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DO VIDEO GAMES DREAM OF PROPER LOCALIZATIONS?

Whilst movies in the CIS region are usually voiced with great care and attention to details and books written in different foreign languages are mostly translated as it should be, the issue of poor localization of computer-related products, be it a software program or a PC / video game, still remains.

Not to be judgmental, it is necessary to mention that there are nicely localized games as well. Although they are not free from inaccuracies or even epic fails sometimes, of notice can be a close-to-perfect work on *Dragon Age: Origins*, where semi-versed speech of one of the playable characters was also voiced in poems in the Russian language, or an amazing localization of *World of Warcraft* that preserved hundreds of multi-layered allusions and "Easter eggs". Both are pleasant to the eye and ear but these two are an exception from the rule.

So why do the localizations of video games often lack proper quality, rolling up one's ears and making people feel dumber than they really are while playing?

Before we get down to the matter at hand, it is worth noting that PC and / or video games have always been underestimated in terms of linguistic and scientific research. At least, they are of little interest throughout the post-Soviet space. There has been an increase in papers dedicated to the research of movie- and literature-related issues in translation studies, stylistics, pragmatics and some other fields of linguistics over the recent years, but the games are still thrown into the pending tray. They do not deserve it at all, for many are great examples of storytelling and writing that have thousands of intricate linguistic and lingual tasks to discover and solve. That is why even a brief insight into the matter can bear fruit and become a catalyst for further research, and we hope that this paper would reveal at least some of the key problems of the present-day localization of this entertainment-based PC / console software.

First of all, we have to say that the process of localization is not that easy as it may seem. It is a complex and often complicated task that involves translation of hundreds of pages of in-game texts, interfaces and menus, tens of sleepless nights spent on editing, and many hours of voice acting. An AAA-title may require several months of hard work if not more to be localized only into one particular language (and such games are usually localized into English and all major European languages, and also into some Asian ones).

From these arises yet another pressing issue that impacts the quality, connected with a large number of internal and external challenges. These can include a demand to complete or speed up the localization process from the publisher ASAP (in order to place the product on the market on its release date), too short deadlines to process and edit large bodies of data, insufficient funding, lack of expertise and experience in the localization team, out-of-character translation, gender-related inaccuracies, inability to synchronize the voice tracks, and software-related issues. All these things can lead to a noticeable decrease of the final quality of the product, giving birth to customer rage and

godzillions of memes. With miles of text-based info (e.g. interactions between the player character/s and the NPCs, descriptions of various items, abilities, lore books, and so on) to be translated and hours of voice acting to be done again in a different language, drawbacks and irregularities in the style, text and other language-attributed parts of the game are inevitable. And yet these flaws can be unexpectedly terrific and awkward on some occasions, leaving room for scientific curiosity and desire to investigate the reasons for their existence and the consequences of the unsatisfactory localizations released into the marketplace.

There are too many issues to cover in one article, and that is why we will focus our attention on the problems of *voice acting, lore & immersion breaking*, and *ad-libbing* this time.

Our today's victims are the official English and Russian trailers of *Destiny 2* (to be released in 2017) [2, 3] and the localization of *Mass Effect: Gold Edition* (2009), namely a thorough comparison of the original English version and its Russian counterpart made by the game news portal Stopgame.Ru [1]. Both of these are fully dubbed, allowing us to draw many parallels between how these localizations were done and how they should have been done.

The problems related to voice acting are plenty and can include overacting, lip sync desynchronization (when the line voiced is excessively long or too short to fill into the original passage spoken by a game character), inadequate tempo of speech, unnecessary pauses and wrong intonation, and the use of improper lexis and / or style among other things.

Many of these are caused by the fact that the voice actors often work on the project head-on, without knowing or seeing what is happening in game, as well as without any particular info about whom they voice and how they should do it. Another issue lies in the translations and post-editing made by the localization team, which can also be out-of-context or done in a rush. A great example of such "marvelous" voice acting, caused by a multitude of production drawbacks, is the Russian trailer of *Destiny 2*:

cf. "…which means if I don't see you out there, *I'll kill you myself…*" with "то есть не вздумайте откосить, *а то получите…*" (will *get* what?); "Worst case scenario – *you die…*" vs. "В худшем случае – *конец…*" (the *end* to what?); "Today we know our enemy/ His name's… Gary! Or Gil. Glen? I dunno, it is something with the G!" vs. "Сейчас мы знаем имя врага. Его зовут… Гэри! Ой, Гил. Глен? Так ведь? Я забыл… Что-то на "Г"!

The very last example in the video shows how a loud and pompous phrase of the speaker is voiced in a dull, neutral manner in the dubbed version of the trailer. This ruins the original message of the video and breaks game immersion. In other words, these inaccuracies and ad-libbing lead to a shift in its perception by the audience who becomes misinformed and puzzled. The setting of the game, its lore and the level of immersion are intertwined, and such mistakes can destroy the atmosphere translated to the player by the game developers and scriptwriters. Another example of the immersion-breaking voice acting would be the episode from *Mass Effect: Gold Edition*, where a krogan (a large male representative of the frog-like, militaristic humanoid race

that generally hates humans, armed to the teeth and with a gruff voice) asks the main character about one of his/her wet jobs:

cf. "*You. Human. You're one they call Shepard*? – Who wants to know?" with "*Здравствуйте, это вы что ли Шепард? –* А кто спрашивает?"

The original utterance, said in a despising and low tone, got transformed into a real immersion-breaker due to its unnatural style in the Russian language. There are many similar examples throughout the whole game.

One of the in-game NPCs starts swearing like a drunken sailor despite that his original voiceover is absolutely different from the dubbed one and does not contain so many obscenities.

The voices of the main character in the original game and in the localized *Mass Effect* are so different that it is almost impossible for the player to identify himself / herself with this character.

Yet another example comes into mind when an important official begins to use slang words and some unusual additions to his speech to discuss very serious problems in the dubbed game:

cf. "Saren's a Specter, one of the best. *A living legend…*" vs. "Сарен – Спектр, и один из лучших. *Живая легенда, все дела…*"

This ad-libbing, and again there are dozens of situations where it is unnecessary and even detrimental to the cause, leads to the results most unexpected: what is serious becomes funny, awkward and too pretentious, while jokes may be ruined or turned into something hardly legible.

It is difficult to say if the state of affairs in localization business gets different and what will become of all these fails. Will it all change for the better or become worse? That remains to be seen…

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