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PECULARITIES OF VIDEO GAMES RENDERING INTO UKRAINIAN (BASED ON THE LOCALIZATION OF “BALDUR’S GATE 3”)

Localization has become a widespread phenomenon over the past few years due to growing interest in video games and developers' pursuit of increased sales by reaching foreign markets. However, despite the existing demand, there are misunderstandings about this process, as people are unfamiliar with the concept of localization, how it differs from translation, how it is actually carried out, and the factors that determine the use of specific translation strategies.

The aim of the research was to define the very concept of “video game localization” and its main characteristics, describe the challenges that arise during this process, analyze the issues that influence the choice of translation strategies in specific selected cases, and classify the most common strategies used during this process to identify the distinctive features of Ukrainian video game localization.

The research analyzed the main translation strategies and transformations, using examples from the Ukrainian localization of names for creatures, plants, locations, spells, and weapons, which also constitute quasi-realities in the fictional world of the video game “Baldur’s Gate 3”.

Methods of research used during the study include general scientific and research methods: different types of analysis, induction, deduction, comparative analysis of texts and their translations, analysis of transformations and context, to identify and compare the phenomena in the original and translated texts, and to determine the translation strategies.

The results of the research reveal that the primary strategy used by translators when localizing video games is, specifically, foreignization in cases involving fantasy elements. These results demonstrate that players' claims that Ukrainian video game localizations are inadequate due to excessive reliance on the domestication strategy are incorrect, as this strategy applies only to a few specific instances, not to the majority of a video game's textual elements.

Key words: localization, video games, in-game text, quasi-reality, stylistic features, translation strategies, translation transformations.

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ОСОБЛИВОСТІ УКРАЇНСЬКОГО ПЕРЕКЛАДУ ВІДЕОІГОР (НА МАТЕРІАЛІ ЛОКАЛІЗАЦІЇ ВІДЕОГРИ «BALDUR’S GATE 3»)

Локалізація стала важливим явищем за останні кілька років через зростання зацікавленості людей у відеоіграх та бажання розробників збільшити свої прибутки завдяки виходу на іноземні ринки. Втім, незважаючи на

дійсний попит, існують певні непорозуміння щодо цього процесу, оскільки люди не ознайомлені з явищем локалізації, його відмінностями від перекладу, а також із тим, як саме створюється локалізація і чим зумовлене використання певних перекладацьких стратегій.

Метою дослідження було охарактеризувати саме поняття «локалізація відеоігор» та основні характеристики, описати перешкоди, які виникають під час цього процесу, а також проаналізувати загальні явища, які впливають на вибір перекладацьких стратегій у певних обраних випадках, і класифікувати найпопулярніші стратегії та трансформації, що були використані, щоб визначити особливості української локалізації відеоігор.

Під час дослідження було проаналізовано основні перекладацькі стратегії та трансформації на прикладах української локалізації назв істот, рослин, топонімів, заклинань і зброї, які є квазі-реаліями вигаданого світу відеогри «Baldur's Gate 3».

Для дослідження в цій роботі використовувалися загальні наукові та дослідницькі методи: різні види аналізу, індукція, дедукція, порівняльний аналіз текстів та їхніх перекладів, аналіз трансформацій і контексту з метою виявлення та порівняння явищ в оригінальних і перекладених текстах, а також визначення стратегій перекладу.

Результати дослідження демонструють, що основною стратегією перекладачів під час локалізації відеогри є саме фореїзація у випадках, пов'язаних з фентезійними елементами, присутніми у відеогрі. Ці результати можуть бути використані для демонстрації того, що твердження гравців про те, що українська локалізація відеоігор є неякісною через надмірне застосування стратегії доместикації, є помилковими, оскільки ця стратегія стосується лише кількох конкретних випадків, а не більшої частини текстових елементів відеоігор, які були проаналізовані під час дослідження.

Ключові слова: локалізація, відеоігри, внутрішньоігровий текст, квазіреалія, стилістичні особливості, стратегії перекладу, перекладацькі трансформації.

Introduction. Video games are growing in popularity and becoming a favorite form of entertainment for many people around the world. However, in Ukraine, the localization industry began to develop later than in other countries because game developers and publishers considered it unprofitable.

