvious, as there are elements in the game where you are burning up, so obviously if that’s the case, you would use this powder to alleviate that.”

Other players made similar remarks regarding interactivity. This can be regarded as a form of partial polysemiotic consistency, where the name clearly fits the function, but not the aesthetics of the game world. Indeed, the same item only received an average of 3.9 for immersion. Thus, Player Two gave it a score of 2 and remarked, “I can’t say that it particularly fits with the game environment.” Player Eight also gave it a low score of 4 and stated that it was “not really fitting the Chinese theme.” The other players provided similar reasons for giving low immersion scores.

This demonstrates that just because a strategy is considered a form of foreignization, it does not necessarily ensure a strong foreignizing effect. This can particularly be the case

with the literal translation of a Chinese CSI composed of multiple characters. While the combination of Chinese characters can create something culturally specific, as with *Body Cooling Powder* and many other examples, the individual characters themselves may not be culturally specific. As a result, a literal translation may provide clarity rather than cultural flavor.

These examples demonstrate that player reception of interactivity can be enhanced through both domesticating and foreignizing strategies, and that polysemiotic consistency can be approached in more than one way. In these cases, polysemiotic consistency appeared to be partially engaged but not fully achieved. While the translations corresponded with item functions, players did not feel that the names connected to the game world environment in the same way.

This raises the question of whether it is possible to combine appropriate approaches and strategies to produce translations that are well received for both immersion and interactivity in highly culturally specific video games. The answer to this question is yes, and this will be contextualised in the following section.

5.3 Helping Both Immersion and Interaction

Indeed, there were instances in which items were positively received for both immersion and interactivity. This was most evident in the case of *Incense Trail Talisman* (缩地青符), which received an average score of 8.5 for immersion and 7.1 for interactivity. It was translated using a combination of strategies that altered the original meaning, which was “shrink earth green talisman.” In this case, *shrink earth*, meaning to reduce distances, was substituted with *incense trail*; the term *green* was omitted; and the character for *talisman* was literally translated.

Despite the complex approach to this translation, Player Three gave it a 6 for immersion and stated, “The incense and talisman parts sound Chinese,” and then gave it a 7 for interactivity, in terms of how well the name fits the function, stating, “It teleports you back to a save point along the trail.” Player One gave it a higher score of 8 for immersion, reflecting, “Because I assume anything to do with incense would be linked to meditation and spirituality,” and then gave it an 8 for interactivity, explaining, “There’s a similar one in *Assassin’s Creed* where you can sit to meditate and unlock certain functions.”

This demonstrates how some players have expectations stemming from genre norms or tropes encountered in other games. Moreover, it shows that it is possible to craft translations that convey a sense of immersion while also facilitating a smoother interactive experience, thereby achieving a stronger form of polysemiotic consistency.

Thus, by combining appropriate domesticating and foreignizing strategies, it was possible to translate terms that were well received in terms of both immersion and interactivity. These more carefully balanced approaches can provide a more user-centered outcome, while potentially still meeting the requirements of a China-based client or developer who may have commissioned a translation that strongly advocates a more literal conveyance of CSIs.

5.4 Hindering immersion and interactive experience

Although some approaches achieved the right balance, in one instance a translation was poorly received in relation to both immersion and interactivity. *Awaken Wine Worm* (三冬虫) received an average score of 4.5 for immersion and 4.1 for interactivity. It was translated by omitting the first two characters, which literally meant “three winter,” then adding “awaken wine,” and finally using concretization to change the third character from “insect” to the more specific “worm.” This lack of foreignizing strategies was unusual compared to other items. With knowledge of the game, it can be argued that the addition of “awaken wine” loosely corresponds with its function of upgrading the Old Gourd, which stored the Coconut Wine that replenished health. However, the players still struggled to connect this domestication-heavy approach with the game world environment.

Regarding how well item names supported immersion, Player Two gave it a 2 and said, “It’s a hindrance, I guess. It doesn’t sound Chinese.” While Player Three gave it a higher score of 5, they reflected, “It could be a bit of a Chinese thing, but not one that I’ve heard of.” In relation to interactivity and how well the name fit the function, Player Five gave it a 3, remarked that the name was misleading, and explained, “You’d think it’s a worm that awakens wine or something, but that doesn’t make sense.” Likewise, Player Four gave it a low score of 4 and stated, “With the word wine in it, I would associate it with the gourd in the game, and that’s a pretty fair assumption, but the awaken and worm part, I’d need to look it up.” Player Four added that while they did not mind pausing to read explanations and enjoyed the otherworldliness of it all, such names might take other players out of the experience.

Seven of the eight players frequently complained about how the translations disrupted their gaming experience. Only Player Four was as accepting of translations that broke polysemiotic consistency in this way. In video game translation, unintentionally taking the player out of the gaming experience is viewed as breaking a cardinal rule. As Bernal-Merino (2018, 130) states, “the conversation between the game-machine and players should not break down.” Similarly, Deckert and Hejduk (2022) reflect on how even spelling deficiencies have the potential to break immersion or flow. This disruption of play or flow can also be framed through Csíkszentmihályi’s (2009) flow theory, in which an optimal experience requires flow. As explained by Csíkszentmihályi (2009,

71), flow is achieved when “one’s skills are adequate to cope with the challenges at hand, in a goal-directed, rule-bound action system that provides clear clues as to how one is performing.” This example, as well as others in Sections 5.1 and 5.2, demonstrates that domestication strategies alone do not ensure polysemiotic consistency and raises further questions about the intentions behind Chinese-to-English translations that disrupt player flow.

6 Conclusion

This section highlights the main contributions from a methodological perspective, as well as identifying main trends (6.1). It also touches on the limitations of this study and ideas for future research (6.2).

6.1 Main Contributions

This study provides insight into the player reception of highly culturally specific Chinese video games, in this case an ARPG inspired by classical Chinese literature. This study combined elements of both corpus design and player reception to provide a more granular view of how diverse cultural approaches and translation strategies can impact player immersion and interactive experience. While general translation trends can be observed from a corpus-based approach, the comments from the interviews helped shape the narrative and provide direct user-centred feedback. This can be utilised by developers and localisation agencies who wish to facilitate a more user-centred approach to video game localisation, as well as instructors who train the next generation of video game localisation linguists.

In terms of cultural specificity in translation, this research reveals a more nebulous relationship between translation approaches and player reception. It demonstrates how the traditional dichotomy of domesticating and foreignizing approaches does not in itself necessarily lead to a term being received well or poorly in terms of immersion or interactivity. The cultural approach of foreignization was used to translate most of the CSIs. It can include strategies such as transliteration, which can lead to better player reception in terms of immersion while hindering player reception in terms of interactivity. However, other foreignizing strategies, such as literal translation, can often be associated with favourable outcomes in terms of both immersion and interactivity, although this is also dependent on the nature of the item.

Domesticating strategies were used less often than foreignizing strategies. This adds to the growing observation that Chinese-to-English video game localisation tends to rely more on foreignizing strategies than, for instance, games being localised from Japanese. Additionally, this study shows instances of domestication being part of both the most well-received and the most poorly received translations. This suggests that cultural

approaches and translation strategies are only one part of the picture. More important is how skilfully they are applied in relation to the graphical, audio, and interactive components of the items to achieve polysemiotic consistency, flow, and a more user-centred experience.

