

WE ARE ALL EQUAL IN THE GAMING WORLD

An observation-based study of video game players' perception of localisation



Image: <http://www.allyourbasearebelongtous.com/>

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ABSTRACT

Localisation is a complicated process involving cultural, technical and linguistic alterations of a source product. Video games are not “translated” as literary works are, for instance, but localised – this process includes adapting them to a new locale so that they can be successfully sold, marketed and enjoyed there. When it is done inaccurately, localisation prevents players from playing a video game to the fullest, as it obstructs interaction. Furthermore, this issue often extends to communication between individual players engaged in online multiplayer. Given that localisation is highly overlooked in academics, this study aims to answer the following research question: how do video game players identify localisation in online multiplayer titles? Additionally, it also proposes a sub-research question: how do players motivate their preference for localised video games manufactured in countries other than their own? To answer these two questions, the project made use of participant observation combined with semi-structured interviews, during which selected small teams of gamers played chosen online multiplayer games (of different genres, e.g. multiplayer online battle arena and first-person shooter). The data gathered was subsequently subjected to thematic analysis. It was discovered that players have expectations of localisation strategies used in their played video games, regardless of making a distinction between “translation” and “localisation” procedures. Participants assessed them based on the general quality, faithfulness towards the original, and regularly mentioned an authentic “feeling” of the source being present or absent in the target product. Participants exposed to negative experiences with localisation preferred not to launch games in their native languages; others found reasons for doing so, such as being incapable of understanding the game entirely. Yet, the online gaming community was described to be internationalised and reliant on languages dominant in certain regions, such as English for Europe and North America. The all-embracing conclusion was that localisation provides gamers with options of playing in their preferred languages and thus it is a strategy of rendering them more accessible to everyone.

KEYWORDS: *Localisation, video games, online multiplayer, communication, gaming community*

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Preface

I would like to thank a few people who not only contributed to the completion of this thesis, but also supported me on the various stages of writing, stressing out and analysing:

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Globalisation of video games

Numerous goods from all over the globe have become inherent to popular culture – but how often does one wonder about their origins? The modern world has already gone far in successful and widespread internationalisation of entire cultures, providing a vast collection of items which can potentially be difficult to ascribe to a particular region. Multiple products have become so essential in everyday life that Coca Cola, for example, is no longer perceived as a unique American brand symbol, but as a typical soft drink consumed all over the globe. Accessibility of Hollywood-originated blockbusters does not discriminate amongst countries, since translation is so readily available. Whatever has the potential to make it big and can afford effective marketing – sells. Yet, the issue of comparing locally produced goods to those imported from abroad is ever present. A constant clash of values incoming from all directions, coupled with an overwhelming choice of options, serves to prove how important an issue globalisation has been and possibly will be for years to come.

Due to increased availability and technological development of the past decades, video games have become greatly embedded in popular culture and are now enjoyed in a global context. They are regularly made available for purchasing everywhere as soon as they appear on store shelves in Japan or United States, the game-changing market leaders.

Despite there being as many accounts on positive effects of gaming as there are negative, all arguments eventually lead to increased awareness about their importance and wide presence (Bomba, 2014, p. 49). Video gaming culture encompasses tastes, customs, meanings and identities (Shaw, 2010). Considering the size of international gaming communities which widely communicate in many languages, it should come as no surprise that many more people are enjoying this pastime immensely on all sorts of platforms, compared to the now obsolete stereotype of young male nerds (Shaw, 2010; Ipsos MediaCT, 2012; ESA, 2016; Ipsos Connect, 2017). The process of making these products, too, largely follows the logic of universal marketing; companies like the Japanese Nintendo, with its divisions established in different parts of the world, own global capital but operate in given regions (Arsenault & Castells, 2008), thus necessitating changes tailored to specific markets. As a result, modern blockbuster titles (AAA games) such as the American *Call of Duty* or *Grand Theft Auto* franchises, are produced, shipped and advertised at the same time in

multiple lingual versions (Bernal-Merino, 2006; Mangiron & O'Hagan, 2013), undergoing localisation for that purpose. As many as 10 languages for the target at the game's premiere may be included (Hasegawa, 2009, as cited in Mangiron & O'Hagan, 2013), an amount which greatly exceeds the old-fashioned practice of video games being made in and for one country only.

1.2. Localisation

“Localisation” comprises several processes – of cultural, linguistic and technical nature – which a video game undergoes to be adapted for sale in target countries (Carlson & Corliss, 2011; O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013, p.19). The term in fact encompasses “translation” (Munday, 2008, p. 191) and is strongly associated with the technological and business aspects of making software and video games. A common practice for software and other multimedia with different components such as spoken and written text, it requires some degree of engineering needed to transfer the translated parts back into the source product (Mangiron & O'Hagan, 2006; O'Hagan, 2009; Mandiberg, 2012). For instance, an interface originally coded for Japanese audiences needs to respond in the same manner to player input after being localised into English. All media products, however, are susceptible to even small changes of the source matter and hence often involve a complicated transformation procedure. The final product retailed in Europe might be released under the same name as its Asian equivalent, but as certain cultural references could result in a cross-cultural misunderstanding, it sees the removal and appropriation of content. Localisation potentially introduces such changes to the source code, leading to the creation of an entirely unique version of a given game. And yet, good localisation would not restrict proper reception in a target culture (Di Marco, 2007; Carlson & Corliss, 2011).

The idea behind localisation is simple: when a product is transformed successfully, it appears as if it was initially made in the target language. When translation fails, it gives the impression of being clunky and unnatural. It can be expanded to include cultural errors or, in the most extreme cases, complete disappearance of distinct cultural elements, such as in the case of the Japanese *Gyakuten Saiban* localised into *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*, where even the place of action became USA, rather than the original Japan (Mandiberg, 2012). At times, it constitutes a conversion, to a varying degree in terms of subtitling, dubbing and such, of an item positioned in one culture to another. Its implications are relevant, since

numerous products are altered to such an extent that it becomes impossible to discover their original roots. On the other hand, some may prefer to choose exotic values over their own (Consalvo, 2016): the most appealing may thus be the product which clearly is imported from a different place, possibly even left in its original language to preserve a feeling of authenticity. Yet, if one compares the original with the end result, a certain degree of bias always needs to be taken into consideration, because the agenda of different translators might be more or less overtly present (Carlson & Corliss, 2011).

Often the issue of source language to target language alterations involves long segments of code, as languages are inherently different – a good illustration would be the change of space required for Japanese or Mandarin Chinese to English or Italian and vice versa. Furthermore, localisation frequently goes hand in hand with marketing: video games need hardware to operate, thus any localisation work also needs to account for the fact that when the next big hit is released, it will need to be made available on Play Station 4, Xbox One and personal computers¹, which are altogether different systems. However, some releases only incorporate different language versions of a game on a platform, for instance Steam for PCs, whilst console data storage devices, such as DVDs, are constrained by their sizes. When games are released as exclusives for a given platform, the effort required decreases, but often so do profits. To compete, therefore, companies usually approach a more open strategy of multiplatform releases, and – increasingly nowadays – cross-platform play. This conceivably causes producers to anticipate hardware and software issues, thus they need to plan marketing and localising strategies in advance. In the long run, however, this enables them to maximise revenue.

When it comes to acquisition and consumption, a study conducted in 2005 (Wordbank, as cited in Schäler, 2008) found that as many as ¾ of all consumers capable of speaking fluent English still want to be communicated in their own language when making decisions related to purchase, while 61% are apprehensive of a brand with which they have previously experienced miscommunication due to bad translation. A more recent study (DePalma, Hedge, & Stewart, 2014) discovered that customers are anxious about spending their money when websites, products and customer service are unavailable in their mother tongue. Lastly, a projection for 2015 attributed 30-50% of global video games revenue to successful localisation (Chandler & Deming, 2011, p. xiii). Nonetheless, as explicated by the

¹ At least at the time of writing.

mention of English language, some dominant cultures are in the position to impose certain standards and limitations on others. Video games produced in the United States are first and foremost made in English to be sold on the local market; similarly, those manufactured in Japan are prepared specifically for that public. Europe often embraces a standard set, FIGS (French, Italian, German, Spanish), based on market similarities. Correspondingly, the Asian market is often treated as a whole, especially when comparing with North America, Europe and Australia, despite countless linguistic differences. Consequently, all types of popular media products, not only video games, see a discrepancy between the original and the target often regardless of existing translation in the form of subtitling or dubbing.

Translation and localisation always involve some elements of the source culture being lost when reiterated. Jokes sound less funny; gestures can be misunderstood; a simple item such as a Play Station controller needs remapping because of the “O” and “X” symbols carrying different contextual meanings in the West and in the East (O’Hagan & Mangiron, 2013, p.115).

1.3. Research question and sub-question

Despite numerous video games being produced nowadays, localisation is certainly not an easy task. Adding localisation not only lengthens the process, but complicates it further, and no guaranteed success formula for it exists. Once the finished product lands on store shelves, gamers start playing and discussing – and its creator usually quickly learns of their reactions, especially since feedback is virtually instant. Considering such a relationship between a video game and its players, this project analyses what localisation (either successful or ineffective) entails and how it is perceived by the target audiences. Specifically, the goal of this thesis is to discover a definition of good localisation as seen through the eyes of those who play and thus need to understand and communicate with the game perfectly. The research question is as follows:

RQ: *How do video game players identify localisation in online multiplayer titles?*

The study focuses on multiplayer modes of play, which add another channel of communication – namely, between individual players. Whether cooperating or competing, online multiplayer games encompass a vast array of genres and distinct products. Because of their popularity and people’s engagement with titles such as *League of Legends* or *Counter-Strike*, they seem a mostly adequate type of games to be analysed in a modern context.

Contrary to single-player games often being reliant on storytelling and immersion, multiplayer games have been deemed especially relevant, given the degree of freedom of communication and interaction they provide.

To collect individual accounts of players, a qualitative method was used: more specifically, participant observation combined with short interviews. The data gathering process followed several recordings of gaming sessions in real time with the researcher spectating teams of players and asking them questions. These observations concentrated on video game players engaged and active in multinational gaming communities. Since localisation applies extensively to both single- and multiplayer modes, it can be narrowed down to whether a localised game is at all playable. In the case of multiplayer, it also becomes a question of communication between players who need to reach certain goals through cooperation or conflict. Such dynamics are thus interesting to analyse from a qualitative point of view, provided that gamers are to some extent aware of localisation as such.

The inclusion of a sub-question adds some depth to the issue of localisation being a technical and simultaneously cultural process needed to make a game accessible on international markets. As this research project is meant to study the reception of localised games, it is crucial to see how its importance is perceived beyond investment and industry aspects. The focus is thus placed on gameplay, meaning and the contexts of playing. Correspondingly, this study is aimed at seeking reasons behind the deliberate choice of gaming in a specific language – not necessarily one's mother tongue – and its evaluation. This sub-question is closely linked to the main goal of this study and is therefore meant to be a supplement in the process of evaluating players' response to localisation in video games. It is as follows:

Sub-RQ: How do players motivate their preference for localised video games manufactured in countries other than their own?

1.4. Relevance of localisation

Localisation yet seems a complicated process and a potential issue for marketing a product, despite its alleged regularity and implementation. Despite a change from a purely linguistics-focused to a much more functional cultural and technological approach

(Odacıoğlu & Köktürk, 2015), even university-level Translation Studies pay little attention to this process – as long as an altered product works in its function in the target language (Du, 2012). Guidebooks intended for localisers are mostly based on theory, as the topic itself is still rather novel in translation of multimedia (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013; Bernal-Merino, 2015), resulting in botched treatment of products and their underperformance which can ultimately lead to simultaneous losses of revenue and interest. Generally speaking, not only the necessary academic research is lacking in the field (O'Hagan, 2007, 2009), but so is training needed for translators to become adept at localising video games and other software. Given the high degree of gamification (Deterding, Khaled, Nacke, & Dixon, 2011) in the modern, digitalised age, the global video gaming market expanding enormously due to globalisation of media products, it is thus surprising to see that so many titles are still inaccessible to potential consumers. Finally, the whole issue should be considered from an international perspective – moving beyond language barriers helps to perceive the need for localisation at large. The whole process, after all, does not only concern source-to-target linguistic and cultural issues, but also exporting, marketing and selling of video games. Globalisation surely helps the business itself, yet properly done localisation would improve both the potential financial gains, and the quality and reception of the products.