Analysis of studies. Researchers from various countries have studied the peculiarities of video game localization, and the following are among the main topics examined: definition of video game localization (Mangiron C., O'Hagan M.), challenges in the translation of video games (Bernal-Merino M. A.), challenges in Ukrainian localization (Bohdan O., Bohdan Y.), localization in the context of translation studies (Kanevska O. B., Bilyi I. V.), localization as a part of translation (Mazur O., Kuchiv S.), etc.

The aim. The aim of this study is to analyze the concept of localization, examine the main translation challenges that arise in video game localization, and explore the translation strategies and transformations most commonly used in this context. In accordance with the research aim, a set of tasks has been identified:

- to define the concept of localization and distinguish it from translation;
- to examine the characteristics of video games and the elements subject to localization in order to identify the main challenges;
- identify the main translation strategies and transformations during the localization of video games;

The object of the paper is the peculiarities of video games localization.

Results and discussion. Most people understand the term “video game localization” to mean simply “translation of video games,” since in both cases,

information is transferred from the source language to the target language.

O'Hagan, in her publication, provides a clear definition of game localization as “a set of procedures involved in adjusting games technically, linguistically, and culturally to a given market in order to distribute them in territories other than their countries of origin” (O'Hagan, Mangiron, 2013: 747).

According to the conclusions of Ukrainian scientist Olena Mazur, localization is an interdisciplinary phenomenon that is part of the globalization process and involves adapting a product to a specific environment (Mazur, Kuchiv, 2021: 92).

Also video games can vary widely, from the stories they tell to the gameplay they involve to the ways they relate to historical events and popular culture. This requires translators to possess knowledge of all of these fields to produce an adequate translation.

Another important factor that influences video game localization is the market and the audience. Translators can adjust certain names or phrases during localization to reduce the risk of fan dissatisfaction and, consequently, a potential drop in revenue.

However, most modifications are actually the result of censorship. For example, in East Asian countries, aside from issues related to sociopolitical issues, the most popular reason for censorship is LGBTQ+ themes, as same-sex relationships are illegal in these countries.

The Ukrainian localization of “Baldur's Gate 3” sparked a huge reaction among gamers, as it was the first time a world-famous game was released with a Ukrainian localization at launch. The game was localized by the team “The SBT Localization”, which is a well-known group among Ukrainian gamers.

“Baldur’s Gate 3” is the latest installment in the series of the same name and is set in the Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) Forgotten Realms setting. This world is a fictional realm where magic exists alongside various races and classes. Furthermore, as in any fictional setting, these worlds have their own realities, shaped by the author's culture, language, and phenomena.

According to Oleksandr Rebriy, quasi-reality is a lexical unit denoting objects created by the author's imagination to characterize the fictional world in which the events depicted occur (Rebriy, 2012: 182).

In the world of Forgotten Realms, there are many races that are unique to the D&D universe and therefore do not have a single, established translation, unlike other popular fantasy races.

For example, the translators replaced the name of the race “dragonborn” with the word “драконичі.” The translators retained the word's stem, “dragon,” and translated it as the Ukrainian equivalent “дракон,” without altering its meaning. Also, the translators decided to apply a domestication strategy to the second part, “-born,” and used the suffix “-ич,” which indicates belonging to a particular kind. The head of the “SBT Localization” also explained that other options, such as “драконородні” and “драконороджені,” were considered too long due to the limited space for text in the game (“Baldur’s Gate 3”).

There are also cases, such as “githyanki,” a species name that has been transliterated into Ukrainian because they communicate in their own fictional language, in which the name of their race translates as “followers of Gith”.

After analyzing which transformations were most frequently used in the translation of creature and plant names, the following can be concluded. The most common transformation was transcoding, accounting for 30% of all translations. In second place is transcreation, which was also most frequently applied to creatures than plant names, accounting for 28%. Literal translation was used in 26% of cases, most often in plant names. Contextual substitution was employed the least, for only 16%.

Geographical names also play an important role in the game world, as they are essential for players to navigate the map. Like other names, they carry a meaning that can reveal information about a location even before players set foot there.