6.2 Future Research

This study has added to the growing narrative around the translation of CSIs in the localization of Chinese video games. However, it was not without limitations. A sample size of eight participants does not guarantee that the findings are broadly generalizable in a manner that would be representative of the entire phenomenon. Despite the small sample size, certain patterns could still be observed. Further research should strive to increase the sample to at least several dozen participants to allow for statistical analyses that could enable more generalizable and representative accounts. Moreover, due to the focus on one category of CSIs from the first chapter of the game, there is scope for a more thorough exploration of the translation of CSIs in this game. This could entail a wider range of CSI categories, including the names of NPCs, locations, items, skills, moves, and other elements of the game system.

While the localization of items was sometimes received favorably in terms of immersion and interactivity, there was a strong tendency toward the use of the foreignizing strategy of transliteration, which aided immersion but often at the expense of interactivity, flow, and thus playability. This was applied regardless of whether items were simply crafting ingredients or items with a more immediate in-game effect, and it resulted in a disruptive experience. To some extent, this appears to run counter to the fundamental principles of localization. It would therefore be valuable for scholars to explore this phenomenon in more detail. This could include an analysis of other categories of CSIs in this game. To develop a broader view of industry practice, researchers could focus on other culturally specific Chinese video games to explore whether the trends identified here are becoming more norm-like or whether new patterns emerge. Such research could further explore the line of inquiry opened by this study regarding whether the translation practices observed in this video game can even be considered localization in the traditional sense, or rather a byproduct of strict time constraints, a lack of resources, or indicative of a more reluctant journey west.

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Audience and Player Preferences Regarding the Cultural Localization of (Non)Interactive Multimedia Products in Iran

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Abstract

Existing survey-based user-centric game localization studies lack a detailed approach to audience preferences regarding the cultural aspects of (non)interactive multimedia localization. Thus, the present study seeks to provide an account of the culturalization preferences of the Persian audience in the context of video games and movies. By providing 209 Persian-speaking participants with a 23-item questionnaire based on content subject to modification in video games and movies (religious issues, sociocultural issues, and sociopolitical references), the results showed that the existing culturalization practices in Persian multimedia localization do not align with Persian audience preferences, except in dealing with sociopolitical references made to Iran. Demographic factors such as gender, age, and consumption habits influenced preferences, alongside strong correlations between views on game and movie localization and negative perceptions of censorship's impact on quality. These findings have implications for more informed Persian game localization decisions, both for agencies and for policymakers.

Keywords: Culturalization, audiovisual translation, video games, localization, censorship, interactive media, non-interactive media

1 Introduction

Ensuring the proper acceptance and reception of localized multimedia products in different locales calls for a more refined approach to handling culturally sensitive content, among other factors (Dong and Mangiron 2018). As an important mechanism through which content can be modified to align with the values of the target market, censorship has generally been viewed in a negative light (Ellefsen and Bernal-Merino

2018). Studies addressing the cultural aspects involved in the localization of video games have gained traction in recent years, especially those focusing on the reception of localized products. Crucially in game localization, the traditional notion of linguistic equivalence is challenged, and what stands as “true” or “false” is heavily influenced by the knowledge and insights offered by the final receivers of the product (Fernández Costales 2016).

Such insights are of particular interest in Game Translation User Research (GTUR), which is a participant-oriented strand of research focused on how users of localized products receive localized game versions (Deckert et al. 2024). Of particular interest in this regard is the concept of quality, which can be addressed in terms of factors that can play a pivotal role in positively or negatively affecting player experience in the context of localization.

Given the negative light that is usually associated with censorship, it is one of the factors that could be linked to the perceived low quality of localized video games, especially in a locale such as Iran (Khoshsaligheh and Ameri 2020). Zoraqi and Mousavi (2024) addressed the mechanisms through which modifications are made in Persian-localized video games, which were mostly argued to be suboptimal and prone to undermining players’ gameplay experience (e.g., removing game cut-scenes to ensure that culturally sensitive information is removed in the Iranian market).

Such insights raise critical questions regarding whether the utilization of proper culturalization practices would lead to improvements in users’ perceptions of Persian-localized video games or whether the Iranian audience generally leans more heavily toward the original titles. Against this backdrop, and drawing on the identified instances of censorship as a mechanism for the cultural localization of video games by Zoraqi and Mousavi (2024) and movies by Pakar and Khoshsaligheh (2022), we attempt to shed light on the reception and perception of the culturalization practices employed by official Iranian game localization companies.

Moreover, users’ preferences regarding these practices are addressed alongside their preferences regarding non-interactive audiovisual products. This is done to ascertain the existence of a possible correlation, or lack thereof, between players’ preferences for video games and their preferences for the consumption of filmic products.

Thus, our study seeks to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the preferences of Persian video game players regarding the culturalization practices employed in Persian game localization?
2. What are the preferences of Persian video game players regarding the culturalization practices employed in Persian non-interactive multimedia localization?

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3. Is there an association between video game players' preferences for the culturalization of video games and non-interactive multimedia localization?

2 Culture and Censorship in Localization

The cultural aspects of localization pose great challenges to game localization practitioners. This speaks to the idea that video game translators are required to have a solid background in and grasp of the cultural sensitivities of the locale to which they are translating (Zoraqi and Kafi 2025). Any form of negligence toward the sociocultural values of the target locale can lead to backlash either from state authorization bodies or from the general public.

Closely connected to the cultural values that need to be heeded in the process of localization is the corresponding age rating system (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013). Rating systems are widely used for labeling media content, especially to give parents an idea of what their children will be exposed to as a result of consuming certain media content (Gentile 2008). Depending on the locale, various rating systems have been developed and are currently employed (e.g., USK in Germany, PEGI in Europe, ESRB in the United States, and ESRA in Iran).

Felini (2015) makes the critical observation that certain age rating systems (PEGI and ESRB in their case) focus more on the negative aspects included in video games (e.g., sex, profanity, discrimination, etc.) than on the positive aspects. Along similar lines, Zoraqi and Mousavi (2024) provide a descriptive account of the rating criteria employed in the Iranian rating system, ESRA, and note the lack of clarity in this system with regard to what is considered "inappropriate."

Given such complexities, it should come as no surprise that rating systems are generally ignored by video game players (Hollett et al. 2022) and/or are not clear enough for parents to develop a solid understanding of (Azam 2023).

Such rating systems draw extensively on censorship and cultural gatekeeping practices to ensure that certain content is edited out. Censorship and cultural gatekeeping practices have been explored extensively in the context of audiovisual translation. With regard to Iran, it has been suggested that official Iranian broadcast channels consistently censor and filter out themes such as (non)verbal sexuality, profane language, Christianity-related symbolism and rituals, violence, sensitive political references, and extramarital affairs in Persian dubbing (Pakar and Khoshsaligheh 2021). However, it has been suggested that the implementation of these practices is applied inconsistently in non-interactive media localization, especially through dubbing (Pakar and Khoshsaligheh 2022).

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Overlaps and lines of analogy can be drawn between themes subject to censorship and filtering across Persian game localization and the localization of non-interactive media such as films. As mentioned previously, religious issues (in the form of ensuring proper dress codes) and sensitive political references consistently constitute sensitive themes in official Persian game localization. However, issues such as foul language and violence are not consistently filtered out in localized game versions in the official Persian market (Zoraqi and Mousavi 2024).