1.5. Outline of the thesis

After a brief introduction to video game localisation, Chapter 2 provides an overview of existing research with a focus on a) participation and reception in gaming, b) the social side of playing video games, c) technicalities of localisation and its role in the study of translation, and d) how localised video games are sold across the globe. Chapter 3 gives an account of participants involved, software used, how the participant observation procedure was carried out, how the data was collected and analysed. Next, rich descriptions of data, including verbatim accounts, are presented in Chapter 4 and primarily analysed. In the closing chapter, the research question and sub-question are answered, and a final insight is provided. Furthermore, limitations of the project are elaborated upon, and the thesis ends with some recommendations for future localisation work.

Chapter 2: Theory and previous research

The following chapter introduces concepts crucial to the project in more detail. The first subsection discuss how video games are used, played, received and customised in regard to the uses and gratifications perspective and social shaping of technology. Secondly, the social aspect of gaming is outlined as opposed to single-player modes, given that this study focuses on online multiplayer. The next subsection provides an account of the different sides of localisation in terms of technical procedures, as well as the cultural and linguistic changes implemented in the process of localising. Next, a more business-oriented side is mentioned, and different game-making countries are compared. The final section provides a summary intended to link into Chapter 3 (methodology) and Chapter 4 (results).

2.1. Playing video games

What sets video games apart from other widespread media products? Academics have discussed the general approach towards gaming, players, reception and usage of video games in the context of media products consumed and possibly shaped by its audiences (Williams, 2005; Shaw, 2010; Corliss, 2011; Kahn & Williams, 2016). With a great focus on the effects of games on people, less attention is drawn to the choices made by those who play them (Williams, 2005). This medium, however, is unique due to its interactivity: it requires participation, attention and some reflexes to truly be enjoyed (Vorderer & Klimmt, 2003; Tan & Jansz, 2008). Games are now widespread, being present almost everywhere (Costales, 2012). What is perhaps the most significant, is the fact that video games increasingly require interaction (Gee, 2007), not only with artificial intelligence, but other human players. Those persons are much more than consumers of the medium; they participate and contribute to production (Shao, 2009) by developing relationships and establishing communities (Tan & Jansz, 2008; Neys et al., 2014); eventually the gaming experience transforms to encompass different sorts of attitudes and backgrounds, creating a gigantic patchwork. Understanding this as the foundation of video games' existence is thus a key aspect – one which can potentially hinder the entire experience, as communication between the game and the user is a necessity. Whilst this user-to-user aspect of playing video games used to be mainly linked to massively multiplayer online goliaths like *World of Warcraft* or simply enjoying the interactivity offered by a Wii console for up to four players

in the quiet of one's house, it has changed to include people at all stages of game making and receiving. The audiences – video game players – accordingly become involved in the creation of the product itself (Corliss, 2011; Huotari & Hamari, 2012).

2.1.1. Participation and reception in the gaming experience

Participation is progressively becoming an observable aspect of media usage (Livingstone, 2013), with the idea of “participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2006) playing a part in the industry at large: the interactivity of video games, too, is easily linked to the distinction between passiveness and action (Corliss, 2011; Park & Lee, 2012). According to the uses and gratifications perspective, one can make a distinction between passive and active receivers of media products (Shao, 2009). Merely engaging in a game may be considered consumption of media content; social interaction online becomes participation in turn, and customisation is linked to production (Jansz, Slot, Tol & Verstraeten, 2015). Time and effort invested into these activities obviously differ. In other words, the act of playing video games may be as simple as launching a game and enjoying some time in a virtual fantasy world, yet it may as well involve persons taking the source code and modifying it to give the product a completely new dimension. Taking this assumption even further, players partake in the creation of video games by giving them value through playing (Gee, 2007; Huotari & Hamari, 2012), because a game’s basic function is only fully realised when there is interaction with the player (Jansz & Martens, 2005).

Localisation and video gaming are not only associated with interaction, however. The social shaping of technology perspective might be useful for evaluating reception in direct reference to this medium’s highly technical nature, as well as the impact innovation has had on it. The viewpoint itself aims to critically assess the influences of social, institutional, economic and cultural factors on innovation, the shape and consequences of technology itself. Alluding to a more pro-active, agenda-driven response to development, this viewpoint criticises technological determinism, instead focusing on a collective culture of technology (Williams & Edge, 1996; MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999; Bijker, 2009). In a broader context, this view can be applied to people giving meaning to technology – it is, after all, being improved and shaped by their needs. Bijker (2009) considers a “technological system” by differentiating broader assemblages from single artefacts (p. 66): this appears to be a good approximation of what video games constitute, given the presence of technical, sociological,

psychological, industrial and other such aspects of their creation and reception alike. The general “technological culture” (p. 72) is consequently the industrially sophisticated – participatory and shaped by individuals – society of today. Perhaps media users longed for more freedom in the consumption aspect of using their preferred products, and that consumption thus evolved into active participation for some and customisation for others.

The video games industry is far from being an isolated case of products manufactured and sent out with no feedback. For the purpose of this research project, it is vital to consider the aspect of consumers’ reception – or the group collectively called “players” due to the interactive nature of this medium (Vorderer & Klimmt, 2003; Shaw, 2010; O’Hagan & Mangiron, 2013; Neys, Jansz & Tan, 2014). As audiences shape their preferences for media products based on personal needs, those preferred media in turn reflect their social and psychological standards (Wu, Wang & Tsai, 2010). Thus, video games are made for a purpose, but – in line with uses and gratifications theory – they are simultaneously played for a certain goal. Contrary to a common belief of video games existing only “for fun”, like countless other media products (Vorderer, Klimmt, & Ritterfeld, 2004) they have been found to provide people with means of reducing stress, teaching and learning, and obtaining social gratifications (Sherry, Lucan, Greenberg & Lachlan, 2006; Tan & Jansz, 2008; Park & Lee, 2012). To many users, nevertheless, the entertaining factor is most important.

Finally, to give localisation a purpose, it should be considered within the context of active reception of media such as video games. Whilst translations and mods done by fans have always been present and widely discussed within fan culture (Jenkins, 2006; Goggin, 2011), another aspect which has not been emphasised extensively in research is the reception to localisation (O’Hagan & Mangiron, 2013). Three crucial factors are highlighted: revenue, feasibility and understandability. Both moneymaking and feasibility are reserved for the technical side of the industry and perhaps of much lesser concern for common users, but understandability is a crucial aspect which ties into translation proper. All these features ultimately assess the product’s reception or, more explicitly, how satisfied gamers are with the end product, especially in the target language. Failure to make a localised game comprehensible results in cases such as the infamous line “all your base are belong to us” from 1989’s *Zero Wing* becoming a meme (Carlson & Corliss, 2011): a single line of badly translated English text which has since given the game a cult-like status on the Internet. Considering how easy it has become to exchange commentaries and reviews on a global

scale (due to built-in feedback systems on online platforms), these responses are no longer kept within private spaces of individual users or game magazines and stores. Player experience is now a concern for businesses and other players alike (Corliss, 2011).

2.1.2. The social aspect of playing

One of the commonly established reasons for playing video is the option of enjoying them with other people (Sherry et al., 2006; Carlson & Corliss, 2011; Terlecki et al., 2011; Neys, Jansz & Tan, 2014; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2015). In Europe alone, a vast majority (ranging between 44% and 60% of all gamers in the sample) opts for playing online with others, rather than on their own (Ipsos MediaCT, 2012). In North America, it is as many as 54% of the gaming populace (ESA, 2016). Gamers want to be engaged in competitive or cooperative multiplayer modes; they want to feel connected to others and become a part of communities. The constantly rising popularity of MMO titles proves that well, as they manage to blend the social aspect well into competition and escapism and fantasy, leading to a thriving prevalence of bestselling online titles (Wu, Wang & Tsai, 2010; Lin, Lin & Jhan, 2015). Similarly, it creates an opportunity for meeting other, like-minded people (Jansz & Martens, 2005) – persons who enjoy the same titles or genres – which helps to reinforce self-esteem. Gamers in particular find themselves divergent from non-playing groups of people (Tan & Jansz, 2008; Shaw, 2010), which in more extreme cases could indicate an elite-like approach, as people begin identifying within a certain subculture interested in this hobby. Interestingly, however, there seems to persist a stigma of playing alone (Shaw, 2010), as compared to making this pastime an occasion for spending time with others, possibly arising from the fact that enjoying video games on a global scale is still perceived as an inferior activity in general.

A significant aspect of playing multiplayer in an online setting and a key theme of this research project, is communication. It usually is assumed that while players are engaged in a game, the messages they exchange are simply task-oriented in nature – however, this supposition undermines the entertainment and emotional values which such communication can also entail (Kahn & Williams, 2016). Video games always present some attainable goals (otherwise they are unplayable) which can be sorted based on what the players themselves want to achieve (Tan & Jansz, 2008). Here, the different motivations for playing games could be clashing between individual players, as they are likely to be similar, but not entirely

undistinguishable. Communication within a group can be disrupted, for instance, when some team members are playing for achievement, and others merely as a form of recreation.

Setting aside potential technical difficulties imposed by online gaming platforms, certain objectives should be communicated in a direct manner, preferably at the start of each gaming session, so that each and every individual's agenda is not overlooked.

Compared to single player modes where the immersion aspect appears to hold a central position, multiplayer titles often sacrifice that aspect, be it due to how a game itself is constructed or because of individuals' interference, in favour of a continuous feeling of interaction between players. In fact, modern video games tend to enforce an online playing mode, which is often inseparable multiplayer (Bernal-Merino, 2015). Habitual, "hardcore" gamers especially are found to value the social aspect along with a desire to gain expertise in the medium itself (Neys, Jansz & Tan, 2014). Many other motivators, however, are involved and possibly observable in multiplayer – honing own skills and progressing with achievements, for instance (Vorderer, Klimmt, & Ritterfeld, 2004; Yee, 2006; Jansz & Tanis, 2007). Consequently, norms of a group or society, exerted by peer pressure for instance, might also be influencing players to engage in multiplayer (Valkenburg, Peter, & Walther, 2016). Assuredly, these do not exclude one another, because players can sometimes only assess their skills against other people, who can reach similar or identical ability levels, as compared to AI-controlled, automatically programmed characters. Playing in such an environment naturally elicits some sort of response, such as when one feels optimistic and self-confident due to succeeding in a task and managing to gain the upper hand against an opponent (Vorderer & Klimmt, 2003).

2.2. Localisation

The practice of localisation does not have a long history, neither in the field of video games as cultural products, nor in Translation Studies. In fact, the early beginnings of the industry did not even account for full localisations of games in order to minimise costs (Schäler, 2008, p. 196). Because it has never been made distinctive within the context of studying globalisation (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013), the most common associations involve (literal) translation as is, especially when linked to media products. Similarly, translation is often taken for granted by unaware audiences who find it difficult to realise that any given product they are receiving had, in fact, been made in a foreign culture and adapted to suit

their tastes – the work performed by translators of different specialisations is undervalued when it is transparent, and critiqued when opaque. Thus, as technology in its infancy was a wonder, localisation was often regarded as a risky investment or a side-job undertaken by those who happened to have some time on their hands. There were no trained professionals, nor any widely available guidelines or strategies which anyone could refer to in order to localise better. While now it has become recognised as a branch of Translation Studies (Bernal-Merino, 2015), and of course the more global aspect of technology, it is conceivable that it has grown due to a more trivial – monetary – reason in general. A product changed to suit a target audience is likely to sell and provide profit.

In this section, localisation is described in reference to the technical, cultural and purely linguistic aspects which are involved in the process of translating a source product into a target. An overarching concept – skopos, the purpose of translation – is used to link strategies and approaches back to the participation and reception aspects of playing localised video games. Skopos on its own denotes what context a translation of a source (or in this framework: localisation) is placed, how it is meant to function in the target language and by extension, what decisions this entails (Nord, 2005, 2016). Moreover, it serves to show that “faithfulness” of the target is a tricky concept, not reliant on mere word-to-word equivalence (Du, 2012, p. 2190). Indeed, O’Hagan and Mangiron (2004, as cited in O’Hagan, 2009b) see entertainment as the skopos of video games localisation; and Costales (2012) values playability in that aspect, but smooth communication and gaming experience also need to be taken into account, given that the ultimate product needs much more than just translated text (O’Hagan, 2007).

