Netnography of Fan Localization on Social Media Releases: Observation of Overwatch (OW) and Overwatch League (OWL)

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Abstract

The fanbase of the *Overwatch* series and its esports competition, *Overwatch* League, has witnessed numerous enthusiasts, who are dedicated to fan localization of diversified social media releases from English sources into the Chinese context. The implementation of such fan activities has significantly enhanced the dissemination of information across various language contexts, thereby fostering extensive interactions within global fan communities. Through frameworks of practice-led research and netnography, this article examines Chinese fan localizers' incentives and procedures in contributing to the English-Chinese localization of social media content. It also sheds light on potential localization issues concerning including authenticity of the information, localization quality, and fan localizers' subjectivity. From an academic standpoint, this article explores the significant transformation of audiovisual works by extending academic cognition into new media forms, technical tools, user behaviors, and relationships with communication and translation. It illustrates the multifaceted nature of game localization and highlights the potential integration of social media fandom to generate localized content related to video games. Furthermore, it delves deeper into the intricate interplay between game localization, audiovisual translation, and game communities.

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1. Introduction

The advent of communication technologies has significantly broadened the scope for social beings to transcend their physical limitations (e.g., Taylor et al., 2013; Biocca & Levy, 2013). Social media are interactive technologies to facilitate the creation and dissemination of information, ideas, interests, and diversified forms of expression within virtual communities and networks (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Fandoms in the digital age utilize social media platforms to connect, interact, and exchange knowledge about their shared interests (Pearson, 2010). The interaction on social media through ways including views, likes, and reposts can sometimes significantly amplify the virality of messages on the Internet, especially in the global fandom (Hutchins & Tindall, 2016).

The incentives for the research lie in the observation that members of a local game community often exhibit significant demand for acquiring diversified social media releases, even if some of them are originally targeted at audiences speaking different languages. The information from different language contexts, carried in multimodal forms (e.g., text, image, video) and multiple resources (e.g., official posts, fan posts) usually provides members of a specific game community with insights into global perspectives, thereby enhancing their fan engagement and satisfaction. Consequently, the utilization of social media platforms to release fan posts has progressively become a prevalent means for extensive dissemination of fan localization on social media releases associated with video games or esports. However, the dearth of scholarly research in these related fields implies a large deficiency.

2. A brief introduction to *Overwatch*, *Overwatch* League and the Chinese community

Overwatch (Blizzard Entertainment, 2016) and *Overwatch 2* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2022) are team-based massively multiplayer online (MMO) first-person shooter (FPS) video games, developed and published by Blizzard Entertainment. *Overwatch 2* (OW2) is the updated and iterated version of *Overwatch* (OW). OW2 has replaced OW since its release on 5 October 2022 with renewed aspects such as interfaces, gameplay modes, character models, and maps.

Overwatch League (OWL), owned by Blizzard Entertainment, is a series of professional esports tournaments based on OW or OW2, with its inaugural season in 2018. The teams competing in OWL are independent and city-based, differentiated by their cultural identities (e.g., color, logo), ownership, and team players. The inherent nature of OWL cultivates distinct fan bases for both the team and the player, which do not completely overlap.

Fandom for OW and OWL are inherently intertwined due to the highly centralized significance in the esports nature of the game, with the overall fandom usually called OW global or local communities. The OW Chinese community's presence was once prominent and conspicuous. China has offered a wide range of enthusiasts, engaging from gameplay to online fan creation (e.g., interesting comments, talented fan arts, or in-time news dissemination), and even offline activities (e.g., fan meetings). To increase the connection between fan groups and officials, talented fan contributors were once invited to attend the

Blizzard Chinese annual ceremony called *huangjin niandu shengdian* 黄金年度盛典 "the Annual Gold Grand Ceremony". Echoing Zimmerman (2019, p. 913), the complex affiliations of the OW Chinese community result in members inhabiting different stages of the membership life cycle, and the diversity can keep them more likely to continue playing.

Unfortunately, this peak state has come to a historical freezing period with the termination of the cooperation between Blizzard and NetEase in January 2023. The cooperation between the two giants started in 2008, due to the regulations of the Chinese government that non-Chinese video game companies need to partner with Chinese manufacturers on the distribution of non-Chinese video games into the Chinese market (Zhang & Chiu, 2020) and should process extremely sophisticated censorship (Zhang, 2012). To date, no other Chinese agencies announced their partnership with Blizzard, which has resulted in Blizzard's servers originally designed for China being inactive. Although the official localization of in-game content and important social media releases in simplified or traditional Chinese has still maintained a stable operation conducted by Blizzard localization teams, the termination of the collaboration has led to a significant decline in the popularity and reputation of OW and OWL in China.