In this landscape, censorship is generally frowned upon in the context of game localization. Part of this can be explained by the practices employed by game localization companies to achieve this aim. In the Persian context, Zoraqi and Mousavi (2024) have suggested that Persian game localization companies tend to expunge traces of inappropriate dress codes for female characters, references to alcohol, foul language, and sociopolitical references through a variety of channels, including removing cut-scenes, applying graphical changes, and silencing the soundtrack. Such “clumsy” practices for making products sellable in the target locale could lead to pessimism toward the practice of game localization, depending on the norms of the recipient context.

3 User-centric Studies in Game Localization

The history of user-centric game localization studies can be traced back to the late 2000s, with O’Hagan (2009) setting out to assess the impact of embedded cultural assumptions in game design in the context of localization from the viewpoint of a single participant. Using the player’s trajectory and hand movements, along with think-aloud protocols, post-task interviews, and player logs, she highlighted the importance of addressing the cultural assumptions underpinning original game designs during the process of localization. This study proved insightful in that it revealed the determining role of game design in player experience. However, this work was significantly limited by the fact that it employed only one participant.

O’Hagan (2016) conducted a follow-up, larger-scale study using an eye tracker and galvanic skin response by recruiting 21 participants with three different native languages. This cross-cultural study did not point to any significant differences in players’ experiences. Other cognition-based user-centric studies have primarily been concerned with accessibility in game localization (e.g., Mangiron 2016; Larreina and Mangiron 2025; Oliva-Zamora and Mangiron 2025).

Perception-based user-centric studies have been an especially fruitful area of investigation, as they have helped reveal some of the major areas that call for more robust empirical analysis on the one hand, and how currently localized game titles are perceived by target users across different locales on the other (Ellefsen and Bernal-

Zoraqi, Amir Arsalan and Mousavi, Movahede Sadat. 2025. Audience and player preferences regarding the cultural localization of (non)interactive multimedia products in Iran. In: L10N Journal. 2(4), pp. 101-127.

Merino 2018; Kudła 2021; Fernández Costales 2016). One of the first such scholarly endeavors was that of Geurts (2015), who addressed the preferences of Dutch gamers using an online questionnaire. One of the major findings of the study concerns the idea that Dutch gamers were mostly optimistic about the increasing number of video games being localized into Dutch, a sentiment that may not be common among gaming communities across different locales.

In a similar perception-based study, Khoshsaligheh and Ameri (2020) studied Persian players' perceptions of game titles localized into Persian. Drawing on the findings of questionnaires, they revealed that Iranian players tended to favor titles that maintained the cultural flavor of the original and were inclined to support the localization of more titles into Persian. Yet, players' perceptions of currently localized Persian game titles were not very positive when it came to localization quality, mostly due to censorship (Khoshsaligheh and Ameri 2020, p. 201).

Having highlighted some of the most relevant insights generated so far in GTUR, we seek to advance our knowledge of how Persian players' perceptions of cultural localization in video games can shape their understanding of game localization quality and the levels and mechanisms of modification considered acceptable from their perspective.

4 Method

This is a quantitative, survey-based study that was prepared and distributed online through Qualtrics via relevant gaming channels on Telegram in Iran.

The questionnaire on players' cultural game localization preferences was developed to collect the data required to answer the research questions addressed in the present study. The questionnaire consisted of two main sections. The first section was directed at collecting respondents' demographic information and addressed age, gender, weekly playtime of (non)localized video games, and weekly watch time of movies and films (4 items).

The second section was concerned with capturing players' preferences regarding the cultural localization practices of video games and movies. The questionnaire was developed based on the findings of Zoraqi and Mousavi (2024) regarding the cultural localization practices currently employed in the Persian game localization market. Additionally, the study by Pakar and Khoshsaligheh (2022) regarding the censorship practices applied in the Persian context for the cultural localization of multimedia products was also drawn upon.

Given our focus on cultural localization in the fields of video games and movies, these two studies provided a kaleidoscopic view of how cultural localization is carried out in

Zoraqi, Amir Arsalan and Mousavi, Movahede Sadat. 2025. Audience and player preferences regarding the cultural localization of (non)interactive multimedia products in Iran. In: L10N Journal. 2(4), pp. 101-127.

(non)interactive multimedia materials. In this respect, the second section of the questionnaire consisted of 14 items focused on modifications revolving around dress codes, sexual acts, references to alcohol, violence, dancing (by women), foul language, and negative references to Iran in both video games and movies.

Additionally, a third section was included to account for the role of age ratings, the quality of cultural localization (i.e., whether censorship and modifications are carried out overtly or covertly), and respondents' perceptions of how censorship can impact the quality of localization (5 items).

As already mentioned, the questionnaire was distributed through relevant gaming channels on Telegram in Iran, and the choice of Telegram as the primary platform was due to the fact that it is the most widely used messaging application in Iran (Dursun 2017). The questionnaire was available from May 2, 2024, to November 5, 2024.

The aims and interests of the study were explicitly stated at the beginning of the questionnaire, and participants were required to declare their consent to participate in the study. Additionally, they were informed that participation was completely voluntary and that they were free to leave the questionnaire at any stage. They were also informed that their information would be kept confidential.

The face validity of the questionnaire was ensured by conducting a pilot survey with 10 potential participants (whose responses were not included in the final analysis). Through this pilot testing, 2 items were excluded based on the feedback received from the initial participants. In terms of content validity, two experts in the field of audiovisual translation (one specializing in Persian audiovisual translation and one in a non-Persian context) were consulted. Based on the feedback received, 5 additional items were excluded on the grounds of potential overlap with other items. Eventually, another phase of pilot testing was conducted with 10 more participants to ensure that the questionnaire had acceptable face validity (these responses were included in the final analysis).

The analysis was primarily carried out using descriptive and inferential statistics. Regarding the latter, the non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis test was conducted to perform cross-group comparisons, as this non-parametric approach is suitable for skewed survey data and small subgroups, avoiding parametric assumptions such as normality while detecting significant differences.

4.1 Participants

A total of 238 responses were collected, but 29 responses were discarded due to incompleteness, suspension for patterned answers, or straight-lining (i.e., choosing the same answer for a number of consecutive questionnaire items). For the identification

of such cases, the quality check mechanisms of Qualtrics were relied upon, through which responses that met the abovementioned criteria were flagged. Eventually, 209 responses were retained, the descriptive information for which is provided in Table 1.

