

Game Localisation in Live Game Streaming: A Practice-Led Case Study

Dody M.H. Chen

University College London
6-18 Gordon Sq
London WC1H 0PQ, UK
dody.chen@ucl.ac.uk

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, it has been observed that a small group of Chinese-speaking streamers engage in Let's Play streaming, showcasing their gameplay of non-localised or partially localised video games, particularly English games.¹ The act of localising video games in live streaming is referred to in this research as 'streaming-based game localisation'. One major reason is that many games, particularly indie games, are not localised in Chinese due to their commercial plans, and (US-)English often serves as the default pivot language for the indirect translation of video game products not originally developed in English (O'Hagan 2022).

As the level of English skills of Chinese spectators varies, streamers are usually required to explain the English game content properly such as in-game texts, or cultural nuances through approaches like translation, interpreting, explanation, or commentaries. Instant feedback for live streaming is delivered through *danmu*, a technology facility on most Chinese streaming media that enables real-time comments being sent by registered users to zoom across the video sharing or streaming screen like bullets (Zhang and Cassany 2020). Since those streamers typically upload their streaming recordings to the video sharing section for public viewers' unlimited viewing, they usually receive delayed feedback via *danmu* or comments for the videos.²

As my four-year PhD project, this research focuses on two questions in association with the niche activity of streaming-based game localisation: First, what strategies do game streamers implement to deal with the English-Chinese localisation of specific game content? Second, from a multimodal point of view, what is the role of the acoustic channel and the visual channel in streaming-based game localisation from English into

¹ Let's Play is a form of game streaming that documents the gameplay of a video game, typically including commentary from the streamer and optionally featuring a camera view of the streamer's face.

² On most Chinese video sharing platforms, videos available for unlimited viewing can receive both *danmu* and comments, with *danmu* displayed on the screen and comments presented in a separate section. For most Chinese live streaming services, the streaming only receives *danmu*, which is displayed on the streaming screen.

Chinese? Two fundamental prerequisites are to identify both the streamer samples and the video game samples.

Observing a series of events and formulating these research questions are closely tied to my personal experiences. As an active content creator on Bilibili, a Chinese video sharing and live streaming platform, I have been releasing almost 200 videos since 2018. My Bilibili ID is 洪荒少女陈多多 “Primordial Girl Chenduoduo” (Chinese Pinyin pronunciation: hóng huāng shào nǚ chén duō duō; pronoun: she/her; herein referred to as Chenduoduo), which amasses a total fan base of over 15,000 and video viewing over 1 million.³ In 2021, I streamed an English game demo called *Children of Silentown: Prologue* (Elf Games and Luna2 Studio 2020) and attempted to localise it orally in live streaming, prior to finalising my PhD research questions.⁴ The inclusion of myself in the design echoes the framework of practice-led research, which emphasises that not only is the creative work itself regarded as a form of research, but also the practice of creativity like specialised knowledge possessed by creative practitioners or the artistic processes can yield valuable insights (Smith and Dean 2009).

I reviewed Chinese social media to identify game streamers who had streamed and localised *Children of Silentown: Prologue* and successfully archived the recordings. The only game streamer who has met the standard across Chinese platforms so far is 谜之声 “Sound of Mystery” (Chinese Pinyin pronunciation: mí zhī shēng; pronoun: he/him; herein referred to as Mizhisheng).⁵ Mizhisheng is a famous Chinese game streamer, amassing over 1100 videos uploaded onto his Bilibili channel, 420,000 subscribers on Bilibili and over 2 million followers across Chinese media.⁶ Mizhisheng has been consistently streaming and localising games for over 10 years, and he continues to engage in game streaming almost daily.

Due to the complexity of the selection of the game and streamer samples, over the course of 4 years, this research has developed into a descriptive translation study based on practice-led research, netnography, multimodal corpus studies, and semi-structured interviews. Multiple methods contribute to a comprehensive investigation of the phenomenon, called triangulated methodology (Patton, 1999).