After the incident, many well-known Chinese OW esports players, streamers, and commentators have changed career paths due to the suspension of the official OWL esports streaming. Many Chinese gamers assert that their previous investments of time, money, and emotions have lost their value. After OW2 was officially collaboratively released on Steam on 11 August 2023, the public has witnessed an unprecedented number of negative reviews, ranking among the top list in terms of unfavorable feedback from Chinese Steam users in history.[1]

3. Literature review

Given the research focus on fan localization in media-based fan communities, a solid theoretical introduction to cross-field disciplines, including game localization, fan localization, and game community, serves as the cornerstone for this study. Besides, the theoretical foundation of methodology encompassing netnography and practice-led research is also illustrated.

3.1. Game localization and fan localization

The emergence of localization was observed in the early 1980s during the transition to the digital era (O'Hagan & Ashworth, 2002; O'Hagan, 2009). Localization is a broad concept, which involves localization of works in life concerning the language context shift (Esselink, 2003).

Game localization was originally derived from the need to distribute video games from a source language context to the target language context (Mangiron et al., 2014). Game localization refers to multi-dimensional localization, especially the transformation of game software developed in one country into a

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[1]. The release of *Overwatch 2* on Steam on 11 August 2023 aims to enhance its global distribution on a new platform, albeit significantly later than the official global publication of *Overwatch 2* on 5 October 2022.

target territory, and the localization works concern a wide range of linguistic, cultural, technical, sociological, and market-accessibility issues (Sánchez, 2009; Zhang, 2012; Bernal-Merino, 2014; Mangiron et al. 2014; Zoraqi & Kafi, 2023).

Fan localization, based on its lexical references, means "fan-conducted localization", which includes diverse practical ways such as fansubbing, fansdubbing, scanlation, and fan game localization (Vazquez-Calvo et al., 2019). For a historical period, fan localization has once raised heated debates on copyright issues, which caused the term with derogatory connotations concerning pirated games in certain circumstances. Conversely, society has also witnessed fans' contributions such as the modification of read-only memory (ROM) data to extend exposure to classic games (e.g., Sánchez, 2009).

3.2. Game community

A video game community is a collective of individuals, either online or offline, who are initially brought together by their basic interests in video games and related content (Nascimento et al., 2014). The shared interest encompasses not only video games but also a sense of belonging, integration, fulfillment of needs, as well as shared emotional connections (Saldanha et al., 2023).

The implementation of tailored global or local game community operations, based on localization requirements, constitutes a fundamental component for achieving commercial success for a video game (Ruggles et al., 2005; Kerr & Kelleher, 2015). Various models and operational strategies for game community management have been proposed (Ho & Huang, 2009). Video game developers are also encouraged to actively participate in online gaming communities to establish strong connections with gamers and promote distribution (Ruggles et al., 2005), or initialize the developer-community co-creation to enhance the reception (Bernal-Merino, 2016).

3.3. Netnography and practice-led research

Online communities give rise to or manifest cultures (Kozinets, 2015). The notion of a field site is thus decentralized, and specific themes serve as focal points that aggregate diverse online addresses, posts, individuals, and social groups (Belk & Kozinets, 2017, p. 12). Netnography has been a prominent contemporary ethnographic approach, which entails participatory observation through online fieldwork (Kozinets, 2015; Belk & Kozinets, 2017; Addeo et al., 2019).

For translation and interpreting studies, there has been a notable increase in innovative methodologies that surpass disciplinary boundaries to investigate the agents, or practices (Marin-Lacarta & Yu, 2023, p. 1). Scholars have discussed issues of netnography in translation studies, highlighting the investigation inquiry, informed consent, data management, relationship management (Huang et al., 2023), researcher-participant relationship, or subjectivity-objectivity balance (Lu & Lu, 2022).

Netnographic approaches provide abundant information through the detection of specialized websites, blogs, and internet forums (Mangiron, 2017, p. 89). Some researchers have creatively explored game

localization under netnographic frameworks, such as Karagöz (2021) on indie game localization Facebook group, Mangiron (2021) on SEGA's video game localization strategies and receptions, Dody M. H. Chen (2022) on the localization strategies of OWL Chinese streaming, Afzali and Zahiri (2022) on Iranian game players' translation needs.