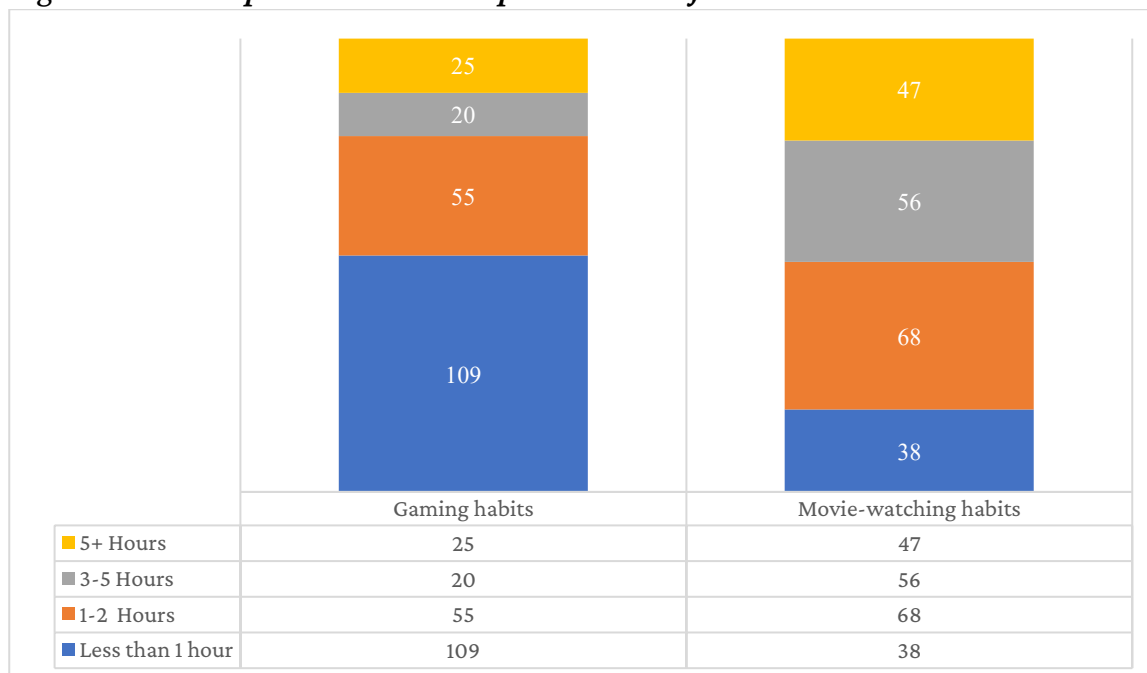
Table 1. *The Age and Gender Distribution of the Participants.*

Age range	No.	Gender	No.
18–19	106	Male	51
20–29	82	Female	153
30–39	18	Prefer not to say	5
40–49	1		
50–59	2		

Further lines of differentiation can be drawn between non-players (less than 1 hour of playtime weekly), casual players (between 1 and 5 hours of playtime weekly), and hardcore players (more than 5 hours of playtime weekly). The same differentiation can be made with regard to movie-watching habits: non-movie consumers (less than 1 hour of watch time weekly), casual movie consumers (1–5 hours of watch time weekly), and hardcore movie consumers (more than 5 hours of watch time weekly).

The frequency of each of these groups of respondents is provided in Figure 1, along with their consumption habits as movie watchers.

Figure 1. *The Respondents' Consumption Habits of Video Games versus Movies.*



As shown in Figure 1, the majority of respondents reported playing video games for less than 1 hour per week ($n = 109$), followed by 1–2 hours ($n = 55$), 3–5 hours ($n = 20$), and more than 5 hours ($n = 25$). With regard to movie consumption habits, the majority of respondents reported watching movies for 1–2 hours per week ($n = 68$), followed by 3–5 hours ($n = 56$), more than 5 hours ($n = 47$), and less than 1 hour ($n = 38$). Accordingly, the gap between individuals engaging with video games for shorter periods per week and those who play for longer periods is more pronounced, while the same cannot be said for movie-watching habits.

To gain deeper insights in this regard, players were asked whether they had experience playing Persian-localized video games. The relevant details are provided in Figure 2.

The number of respondents with experience playing Persian-localized video games (50%) was almost equal to those who did not have such experience (50%). To gain deeper insights into players' gaming habits and their experience with Persian-localized video games, it was revealed that of the total 113 respondents who played video games for less than one hour per week, almost half of them (48.3%) had played Persian-localized video games, while slightly more than half (51.7%) had not.

Gathering insights from participants with such a diverse range of consumption habits could help develop insights into how players expect Persian-localized video games to appear (through the perspectives of players who had not played Persian-localized video games) and how players have received the products of official Persian game localization.

Having outlined the demographic profile of the participants taking part in our study, we now move on to present the results regarding participants' preferences toward the various dimensions of cultural localization practices in (non)interactive multimedia materials.

5 Results

This section presents the results of our study regarding the experiences of video game players and consumers of non-interactive multimedia products with respect to the various dimensions of cultural localization into Persian.

5.1 Culturalization Preferences

This section of the questionnaire focused on how Iranian (non)players' preferences were shaped with regard to the handling of social, political, and cultural considerations. Therefore, religious issues, sociocultural issues, and sociopolitical issues are addressed here.

5.1.1 Religious issues

In this category, the focus was on how players and movie-watchers preferred the tackling of religious issues in Persian-localized products. Accordingly, the items revolved around dress codes, intimate relationships between characters, alcohol, and women’s dancing.

5.1.1.1 Dress codes

The category of dress code concerns the extent to which consumers of Persian-localized video games and movies would prefer the clothing styles of characters to be modified to align with Iranian-Islamic values. Table 2 provides the respective descriptive statistics.

Table 2. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Dress Codes in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
1) Dress codes should undergo modifications in localized video games.	37.8%	24.4%	24.9%	9.1%	3.8%
2) Dress codes should undergo modifications in localized movies.	41.1%	25.8%	22%	7.2%	3.8%

CD: Completely Disagree; D: Disagree; U: Undecided; A: Agree; CA: Completely Agree

As observed in Table 2, participants’ preferences regarding the various dimensions of religious issues in the process of cultural localization are approximately similar when it comes to (non)interactive multimedia products. Regarding the first aspect, that is, the modification of dress codes to ensure alignment with Iranian-Islamic values, the majority of participants (completely) disagreed with dress codes undergoing any sort of modification (62.2% for video games and 66.9% for movies).

To better interpret these findings, a Kruskal–Wallis test was conducted to identify any differences between male and female users’ preferences. Accordingly, significant differences existed between users’ gender and their preferences regarding characters’ dress codes and clothing ($H = 10.522$, $p < .05$). Female respondents were more lenient toward the modification of source dress codes in video games ($M = 2.32$) and movies ($M = 2.23$), while male respondents showed a greater preference for the maintenance of such items in localized games ($M = 1.67$) and movies ($M = 1.59$). These insights contribute to the longstanding discussion about female characters being designed to please the male audience as “eye candy” in the male-dominant gaming market (Downs and Smith 2010; Malkowski and Russworm 2017).

Speaking in terms of age, statistically significant differences were found between participants' age and their preferences for dress code modifications in video games ($H = 10.132, p = 0.038$). However, based on the values yielded by the Kruskal–Wallis test, the same cannot be said for users' preferences in this regard in movies ($H = 11.763, p = 0.019$). The results of the pairwise comparison revealed this difference to occur between participants aged 18–19 and those in their twenties ($H = 18.244, p = 0.033$). Participants between 20 and 29 years of age did not show much support for the modification of source-culture dress codes in video games ($M = 1.99$) and movies ($M = 1.87$). By contrast, the younger age group expressed less leniency toward the lack of modification of such content in video games ($M = 2.42$) and movies ($M = 2.32$).

5.1.1.2 Intimate inter-character relationships

The focus here is on how the displays of affection or intimate physical contact (e.g., kissing, hugging, etc.) should be handled throughout the process of cultural localization. The relevant descriptive statistics are provided in Table 3.