2.2.1. Localisation: technicalities

Basing on the economic capability of a video games-making company, localisation can be summarised as the following four categories (Costales, 2012; O’Hagan & Mangiron, 2013):

- No localisation – only the original language is available, usually in the case of budget or indie titles developed by small studios or groups of individuals;
- Box and docs localisation – text on the packaging and in the manual is translated, but the game is left in its original language, this method is preferably chosen when games are sold in countries where the target audience has a good command of English;

- Partial localisation – text and other elements such as interface are translated, but voice-overs remain in the original language, although subtitles in the target language are frequently present;
- Full localisation – the costliest investment which involves a complete translation of in-game text, code and dubbing, typically available only for high-budget AAA titles.

Localisation is no easy task, and people working in this field often need both the translating and the programming skills to finish their work. Not only does it require translation and adaptation for specific locales, as it involves working with multimedia (audio, video, text), but similarly external procedures such as engineering and testing become obligatory (Schäler, 2008, p. 196; Carlson & Corliss, 2011; Costales, 2012). For instance, translating prose is typically performed with a word processor and possibly a computer-assisted tool (CAT); localising a video game may necessitate changing parts of the user interface or even graphics to incorporate changes. Video game localisation can also be associated with generally understood software localisation, as they are relevant for similar matter, but one major aspect sets them apart – video games are affective and interactive (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013). Video games only function if they are being used by a player who continually exchanges messages with them (Tan & Jansz, 2008) and this way they may cause the player to feel certain emotions (Sánchez, Vela, Simarro, & Padilla-Zea, 2012). In other words, software whose skopos is not entertainment, such as Microsoft Office, are predominantly designed to be utilised in an intuitive manner. Video games, on the other hand, need a plethora of factors working in consistency for players to be engaged. According to Mangiron and O'Hagan (2006), for this medium the purpose is “[...]to produce a target version that keeps the ‘look and feel’ of the original, yet passing itself off as the original” (p. 20). This way, whatever language they play in, all gamers should be able to experience the game on an equal level.

A person responsible for localisation needs to be acutely aware of what is happening within the game itself, working in respect to more than a textual layer of the translation, to be able to make it credible – this may be rendered impossible when a simultaneous release in multiple countries is scheduled and a localiser is unable to play the finished game while localising it. Typical translation process could involve strings of text, but with no audio-visual context, the result may turn out to be a failure. One of the earliest through, and successful, changes in localisation include *Pac-Man*, originally named *Puck-Man* after a “paku-paku” onomatopoeia (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013), the sound emitted by the titular character. This

seemingly little alteration did not yet include implementation of changes on a bigger scale, aside from rearrangement of layouts of the arcade machines. *Pac-Man* was born out of concern for the American audiences, as it would have been incredibly easy for them to reiterate “puck” into an obscene word by simply changing the first letter (O’Hagan & Mangiron, 2013). Cultural reception was vital enough at that time to include such changes – if yet small, already significant.

Different strategies are utilised in translating media products. Early studies reference the idea of “hybridisation” (Cintas & Sánchez, 2006; Di Marco, 2007) or “blending” (Thayer & Kolko, 2004): strategies for translating and releasing games in which domestic and alien elements would be combined to account for a greater whole – the final product, in this case a video game produced in one country and sold in another. O’Hagan and Mangiron (2013) discuss, for instance, a process of “transcreation” (p. 54) during which the target product becomes different from the original by the addition of content. They provide an illustration of *Super Mario Bros. 3*, where the game’s ending text was changed slightly to account for a recurring in-game theme². This extra humorous inclusion did not, however, change the game in terms of plot or mechanics. One could argue whether it was truly necessary or simply done on a whim – but more importantly, it was not disruptive. Conversely, translation by omission is a good example of disorderly alterations. When a translator decides to deliberately remove segments of text for whatever reason they see fit – such as inability to find an equivalent term – it frequently creates an overall different image. But perhaps it is a creative interference on a cultural level (Bernal-Merino, 2006), one which should not happen, because it forced an element only for the target audience into a product made in another culture. The implication here is that adaptation becomes a reinvention of the original – a different product. In the longer term, consequently, this implies that the localised or translated product will never be equal to the original, regardless of the effort on the translators’ side.

On the cultural aspect of localisation, video games (and most likely the culture itself) are also assessed on the grounds of decency and censorship. Religion, sexual innuendos, discrimination and the presence of alcohol are of concern in American localisation of Japanese games (O’Hagan, 2007); depiction of blood and Nazism are forbidden in Germany and in Australia (Consalvo, 2006; Mangiron, 2007). Well-thought localisation therefore needs

² “But our Princess is in another castle” added as a joke in the North American release, despite the original Japanese being just a “the end” text line.

to take these aspects into account, and hence the classification systems such as the USA-based Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) ratings come into play. Here, censorship provides a good example for the distinction between translation and localisation. In a video game, there might appear an item on screen – such as a mutilated body or a swastika symbol – which is only perceived visually, but not referred to in any text. It is then plausible that it would be removed or otherwise censored. Obviously, this entails a modification on a major scale, and would likely be frowned upon. Yet, in some cases, such a tactic could be considered acceptable: for instance, when bodies such as the aforementioned ESRB or Pan European Game Information (PEGI) are involved in assessing how a game is to be rated in the target country, and preserving the original content in would change its rating entirely (Di Marco, 2007).

2.2.2. Making and selling localised video games

Globalisation generally assumes not only a physical transfer of goods, but similarly standards, values, practices – aspects that make a culture exclusive. Through modern channels of communication enabled by means of fast transport and transmission, hybridisation becomes a normal occurrence. Especially in media usage, where individuals are subject to decision-making on a frequent basis (Anderson, 1983), the concept of distinctiveness may become contested as people are constantly bombarded by sources flowing in from different directions, both online and offline. Foreign influences start to dominate indigenous audiences who experience a bizarre mix of the old and the new, or the familiar and the foreign. Likewise, producers increasingly need to adapt to new ethics; often reshaping policies towards a specific audience, rather than a broader, global one (Jenkins, 2004). Yet, a product made for that audience may already have been subjected to some cross-cultural merging, as it slowly becomes impossible to disentangle the individual parts in a whole.

Just like innovations in technology and communication, video gaming tradition and practices have changed considerably in the past years. The beginnings of gaming in the 1970s saw a period of popularity of coin-operated arcade games, which players could learn to master easily despite possessing no or very little knowledge of English (Bernal-Merino, 2015) and despite those very games being produced mainly in English. Modern video games are far more demanding, however, and it is often impossible to adapt to rules in a newly

launched game, especially when the language of instruction differs from the player's mother tongue or another spoken and understood language. When communication between the player and the game is jeopardised, success of user experience, and in consequence the game itself, becomes threatened. However, with the abundance of games available nowadays, players often find themselves unrestrained by such factors. With platforms such as Valve's Steam providing support for multiple language versions – in terms of how the game unfolds, but also additional guides and forums – perhaps video games are becoming much more accessible.

Most would agree that in the field of video game production, Japan and the United States largely seem to continue being the spearhead (Consalvo, 2006; O'Hagan, 2009a). Japan has historically been recognised as the market leader and the motherland of giant companies such as Sony or Nintendo. Its distinct popular culture, particularly anime and manga which have become extensively widespread, attracts audiences due to the exoticness (Carlson & Corliss, 2011). Japan, however, relies on insular inclinations: while Japanese products are much welcome in the United States and Europe, it does not flow in the same manner for items incoming from abroad (Consalvo, 2009). Conversely, USA has gained considerable experience shipping their locally made products across the globe, be it larger-than-life blockbusters reminiscent of Hollywood, like *Battlefield*, or sandbox role-playing titles such as *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. The Western influence, however, particularly visible due to products incoming from North America to European countries, is closely linked with power division on the market itself. Perhaps owing to Americanisation of media products or cultural similarities in the Western world, in most cases it is safe to import an American creation and sell it locally, with or without some degree of cultural adaptation. Interestingly, it might not even be a question of marketing overseas: if a media product sells well in the USA, where it had been produced and marketed, profit from domestic sales is frequently sufficient to avoid drawbacks of shipping abroad (Hardy, 2014). Nevertheless, gamers in numerous smaller countries wait impatiently for those big American releases, as their native industries are yet developing in the field, are not inclined towards it or apprehensive towards such investments. Finally, there exist altogether different cases such as video games produced in Asia whose market has traditionally been much less susceptible to Western influences, resulting obviously in an altogether different form of popular culture and media products.

Japanese video games are a particularly interesting case, given how the linguistic and

cultural barrier does not hinder Western receivers from opting to play them. Localisation is certainly helping them to sell. Japanese games, television series and comics progressed from being exotic to much more common, yet a clash of cultural values between the source and the target may end in a massive misunderstanding. This, in turns, leads to obvious outcomes: firstly, a product selling badly; secondly, audiences unwilling to invest in Japanese products in the future. The result is sometimes a bizarrely localised cultural adaptation, such as *Fatal Frame/Project Zero* where the design of the scared, highschool uniform-clad girl protagonist was changed to an older, Caucasian-looking female, suitable for more local tastes (Di Marco, 2007); otherwise it is games designed to appeal to all audiences simultaneously, like the *Devil May Cry* or *Metal Gear Solid* series. In yet more extreme cases, it involves games such as the *Animal Crossing* series where the version adapted for North America had been successfully re-introduced to the original Japanese market with previously localised content³, or *Kingdom Hearts Final Mix* where English voice-overs were adapted to Japanese subtitles to be sold for a second time in Japan (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013).

Europe is yet a rather small player when compared to Japan and North America, but it does have a large base of video game enthusiasts. The Nordic countries, Germany, Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Poland and Belgium in particular score very high on frequencies of playing, with Czech Republic, Poland and the Netherlands leading in terms of online play with other people (Ipsos MediaCT, 2012). Furthermore, on the business-sided end, Teipen (2008) discusses the state of the video game-making industry with a reference to Sweden, Poland and Germany – and observes that perhaps progress is stalled by the very size of this market, despite flexibility and skilled workforce. Germany is similar in this aspect to the United States, as it undertakes a smaller risk by selling video games locally (in German as well) because the domestic market is big enough to profit.

Ultimately, when cultural adaptation in localisation meets business needs, one should consider internationalisation and globalisation. In some cases, companies operating on a multinational scale, such as Electronic Arts, employ localisation strategies to exercise control over their games which are sold globally. Certain elements are purposely designed to be more universal, and others specifically exotic (Lin, 2006, as cited in O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013, p. 36). Such approach used in business resembles strategies recognised as

³ Accordingly, the Japanese branch of Nintendo was impressed with the American localisation and hence released an update containing the America-only content for the original game (http://animalcrossing.wikia.com/wiki/D%C5%8Dbutsu_no_Mori_e%2B)

domestication and foreignisation in Translation Studies (Myskja, 2013). The main difference to this aspect, which sets it apart from older practices, is the timing and control over these procedures, as translation has ceased to be perceived as a necessary evil. If a video game is successfully “internationalised” at the development stage, the process of localising it will be nearly seamless (Chandler, 2005, as cited in O’Hagan & Mangiron, 2013, p. 90; Bernal-Merino, 2006). BioWare (a subsidiary of Electronic Arts) and Lionhead Studios (a subsidiary of Microsoft Game Studios), are a good clarifying case of what practices can help when a big project is involved (O’Hagan & Mangiron, 2013). For their respective game series, *Mass Effect* and *Fable*, directories containing all information on the characters are made available to translators working on localisation. Keeping in mind the fact that rarely does one individual work on a project, this helps a translating team preserve consistency irrespective of whether they are working simultaneously in time and space. Furthermore, on the purely technical side, as *Mass Effect* titles are RPGs, they involve countless dialogue options to choose from in virtually all conversations which the characters have in-game. Because choosing one initially can lead to a wholly different outcome at the end of the conversation or have no impact whatsoever, all such selections must be simultaneously analysed and localised. BioWare studio thus uses a previewer tool which lets the translator understand context when working on text segments. In addition, it offers information on more trivial aspects, such as the gender of the character speaking, which the translator may not have been familiar with originally.