Practice-led research states the researchers should ideally be the creators of the researched works, practices, or phenomena (Smith & Dean, 2009). Reflective and reflexive thoughts on the production, academically referred to as "exegesis", are indispensable and essential (Smith & Dean, 2009; McNamara, 2012), because the influences, ideas, decisions, materials, technologies, events, and theories can inspire, inform, constrain, or facilitate the process and production of the work (Candy, 2006). Unfortunately, practice-led research is rather rare in recent translation or interpreting studies, except for a few such as Öner (2013) on the professional improvement of translators, and Fernandes (2015) on the reflective analysis of practice-led translation of drama.

4. Method

In this project, ways of fan localization specifically refer to collecting social media releases about OW and OWL from English sources and offering localized versions in the Chinese media fandom. To examine the procedures, incentives, and potential issues, from April 2021 to December 2021, I documented my active participation in OW fan English-Chinese fan localization. Additionally, from August 2020 to April 2023, I used netnographic approaches to record fan localization works and establish multimodal corpora.

4.1. Practice-led research: The practice and exegesis

Initially, my practical engagement in fan localization was driven by fan interest voluntarily. As I delved deeper into the scholarly field, these practices have formed the research foundation.

I used two social media accounts to deliver my fan localization works. The first account is fully owned by me on Bilibili, a Chinese video-sharing and game-streaming platform, whose id is *honghuangshaonv chenduoduo* 洪荒少女陈多多 "Primordial Girl Chenduoduo" and the current subscribers are over 14,500. I have been using this account to upload a few videos featuring the introduction of the OW updates, and those English game slang terms used in OW game context, or OWL events.[2] All videos are freely accessible in the online public domain without any registration requirement.

The second account is on Sina Weibo, a Chinese social media and social networking service. It was called *ronghuo ziliao zhan* 熔火资料站 "Melting-fire Data Station", whose subscribers were about 60,000 at the end of the practice period. Originally, it was a social media account established by a group of voluntary fans dedicated to disseminating news about OW and OWL. Due to various factors, the account has changed its name and function, leading to its discontinuation of operations on fan localization.

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[2] For more information, please see the video collection: https://space.bilibili.com/2240801/channel/seriesdetail?sid=3595446

Furthermore, it has remained inactive for an extended period to date. From April 2021 to December 2021, I used it to release Chinese-localized social media releases on OW and OWL such as the localization of official English game news from Blizzard officials, or English fan posts on Reddit. The total number of localization-related releases has reached 2,000 pieces.[3] The social media management and localization works were exclusively undertaken by me during the practice period, which explicitly signifies my complete autonomy in the selection of localization sources and the production of the Chinese target versions. The data are readily accessible in the public domain without any registration requirement for viewing.

4.2. Netnography: Data collection and analysis

From August 2020 to April 2023, I observed the events of OW and OWL that highly triggered English-Chinese fan localization.

The total number of key events screened for this project amounts to 128, with each event deriving at least a piece of fan-made Chinese social media post and its English source. These game events, varying in scale and significance, are chronologically arranged. Certain events may trigger an extensive series of events and an abundance of social media posts (e.g., the termination of the Blizzard-NetEase cooperation).

Based on the temporal sequence of events, I systematically categorized and compiled multimodal corpora, as the modal display is expanded to include multimodal content, such as hyperlinks, or screenshots. To decrease potential ethical issues, fan localizers were anonymized, with a sole focus on localization strategies, or issues. Detailed annotations were added to record significant features such as the connotations of game slang terms, or the context. To monitor the dissemination of fan posts, the count of subscribers, comments, or retweets associated with fan localizers of a particular piece of data was recorded. Furthermore, typical or representative comments were recorded, coded, and anonymized. Last, the related social media releases by OW Chinese game officials or verified OW Chinese official localizers were collected, if available, to form a control group.

5. Findings and discussion

This chapter offers a systematic overview of fan localization on social media releases about OW and OWL. It not only elucidates the fan localization procedures and incentives but also sheds light on prominent contradictions and involved stakeholders.