Table 3. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Intimate Inter-Character Relationships in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
3) Display of affection or physical contact should undergo modifications in localized video games.	22%	14.8%	26.3%	23.4%	13.4%
4) Display of affection or physical contact should undergo modifications in localized movies.	24.4%	19.6%	24.4%	19.1%	12.4%

According to Table 3, participants' views in this regard were almost identical across both media. Almost one-third of participants either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the censoring of intimate physical contact in video games (36.8%), while almost half of the participants held the same opinion regarding movies (44%). Conversely, 36.8% of participants (strongly) agreed with censoring such content in video games, compared to 31.5% in movies. Over a quarter (26.3%) were undecided in the case of video games, and slightly under a quarter (24.4%) were undecided in the case of movies.

To gain deeper insights, we factored in the variables of age and gender to account for To gain deeper insights, we considered the variables of age and gender to account for any potential differences across groups. Based on the results of the Kruskal–Wallis test, statistically significant differences existed between the two gender groups in terms of how they would prefer the handling of scenes containing intimate relationships

between characters in video games ($H = 20.061, p = 0.001$) and movies ($H = 22.001, p = 0.001$). Female participants showed a greater preference for the exclusion of scenes containing sexual intimacy in video games ($M = 3.17$) and movies ($M = 3.02$), whereas male respondents were more lenient toward the preservation of such material in video games ($M = 2.20$) and movies ($M = 2.00$). This polarizing perspective reflects how men and women tend to react differently to visual sexual stimuli, with men generally being more prone to respond to such stimuli (Rupp and Wallen 2008).

In terms of age differences, significant differences were found regarding respondents' preferences in video games ($H = 11.644, p = 0.020$) and movies ($H = 18.153, p = 0.001$). Based on the results of the pairwise comparisons test, this significant difference was observed between participants aged 18–19 and those aged 20–29. The younger age group showed a greater preference for censoring such material in video games ($M = 3.16$) and movies ($M = 3.08$), whereas the older age group was less supportive of this practice in video games ($M = 2.65$) and movies ($M = 2.38$).

In terms of players' experience, significant differences were observed regarding preferences for the display of affectionate contact in video games ($H = 10.984, p = 0.012$). Drawing on pairwise comparisons, nonplayers and hardcore players differed significantly in this respect ($H = 40.570, p = 0.002$). Nonplayers mostly preferred such content to be filtered out from video games ($M = 3.12$) and movies ($M = 2.88$). However, hardcore players were less supportive of such practices in video games ($M = 2.20$) and movies ($M = 2.24$).

This may indicate that hardcore players develop stronger consumption habits regarding (localized) video games due to prolonged exposure to certain types of content, while their comparatively lower exposure to movies may result in less established attitudes in that domain. In other words, it could be argued that players do not necessarily transfer their expectations from gaming contexts to non-gaming contexts.

This interpretation is further supported by the fact that significant differences also emerged as a result of respondents' movie consumption habits and their perspectives regarding the modification of such content in video games ($H = 18.184, p = 0.001$) and movies ($H = 27.617, p = 0.001$). In the context of video games, these significant differences occurred between the preferences of hardcore movie watchers and casual watchers ($H = 37.895, p = 0.001$), as well as between hardcore watchers and non-watchers ($H = 50.945, p = 0.001$).

Regarding movies, in addition to differences between hardcore movie watchers and non-watchers ($H = 63.580, p = 0.001$) and between hardcore movie watchers and casual watchers ($H = 45.849, p = 0.001$), differences were also observed between regular watchers (3–5 hours) and hardcore watchers ($H = 35.937, p = 0.002$). Hardcore movie

watchers were generally in favor of maintaining the depiction of affectionate contact in video games ($M = 2.23$), though less so in movies ($M = 1.96$). By contrast, casual watchers were more supportive of modifying such content in video games ($M = 3.12$) and movies ($M = 3.00$), while regular watchers were somewhat less supportive of removing such scenes in video games ($M = 2.94$) and movies ($M = 2.73$).

Although interesting, this finding should not be surprising, as casual movie watchers may not be exposed to movies or video games long enough to develop strong preferences regarding each aspect of cultural localization. However, this calls for further analysis, which will be complemented by analyses of the upcoming issues below, as well as correlational analyses.

5.1.1.3 References to alcohol

In this category, the participants' views regarding the depiction of alcohol in video games and movies was addressed. The descriptive information for this category is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Alcohol in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
5) References to alcohol should undergo modifications in localized video games	33.5%	19.6%	23.4%	14.8%	8.6%
6) References to alcohol should undergo modifications in localized movies.	34.4%	21.1%	23%	13.4%	8.1%

As shown in Table 4, over half of the respondents were (strongly) against the modification of references to alcohol in video games (53.1%) and movies (55.5%). Around a quarter of the participants did not have a clear opinion on the matter in the case of video games (23.4%) and movies (23%).

In this regard, significant differences existed between female and male respondents for video games ($H = 24.643$, $p = 0.001$) and movies ($H = 23.371$, $p = 0.001$). Female respondents were mostly in favor of filtering out references to alcohol in video games ($M = 2.71$) and movies ($M = 2.63$), while male respondents did not share the same opinion in video games ($M = 1.75$) and movies ($M = 1.73$).

Significant differences were also observed between participants in terms of age in the case of video games ($H = 19.249$, $p = 0.001$) and movies ($H = 24.164$, $p = 0.001$). Drawing

on the results of the post hoc test, the differences occurred between participants in the age ranges of 18–19 and 20–29 in video games ($H = 31.467, p = 0.001$) and movies ($H = 34.634, p = 0.001$). In the case of movies, in addition to the aforementioned age groups, differences were also observed between individuals aged 18–19 and those aged 30–39 ($H = 43.101, p = 0.004$).

Based on the results, the youngest age group was more lenient toward censoring alcoholic content in video games and movies ($M = 2.79$ and $M = 2.78$, respectively). This preference was observed to a lesser extent among participants aged 20–29 ($M = 2.10$ and $M = 2.00$, respectively). Among participants aged 30–39 ($M = 2.06$ and $M = 1.83$), preferences were largely in line with those of participants in their twenties ($M = 2.11$ and $M = 2.02$). This additional difference in the case of alcoholic depiction could be explained by the fact that, in our study, older age groups were more inclined to watch movies than to play video games.

5.1.1.4 Female dance

Dancing is another theme that is subject to strict censorship in the Persian (interactive) media. The descriptive statistics of the participants' responses are provided in Table 5 below.

Table 5. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Female Dance in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
7) Female dancing scenes should undergo modifications in localized video games.	42.6%	17.2%	29.7%	6.7%	3.8%
8) Female dancing scenes should undergo modifications in localized movies.	45%	21.1%	23.4%	6.7%	3.8%

In this category, we focused particularly on female dancing themes because they have been suggested to be subject to strict modification in the process of media localization (Pakar and Khoshsaligheh 2022). Interesting insights were gained in this regard. To be precise, more than half of the respondents (strongly) disagreed with the modification of female dancing scenes in video games (59.8%) and movies (66.1%). Slightly less than a quarter of the participants were undecided in this regard in the case of video games (29.7%), and almost one-fourth held a similar opinion in the case of movies (23.4%).