One of the key locations in the game is “Sunlit Wetlands”. This name is associated with something positive, even though “wetlands” means “swampy or marshy land”, but it's not actually a swamp. In Ukrainian, it translates to “водно-болотні угіддя,” but this name is scientific and is not suitable for the context. As the story unfolds, it turns out that this is actually not a pleasant

place, but a “Putrid Bog”. So one of the translators' tasks was to make it sound appealing to the target audience, because the player must be willing to explore the area, and then be frightened when the truth is revealed. Therefore, using a transcreation, the translators replaced the part that alluded to a swamp with “улоговина”. The adjective “sunlit” was translated as “сонячна.”

There are also other examples of strategies employed. For instance, “Crèche Y’llek” was transliterated in the Ukrainian localization, indicating that the translators used the foreignization strategy. According to the Oxford Dictionary, “Crèche” is a place where babies and young children are looked after (Oxford Paperback Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2007: 207). Since this word is used in the game by only one race, the translators translated it in order to highlight this cultural distinction. “Y’llek” has no known origin, and its meaning is a mystery. Therefore, this word was simply transcoded, resulting in “Креш Й’ллік” in the Ukrainian localization.

Additionally, after compiling a sample of various location names from the game, the following data was obtained. Literal translation was the most common transformation, accounting for 58% of the translations. In second place is contextual substitution, with 25% of the translations. Then there is transcreation, which accounts for 9% of the translations. The least used translation transformation was transcoding, accounting for 8% of cases.

Weapons are a very important part of the game, as they directly affect gameplay. Their names may be simple, merely indicating the specific type, but they can refer to certain characteristics of the weapon, or who it belongs to (O’Hagan, 2015: 117).

For example, the translation of the “Staff of Crones”. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a “crone” is an ugly old woman (Oxford Paperback Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2007: 210). In Ukrainian culture, there is no concept equivalent to “crone,” and the closest term is “відьма” (“a witch”). Therefore, the translators rendered the name of this weapon as “відьомський посох” so that Ukrainian players could understand exactly where this staff comes from and to whom it belongs.

However, there are also exceptions. For example, the name “Markoheshkir” was transliterated because it has no known meaning, and it is unclear which in-game language it comes from. For this reason, the translators opted for a foreignization strategy, which is why it appears as “Маркогешкір” in the Ukrainian localization.

After analyzing the various names of weapons, the following conclusions can be drawn. Literal translation is the most common, accounting for 51%. Contextual substitution was used in 23% of cases, while transcreation accounted for 19%. Transcoding was used the least, accounting for only 7% of all cases.

Another important part of this game is spells. Some of them consist of just a single word, and therefore, most of these spells are usually translated literally. For example, spells such as “Blight,” “Aid,” “Resistance,” and “Friends” were translated as follows: “Тниль,” “Поміч,” “Опір,” “Друзі.” However, there are isolated cases where a translator cannot use a literal translation of a name. For example, the spell “Shillelagh,” whose name derives from the Irish word for a stick and comes from the words ‘sail’ and ‘éille,’ meaning ‘willow,’ and ‘leash’ originally” (What is a Shillelagh). This spell imbues a weapon with the power of nature. For Ukrainian players, this concept is very foreign, unlike for English-speaking players, so the translators used a strategy of domestication and translated the name as “Тирлига”.

Another group of spells that can be identified consists of those formed by an adjective and a noun. These are also typically translated literally. For example, spells such as “Torn Whip,” “Stinking Cloud,” and “Insect Plague,” which were translated as “Терновий батіг,” “Смердюча хмара,” “Комашина чума.”

The conclusions regarding the translation of spells, the most commonly employed translation transformation was literal translation, accounting for 72% of cases. Then comes contextual substitution, which was used to translate 18% of spells. Transcreation was used only 8% of the time. Transcoding was used the least, accounting for 2% of the total.

Conclusions. In Ukraine, the localization industry began to develop even later than in other countries, as it was considered unprofitable. As a result, there is no common understanding of what localization actually means, which is why translators often face negative reactions.

The research analyzed the main factors influencing localization. It was also important to identify the specific strategies and transformations used in video game localization to understand which are most commonly employed.

In general, video games have become an integral part of many people’s lives, so understanding the concept of localization is now more important than ever. However, various challenges and peculiarities must be taken into account during localization, as they significantly impact the process.

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