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[3] The nomenclature and the function of the account have undergone a series of modifications owing to functional adjustments by fan group members. Nevertheless, all my localized content remains preserved in the timeline of social media releases from April 2021 to December 2021. For more information, please see: https://www.weibo.com/u/3953818744

5.1. Incentive: From self-motivations to social-media fandom hierarchy

Fan localization or fan translation distinguishes itself from other non-professional localization or translation, such as volunteer translation (Evans, 2019), because fan localization focuses specifically on popular culture (O'Hagan, 2009; O'Brien, 2011). Like fansubbing or fansubbing, the vast majority of English-Chinese fan localization on social media releases about OW and OWL is not primarily motivated by direct monetary gain, but about loving, spreading, popularizing, and learning to a popular domain (Wang & Zhang, 2017).

The social media account to release the localized content can be owned by either individuals or groups. Moreover, it can be a personal social media account that mixes the fan localizer's authentic experiences and identities (e.g., selfies, educational background) with fan localization practices, or even an anonymous one that solely provides fan localization releases. Intriguingly, a prevalent strategy for managing social media accounts is observed, involving the establishment of fictitious identities on platforms to attract a broader community. In this respect, although a team of fan localizers may be involved in the localization process, their public image is consistently uniform and fictionalized, which facilitates the resolution of staffing issues within the localization group and centralizes the public attention to a fictionalized figure to get rid of potential criticism of specific personnel.

Social media platforms offer fan localizers an avenue to cultivate a dedicated group of subscribers for their social media accounts. Especially due to a standing national ban on access to many non-Chinese websites enforced by the Chinese government since 2009, the majority of the OW Chinese community lacks access to pertinent information on English social media. To this end, numerous sub-fandoms have been gradually established within the wider range of the OW Chinese large fandom, whose shared interests are not only targeted to fan localizers' dissemination, localization, and explanation of OW or OWL information but also involve almost all aspects of fan localizers.

Consequently, community members may develop a sense of affiliation, reverence, or devotion towards specific fan localizers (Groene & Hettinger, 2016), and these fan localizers gradually acquire the status of so-called "fan celebrities". This instance echoes McCudden (2011) that authority, investment, cultural capital, and social capital are approaches to fandom hierarchy. The observation on the OW Chinese fandom hierarchy extensively highlights that the distinctive features of fan localizers lie in their ability to provide a greater amount of content to the local community. In this context, it is plausible that the hierarchical structure and reputation within fandom, predominantly virtual but inevitably accompanied by substantial feedback, may exert influence on the genuine intention underlying fan localization. Furthermore, it should be noted that the fandoms for specific fan localizers may potentially lead to the misuse of fan influence and raise hatred toward game officials, particularly in social contexts where certain sub-fandoms hold opposing views to those endorsed by game officials. In OW Chinese history, cases have been widely reflected in fan localization, whose content is about the Blizzard-NetEase cooperation end.

Significantly, the implementation of incentive policies on social media platforms for information dissemination and interactions can effectively facilitate the spread of fan localization and reinforce the existing hierarchy within fandom. Taking Sina Weibo as an example, despite the limited subscriber scale of some fan localizers, leveraging keyword search, trending topics, hashtags, and popularity metrics such as likes or reposts can effectively expose the content to a wider range of audiences, enhancing the influence and reputation of fan localizers. Conversely, the dissemination of social media platforms also enables unrestricted modification or substitution in localized versions, thereby raising concerns about the reliability of the content, even though some fan localizers exercise caution to avoid errors and openly acknowledge the limitations.

Interestingly, even though the popularity and reputation of OW or OWL have recently largely declined in contrast to its peak state, attention from some dedicated Chinese OW fans is still gathered about the English content of whether the new partnership will be established between Chinese companies and Blizzard. This observation extends O'Hagan (2009) and O'Brien (2011) on the correlation between fan localization and the popularity of the culture. It further suggests that incentives for fan localization of a popular domain constitute a dynamic and time-effective field.

5.2. The procedure: Three stages

There are generally three stages for utilizing social media platforms to post localized social media releases from English to Chinese about OW or OWL.

The first stage is to situate and select the information source from the English context. As previously introduced, the sources of information are diverse, involving official publications, fan forums, and almost every space and corner of the Internet. In this case, fan localizers usually frequently engage in participatory observation of specific English social media platforms such as Twitter or Reddit to discern valuable trends for localization purposes. On the other hand, it is important to align with the social media positioning of the fan-established account and cater to local audiences' preferences, which may, in turn, help fan localizers screen localized sources. In the OW Chinese community, the public has witnessed a few social media accounts that offer localized content catering to specific needs, such as the localization of news related to a specific OWL team or the translation of Reddit fan comments about game updates.