Analyzing these figures further, the Kruskal–Wallis test revealed interesting differences across groups in terms of age for video games ($H = 15.891, p = 0.003$) and movies ($H =$

15.429, $p = 0.004$). In video games, these differences occurred between participants aged 18–19 and 20–29 ($H = 22.589, p = 0.007$) and between participants aged 18–19 and 30–39 ($H = 42.104, p = 0.004$). The mean score of participants aged 18–19 ($M = 2.37$) was higher than that of participants aged 20–29 ($M = 1.94$) and those aged 30–39 ($M = 1.56$). Similarly, in the case of movies, a comparable hierarchy of mean scores was observed (18–19: $M = 2.28$; 20–29: $M = 1.84$; 30–39: $M = 1.50$). Accordingly, participants aged 30–39 generally preferred that no modifications be made in this regard in video games, followed by those aged 20–29 and those aged 18–19.

Participants' gender also affected their preferences regarding the depiction of female dancing in video games ($H = 14.056, p = 0.001$) and movies ($H = 10.047, p = 0.007$). For male respondents, a mean score of 1.59 was calculated for both video games and movies. However, these scores were calculated as 2.13 and 2.27 for female respondents, respectively. In other words, male participants were more in favor of retaining scenes involving female dancing in video games compared with female respondents.

Participants' gaming background was not found to affect their preferences regarding the depiction of female dancing scenes in video games and movies.

5.1.2 Socio-cultural Issues

This category was concerned with how players and movie-watchers preferred the handling of sociocultural issues in Persian-localized products. Accordingly, the items revolved around the treatment of violence and foul language.

5.1.2.1 Violence

The depiction of violence in video games and movies is a controversial topic (Shao and Wang, 2019). Here, our focus is on how (non)players view the depiction of violence in video games and movies. The overall descriptive statistics in this regard are provided in Table 6.

Table 6. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Violent Content in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
9) Violent content undergo modifications in localized video games	25.4%	15.8%	20.6%	27.8%	10.5%
10) Violent content should undergo modifications in localized movies.	25.4%	20.6%	17.2%	26.8%	10%

In the case of video games, the majority of the respondents (strongly) disagreed with (41.2%), and a bit less than a quarter of the participants were undecided on the topic (20.6%). Regarding movies, this proportion of (strong) disagreement was even more pronounced (46%), while 36.8% of the respondents (strongly) agreed with such modification. To further break down these numbers, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test revealed significant differences across age groups in video games ($H = 17.537$, $p = 0.002$) and movies ($H = 17.192$, $p = 0.002$). More specifically, the post-hoc test revealed this difference to lie between the 18–19 and 20–29 age groups. The younger age group was more in favor of modifying the violent content in video games ($M = 3.08$) and movies ($M = 3.06$) compared to the older age group ($M = 2.44$; $M = 2.35$, respectively).

Similarly, significant differences were observed between male and female participants in video games ($H = 39.463$, $p = 0.001$) and movies ($H = 34.477$, $p = 0.001$). A staggering percentage of male respondents (strongly) disagreed with the modification of violent content in video games (76.5%) ($M = 1.86$) and movies (76.8%) ($M = 1.88$); a minority of the respondents (strongly) agreed with such modifications in each case (15.7%). Female respondents evinced more or less the opposite pattern in that opinions were split in this regard. Almost half of the respondents (46.4% in video games and 45.1% in movies) favored such modifications in video games ($M = 3.16$), and the same could be said for movies ($M = 3.07$).

Significant differences also held in terms of gaming experience for violence in video games ($H = 16.642$, $p = 0.001$) and movies ($H = 13.363$, $p = 0.004$). The significant differences were established between non-players and hardcore players in video games ($H = 42.574$, $p = 0.001$) and movies ($H = 43.627$, $p = 0.001$). More interestingly, significant differences were also revealed between non-players and regular players ($H = 42.469$, $p = 0.03$).

5.1.2.2 Foul Language

The improper treatment of foul language in the context of movies (Pakar and Khoshsaligheh 2022) and video games (Zoraqi and Mousavi 2024) was the reason for the inclusion of this category in the questionnaire. The overall descriptive statistics are provided in Table 7.

Table 7. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Foul Language in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
11) Foul language should undergo modifications in localized video games.	20.6%	17.2%	18.7%	26.8%	16.7%

12) Foul language should undergo modifications in localized movies.	23.4%	21.1%	18.2%	23%	14.4%
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Unlike the previous cases, in the case of foul language in video games, a bit over one-third of the respondents (strongly) agreed with the modification of such language (37.8%), whereas almost half of the respondents held the opposite view (43.5%). As for movies, however, the opinions were somewhat different in that almost half of the respondents (strongly) disagreed with any such modification (44.5%), and a bit over one-third of the respondents (strongly) agreed with the matter (37.4%).

Significant differences arose in this regard between participants aged 18–19 and 20–29 in video games ($H = 24.771, p = 0.005$) and movies ($H = 24.617, p = 0.005$). While 18–19-year-olds were more in favor of having the foul language modified in video games ($M = 3.28$) and movies ($M = 3.09$), this preference was much less pronounced among 20–29-year-olds for video games ($M = 2.72$) and movies ($M = 2.55$).

In terms of gender, significant differences existed between the two groups for video games ($H = 31.879, p = 0.001$) and movies ($H = 26.594, p = 0.001$). Female respondents were more in favor of having foul language modified in video games ($M = 3.35$) and movies ($M = 3.12$), whereas this preference was much less pronounced among male respondents for video games ($M = 2.06$) and movies ($M = 2.02$).

Players' gaming background was revealed to modulate players' preferences in this regard for both video games ($H = 14.516, p = 0.002$) and movies ($H = 13.316, p = 0.004$). For both video games and movies, the difference was observed between non-players and hardcore players ($H = 45.001, p = 0.001$) and ($H = 44.501, p = 0.001$), respectively. Non-players mostly favored the modification of foul language in video games ($M = 3.31$) and movies ($M = 3.08$), while hardcore gamers argued against such modifications ($M = 2.24$ and $M = 2.04$, respectively).

5.1.3 Socio-political References

Socio-political references concern how politically sensitive issues are handled in the cultural localization of (interactive) multimedia products. Thus, we specifically focused on how positive and negative references to Iran should be handled in the localization of video games and movies.

5.1.3.1 Negative References to Iran

Negative meta-references to Iran have to do with how negative references or mentions to Iran have to be treated during localization. The descriptive statistics are provided in Table 8 below.

Table 8. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Negative Political References to Iran in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
13) Negative references to Iran should undergo modifications in localized video games.	17.7%	17.7%	20.6%	27.8%	16.3%
14) Negative references to Iran undergo modifications in localized movies.	17.7%	18.2%	24.9%	24.9%	14.4%

According to Table 8, rather polarizing responses were expressed regarding the handling of meta-referential material related to Iran. In video games, a bit over one-third of the respondents (strongly) disagreed with the modification of negative references to Iran (35.4%), while almost half of the respondents (strongly) agreed with the modification of such references (44.1%). Regarding movies, similarly, a bit over one-third of the respondents (strongly) opposed the application of any such modifications (35.9%), whereas 39.3% of the respondents held a (strongly) agreeing view.

In terms of age, significant differences were observed between participants aged 18–19 and those aged 20–29 ($H = 35.867, p = 0.001$) for the localization of video games. Similarly, for movies, significant differences were revealed between the same age groups ($H = 36.582, p = 0.001$) and between 18–19-year-olds and 30–39-year-olds ($H = 49.222, p = 0.001$). Participants aged 18–19 were more in favor of modifying the negative references made to Iran in video games ($M = 3.44$) and movies ($M = 3.339$). Yet, participants aged 20–29 were against such modifications ($M = 2.65$ and $M = 2.60$, respectively). As for the 30–39-year-olds, they almost shared the same opinion as the 20–29-year-olds for the case of video games ($M = 2.78$) and movies ($M = 2.39$).