2.3. Conclusion

Localisation has come to play a great part in marketing and selling of products on a global scale, even if its value is still being undermined in this aspect. Perhaps such approaches will turn out to be more widespread in the years to come, with the video gaming industry itself expanding enormously, and more countries joining its creative and corporate sides. Releasing games only in English and Japanese is no longer the cost-reducing future of the video games industry, since far too many companies operate on a global scale and want to cater to as big an audience as possible (Bernal-Merino, 2015). Perhaps localisation will expand to include more than just a common FIGS language package, as the importance of video games is understood in smaller and less significant economically countries.

As this research project focuses on players who particularly enjoy online

multiplayers, the game-player and the player-player relations discussed in this chapter are to be explicitly described and analysed. Thus, not only is the exchange of message between individual players in a team necessary, but so is the communication required for a video game to operate in the first place. In this aspect, localisation can be perceived as a bridge, because it allows both these forms of communication when done properly.

Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter provides a description of the chosen qualitative research method – participant observation combined with semi-structured interviews – supported by an explanation of what motivated this approach. Next, a list of criteria for participant recruitment and a general account of participants involved is provided. The last two sections describe the data collection process, and how the results presented in Chapter 4 were analysed. Final remarks include an assessment of validity, reliability and the role of the researcher in this project.

3.1. Research design

The primary method chosen for this project was participant observation: it concentrated on players engaged with video games. Qualitative methods were chosen in this study to account for detailed answers from participants in order to provide accounts on an individual level, as opposed to bigger, generalisable groups (Williams, 2005). The researcher accompanied participants in an online setting, albeit without playing the games herself. To enable that, a few platforms were utilised. The first table lists all software involved in the course of data gathering, excluding Open Broadcaster Software Studio which was only used by the researcher to record video and audio feeds⁴:

Base gaming platform (software used to launch the game itself)	Games played on the platform	Streaming and recording software used in the process (in-house or 3rd party platform)
Steam	<i>Left 4 Dead 2, Counter- Strike: Global Offensive, Rocket League</i>	Steam, Discord, Facebook
Battle.net	<i>Overwatch, Hearthstone</i>	Battle.net, Discord, Facebook, Twitch
Hi-Rez launcher	<i>Smite</i>	Discord
LoL client	<i>League of Legends</i>	Discord, TeamSpeak

Table 1. List of software used in the study

⁴ Naturally, the recordings were made locally on the researcher's hardware, thus they are relatively not as important as the software used to communicate.

The other table provides a short summary of all games played:

Title	Genre	Brief description
<i>Left 4 Dead 2</i>	First-person shooter, survival horror	Team-based adventure through a zombie-infested dystopian world, heavily reliant on cooperation. Incorporates multiple game modes, including a single player (where the other characters are AI-controlled). Primarily player-versus-environment.
<i>Hearthstone</i>	Collectible digital card game	Originally based on the popular online role-playing title <i>World of Warcraft</i> , <i>Hearthstone</i> lets players create decks of collectible cards which they can then test against AI-controlled characters or other people. 1-on-1 game.
<i>Overwatch</i>	First-person shooter	A mix of fantasy and sci-fi, <i>Overwatch</i> takes place in the future and has players control hero characters whose abilities are based on their primary roles (offensive, defensive, “tank” and supportive). Usually played in teams of 6-on-6 human players.
<i>Counter-Strike: Global Offensive</i>	First-person shooter	The archetypical FPS game, CS:GO groups players into teams of Terrorists and Counter-Terrorists. Elimination of the other team is accompanied by completing certain objectives. Very popular in the competitive gaming scene.
<i>Smite</i>	Multiplayer online battle arena	A non-continuous arena game incorporating elements of action and strategy genres. Players take control of gods (e.g. Greek, Mayan) and battle in teams of 2-5 people against AI-controlled enemies or other players with similar skills.
<i>League of Legends</i>	Multiplayer online battle arena	A non-continuous, team-based “tower defense” type of game. In LoL, players oversee the actions and skills of champions inspired by fantasy, folklore, etc. It is also playable against AI-controlled characters.
<i>Rocket League</i>	Sports	Largely a football-action game hybrid in which players steer rocket-powered automobiles to score goals. This title involves both single- and multiplayer modes, as well as online and local play.

Table 2. List of games played in the study

Whilst many other games (e.g. “The Witcher”, “Heroes of the Storm”, “Chivalry”) were mentioned in the course of discussions between the researcher and her participants, they do not form the basis of analysis, especially when they are not multiplayer titles. They are still mentioned in the following chapter, because some participants have not had as pronounced localisation experiences in the games they were playing during the observations.

Steam and Battle.net performed exceptionally well, given that they allowed for both spectating and chatting. Most participants were comfortable talking with the researcher over Discord, although one group expressed a preference for TeamSpeak, while another opted for Facebook given that the participants did not have active accounts on either. Participants playing *Overwatch* (which does not have a seamless spectator mode in-game) streamed gameplay with the use of Twitch; additionally, one session of *League of Legends* was partially recorded via You Tube due to connection issues.

The gathering of specific information was necessary to provide data to answer the research question and sub-question, therefore questions were asked during the gaming session or subsequently. The topics included: game motivations, language settings, communication issues and prior experience with localised video games. Whenever participants were willing to discuss while playing, they were enquired to do so concurrently. If they preferred to focus on gaming, questions were asked afterwards. At times, the researcher had to change her level of “moderation” (Cronin, 2008, p. 229) to suit the observations: there were participants who needed more guidance than others in answering questions about localisation – here, the researcher usually followed her question list closely and provided necessary explanations of concepts. Some participants, on the other hand, started discussions amongst themselves after being prompted with some opening questions.

What is perhaps most important, is the fact that this study occurred in natural conditions, hopefully eliciting more truthful responses and behaviour (Boeije, 2010) with the researcher becoming a witness and taking part in the task (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Since video game players tend to be heavily stereotyped outside of their own environment, a personalised inside view helps to combat potential labels by presenting their perspective in more detail. Finally, as ideal game researchers should be gaming themselves (Williams, 2005), it is conceivable that participants found her less detached from the source matter than they would have found an outsider. More so, observing and talking with participants over the Internet with the use of a voice chat and a streaming platform simulated an actual

online gaming environment and possibly decreased stress resulting from the researcher's physical presence. The researcher was aiming for an observer-as-participant, moderate approach to avoid becoming either a complete participant or observer (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) and focus on the observations (Creswell, 2013). More specifically, she acknowledged her role, and participants were overtly informed of the purpose of the study prior to the start of the participant observation. In all cases, an agreement between the researcher and participants was reached in terms of recording audio and video. In most cases, no private information or image were disclosed, aside from self-assigned nicknames and other relevant game data.

3.2. Participants

Video game players who perceive the activity of gaming as a hobby were the main target: gaming for at least 10 hours a week (Neys et al., 2014; ESA, 2015; ESA, 2016) was satisfactory for the scope of this project, but more than that amount – desirable as well. Participants identifying themselves as "gamers" or simply "players" constituted a model sample, as this criterion automatically excludes occasional or incidental users (Tan & Jansz, 2008) – for instance, people who play infrequently or people with no interest in video games of any kind. The study, however, did not discriminate between gamers who devote more or less time on a day to gaming, such as "heavy" or "casual" gamers (Neys et al., 2014), given how many of the participants emphasised that they can only find time to play during weekends. Additionally, such a distinction would have likely diminished the group of participants at a very early stage – hardcore gamers could be less inclined to cooperate with casuals, while the latter often only play in order to stay in touch with their peers (Lin, Lin & Jhan, 2015).

Given that the research question does not call for a specific genre to be selected, it was to be anticipated that certain types of games popular in the multiplayer field emerged more often than others. For that reason, the study selected gamers who enjoy playing with others in cooperative and/or competitive modes – this condition simultaneously satisfied the prerequisite for having a functional online account as the base for playing a chosen game or multiple products. No dedicated video game consoles were necessary for participants to be used, as personal computers proved sufficient; they are also the most popular platform in Europe (Ipsos MediaCT, 2012).

To summarise, the required criteria were as follows:

- Spending at least 10 hours a week on gaming,
- Identifying gaming as a hobby,
- Enjoying multiplayer online modes of play,
- Being in possession of any gaming platform and associated game/software.

Participants did not need to be explicitly familiar with “localisation” or “translation of video games” prior to the participant observation procedure – in fact, the former was often undistinguishable from the latter and had to be reexplained by the researcher. Yet in some occasions, participants completely disregarded the idea of localisation as such and constantly referred to translation. To make sense of either one, participants were asked to, for instance, provide an individual assessment of how well a game can communicate its goals in a chosen language and whether there are any limitations when playing with people who have the same title set to a different language.

Approximately 30 participants were involved in this study⁵. Whilst nationality was no prerequisite for recruitment, a very diverse group indeed contributed to this project, as the players were people from – amongst others – Poland, France, Russia, Chile, Greece and Taiwan. This helped to diversify the variety of languages used and described by them in reference to their played video games.

Some game environments required groups of 5-6, but most sessions involved 2 or 3 players which ultimately led to producing more in-depth answers. The procedure itself started with purposive, theory-based sampling – by picking potentially rich in information sources (Coyne, 1997; Boeije, 2002, Cronin, 2008) – and continued with snowball sampling due to participants recommending other players they personally know or have interacted with. Some participants recruited purposely served as gatekeepers. They allowed the researcher to contact teams composed of gamers who have had a long history of playing certain games together; additionally, they enabled access into servers and groups established on given platforms (such as Team Speak). In that way, despite the first sessions involving the researcher’s peers, the larger part of the data gathering process thoroughly excepted biases which could arise from studying one’s family members and close friends (Hermanowicz, 2002).

⁵ It is impossible to state exactly how many, given that in one instance, participants and the researcher were chatting through a public server on TeamSpeak, and many other people logged in and out during the process.

3.3. Trial observations

Aside from audio and video tests performed over a March-April period with different games and platforms, two trial runs were conducted in March to test how participant observation functions in the field of video games. Steam and Battle.net were used for streaming games, while Discord voice chat served as a complement. The first one involved a group of four people playing *Left 4 Dead 2*, a cooperative player-versus-environment experience; followed by another trial where a single participant streamed a session of the 1-on-1 competitive card game *Hearthstone* for the researcher. The first trial saw participants playing the same game but with different language setting: some chose the original, unchanged game, and others the Polish localisation. It was noticed by the participants and the researcher that the Polish version was not fully localised, as voice-overs and some character names remained unaffected. This test run proved interesting in regard to group dynamics and language use – the entirety of the gaming session, the group was communicating in a mix of Polish and English. Finally, participants provided the researcher with their insights on localisation of *Left 4 Dead 2* and other games in general.

During the second trial, the participant played a few matches of *Hearthstone* in Polish. Compared to the previous title, this game is a fully localised into multiple languages. The participant was observed injecting terms borrowed from English into his commentary; he named streamers and professional e-sports players as the reason for doing so. While fruitful in terms of data gathered on localisation issues, this session did not resemble a multiplayer environment, given that the participant was playing against an unseen online opponent on his own. This test involved only the participant and the researcher, creating an atmosphere more reminiscent of an interview.

These two tests eventually allowed the researcher to determine whether group dynamics contribute to production of richer data or, by contrast, obstruct the process. As such, the following recordings progressed in groups ranging from 2 to 6 people: this helped to avoid an interview-like, one-on-one atmosphere.

3.4. Data collection and analysis

10 recordings amounting to roughly 650 minutes of audio and video footage, and around 50 pages of fieldnotes made in the March-May period formed the basis for the analytical part of this project. All games chosen by the participants were popular multiplayer titles, albeit they varied from 1-on-1 (*Hearthstone*) to 6-on-6 (*Overwatch*). Furthermore, all of them were available in at least 8 languages, although only games produced by Blizzard Entertainment offered full localisation. Games launched via Steam (e.g. *Rocket League*) were dependent on the platform itself, and finally *League of Legends* had its language options limited by the region in which it was played (more on this explained in Chapter 4).

The recordings were reworked into transcripts, re-watched and re-read subsequently in order to account for all the levels at which data could have been collected, for instance the language of a game interface or usage of text chat (by both the participants and at times other players). As a result, the produced transcripts include short descriptions of what participants are doing at crucial moments of the gameplay and also when they discuss something happening simultaneously on the screen. It must be noted here, however, that the researcher sometimes needed to validate certain actions from the participants, because some of the games implement a spectator delay designed to prevent a potential opponent from enclosing information during ranked matches (e.g. LoL).

