

Fan Localisation in the Chinese *Overwatch* Game Community: Conflicts about the Information Transmission

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Game localisation is a complicated multi-disciplinary research domain, where a large amount of content in and out of a video game needs to be localised properly on the technical, linguistic, and cultural adaptation for the territories where they will be released (Mangiron et al. 2014; Mangiron 2021). Online communities have witnessed diversified fascinating fan localisation practices (Wang and Zhang 2017; Vazquez-Calvo et al. 2019; Yu, 2022), but community members can bring backlashes to game companies and cause conflicts (Laato and Rauti 2021). *Overwatch* has been researched on its esports events (e.g. Välisalo and Ruotsalainen 2019), gender representation (e.g. Choi et al. 2020; Välisalo and Ruotsalainen 2022), nation and community (e.g. Adler 2019; Turtiainen et al. 2020), and English-Chinese streaming localisation (e.g. Chen 2022). The Chinese *Overwatch* community has long seen conflicts derived from the gap between the official and fan localisation on the English game news or English-speaking esports players' social media posts (see Chen 2022). These conflicts are not only triggered by whether the information is localised, but also caused by the result of localisation, and the reception of the localised content. These conflicts are growing severe especially after the end of the contract between Blizzard and NetEase in early 2023, which caused the official distribution of *Overwatch* in mainland China to no longer exist. However, inspiring facts are that the Blizzard Chinese localisation team still works for the in-game Chinese updates, and mainland gamers still contribute to the community by gaming, streaming, competition arrangement, and localisation.

From localisation theories such as those of Zhang (2012), Bernal-Merino (2014), and Mangiron et al. (2014), some apparent issues of localisation can be attributed to the delay of the official game news release in Chinese, the fan-made mistranslation, improper cultural adaptation and various stances or perceptions of fan localisers. Unfortunately, such complicated *Overwatch* fan practices have not been examined thoroughly due to the lack of researchers' in-depth community immersive experiences and the disregard for systematic examination from perspectives like bilingualism and localisation.

The research aims to explore how Chinese fan localisers contribute to the game community, what conflicts they may derive from localisation, how these conflicts are

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derived, and what implications can those fan activities offer to official game localisation and game distribution. For narrowing down the pool of information, I selected three important issues that are deeply associated with Chinese fan localisers on information transmission throughout *Overwatch* global and Chinese history. The first is Blizzard's sexual harassment issue and one of its impacts on the game character's name change from 'Jesse McCree' to 'Cole Cassidy' in 2021. The second is the Chinese warm-up release of *Overwatch 2*, the renewed version of *Overwatch*, in late 2022. The third is the termination of the collaboration between Blizzard and NetEase, Blizzard's former Chinese distribution agent, in early 2023.

A descriptive, participant-oriented, netnographical, and documentary approach was conducted to obtain the data. The first data group is collected by a practice-led approach, for which I voluntarily conducted 8-month fan localisation in the Chinese *Overwatch* community from April to December 2021. My tasks include the fan translation of the official *Overwatch* English novel, *Deadlock Rebels* (Ely 2021), and the localisation of game updates or esports news for a fan-made we media on Sina Weibo. This participatory practice-led method can provide fruitful insights for targeted fan localisation activities (Smith 2009), and all my localisation works are open-access. The second data group is collected by participatory observation, a useful research approach to obtaining social media data (Kozinets 2019). Methods such as screenshots, screencasts, and transcribing approaches were adopted in my participatory engagement with the Chinese *Overwatch* community from 2020 to 2023. The observed objects include two Chinese social media, Sina Weibo (a social media like Twitter) and Bilibili (a video sharing and streaming platform like Youtube). Chinese fan localisers post their Chinese localisation on English game news, English-speaking esports players' posts, and heated English game trends. All data collected in that period is open-source. To establish the control group, I also recorded and annotated the content released by the Chinese official accounts of *Overwatch* on Sina Weibo and Bilibili, whose media release is mainly about in-game updates and game news. Meanwhile, the open-access releases by *Overwatch* official localisers on Sina Weibo and Bilibili were also collected. Official localisers sometimes explain the latest or urgent game events and illustrate interesting localisation strategies they adopt for official game localisation. Reception of official and fan localisation works was recorded via social media comments, and they were annotated with game events, heated trends, cultural elements, and sensitive content (Fernández-Vara 2014). Last, I analysed data by using comparative discourse analysis and translation commentary, focusing on localisation issues and features (Hatim and Mason 2014) to produce findings.

This study examines major English-Chinese fan localisation approaches such as screenshots, screencasts, reposts, translations, and comments. It then portrays how diversified semiotic modes are utilised by fan localisers, including (text-layer) translation, (sound-layer) dubbing, (multimodal) video sharing, and live streaming. It highlights that fan localisation practices are inevitably embedded with fan stances and perceptions of the transmitted information, as well as their interpreted Chinese community's reception. On the one hand, fan localisation is an emerging approach to transmitting information between two language-based communities. On the other hand, issues of fan localisation such as (low-quality) machine translation, mistranslation, lack of localisation strategies, and self-made biased interpretations may cause negative impacts on some stakeholders (e.g. game companies, game official localisers, esports players). This has, in turn, stressed that the delayed actions or invisibility of official localisers in specific areas of information (e.g. gender issues, political content, emergent events) should also be investigated. Further approaches may include interviews with official or fan localisers for an in-depth study, and they can disclose findings about Chinese censorship laws, Internet regulations, cultural acceptance, and working modes or limits of the game's official or fan localisers. Overall, this study

hopes to shed light on the fan localisation and transmission of game-related information on social media, as an extension to game localisation studies.

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