Gender was also revealed to be influential in this regard ($H = 17.884, p = 0.001$). Female respondents were more lenient toward a modifying approach for video games ($M = 3.32$) and movies ($M = 3.25$) compared to males ($M = 2.45$ and $M = 2.35$, respectively).

No significant differences were observed between (non)players of different calibers in either movies or video games.

5.2 Localization Consumption Behavior

The second section of the questionnaire was directed at gaining insights into how consumer behavior is shaped around the localization practices and preferences revealed in the present study. This section encompassed such areas as age ratings, proper culturalization attitudes, and quality perceptions.

5.2.1 Age Rating

As already mentioned, the age rating system used in Iran is ESRA. Participants were required to provide information regarding how heedful they are of the age rating of video games prior to making their purchase (or free download). Note that only the age ratings of video games were taken into account, since movies are not distributed with explicit age ratings on Iranian streaming platforms (e.g., Filimo). The majority of the participants (62.6%) were considerate of the age ratings assigned to localized video games prior to their consumption of the product, while only 15.3% disregarded such information. No significant differences were observed in terms of age and gaming habits. In terms of gender, where significant differences were observed ($H = 11.782, p = 0.003$), female respondents were suggested to be more heedful of such information ($M = 3.81$) compared to male respondents ($M = 3.14$).

5.2.2 Proper Censorship Attitudes

Proper censorship here means if the cultural aspects of localization are carried out neatly and covertly in a way that users would not recognize the potential occurrence of any modifications. Table 9 provides the respective descriptive statistics.

Table 9. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Proper Censorship Attitudes in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
15) I would play video games that are properly censored.	18.2%	14.4%	34.4%	27.3%	5.7%
16) I would watch movies that are properly censored.	26.8%	19.6%	26.3%	22.5%	4.8%

In this regard, over one-third of the respondents were undecided regarding video games (34.4%). A bit less than one-third (strongly) disagreed with the consumption of covertly censored video games (32.6%), while another one-third expressed support for properly culturalized video games. Regarding movies, around half of the respondents argued against the consumption of products that are even properly culturalized (46.4%), while 27.3% expressed a preference for the consumption of such products. No significant differences were observed between participants in terms of age.

In terms of gender, it was revealed that significant differences existed between male and female respondents for video games ($H = 12.893, p = 0.002$) and movies ($H = 7.378, p = 0.025$). While male respondents were more negative regarding the consumption of properly culturalized video games ($M = 2.35$) and movies ($M = 2.72$), female

respondents expressed a more positive attitude in this regard for video games ($M = 3.06$) and movies ($M = 2.74$).

We also found players' gaming habits to be impactful on how they view properly culturalized video games ($H = 13.399$, $p = 0.004$). Non-players and hardcore players differed significantly in this regard ($H = 44.469$, $p = 0.001$). Non-players were more positive regarding the consumption of properly culturalized video games ($M = 3.04$) and movies ($M = 2.69$) compared to hardcore players ($M = 2.08$ and $M = 2.04$, respectively).

5.2.3 Quality Perceptions

Lastly, we were interested in how users' quality perceptions are affected by censorship and culturalization practices. In this vein, we concluded our questionnaire with two items addressing this issue, the descriptive information for which is provided in Table 10.

Table 10. *The Frequency of Participants' Preferences Regarding Quality Perceptions in Cultural Localization.*

Items	CD	D	U	A	CA
17) In my opinion, censorship negatively affects the quality of localized video games.	3.3%	14.8%	27.3%	26.8%	27.8%
18) In my opinion, censorship negatively affects the quality of localized movies	4.3%	11.5%	23%	25.8%	35.4%

Per Table 10, it could be concluded that the majority of the respondents viewed censorship negatively in video games (54.6%) and even more so in movies (61.2%). Only a very small percentage of the respondents viewed censorship positively. This unanimously negative view is reflected in the absence of any significant differences across different age groups and gaming profiles. However, significant differences were established between participants with different gender profiles ($H = 22.714$, $p = 0.001$). Overall, female respondents had a more positive perception of the interplay between quality and censorship in video games ($M = 3.39$) and movies ($M = 3.55$) compared to men ($M = 4.18$ and $M = 4.29$, respectively), although, as evident, neither of the two groups perceived censorship in a positive light.

5.3 Correlations between Players' [Interactive] Multimedia Products

In an attempt to answer the final research question, we conducted Spearman's correlational analysis to identify potential correlations between (non)players' culturalization preferences regarding (interactive) multimedia products. The results of Spearman's correlational analysis are provided in Table 11.

Table 11. *Spearman's Correlational Analysis Results.*

Item	GLP	MP
GLP	---	.960**
MP		---

** $p < .01$. GLP: Game localization preferences; MP: Movie preferences

Per Table 11, it was revealed that strong correlations between the participants' game localization preferences and their preferences for how non-interactive multimedia products need to be handled. In other words, we revealed that, in the case of our research, participants tend to transfer their preferences in one digital milieu to another.

6 Discussion

The concern of the present study was to identify Persian-speaking players' preferences regarding the cultural localization of video games. Additionally, we sought to explore possible correlations between players' culturalization preferences in the context of video games and movies. Drawing on the data gathered from a total sample of 209 Persian consumers of (non)interactive digital products, insights were obtained regarding (non)players' culturalization preferences in terms of religious issues (dress codes, inter-character intimacy, alcoholic references, and female dance), socio-cultural issues (violence and foul language), and socio-political references (meta-references to Iran).

Our findings most notably point to the impact of gender differences on how (non)players' preferences are shaped with respect to the culturalization practices employed for the localization of (non)interactive multimedia content. In general, female respondents evinced a more conservative approach regarding the depiction of female dress codes and dancing, inter-character intimacy, and alcoholic content. These findings point to the established conservative nature of women regardless of their religious beliefs (Mercer and Kohn 1979). The idea that religious beliefs might not fully account for female sexual conservatism points to the possible role of sexual disgust (Kubinski et al. 2018), which is suggested to impact vocational and affective decisions (Al-Shawaf et al. 2018).

Having touched upon the potential impact of gender differences in culturalization, we also provided evidence for the role of age-group differences. Notably, there were differences between dress-code and inter-character intimacy preferences across the age groups of 18–19 and 20–29 in non-interactive contexts. These differences could be accounted for by the more pronounced role of religiosity among adolescents compared to older age groups (Aalsma et al. 2013). Additionally, these differences could be approached more carefully given the greater exposure of Iranian players aged 20–29 to video games. Indeed, as published in the latest report of the Digital Games Research Center of Iran (DIREC), the average age of video game players in Iran is 23 years (DIREC 2021). Thus, having more experience interacting with video games could contribute to the formation of more refined preferences regarding the culturalization practices employed in video games.

Similarly, the same gender differences were observed between men and women in terms of the depiction of alcohol. As a country with strict measures against alcohol consumption, it should come as no surprise that female participants preferred the filtering out of alcoholic depictions. This could also be approached from the perspective that women tend to be less liberal in their approach toward alcohol consumption, as evidenced in a case study in Poland (Podstawski et al. 2019).