A theory-driven thematic analysis was chosen to arrange the results – this flexible qualitative method seemed particularly suitable for analysing such mixed data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It helped to pinpoint patterns, and to organise the various written and visual extracts. Given the research done prior to conducting participant observations, the analytical stage of this project was grounded in topics related to the research question and sub-question (localisation, multiplayer, etc). Themes were designed to cover groups of patterns directly related to the research question at hand.

The thematic analysis followed a procedure designed by Braun and Clarke (2006): from the initial stages of re-reading and transcribing up to the production of a written report on the results. In-between these two, analytical and interpretative work was done – hundreds of codes were created, reworked into groups and themes, to finally be reviewed, limited and named accordingly. Whilst codes were constantly being refined, the themes were mostly rotated between overarching and subordinate ones, forming subthemes within bigger units. The final themes were intended to maintain internal coherence and external

diversity (Patton, 1990, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, they are meant to be seen as informative narratives of the gamers' accounts – by exceeding merely the surface level, and considering the implications, differences and interpretations of people's descriptions.

To account for validity and reliability, the researcher needed to first become aware of her own biases which could influence the outcomes of this study. The participants' views were described in rich detail and thoroughly contrasted to avoid bias on the researcher's side, and the latter's opinions are overtly indicated when stated (Boeije, 2002; Noble & Smith, 2015). Whenever possible, verbatim accounts and alternative possible readings of the data are proposed. As stated, with the researcher recognising video games as her hobby, participants would feel at ease, but this could simultaneously impact both the data gathering and analysing processes. The researcher did not participate in gaming, rather focusing on research and adapting a side perspective. Interestingly, she was explicitly asked by some not to comment on their playing style, thus she refrained from making excessive remarks in general. Some participants were overtly aware of the fact that the researcher is a gamer and used it to exclude what they perhaps considered obvious information regarding chosen video games, potentially leading to some loss of interesting data. Others, who had not been acquainted with the researcher outside of a research setting, attempted to undermine her notion of gameplay. In one instance, this caused a group to inquire the researcher about her gender, social media presence and a proof of a gaming history – when the latter was provided, however, the topic of the conversation simply changed.

Finally, the researcher kept a comprehensive log of steps taken at all stages from finalising the theoretical background for the thesis itself up to the formulation of a conclusion. It included: fieldnotes, quotes from participants, technical information on games and game modes, personal assumptions, and guidelines provided by the thesis supervisor. This decision was made to provide transparency and maintain consistency of the project (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter provides a description and results of thematic analysis performed on the gathered data: all themes and sub-themes which have been distinguished as relevant to the research questions. They are separated into two main categories: localisation in online multiplayer titles and communication in multiplayer gaming. Thus, they define the core topics discussed and seen in the participant observation process, as well as the main concepts contained within the research question and sub-question.

4.1. Localisation in online multiplayer titles

This theme covers participants' assessment of localisation strategies and approaches adapted in their played multiplayer titles. Four sub-themes are contained to provide two contrasting views each: firstly, usefulness and unneccessariness; secondly, good and bad quality of localisation.

Before presenting the results, it is vital to note that the distinction between "default" and "native" languages is regularly made by the participants themselves, rather than the researcher. The participants often discussed English in particular as a "default" and most commonly used language in their chosen video games; when referring to their mother tongue, they would use the language's established name, such as simply "Polish". Whilst this helped to organise sub-themes to suit that discrepancy between tongues, at times it had to be explicated by the researcher during participant observation, as well as the thematic analysis procedure. Where relevant, this difference is overtly described in this chapter.

4.1.1. Benefits of localisation

It's way too difficult for starters. But I'd love to have a guide in Dutch. Because there's so much, so much difficult stuff. [...] if it's like, not too difficult, the game is not too difficult, then English is fine for me. (Rien)

Participants across the different games sometimes remarked about how having language options to choose from – localised versions of a given game – is practical. Ada saw that many games which she had tested did not offer a Polish localisation, instead having only a German one (this is potentially applicable to games released in Europe) or English. Orlando

admitted that “in some occasions, I might [change the language], just to see”, while Aaron added that “if the option was more readily available I would’ve for the lols, just for fun” which implies that having such possibilities, even when not making use of them, is better than having none. Other players went as far as to state that whenever Polish, their mother tongue, was available, they would choose it; although Tom, for example, would do so after an assessment of “whether everything in the game is comprehensible”. Peter then added: “I would generally change it, but sometimes I have to play in English on that West [LoL server]”. Interestingly, Lars remarked about how a game needs to be “actually programmed to be in Dutch”, therefore alluding to the technical side of the localisation process which largely relies on the fact that a game, first of all, must be compatible with a given language on the coding level. Corresponding with the theoretical background on localisation, *The Witcher* was recognised by many participants due to different reasons such as having undergone simultaneous localisation, as well as sounding very good in English (the game was initially made in Polish)⁶. Finally, changing language options was also listed in the opposite situation – when starting the game in an already localised version but preferring to revert to the original, for example (this is also discussed in 4.1.2 and 4.1.4).

In terms of language preferences, participants were seen to have experiences with multiple versions while usually sticking to one which they found the most appealing. Camilo, for instance, liked *Overwatch* in Japanese, because he “usually prefer[s] voice actors/actresses from Japan”, which in this case perhaps extends to both unlocalised games originally in Japanese, as well as ones localised into the language – such as the American-made *Overwatch*. In general, he felt that Blizzard Entertainment⁷ “makes a really good job” at localising their games.

Furthermore, some participants commented on English as not being the dominant language for some regions. Similar to Peter talking about the game language being forcibly changed when switching servers, the other group engaged in *League of Legends* also referred to a region-based divide. Flora had watched streamed recordings of the game in Chinese where even technical terms were localised – and participants in that same group agreed with the researcher that perhaps talking about and in the English language is only appropriate for European and American servers. There, however, seems to be a difference in

⁶ This game is single player, but it has been mentioned a few times by the participants and thus deemed vital.

⁷ It is interesting to note that whenever video games produced by Blizzard were mentioned in the observations, participants always remarked about how well-made they are. Blizzard Entertainment seemed to be generally associated with quality as such.

prioritising language options for the West and the East, as Akira explained that in LoL, players will:

use their own languages, like Asian servers. Korea will use Korean, China Chinese, Turkey will use Turkish,

to which Derek added that:

[...] And for both European and the... American servers, just like Western servers in general will use English.

The implication here is interesting because despite having a range of languages to choose from (17 to be exact), *League of Legends* limits their players based on where they are geographically, thus proving that the literal understanding of “locale” in “localisation” is at times taken to the extremes, as it does not, in fact, allow to connect them in multiplayer. In this sense, West European players can only queue in matches with other Western Europeans, and so on.

When asked about full and partial localisation strategies, many participants realised that games usually provide “original” English voice-overs alongside subtitles in respective languages. Aaron thought that “in a lot of cases, just having a dub is good enough”, possibly indicating that it frequently is entirely unavailable; and Nick preferred to play with subtitles turned on where the game did not provide fully translated dialogues. *Battlefield* and *Call of Duty*, however, two immensely popular FPS titles, were used as examples of fully localised video games. When talking about the first one specifically, Roy said that “[...] people really play in their mother tongue, because... well, ‘cause, you know, it’s better, right”. Moreover, Lydia made a clear distinction between full and partial localisation:

I mean, I’m generally for this, that when you translate, you translate all subs, [...] both the dubbing and subbing, or you simply make dubbing available. So that it’s not half-Polish, half-English. Because it’s like, when someone doesn’t know either language, it makes no sense.

In the context of the game which she was playing, *Left 4 Dead 2*, it does indeed appear to be a critique of the very game which not only does not provide Polish dubbing, but also keeps multiple character names unchanged from the original English version, resulting in a partial localisation into Polish. Yet, other participants who enjoyed that title did not indicate that it was an issue to them. Similarly, one player engaged in *League of Legends* did

not mind playing a game which is partially localised and rather felt that it would be:

[...] only a bit weird, when you're for example reading dialogues in English but someone is talking in Spanish [...] (Peter).

Unfamiliarity with English (as most of the games mentioned by participants were originally published in that language) or another dominant language was declared by some as a possible cause of miscommunication on the player-to-game and player-to-player levels. Orlando, for instance, talked about Russian players who “simply actually didn’t know English”, while Adalbert thought that they “don’t want to learn the language”. Derek accused French LoL players of being “too proud to play it in English”. Aaron, on the other hand, acknowledged that a language barrier in unlocalised video games is still common, as he referred to games made in Japan:

And for games that aren't, and I do wanna play them, I almost always try to find English, especially if it's a game in like Japanese.

4.1.2. Inadequacy of localisation

I mean, you know, even if this game was in Japanese, I think we could still easily play it. It's just so intuitive that it doesn't require great command [of English]. (Nick)

Despite the assumed view on the practicality of providing gamers with a variety of language options enabled by localisation, many participants seemed to believe that localisation is not truly essential for a video game to be playable. Compared to the first sub-theme which adopts the view that localisation does play a role and can be perceived as a positive addition to video games, an opposite view was also strongly prevalent amongst the participants of this study – localisation was widely observed as superfluous.

Here, first of all, great importance can be attributed to the notion of a default or original language being the intended rendition, and this opinion was shared in nearly all groups. As Guilherme expressed it:

I've always liked to play games in its original language, because I think it shows you the more accurate view in how the developers wanted to show you their work and feelings.

Misha, Curt, Rien, Omiros, Roy, Adalbert, Ada, Derek, Akira, Flora, Adeline, Pepe,

Lars and Victor acknowledged that they always play in English – for neither one of them was English a mother tongue. Whereas some of them were not aware of possible other language options, others would change it as soon as presented with an adequate prompt to do so. Even fewer players were conscious of localisation strategies, as the sole concept itself even proved undistinguishable from translation associated with other media, such as books. Lars justified his English preference by saying that he “despise[s] the Dutch language” which also happens to be his native tongue; Adeline and Victor admitted to choosing English over their native French; Rien thought that in some instances, games in Dutch were more difficult to play. Interestingly, Adalbert had not changed *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* from Polish to English as an exception only because he did not feel that the game was rich enough to necessitate playing in the “original”. On one level, it does resonate with the games played and described in this study, given that they were almost exclusively American creations; nevertheless, all these games are available in 8 to 25 different languages. Still, English as a “base language” (Aaron) was particularly important in regard to playing and talking about video games in general.

Building on the concept of default language, some participants shared the view that simply “everyone” (or at least video game players) knows English, so localising or translating products is not needed. According to Derek, “People know enough English to get by”, and Roy, “everyone knows enough English to comprehend what [the game] is about”. Omiros, Adeline and Victor proclaimed that people who engage in online multiplayer must know it to communicate, which constitutes the basis for successful playing on the player-to-player level. Rien and Lars described how they “grew up with English” and thus became accustomed to it at an early stage in their lives, to the point where their Xbox setting up in Dutch as a default is perceived as a bother. Moreover, Rien said that:

It just feels weird when you've already played a game in English and then, uhm, and then you play the game again but then in a different language.

Participants who perhaps felt proficient enough in English, did not see a particular difference between language versions, nor did they mind partial localisation. Oliver and Tom agreed with each other that they “do not look a gift horse in the mouth”⁸. Lydia at some point said that:

⁸ This is a special case of translation equivalent provided by the researcher, as the original quote used a very niche and untranslatable meme to express the meaning of this sentence.

[...] to be honest, I rely more on, I mean, sometimes on the sounds, sometimes on the subs, so it doesn't matter to me if they're in English or in Polish.

This is especially thought-provoking, given that the same participant was not only observed to be playing with the game set to Polish, but even implied that partial localisation is a sloppy effort.

For games which were perceived as easy or intuitive, as seen in the top quotation by Nick, or as expressed by Adeline in reference to *Smite*, localisation was not judged to be necessary. Roy felt this particularly about CS:GO:

[...] it is such a game... which is just the easiest it can be, so there is no dubbing, you don't use any commands, the chat is just for offending others, really. [...] It is really kept to a minimum.

Adalbert proclaimed that he knows *Hearthstone* well enough to be able to play in even random languages, because “*no matter, you don't even need the text that is on the [cards] [...] because you know everything*”, while Orlando liked the original English audio in that game so much that “it never even occurred to me that, to make the effort to change”. Finally, Ada expressed her opinion on the redundancy of subtitles in *Left 4 Dead 2* as she “couldn't focus on killing [zombies]” because of the subs being in her way.