Commonly, fan localizers, due to their voluntary manners, own significant autonomy and exhibit a certain degree of randomness in their selection of the source content. Moreover, a few fan localizers may prioritize the localization of messages related to heated events to enhance the Internet exposure of their releases, such as the Blizzard sexual harassment scandal, or incidents of esports players' controversial expressions in live streaming. This selection of information, driven by the proliferation of social media and the corresponding surge in fan engagement, can also garner increased popularity for fan localizers.

The second stage is to localize the source content obtained via the Internet to the target language. Since the source information is usually presented in various forms on social media such as simple text, image

with text, or video that contains sounds, texts, and images, fan localizers should devise a strategic approach to ensure and enhance appropriate audiovisual localization (Taylor, 2013; Pérez-González, 2019). The following examples underscore the potential of utilizing multi-modal information sources to facilitate fan localization and enhance content creation. Furthermore, meticulous deliberation of fan localizers is reflected regarding the modal representation of the localized version, particularly about the *Skopos* and the reception.

First, since lots of people may discuss the source of the localized content, fan localizers usually post a screenshot or hyperlink of the source and attach the localized version in parallel. To a certain extent, this approach also serves the purpose of getting rid of the responsibilities of fan localizers in verifying the authenticity of the source, as the clarification of the source can establish a direct connection between the audience and its original context.

Furthermore, for content with a high potential to go viral on the Internet, fan localizers may exhibit a greater inclination towards utilizing non-textual formats for disseminating their localized versions. This can involve transforming the textual content into an image or video format, accompanied by a watermark reflecting the name of the localizer or platform. Furthermore, copyright protection measures implemented by the social media platform are frequently leveraged. These strategies can enhance the audience's cognition of the ownership of the fan localization while reducing instances of secondary dissemination through text replication.

Third, in the case of unlocalized content that incorporates multiple semiotic modes such as videos, certain fan localizers employ strategies like subtitling or voice-over in Chinese to enhance the reception of the content within the Chinese context. Conventionally, numerous transformative works are widely disseminated without copyright restraints (Pearson, 2010; Wang & Zhang, 2017). Controversially, depending on the timing of the initial release of fan localization online and the degree of similarity in specific content, it may potentially give rise to a multitude of ownership disputes in the fandom.

The final stage involves releasing the localized content on social media. The public demand on social media releases about OW or OWL exhibits the extreme attribute of immediacy, such as social media posts of esports players following live events or online fandom debates about contentious topics. Even in cross-linguistic contexts, certain Chinese fans actively seek immediate access to real-time localized information from English sources, preferably without any discernible delay. This has largely been in line with timeliness in the construction of newsworthiness (Bednarek, 2016).

To cater to the demands of the community and enhance the visibility of localized content on the Internet, fan localizers are typically expected to commence their work promptly upon online publication of the source material. Therefore, it is common to see fan localizers work late into the night to produce and disseminate localized messages, especially when the official releases of OW or OWL in English often coincide with late-night hours in China due to the time difference between China and the USA. In certain exceptional scenarios, the fan localizers may live stream the English press conference of OW or OWL

and promptly provide streaming commentaries using a consecutive interpreting approach to facilitate streaming spectators' perception of the non-localized content.

Interestingly, it is a common practice for OW fan localizers to openly acknowledge their inability to effectively handle the localization of certain game slang or unfamiliar cultural connotations. In Zhang and Cassany (2020), the correction, modification, and discussion of netizens with fan localization or translation works can be discerned from comments, and a similar case is also observed in many OW Chinese fan releases. In this scenario, the task of fan localizers is not expected as localization, but rather it entails accurately transmitting the unlocalized information from the source context to the target community in time. On the Internet, individuals with translation expertise often provide detailed explanations in comments and reposts when encountering such content. For subsequent audiences, the version they receive on social media represents a collaborative effort, showcased through interactions on social media platforms (Zhang & Cassany, 2020). Consequently, perusing the comments section to gauge an overall opinion has become a customary practice among netizens towards fan localization.

5.3. Controversial issues

Ideally, fan localization can disseminate desired information within the local OW community, thereby generating attention and fostering community development. However, fan localization also gives rise to numerous issues in the fandom, and the advent of social media has expanded the impact of issues to a broader spectrum of stakeholders. The following presents three types of issues, including the authenticity of the information, the quality of fan localization, and the subjective consciousness of fan localizers.