One of the areas where content modification was more favored by the participants had to do with foul language. This could be explained by the fact that foul language is generally considered inappropriate in the cultural and religious values of Iran (Floor 2015). Yet, our results point to significant differences in this respect across different age and gender groups. Most notably, the stronger preference of female participants for the modification of foul language usage could be attributed to the idea that men tend to resort to foul language and exhibit aggressive behaviors more often than women (Güvendir 2015).

Lastly in this regard, we addressed socio-political references concerning whether negative references to Iran should be censored. This category suggested some alignment between the actual culturalization practices that are in place for movies and video games (Pakar and Khoshsaligheh 2022; Zoraqi and Mousavi 2024), where the majority of the participants were in favor of modifying negative representations and mentions of Iran.

The last point of interest in our research lay in how the consumption of Persian culturally localized products is shaped by such culturally embedded considerations as local rating systems (ESRA in our case). Our findings point to the fact that Persian audiences tend to rely more on the age ratings assigned to localized video games and movies. This is not in line with the preferences of users in other locales (e.g., Australia),

where it has been suggested that they tend to rely more on fan communities and Twitch streams to obtain the information they need.

The relatively high number of undecided responses (20–30% across items such as dress codes, violence, and dancing) likely reflects participants' ambivalence toward complex cultural localization issues, where personal media habits clash with normative expectations, rather than indifference. This is particularly true among casual consumers lacking firm stances. This indecision underscores nuanced preferences and warrants future qualitative exploration in GTUR.

As it stands with the current culturalization practices in video games, where enjoyment is suggested to occupy a secondary position to rapid market release in the Persian market (Zoraqi and Mousavi 2024), we provided evidence for how the existing practices have led to distrust among users. In this vein, there were apathetic attitudes toward proper culturalization and negative quality perceptions regarding the use of censorship as a mechanism for ensuring cultural suitability. This suggests that while certain modifications are welcomed by users (e.g., socio-political references), others are not considered equally favorable (e.g., religious issues).

It is worth mentioning that the perceptions of the participants in our study must be viewed in terms of a scale and not as absolute values. Furthermore, our findings are not generalizable, and further large-scale studies adopting a more detailed approach to the various constructs introduced in this research are required. Disproportionate response rates, primarily from females (73%) and younger participants (18–29 years: 90%), along with the low number of hardcore gamers (12%), may limit generalizability to broader Persian media consumers, potentially skewing findings toward more conservative preferences regarding censorship.

7 Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to understand Persian audiences' preferences regarding the culturalization practices of (non)interactive multimedia products. Additionally, we sought to address the interplay between censorship as a mechanism for ensuring cultural suitability and quality perceptions among Persian audiences. Our findings highlight a lack of agreement between existing culturalization practices and audience preferences. Additionally, we highlighted the importance of a more nuanced approach to user profiles, as gender, age, and experience levels were revealed to introduce different opinions in certain regards. The importance of this consideration is further emphasized given the existing correlations between audience preferences in the context of video games and movies. Thus, our study provides both practical and pedagogical implications for the localization market by offering insights into the role of demographic variables as well as the particular socio-cultural contexts in which the

Zoraqi, Amir Arsalan and Mousavi, Movahede Sadat. 2025. Audience and player preferences regarding the cultural localization of (non)interactive multimedia products in Iran. In: L10N Journal. 2(4), pp. 101-127.

task of multimedia localization is carried out (in our case, Iran). Additionally, such user-oriented perspectives gained in our study could complement other studies (e.g., Tondello et al. 2018) addressing the role of user preferences in shaping gaming experiences.

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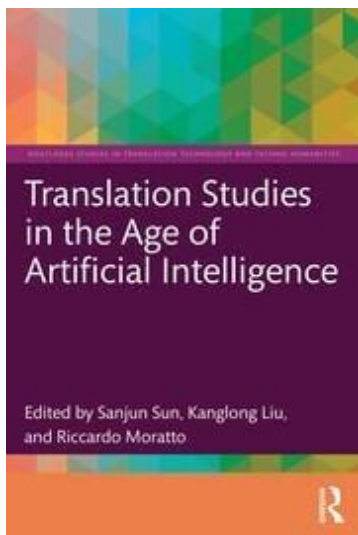
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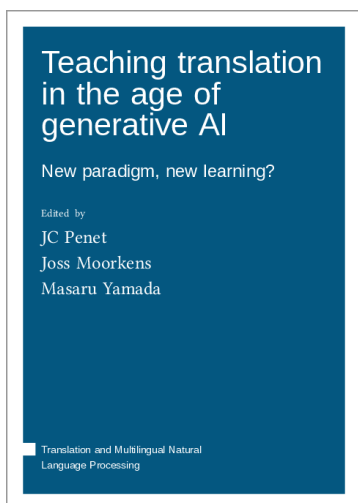
Final Variable

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 magazines that game localization researchers might find useful.



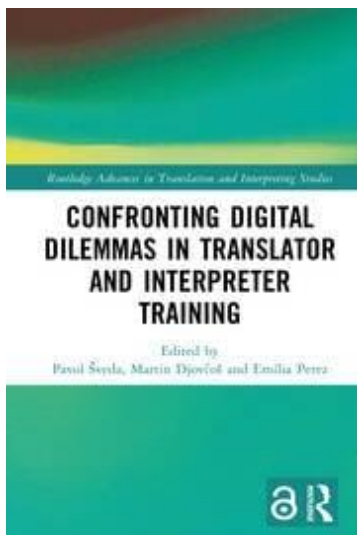
Translation Studies in the Age of Artificial Intelligence (2025), edited by Sanjun Sun, Kanglong Liu, and Riccardo Moratto, is a comprehensive collection that explores the profound paradigm shift in the translation landscape caused by artificial intelligence (AI), specifically Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT. The volume systematically examines the impact of AI across technical, pedagogical, and ethical dimensions, bridging the gap between theoretical research and professional practice. Chapter 3, authored by Nick Lambson and Lintao Han, examines how AI is fundamentally reshaping the localization industry – the process of adapting products for foreign markets through linguistic, cultural, and technical adjustments.

<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003482369-4/localization-ai-era-nick-lambson-lintao-han>



Teaching Translation in the Age of Generative AI: New Paradigm, New Learning? (2026), edited by JC Penet, Joss Moorkens, and Masaru Yamada, provides a comprehensive exploration of how generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has acted as a major disruptor in the translation industry and translator education since the launch of ChatGPT in 2022. The book is structured into three parts that address new skills and competences, new knowledge, and new teaching approaches necessitated by this "new paradigm". Its primary goal is to empower educators and students to navigate the uncharted territory of GenAI in a way that is ethical, sustainable, and human-centered.

<https://langsci-press.org/catalog/book/520>



Confronting Digital Dilemmas in Translator and Interpreter Training (2025) edited by Pavol Šveda, Martin Djovčoš and Emília Perez, examines how new technologies, including artificial intelligence, are reshaping training practices, professional competences and educational priorities. The book is organized into three parts focusing on theoretical foundations and pedagogical innovation, the integration of technology into professional practice, and the social and ethical implications of these developments. By foregrounding the complex relationship between technological change and human expertise, the collection offers a timely point of reference for educators, researchers and students concerned with the future of translator and interpreter training.

<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9781003562535/confronting-digital-dilemmas-translator-interpreter-training-pavol-%C5%A1veda-martin-djov%C4%8Do%C5%A1-em%C3%ADlia-perez>