As described in the previous section regarding *League of Legends* language options, a more limited side of localisation was also assessed by some participants, albeit not in an overt fashion. The geographical restraints – for instance how European *League of Legends* players cannot form teams with Asian players – imposed by regions in which games are published were seen as an inconvenience, and Flora suggested it might be a financial matter since the region-bound account settings can be altered via a paid service.

4.1.3. Good quality of localisation

But that's in, then again in other certain games that do it well, you don't even think about the fact that it was translated. (Derek)

While not plenty, examples of well-done localisation show that when it is indeed correctly implemented in a video game, it serves to boost the experience of playing. Juanito, for instance, praised the Latin American version of *Overwatch*'s Spanish localisation:

I Think the LATAM version is really good, it respects a lot of the identity and tone of the characters in [E]nglish, and also try to keep the spirit of phrases and quotes.

Guilherme thought that both Japanese and Latin American Spanish localisation of that game were good, since “Blizzard always makes things in an excellent way”; Camilo remarked that largely “games have been taking the localization process much more seriously since a few years back” and that *Overwatch* has “no default language” since the company in charge is “taking in account the experiences of their players all over the world”. Pepe likened the Latin American Spanish version to English and admitted that “it’s acceptable” – he did not think it could exceed the original language version, however.

Continuing with the participants’ assessments, Orlando compared German and English versions of *World of Warcraft* (in the context of its spinoff game, *Hearthstone*):

I remember WoW was localised for German, and it was also better than in English, ‘cause it’s like, it had the nuances of, oh, you know, feminine and masculine for classes [...] Which is interesting, at least to me it is.

On the topic of German localisation, he also thought that real-time strategy games “sound really well in German”, referring to the dubbing provided in games localised into German.

Whereas most examples are English-to-other-languages, a few other language pairs were observed. Flora, Derek and Akira, for instance, mentioned playing Korean MMORPGs together and assessed the localisation quality as “not broken” and “for the most part [...] fun, but not perfect [...]”. This, compared to Orlando’s attention to grammar and Juanito’s care for the feeling of the original characters, serves to show that participants had varying concerns of what good localisation entails. *The Witcher* emerged a few times in passing as a game in which localisation into English was particularly well executed. Orlando even called it “absolutely incredible”, feeling that voice actors involved in localisation performed in a great manner; and Derek admitted that it felt natural and he “couldn’t tell anything wrong with the writing”, as compared to Akira who decided to play it in the original Polish with only English subtitling.

Finally, in the context of extreme examples of good and bad localisation, an interesting remark was made by Aaron: “when it comes to fan stuff, fan stuff is generally either patchy or it’s uh, because it’s done for free, it’s done very well, because it’s a passion project”. He also recognised a difference between “in-house” translations and those

performed by outside parties, again referring to the quality of fan work. While it is not, of course, the topic of this study, it is nevertheless fascinating to observe that fan translations can be appreciated on the same level as officially-licensed work.

4.1.4. Bad quality of localisation

[...] very often it's way too monotone like that. The original, let's say, the English voice actors are putting so much, you know, feeling and emotion into their line. And the Russian one doesn't. (Orlando)

In line with localisation being redundant in the participants' views, they often provided the researcher with cases of elements which struck them as particularly badly done. Firstly, the players concerns lied with adaptation into their mother tongues. Guilherme and Juanito both despised the European Spanish localisation of *Overwatch*: the first even noted that it is "often made fun of in all the internet because of the mismatched translations that it has" and the latter – "that seems way more literal and disregards the original material". Camilo and Omiros both stated that past experiences steered them away from translation and localisation. Orlando considered the Russian version of *Metro* "atrocious"; Roy described Polish subtitles in *Heroes of the Storm* in expletives; Curt acknowledged only bad experiences with Polish localisation of games, and in his session with Misha, they both agreed that localised *Hearthstone* discouraged them from playing games in Polish. Last of all, playing *Hearthstone* reminded Aaron of a game for Game Boy Advance which he had played when younger: "it was so atrocious English that you couldn't understand the game".

English was principally believed to sound better when compared with native languages of the participants. Localisation was perceived as "horribly stupid" (Ada) when taken to a literal extreme: participants felt that even calling the "Hunter" or "Tank" characters in *Left 4 Dead 2* "Łowca" and "Czołg" respectively, which are both direct EN-PL equivalents, makes it into a product of an inferior quality. Interestingly, Ada did also admit that whereas the original names are infantile, they still "somehow sound better" in English. Similarly, Orlando recognised two mistakes in translation and localisation work for Russian versions of games:

They translate it word-for-word as opposed to the actual meaning of the sentence, you know, synonyms and the actual meaning. [...] And they very often don't do that. Which can change the meaning of the sentence completely.

In reference to terms used typically by gamers, for instance “playing a support role”, they also remarked that translating them in speech gives a bad impression.

Furthermore, Manuel drew particular attention to audio in games:

I used to play OW with the Spanish (Latin American) language. Actually I play it in English language. I like both languages, but I prefer the last one simply because the English voice actor of Lucio is great. [...] When I feel that the current voice dub is not very natural, I tend to change the language, the native preferably or the language with more credibility.

Aaron, while not necessarily admitting it is a bad aspect, commented that “[...] sometimes the voiceovers can sound a little funny. You always have the voice-overs stereotypes, like that, anything that is dubbed in German will sound angry”. Adalbert and Roy expressed a dislike for Polish dubbing in general, instead opting for English voice-overs.

Lastly, in the course of playing *Hearthstone*, an instance was discussed in which localisation mistakes could potentially have a direct negative effect on gameplay. This concerned errors found in-game which seem to disregard the mechanics, as the translation was not in line with what a specific card was programmed to do.

4.2. Communication in multiplayer gaming

They know enough English to insult you in English. (Flora)

The theme of communication and its jargon-centred sub-theme directly relate to the online multiplayer component of the research questions. In the previous section, localisation was shown to often undermine or enhance interaction between a player and a video game, however the element of player-to-player communication is often as essential in such games. Additionally, this theme encompasses game- and gamer-specific jargon which seems to be internationalised to the point at which it frequently disregards localisation work already implemented. Its implications are thus very fascinating from a dialectal side.

4.2.1. Establishing successful communication channels

All participants referred to using exterior software to establish an audio communication channel: Discord, TeamSpeak, Facebook and so on – Omiros suggested that it “enhances the experience a lot”, Ada and Lydia decided that without it the game would be “more difficult” and “less funny”, and Derek that “it’s a lot more convenient”. Aside from talking amongst themselves while playing, participants often interacted with strangers on the opponent teams and made audible comments about their play. In this aspect, there was a difference between trying to cooperate with those outsiders – often in English – and making remarks in their own groups – always in their mother tongue. Adalbert and Roy in CS:GO, for example, were interacting with their friends, as well as other players they did not know, but it did not seem to be a problem to them. They both, however, agreed that at times communication in a multiplayer game is of much bigger importance than other aspects of gameplay, although it should not be entirely a “game changer”. Ada and Nick, too, thought that occasionally so much is happening in the game that it becomes difficult to organise the team – which, in the case of their session, cumulated in one player being left behind while the rest managed to finish the final level.

Team play was a crucial aspect of community in reference to video games, essentially a “key to victory” (Guilherme). All participants expressed a fondness for playing in self-made teams (“premade”) with people whom they recognised as friends, colleagues, family members or peers. To Derek, playing with friends was “a lot more inviting”; to Adeline and Victor it was predominantly more important than any rankings; to Lars it was a matter of “you normally play better as a team”; to both Curt and Misha it was “much easier”. Camilo even remarked that while he usually does not enjoy FPS games, he can still have fun with his friends, and Adalbert agreed with Roy that he would not ever launch CS:GO to play solo.

Additionally, participants were observed to be giving advice and praise to their team members present on the same chat (especially voice chat), whilst also competing amongst themselves for points and rankings, and attempting to improve their results together. In many instances, they were giving orders and instructions to their co-players: Ada, who knew the structure of *Left 4 Dead 2* levels would lead the others when preparing for a difficult encounter; Andy and Roy directed the team effort in CS:GO; Derek was helping out Akira to navigate the LoL map which they were playing; and Peter and Oliver tried pushing their squad towards more aggressive play (although to different results).

The importance of voicing one's goals was recognised as a crucial aspect of player-to-player communication. As Misha described it:

When there is communication going on between 5 people in a party, someone is leading the game, then you will manage somehow, but when you have, for example, 5 people who are not talking [...] everyone's doing what they want.

When prompted, many participants told the researcher that they play either for fun or for ranking up, while Vas particularly emphasised that “the fun part is at winning” and that “you play, you get better, you win”. Many noticed that “playing competitive with strangers is impossible” because there is no clear division of roles and so on. Largely, however, team play and good communication were the key to maintaining a healthy balance between having fun and playing competitively.

The bad player versus good player assessment appeared to be an issue to all the participants, regardless of whether they were playing in Europe, Latin America or anywhere else in the world. Referring to the issue of cross-play between server regions in *League of Legends*, it would seem that sometimes the in-game matchmaking system would cause problems, as players expect others to talk to them in an international language – which in the majority of cases is thought to be English – but instead simply do not communicate their goals because they are unable to find common ground.

As a solution to these problems, participants suggested that playing with friends and peers is generally the safest option, because “[...] if you're playing with friends, you know—more or less you know in which they are better at” (Omiros).

4.2.2. Miscommunication and other player-to-player issues

[...] There are, like these two types of gamers. Those who care, who want to win and so on [...] the so-called „try hard” and those who do not care that much, well, they just come here and have fun. There are people who play CS, while listening to music.
(Adalbert)

This sub-theme does not explicitly cover a topic contained in the research question and sub-question, but its implications are vital to the entire study. In short, it is a compliment to the main themes, especially because it acknowledges players' perceptions of themselves and other similar people (one of the reasons for picking a qualitative method, as

explained in Chapter 3).

Camilo thought that lack of communication in a ranked match in *Overwatch* is “almost a certain loss”, but also admitted that when he had previously played with people who spoke different languages, his team was able to “with a few common commands [...] harmonize our strategies with ease”. On that topic, Manuel and Guilherme were glad that the game allows players to communicate via some simple commands and emotes built into the interface; the same was observed in the very fast-paced *Rocket League* and *Smite* where players most likely did not have enough time to type out entire sentences on the text chat. Remarkably, in Pepe’s words, *Overwatch* is an example of a “[...] a shooter genre and you basically use your instincts and then try to understand to communicate with the others [...]”.

An interesting instance of miscommunication between players happened in one particular recording. Roy, Adalbert and their fellow co-players had not agreed on the use of one given voice chat, and as a result three people were talking via the third party software Discord, while two others – through the *Counter-Strike* chat. When this occurred to them (and to the researcher as well), they realised that it was influencing their gameplay since they all muted one another on the respective chats.

Next to miscommunication, an interesting occurrence was the refusal to communicate, implied by many to be intentionally done by outsiders who were not willing to engage in team play. Many reflected on how it is indeed possible to cooperate with strangers as long as they want to, but certain populations in particular – across the different games – were criticised to be rejecting the need to communicate in a mutually comprehensible way, instead solely typing or even speaking out in Russian, French, etc.

As Aaron put it:

So you know. And then, I don't why, there's something about French players in “League of Legends,” they get very angry with me. So you know, they'll add you and just start typing in French, so you reply in English, and then they say something like, oh you can't speak French, and as soon as they start doing that, then I use Dutch as a response, and they're immediately like what, then they start speaking English [...] and then you're like yeah, that's right, I knew you could speak English!

Orlando tried to justify this phenomenon:

So the problem used to be a couple of years back. That the Russian players, they simply actually didn't know English. [...] But, uh, and you know, this is like 10 years

back or something like that. Uh, but nowadays, considering how big the internet is there and how internationalised a lot of things are, now it's the same case as the French folks that Aaron just mentioned.

Furthermore, Orlando described how he sometimes reacts to people typing in Russian – in the same language – and thus establishes a connection with them. He did not, however, admit to doing that often, so it is conceivable that he usually ignores such instances.

Conversely, Akira, referring to his own experience, just stated that “you always have that one person who is on mute [...] they won’t talk, won’t listen. Derek shared a similar view, because in his mind, people rarely did not have command of English, rather – they simply did not want to communicate in a game.