5.3.1. Authenticity of the information

According to the prevailing understanding among OW fandom, "official releases" specifically refer to content that is published by game companies on their official website or official social media channels, which ensures comparative accuracy, especially in contrast to the inauthentic news that is widely popular in fandom. Any official release should align with in-game updates and business collaborations, and any premature release can potentially lead to content disclosure, resulting in unpredictable side consequences to the game or events. Widely observed, the public's expectations for certain game designs, content, or collaborative projects have boosted the proliferation of unsubstantiated rumors with inaccurate details of OW2 (e.g., the release date, the game design) in global fandom before OW2 was officially released on 5 October 2022.

Falsehoods spread significantly further, faster, deeper, and more broadly than truths across all categories of information (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Once these OW or OWL rumors are transmitted from one community to the other through the localization and dissemination of fans, the novel information will divert focus from its source and undermine its authenticity (Pierri & Ceri, 2019). Significant backlashes may arise against relevant stakeholders due to their failure to achieve the non-stated missions (Laato & Rauti, 2021). The corresponding online feedback, predominantly consisting of criticism, is frequently

observed in comments for verified open-access social media accounts owned by the OW or OWL Chinese officials such as the localization manager or the official esports commentators. Owing to contractual obligations, their ability to refute the rumors is typically constrained.

Meanwhile, it is undeniable that the allure of disseminating fabricated information also captivates online audiences and boosts online subscriptions in the short term, especially when such dissemination can not only offer virtual but also substantial feedback. For instance, video viewing and user engagement on Bilibili videos can be converted into RMB (the official currency of the People's Republic of China) as a form of social media earning. In this scenario, employing unverified materials to generate appealing content and enhance viewership appears as a potential seductive approach, although there are still conscientious fan localizers who rely on verified sources with explicit references to generate comparatively impartial remarks.

Fan localizers have a high level of autonomy in selecting sources, which implies that the assessment of source validity to disseminate is entirely self-dependent. A decentralization within the information dissemination is witnessed, wherein the public is empowered and encouraged to make their judgments on the authenticity. However, the allure of social media exposure and the pursuit of fame in the fandom may affect the generation and dissemination of information.

5.3.2. Localization quality

The field of fan-conducted translation and localization has emerged as a domain of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006). The quality of fan localization has been a subject of academic debate for years, with numerous studies on online communities (e.g., O'Hagan, 2012; Wang & Zhang, 2017; Zhang & Cassany, 2020). Given the nature of fan localization in this project, wherein fan participation is accessible to a wide range of individuals with diverse localization skills and backgrounds, there exists a notable degree of volatility in the level of fan localization quality.

High-quality fan localization has the potential to boost the information flow across different language contexts, provide knowledge, enhance community engagement, and stimulate greater participation in a virtuous cycle (O'Hagan, 2009; O'Hagan, 2012). However, a significant contradiction arises in that the scarcity of talent and labor can lead to a diminished amount of feedback received by localizers, thereby impeding their ability to refine their versions. Additionally, inadequate preparation time or lack of source check or proofreading may compromise the finesse of the localized version. To such an extent, if localization errors like mistranslation or omission are propagated within the OW Chinese community through social media, it can inevitably lead to dramatic consequences that undermine the stakeholders involved in the fan-localized works, and cause fandom conflicts.

At the end of each OWL annual season, selected players with outstanding esports performances are honored, and the most prominent and distinctive person is awarded the Most Valuable Player (MVP). According to the official statement for the 2023 OWL MVP, fan votes make up 25% of the overall tally,

with the other 75% coming from a combination of OWL teams, broadcast talents, and media.[4] Since the inaugural election of the OWL MVP in 2018, the fan vote for the MVP title has become a carnival for fans around the world. Within the global media and communities, advocates of a specific OWL player or the team actively engage in promoting and fostering increased participation in voting for their preferred candidates. Furthermore, this promotional approach of fan voting also places the players under scrutiny, enabling the public to actively count not only their valuable esports talents but also their public behaviors, ideology, and even political stances as motivations for votes. The broad and arbitrary nature of fan voting implies that any inappropriate behavior exhibited by the candidates can exert a significant influence on the outcome of the election.