The modules that constitute the triangulated methodology are separated into: (a) the data collection and analyses of my samples and Mizhisheng’s sample based on separate corpora, which are constituted of the game source content (e.g. game texts), streamers’ speech transcripts and multimodal annotations; (b) the netnographic approaches

³ For more information about Chenduoduo’s Bilibili video sharing channel, please see: <https://space.bilibili.com/2240801>

⁴ For more information about the video, edited based on the streaming recordings, which includes revised Chinese translations in subtitle-like annotations, please see: https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV19v411e7ZH/?spm_id_from=333.1387.search.video_o_card.click&vd_source=1d6ca8a4802c8a4ac21ef830761d2968

⁵ For more information about Mizhisheng’s streaming recording archived by his authorised fansrecording group, please see: https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1s84y1j7yF/?spm_id_from=333.1387.search.video_o_card.click

⁶ For more information about Mizhisheng’s Bilibili video sharing channel, please see: <https://space.bilibili.com/673816>

designed for Mizhisheng's online activities such as streaming-based game localisation or transmedia sharing using screenshots or screencasts with annotations, whose aim is to comprehend his engagement with game developers or fandom; (c) the semi-structured interview with Mizhisheng; (d) my self-reflection based on my streaming-based game localisation and my edited video version. These 4 modules are mutually interconnected and interdependent, exhibiting near-synchronisation on the timeline, with a temporal delay for the interview module due to the research ethics check. While (a), (c) and (d) play a primary role, (b) serves as a supplementary component.

Because the standard game version, *Children of Silentown* (Elf Games and Luna2 Studio 2023), was released in 2023, I set up another corpus for it and conducted a comparative analysis between streamers' versions and the official game localisation in simplified Chinese.⁷ However, this is excluded in the triangulated methodology, as it constitutes a relatively distinct component.

The research reveals compelling findings. By challenging the traditional view of video game localisation as the final step before a game's official release, my research expands the scope to encompass streamers as localisers, their localisation efforts, and live streaming exposure. A variety of strategies are employed in streaming-based game localisation. Streamers not only use traditional translation and interpreting strategies, such as sight translation, word-for-word translation and free translation but also offer commentaries on game images, sounds or other intriguing aspects. Furthermore, streamers produce creative localisation strategies in both visual and acoustic channels. For the visual channel, streamers utilise the mouse cursor to direct spectators' attention or add notes on the screen, generated by live streaming apps to help the information delivery. For the acoustic channel, streamers incorporate verbal performance techniques, such as dubbing for game characters and voice acting for onomatopoeic expressions.

Increasing evidence suggests that streaming-based game localisation is a niche form of entertainment that emphasises creativity, so the quality of localisation is not always the priority compared with traditional notions of game localisation studies. For instance, the absence or rectification of streamers' speech, as well as the mixed use of English and Chinese, can be comparatively accepted and comprehended in the multimodal streaming context. Additionally, although streamers usually receive limited feedback about localisation, their response to live spectators and video viewers may create intriguing effects.

Co-learning is another important feature of streaming-based game localisation. Streamers are often willing to reveal their ignorance during live performances, valuing the learning opportunities they share with their live spectators and video viewers. At times, in live streaming, their streaming screens even display their efforts to search for certain terms or concepts, which are in close connection with ludic language pedagogy for second language learners.

As reflected by Mizhisheng's unique streaming experiences, he possesses a clear understanding of his attributes (e.g. language background, localisation skills, humour, cultural-related knowledge, performing techniques, and online distribution capabilities) and how these traits can help in his streamer's career path. Over the 10 years, streaming-

⁷ Most of the content in the demo version serves as the first chapter in the standard version. *Children of Silentown* (2023) has been localised into 14 languages, including simplified and traditional Chinese.

based game localisation has become a strategy that helps Mizhisheng stand out among peer streamers, increase his fandom, collaborate with game developers for niche games' distribution, and ultimately 'survive' in the competitive landscape of digital content creation.

To conclude, this research, for the first time in academia, reveals the significance of streaming-based game localisation. The academic value of this research lies in the interdisciplinary integration of multiple research disciplines. First, it blurs the boundaries between translation and interpreting in terms of their forms, techniques, or features. Second, it highlights the visibility of translators on the Internet (e.g. Freeth and Treviño 2024; Chen 2024). Third, it discusses the dynamic interplay of multimodality in game design (e.g. Ensslin 2017; Hawreliak 2018), audiovisual translation (e.g. O'Sullivan 2013; Chaume 2020; Gambier 2023; Baños and Díaz-Cintas 2024), and game localisation (e.g. O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013; Bernal-Merino 2014; Bernal-Merino 2018; Mangiron 2018; Mejías-Climent 2018; Zhang and Song 2023).

From a practical perspective, this research offers significant implications for the video game industry. First, it reveals that the combination of game streaming and localisation could become a novel form of engagement, expanding career opportunities for individuals. Second, while the number of individuals engaged in streaming-based game localisation remains limited, game developers and publishers should recognise the potential value of streamers in game distribution and community management. Third, it also suggests that streaming-based game localisation can be utilised for second language acquisition or knowledge cultivation.

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