Curiously, the participants involved in this study – who are, after all, a part of the gaming community – mentioned antagonism on multiple occasions. The notion of a “toxic” community was often paired with the so-called “flaming”, an experience shared by many. Participants referred to other co-players they had played with before who would only use a given communication channel in order to criticise – “flame” – others. Lars went as far as to permanently turn off the text chat’s visibility in *Rocket League* because to him it only served as a channel for flaming. Derek compared it across LoL and CS:GO, seeing the difference between the presence and a lack of a voice chat. Adalbert stated that:

[...] when someone is a bad player, but communicates with the team, that is—but when someone is bad, doesn’t do much or even flames on top of it, that’s it [...] really, even when someone is good but flames, he’s still not good. [...] It ruins the team morale and that is a problem.

Oliver’s team engaged in *League of Legends*, Adalbert’s team in CS:GO and Misha with Curt playing *Overwatch* were observed to directly comment and themselves engage in the flaming of other players who “ruin the game” (Peter), including their immediate peers. For instance, Tom called a co-player “a clown” when his kill-death ratio dropped and Oliver thought other persons “bonkers”⁹ when he could not understand their gameplay strategy.

Juanito recalled his early experience with *Overwatch* when he had to constantly play with outsiders, because his friends were “out of his league” and correspondingly noticed that in ranked competitive mode, people may be very critical:

⁹ Again, this is an approximation, since the original wording was much more offensive.

When playing with strangers, it can happen that they will shout at you to change certain character if is not of its liking, insult if we begin to lose, creating a toxic environment, especially in competitive play, which is taken more seriously.

Adalbert and Roy recognised this happening in *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* and attributed it to the player base possibly being immature:

Adalbert: [...] the age target of these games is, like, it's around 14—[...]

Roy: it's between 12-18 and they're usually like... you know, hormonal...

Adalbert: (laughs) wrecks.

Roy: so, it's like, when mom can't hear them, they flame, and then she enters the room and they stop talking entirely.

Adalbert: [...] This really happens. They're kids! Usually those who play this and shout the loudest and bash others are in fact kids, yeah.

Adalbert even suggested that the game itself is “annoying” but then changed the remark to “the game is actually not to blame, it's the people”, suggesting that a community can render it unplayable. Derek approached this similarly for LoL and said that “the problem is the people who play this game. They're fu**** unstable”¹⁰, to which Flora retorted that “not all people” are, in fact. Interestingly, Adeline in her session explained that she had found *League of Legends* so “toxic” that she turned her attention to *Smite* (also a MOBA) in which she thinks the occurrence is not as serious. Finally, Lars summed up the *Rocket League* players as “this is one salty community”.

In terms of the larger community and gaming culture, certain stereotypes were voiced by the participants. Akira, for instance, stated that:

In “Counter-Strike” it happens. You wish people good luck knowing that they'll just talk Russian and you won't understand at all.

Aaron commented that:

You always have the voice-overs stereotypes, like that, anything that is dubbed in German will sound angry.

Curt had experience with Russian players in particular who “[...] just shout *suka bly***

¹⁰ LoL-playing participants in this study had a particular “love/hate” relationship with the game.

and communication with them is rather hard”; and Vas quoted the same phrase. Players from Russia were also generally believed to be ignorant and aggressive, predominantly in CS:GO. Interestingly, Polish and French players were, too, perceived by some to be causing problems in the game. No other nationalities seemed to be referred to as groups – many participants adapted a very neutral stance on such issues.

Lastly, an interesting aspect of self-awareness of gamers was observed in the CS:GO session. Roy and Adalbert, who both admitted to having used to play for exceptionally long periods, reflected on how it is normal for them to be engaged in intense gaming sessions rather than going out, “it wouldn’t be weird, because we’ve done it a million times” (Roy).

4.2.3. Linguistics & jargon

No, powiem ci szczerze, już dawno nie byłem „campiony” na „spawnie”. [...] Groźnie, groźnie. Jezus Maria, w ogóle jaki „rape”.

Yeah, let me tell you, it’s been a while since I have last been „camped” at a “spawn”.

[...] That’s looking dangerous, dangerous. Sweet Jesus and Mary, what a “rape”.

(Curt)

This quote, provided in its original Polish iteration and an English translation for comparison, embodies all aspects of a prevalent linguistic jargon, as well as a macaronic language, or “code-switching”, which occurs when two or more languages are used in one utterance (Poplack, 2004). This particular mixing of languages also creates hybrids, uses loan words and calques. The above quote not only uses terms recognised by gamers (“being camped”); the participant also inflects them as if they were Polish words (“na spawnie” as in “at the spawn point”), and finally makes a – seemingly pointless – interjection of an English word (“rape”). In general, all participants who spoke in their mother tongues during the observation were using macaronic language, while those who talked with the researcher in English made explicit references to it.

Words and phrases specific to a generally standard game jargon rooted in the English language appeared frequently during the observations. They included, for example: “HP” (hit points), “mana”, “frags”, “lethal”, “level”, “OP” (over-powered), “broken”, “tank”, “combo”, “ganking”, “nerf”, “gg” (good game), “hitbox”, “rep”, “AoE” (area of effect), “ulting”, “ress”, “buff”, “lag”, “spawn”, “git gud”. More game-specific terms included “mid”, “smoke”, “connector”, “contact” for CS:GO, but participants also clarified that map locations are often

named after players in the context of E-sports which styles them as international. Curt and Misha explained that these need to be kept as short and concise as possible, so that people do not waste time typing or saying them out in highly competitive matches, especially in competitions. They also were of the opinion that if such terms were to be translated, they would need to remain parallel and faithful to the original. That was the reason for “ultimate” becoming “ult”, as well as the locales in CS:GO at times being referred to by single letters of the alphabet. Roy explained this in the following way:

Usually, the things we say... we are acquainted with them, because they are obvious in the game, yeah, and they are in English because that's how they are everywhere and they're usually simply shorter in English. That's faster and everyone—you know, even internationally you can say that to someone [...]

Continuing with game jargons, *Hearthstone*-specific terminology saw names of card decks stylised after their main component and class, e.g. “mech mage”, “quest rogue”, “tempo dragon warrior”, “secret paladin”; as well as terms: “turn 1 drop”, “going face”, “mill”, “topdeck”, “meta”. For *League of Legends*, they included: “ward”, “rerolling”, “laner”, “top”, “Flashing” or “turret”. And in the case of *Overwatch*, they were: “teleport”, “play of the game”, “payload” or “solo queue”.

Some participants also had their own names for certain elements, such as Lydia repeatedly calling the “Jockey” enemy “Sraki”, which literally is a manure pun on his name, and Ada referring to a crowbar weapon as a “womback”, which is a twisted translation of the same word. According to Camilo:

Yeah, technical terms are widely used (fps, DPS, meta, ultimates, tank, camper) but every group creates their own terminology.

In Juanito’s view:

There are terms that are the base of any game, but they are only relevant in conversations regarding the competitive scene, such as Frames per second (FPS), or DAMAGE PER SECOND (DPS). What happens more often is creating particular slangs for certain terms of the game, but they are not standard, different groups of people can call the same thing in a different way.

In some cases, explanations for the borrowing of English terms were sought by the researcher and her participants. Orlando, for instance, explored the notion of

“untranslatability”:

It really depends on how... untranslatable the term is? [...] From its square language. So like, for example the term “fast food”, in Russian we say “fast food”. We use the exact same pronunciation and syllables, because, you know, it’s just an Anglicised and Americanised term that I’m pretty sure that in 90% of the languages fast food is “fast food”. [...] And the same can be said about a lot of e-sports terms, I suppose.

Likewise, Lars thought “it would be weird to translate” the term “AoE”, which stands for “area of effect”, and is commonly used across games of different genres. Guilherme and Manuel again referred to English as a dominant language used “in a more multinational context” and “used by everyone in E-games”. Largely, this “multinational context” seemed to matter much to gamers who were conscious of gaming across countries and regions – and they did not appear to mind using terms borrowed from another language in their own.

Sometimes, participants would clarify that they practice their linguistic skills through video games and other software, thus purposefully keeping the English original. Lars and Rien attributed their command of the language at an early age to “travelling, gaming and stuff”; Ada admitted that setting her Steam software to English helped her, because she has been unconsciously learning and remembering words she had encountered; and lastly, Camilo, whose mother tongue is Chilean Spanish, played *Overwatch* in Japanese and English specifically for that reason.

In more extreme cases, words were taken directly from English into another language despite having a functional translation in the target language – ones that could not be compared to the “technical” jargon mentioned by Camilo. For instance: Ada used “safehouse” to refer to the actual location, “ammo” and “kill” appeared in the same session, despite a first aid kit being normally called “apteczka”; Aaron remarked he would still refer to a “lethal” when talking in Dutch because it is “easier” to say it; Derek admitted he constructs sentences in Swedish when talking with his friends and yet uses English when referring to game mechanics; and Adeline and Victor agreed that common terms such as “tank” are literally identical in French; and the Spanish-speaking group in *Overwatch* talked about “another one” when deciding to run more ranked matches. Polish participants recurrently used “Flashing” in LoL, despite some of them playing in Polish which has an official localised name for that spell – “Błysk”. Only Juanito appeared to be aware of an existing translation from English to Spanish, for instance “flanquear” for “flanking”. In most

cases, using swearwords in English was also predominant.

Other times, the macaronic language produced by gamers provided thought-provoking cases for analysis. Again, instead of using practical translated words or approximations, participants would inflect English words in a Polish manner. Polish is highly inflected compared to English, and it would seem that gamers tend to overuse that language feature. Some examples include: “lootuj” (you loot this), “feedujecie” (you are feeding), “zarootowała” (she rooted), “pocraftować” (to craft), “spushujemy” (we will push off/away), “killuj” (you kill), “randomowym” (random).

At some point, Roy ordered his team mates to hide from the enemies by saying:

[...] wszyscy “under”, wszyscy “under”!

[...] everybody under, everybody under!

Whereas Peter shared some friendly advice with Oliver in LoL:

A wiesz [...] że możesz castować pod Flasha [...]

You know [...] you can cast for Flash [...]

Lydia complained about a co-player taking her points for defeating an enemy zombie:

To był mój “kill”!

That was my kill!

And Tom was observed planning the following:

Wiedziałem... To co, zesmituję go na jeden HP, yolo.

I knew it... So what, I am gonna Smite him until he's got 1 HP left, yolo.

Aaron's explanation for this phenomenon was particularly interesting, as it happens to just challenge the purpose of translation at large:

[...] And even then when going as far as to say “two turn lethal” in English, in a Dutch conversation, just because the context in it has become so heavily Anglicised that it's [...] to translate outside of the language anymore. Again, I think it's more an effort thing, more than anything else?

He also alluded to how bilingual people compare languages they know, basically referring to how code-switching works in linguistics and, by extension, in everyday conversations between bilinguals:

It's more effort for you to find a suitable translation that when you're used to dealing with one language against the other, you feel more comfortable just switching out that word.

Lastly, Nick blamed a possible lack of translation in *Left 4 Dead 2*, indicating that localisation and translation are perhaps useful after all – “it's logical [...] when something's not translated, we use it the way we understand it”. His team also elaborated on how they would most likely manage to play in an instance where they had linguistic difficulties with the game – they would attempt to describe certain elements.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The final chapter summarises results collected via participant observation and arranges them in the light of the existing theory on video games localisation and players' reception. It also briefly discusses limitations of this study, and finally provides recommendations for both players and video game producers.

5.1. Findings

As coming from gamers, the data offered certain viewpoints on localisation; but this research project was not planned to be a comprehensive strategic guide on how to sell a Japanese game worldwide, nor could it be in its scope. Generally, the views on localisation can be summed up in two overarching, contrasting categories: when its application is positive, needed, useful and well-performed; and when it is seen as a nuisance, undesirable and badly-implemented.

Good quality of localisation respects the source product on many different levels, adheres to its mechanics, does not disrupt communication between the game and co-players, and makes the playing experience a seamless one. As long as gaming is not interrupted – wherever it concerns playing for fun, playing to rank up, and so on – it is not considered a bother. In short, therefore, it realises its skopos. When a game is not comprehensible in its original language, there should be a localised version option, so that it can be played and enjoyed as intended. Having language options to choose from is always seen as an advantage, even when it is not utilised or when it is used just for the purpose of reverting to the original. Changing the language “for fun” was also observed to be an occurrence, and given that it provides extra entertainment value, it should not be obstructed.