Huang "Leave" Xin, the former Chinese OWL player of Team Chengdu Hunters and the 2021 OWL MVP, has been severely blamed by some netizens for his Chinese voice chats with teammates in an OWL battle round before the election. Many interesting voice communications of OWL players in OWL battles are produced as video programs due to the fans' demands. One of Leave's voice chats on a controversial complaint is accidentally included. In a round, after he was dramatically killed by Dong-eon "Fits" Kim, a Korean OWL player of Team Seoul Dynasty, Leave said in Chinese, "*Fits de maike lei, tamade jixing le* Fits 的麦克雷他妈的畸形了*"* to his teammates. Table 1 shows two distinct fan-localized versions of his expressions from Chinese to English. TT1 has, for a time, caused a lot of disputes for Leave in the English community, as it is a literally translated version of the Chinese expression, showing a creepy, uncivilized, and aggressive attitude to curse the involvers. However, TT1 is incorrect and ambiguous as it fails to explain the specific game slang terms commonly used by Chinese gamers in the game context. In contrast, the game-based connotations in a Chinese game context are accurately elucidated by TT2.

Table 1. Two translated versions

ST (Chinese)	Fits 的	麦克雷	他妈的	畸形了
Chinese Pinyin Pronunciation	Fits de	Maike lei	tamade	jixing le
TT1 (English)	Fits'	McCree	(is) his mother's	malformation
TT2 (English)	Fits'	McCree	(is) fucking	abnormal or awesome

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[4] For more information about OWL MVP, please see: https://overwatchleague.com/en-us/mvp

Annotation	Kim "Fits" Dong-eun is a South Korean player who was playing for Team Seoul Dynasty and Team New York Excelsior in OWL.	Jesse McCree was the name of a hero in OW. The name was changed to Cole Cassidy in October 2021.	他妈的 is equivalent to "fucking" in connotation. Both in Chinese and English, they are more like an adverb that describes the intensity of emotions or assertions without conveying their literal meaning.	畸形了 in the Chinese game context has two connotations. First, it describes someone's unexpectedly excellent gameplay as if it were not done by a normal human. Second, it describes that a person's gameplay is unreasonably bad as if it were made by a stupid machine. This case represents the first situation.

The translation of *tamade* and *jixing le* has been a topic of extensive discussion within the English community before the 2021 MVP election. Controversially, concerning the Chinese game context, Leave's expressions are comparatively common and acceptable. Explicitly discussed by Sherry Yong Chen (2014), the Chinese swearing phrase *tamade* and its Pinyin acronym, TMD, are widely used for online communication. Furthermore, the perception and definition may transform, potentially diminishing users' recognition of the adverse impact of impolite language in everyday situations (Sherry Yong Chen, 2014). Besides, *jixing le*, under this circumstance, is used to praise Fits' extraordinary gameplay to kill Leave in a dramatic scene.

During Leave's engagement in the game, these words have acquired specific connotations. Individuals who possess a deep understanding of the Chinese game context may demonstrate both familiarity and proficiency in comprehending these slang terms, perceiving them as intriguing despite their lack of politeness in their original connotations (Strong, 2019; Dody M. H. Chen, 2022). This may further hint at the reasons why, in the stage of program production, the relevant personnel failed to distinguish and evaluate the potential reception issues of Leave's expressions in wider non-game and non-Chinese contexts. Considering the diverse age groups and language backgrounds of the global audience, Leave's

expressions in the video could have been revised or modified via subtitles to indicate the connotation. Ultimately, gamers with proper translation skills were dedicated to offering explicit explanations of the connotations to global communities, thereby reducing the negative impact of this incident.

The loss of connotation and contextual understanding of fan localization can have profound negative consequences like expanding panic or hostility towards certain stakeholders, especially when the specific content is amplified through social media to influence fandom reception and public opinion.

5.3.3. Fan localizers' subjectivity

Robinson (2001, pp. 2-3) notes that translators are never the original authors of the content, however, they draw on their own experiences of language and the world to formulate effective discourse. One of the widely used techniques for fan translation to embed subjectivity is *tucao* 吐槽, which originally refers to a fansubbing and subtitling strategy that embeds translators' humorous comments in subtitles or as translators' notes (Lu & Lu, 2021). Within broader scopes of research such as communication and media studies, the concept of *tucao* has transcended its original context in fan translation and encompassed any comments that reflect an individual's ideas, thoughts, or complaints (Hsiao, 2015). *Tucao*, according to the fan localization on OW and OWL social media posts, can manifest in the appellation assigned to a specific game character, or the subjective description of an objective statement about game events or news.