While partial localisation was seen as a standard practice which players usually become accustomed to, full localisation is perceived as a more effort-invested process of working on a game. The participants often decided to play with subtitles and admitted that dubbing – thus full localisation in most cases – would be very much appreciated. In the instances of partial localisation and subs, it was also mentioned that this can help to train one's linguistic skills by being exposed to foreign vocabulary and grammar.

Heavy focus was placed on the Anglicised part of the gaming community (most

notably European and American developers and gamers). Participants recognised English as being dominant, but not applicable in all regions of the gaming world, especially Asia. Certain group of players were assumed not to be fully capable of playing in English (again as the dominant language) due to having an insufficient grasp of it. Localisation in general could help to eradicate a language barrier in player-to-game and player-to-player communication. As such, the conclusion is that it should be provided for games made by American and European developers.

On the other hand, bad quality of localisation does not respect the source product, contains sloppy mistakes, disrupts communication with the game and with other players, thus it is generally unwelcome. Past experiences with examples of badly done localisation convinced the participants not to ever pursue it again, and they are now highly unlikely to change language options, unless they have to switch them manually in order to be able to play in English. Players who are explicitly aware of their bilingual skills – or at least self-convinced of this – do not see a particular difference between their mother tongue and English.

Some participants thought that the original language is supposed to be seen as the intended “how to play” a given game – that it fully embodies what its developers and creators wanted to show. Additionally, if one first launches the game in the original and finds it pleasant, he or she would probably not change it to any other language since it may start to “feel weird” after already playing in the original. Similarly, one’s mother tongue (Polish, French, Dutch, Spanish, etc.) may not “feel natural” and sound good enough to make a game fully enjoyable. It can even render it more difficult, less intuitive and not as entertaining.

The participants admitted that intuitive, easy and uncomplicated games do not need to be localised, because as soon as their mechanics are mastered, they mostly become a matter of skilful play rather than anything else. While this was not a critique of localisation and translation per se, it did express a belief that it is perhaps expendable.

Moreover, gaming jargon is so internationalised and Anglicised that no added translations of words, terms and phrases are seen as necessary, because players can easily communicate across nations and regions. Accordingly, gamers can “get by” with their command of English. Many groups also invent their own slang while playing and they do not need translation to cooperate. E-sports and competitions, too, are international and rely heavily on the English language, at least in the regions of concern to participants in this study.

Lastly, Localisation which takes the “locale” (Munday, 2008, p. 191) aspect to an extreme is unwarranted, given that it limits players’ options of mobility and availability in multiplayer games. It may simply be overlooking gamers in favour of making revenue.

5.2. Theoretical implications

Video games are nowadays a widespread, easily obtainable and desired medium. Players in different countries want to test their skills, compete against others or simply escape their everyday lives to virtual worlds. Due to the internationalisation of the market and the practice of sim-shipping (Mangiron & O’Hagan, 2013), AAA games are launched and enjoyed globally, rather than forcing their players to wait for a localisation. Or, conversely, players do not feel a need to wait for a localised version and prefer to play it as soon as it is possible in the original language. In this project, that “original” proved to be the English language in majority of cases of multiplayer online titles, which also happen to be popular in the international gaming community and amongst E-sports professionals (E-Sports Earnings, 2017; <http://twitchstats.net/>). Just as there is a prevalent tendency to learn a commonly used language to communicate across nations, the English-speaking market thrives thanks to an endless process of creation of products relying solely on it. As proven by the participants who made a point of referring to English as a “default” in the context of the video game market, it would appear that not only is it perceived as intentional, but also it has become standardised to the extent that it is even objectionable for some to require that localisation be provided. In addition, bilingual gamers claim to perceive no difference between playing in a native language compared to a foreign one in regard to their interaction with the game. This, too, reflects the conviction that English language is a standard for gamers who need to have good enough command of it in order to be able to engage in video gaming.

In this study, localisation was assessed based on its various features – how it is performed linguistically, how it works technically and how it becomes situated in a target culture. Interestingly, to players it often only occurred that a game which they play is “localised” based on the degree it is “translated” to: instead of looking at the bigger picture painted by cultural adaptation or programmability of certain options, it is limited by gamers to choosing one language from a list of options available or almost literary-like assessment of own names in the target language. In fact, this proves that localisation is not yet an overt process in any manner, and that video game players may find themselves considering

“English only” games as a normal occurrence. In some cases, the participants have had experiences with instances of questionable localisation work – it is then understandable how they prefer to avoid any such similar struggles. If the skopos of providing entertainment and a feeling of authenticity fails in a localised game, there is little reason to pursue playing further. And yet, those gamers admit that they would be willing to play games in their mother tongues if they were available; that some titles are too complicated to be played in a foreign language; or even that the dubbing is particularly pleasant to listen to. Games, however, must be “programmed” to be available in that given language and compatible with it: it must be rendered possible to incorporate different languages in-game at a coding level. Failure to do so on an earlier stage of production can even result in the implemented translation segments making the game unplayable.

It would be, however, unfair to attribute localisation procedures and reception only to one group. As seen in this study, video game players within their own community are not merely “playing” (Williams, 2005) – engaging in the world of online multiplayer games allows them to create, criticise and produce new material. The “system” and merger of different aspects including culture, technology, sociology (Bijker, 2009) – video games – is not situated in a vacuum. Even gamers who take no active interest in modding are, in fact, contributing to the medium itself. Their playing styles, new made-up languages to communicate, streamed and spectated material all shape a new dimension of media usage. That, additionally, could help game developers to suit localisation to people’s standards and expectations, rather than study- and theory-driven attempts at translation. Going back to Shao (2009), it is visible that gamers are no passive consumers of products.

Finally, the field of multiplayer video games is not only expanding at a fast pace – it is immensely popular due to the rising accessibility of free-to-play, team-friendly and intuitive games. FPS titles like *Counter-Strike* or *Overwatch* in particular seem to be enjoyable due to their skill-based (Jansz & Martens, 2005) gameplay, and MOBA titles such as *League of Legends* have accumulated enormous fanbases of players and fans alike. Perhaps in the future, more will be available in a big array of languages, not merely English and other “dominant” tongues; perhaps even more media consumers will become video game players.

5.3. Limitations & suggestions for future research

This study project was completed with much attention to detail: it was carried out in a systematic manner, leading to the collection of rich and interesting data. Still, certain elements could have been improved on – or could possibly be taken into account when future research is concerned. First of all, whilst this study was never aiming at producing generalisable results, thus the choice of a qualitative method, the group of participants recruited could have been expanded. Two extra criteria seem to have influenced some of the results – age and education. Firstly, it appears that older players had a different view on video games in general, and that they described their specific preferences and tastes, while those younger were more in favour of an “anything goes” approach. Secondly, the level of education was in line with their command of languages which surely predisposed their attitudes towards localisation of video games. Many participants assumed that since they themselves could play games in English with no difficulty, that probably extends to the general population of gamers, as everyone was expected to have studied at least one additional language in their education process. Interestingly, this caused stereotypes to emerge while playing and discussing video games: Polish gamers, for instance, would project their own circumstances onto those of foreign players.

Secondly, the participants did not fully understand what “translation” and “localisation” entail and how they differ from each other. Everyone seemed acquainted with the concept of “translation”, especially in reference to popular media products, but “localisation” proved to be a tricky concept. Some participants talked explicitly about literal or nonliteral changes introduced by adaptation into their native languages, however this division mostly covers purely translational issues. Despite the researcher introducing the topic, attempting to explain those two terms, many participants persisted with referring to “translated games”. On the other hand, a number of participants discussed localisation-related issues – for instance geographical limitations, exporting of games or programmability – without fully recognising them as such. Referring to the lack of research on localisation as such, perhaps this observation proves that indeed it is still a mostly alien concept – in this study, however, it should have been explicated better to the participants themselves.

5.4. Recommendations for video game makers

Apart from drawing attention to localisation procedures, reflecting on this study leads to some recommendations for media producers. In this particular case of video games, developers should be more acutely aware of platform differences and limitations imposed by data storage. Even when not opting for playing in a given language, players should be presented with a choice at a very early stage, preferably when first launching the game. In multiple cases, localisation work provides necessary lines of subbed and/or dubbed text, and as such it seems that cutting of entire voice tracks is an unnecessary omission, unless the data storage device is incapable of storing that data. And yet, it appears inadequate that PC players can download as much data¹¹ as needed, including said extra voice packs, while console gamers are limited to the retailed discs. As a result, a localised box and docs set on a newly released PS4 game may indicate that it is only available in the mother tongue of the country it has been localised into.

Furthermore, localisation effort should ideally be put into a wider range of games, so that every age group would be able to choose from a variety of titles available. This is especially important for younger players who are often faced with the choice of either buying a well-marketed, high-budget PEGI 16+ shooter game which just happens to be fully localised, against a kids-friendly, multiplayer Nintendo party game which does not even provide a translation of the manual.

Word count: 19,638

¹¹ This is, quite obviously, restrained by factors such as Internet connection, hard disk space, etc.

Appendix A: Overview of recordings used for analysis

	Number of participants	Language	Time (in minutes)	Platform	Type
<i>Left 4 Dead</i> ^{2¹²}	4	PL, EN	67.5	Steam, Discord	Cooperative player-versus- environment FPS
<i>Counter-Strike: Global Offensive</i>	4 (2 more people were present in-game but did not join the researcher's group)	PL, EN	47	Steam, Discord	Team competitive FPS
<i>Hearthstone</i>	2	EN (the researcher's own game was set to PL, however)	83	Battle.net, Discord	1-on-1 competitive card game
<i>League of Legends #1</i>	3	EN	52	LoL client, Discord	Team competitive MOBA
<i>Smite</i> ¹³	2	EN	61	Hi-Rez launcher, Discord	Team competitive MOBA
<i>League of Legends #2</i>	4 (more people were logging in and out TeamSpeak)	PL (one participant was playing in EN)	69	LoL client (faulty), TeamSpeak, YouTube	Team competitive MOBA
<i>Rocket League</i>	2	EN	54	Steam, Facebook	Team competitive sports
<i>Overwatch</i>	2	PL, EN	52	Battle.net,	Team

¹² This was the first trial recording. The second one was excluded, as explained in Chapter 3, due to it not fitting the data gathering procedure.

¹³ Audio in this recording was mismatched.

#1				Facebook	competitive FPS
<i>Overwatch</i> #2	2 (2 more people played the game but did not feel comfortable talking to the researcher in EN)	Greek, EN	87	Battle.net, Twitch	Team competitive FPS
<i>Overwatch</i> #3	5 (1 more person joined the team but did not talk to the researcher)	Spanish, EN	80	Twitch, Facebook	Team competitive FPS

Appendix B: Topic list

INTRODUCTION

This study involves small groups of participants engaged in a session of a chosen multiplayer video game, played online through a suitable platform and with the use of an internal (in-game) or external voice chat. During the time of the game or subsequently, the researcher asks a few questions regarding 1) players' attitude towards the chosen game, 2) language options in the chosen game, 3) players' view on communication therein, and 4) any localisation strategies or experiences the players are familiar with. There are no right or wrong answers – each participant should simply communicate their personal thoughts on the subject.

The questions do not require to be asked in a numbered order, as comments provided by participants while playing may have already answered certain issues or prompted the researcher to ask them early on. Preferably, questions on localisation are to be asked later.

REGARDING THE GAME PLAYED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Why do you play this particular game?
- How do you make sense of this game in general (in relation to its objectives and etc.)? What are your own goals?
- Have you played this game in any other language than <language X>? What languages were those? Why?
 - If yes: include prompts about specific localised elements, such as UI.
- Are you aware whether the game is at all available in other languages?
- How do you motivate certain choices in regard to language:
 - Changing language settings,
 - Deliberately playing in a foreign language,
 - Playing in a mother tongue?
- (If participants are observed using a specific term in any given language):
 - Why do you use <term X>?
 - Is <term X> used in a multinational context, e.g. e-sports?
 - Why is <term X> interchangeable in a given language?

COMMUNICATION ISSUES

- How would you describe communication:
 - In your team,
 - When playing with friends,
 - When matched with random people – especially when speaking different languages,
 - On a given platform – with reference to speaking and/or typing?
- Is the game playable without any command of <language X> (in case of unlocalised games)?

LOCALISATION

- Are you aware of different approaches towards translating/localising games, such as partial or full localisation?
- Have you had any – good or bad – experience with localised video games?

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