There are numerous cases of *tucao* in the appellation of game characters in fan localizers' posts. For instance, since DoomFist (*mori tiequan* 末日铁拳 "doomsday iron fist"), a male game character, has no hair with dark brown skin, a Chinese nickname of *ludan* 卤蛋 "marinated egg" has thus been popular to refer to him. This slightly mocking and humorous epithet is not initially meant to satire his race or appearance, especially when specific expressions in game contexts are often rendered intriguing (Strong, 2019; Dody M. H. Chen, 2022). Upon reading the message of fan localizers' use of *ludan*, the audience may reinforce the impression of the association with the appellation and the appearance of the character, and better sense the in-joke. Moreover, a few people may find it attractive, thereby creating a sense of similarity and belonging with fan localizers.

Controversially, as the influence of fan localizers gradually becomes established and expanded to form a specific sub-fandom of their own, the subjectivity inherent in the localized version may impact how ordinary community members perceive specific social events upon reception.

In July 2021, the public witnessed the lawsuit against Activision Blizzard by California's Department of Fair Employment and Housing for harassment and discrimination against female employees, which significantly influenced the trajectory of Blizzard's history. Compared with Chinese media outlets, English social media platforms frequently offered comprehensive reports on the matter, serving as the primary platform for updating information. To track the latest release, Chinese fan localizers have been actively engaged in monitoring global trends, localizing relevant reports, and providing self-made

explanations through a plethora of videos or articles. Within China's social media landscape, a multitude of fan perspectives emerged on the debate of certain issues.

In a series of lawsuit-related reports published by reputable English media outlets, the names of certain Blizzard employees are mentioned, who may not be well-known to most Chinese readers. A Chinese fan localizer with tens of thousands of fans once referred to a female former OW producer who expressed her stances about this issue as *pen jie* 喷姐 "an elder sister who sprays". This so-called "nickname" has nothing to do with the person's real name, but it is embedded with a weird, impolite Chinese connotation.

Pen jie 喷姐 is a two-Chinese-characters appellation. *Pen* 喷 "spray" is to express something gushing out, like liquids or words. *Pen ren* 喷人 "spray people" is a famous Chinese Internet slang, which means to curse people usually with no evidence. Besides, *jie* 姐 "sister" is to describe a female who is older than the speaker. The appellation can leave a preconceived impact on the audience that this female has proposed something inappropriate in advance. Noteworthy, in the same fan post, some other OW male leaders involved in the controversy retain the literal translation of their full English name or first name.

The translation approach diverges from the faithfulness of the original text, particularly in terms of gender representation (Arrojo, 1994) to a specific gender-related social event, thereby causing a preconceived notion of the subject. The consequences can be significantly severe when specific fan localizers accumulate a substantial number of followers or establish reputations within the community, akin to being "celebrities", as some of their dedicated supporters may trust their subjective assertions (Collisson et al., 2018). The Internet offers a cost-free and competitive platform for fan localization. However, the audience of fan localization must exercise their critical thinking abilities when evaluating the information.

6. Conclusion

This study sheds light on the practices of fan localization within the OW Chinese game community, whose localization source is focused on diversified English social media releases. The findings address the research questions outlined in the methodology part, including why and how fan localizers adapt themselves to localizing social media releases, and what the potential issues and conflicts are concerning fan localization.

The localization, as well as the re-creation of fans, can be considered a multifaceted and multimodal practice, encompassing diverse audiovisual translation skills. Significantly, the incorporation of fan features and stances with the transmission capacity of social media constitutes a pivotal source for certain disputes. Failure of the fan localizers to investigate the authenticity, the lack of localization quality, and the inclusion of personal emotions and biases, can result in multiple conflicts through the exposure of the Internet and the enhancement of fandom.

The significance and limitations of this project are both primarily constrained by the innovative methodology and the selected cases. While practice-led approaches and netnographic methods have

limited the trajectory and substantiation of findings, the utilization also underscores the necessity to embrace diverse research methodologies and frameworks in the digital age.

From a theoretical standpoint, this article elucidates the multifaceted nature of game localization and underscores its potential integration with social media fandom to further create localization works related to video games. Furthermore, it delves deeper into the intricate interplay between game localization, audiovisual translation, and game communities. It is a practical and research breakthrough, echoing Díaz-Cintas and Massidda (2019) that academic research should explore the significant transformation of audiovisual works by extending academic cognition into new media forms, technical tools, user behaviors, and relationships with communication and translation.

Future research may encompass the comparison between fan localization and official localization on a specific video game or esports domain, the reception of certain fan localized social media works, and the sense of being celebrities of fan localizers.

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Ludography

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