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PRAGMATIC ADAPTATION OF HETEROGENEOUS TEXTS IN THE UKRAINIAN LOCALIZATION OF THE VIDEO GAME DELTARUNE

The article presents a comprehensive study of pragmatic adaptation strategies applied to heterogeneous texts within the localization of the indie video game “Deltarune” into the Ukrainian language. The relevance of this research is predetermined by the rapid expansion of the global gaming industry and the urgent need for a theoretical understanding of modern translation strategies that ensure player immersion and narrative resonance for local audiences in the context of cultural globalization. The paper analyzes the heterogeneous nature of video game texts, which represent a sophisticated synthesis of technical, narrative, and dialogic components. This typological complexity demands a differentiated approach to material processing from the localizer, extending far beyond the boundaries of traditional linguistic translation and literal equivalence.

The primary focus of the paper is directed toward the methods of pragmatic adaptation employed to overcome linguo-cultural and cognitive barriers between the source and target environments. Using the localization performed by the independent “Pereclaw” team as a case study, the article examines such techniques as the compensation of phonetic wordplay, phraseological transformation, modulation, and diachronic stylization. Specifically, the research investigates the specifics of rendering authorial neologisms and puns, where translators utilize deliberate orthographic deviations and the incorporation of archaic Ukrainian graphical elements to authentically recreate the pseudo-archaic idiolects of certain characters. Special emphasis is placed on the adaptation of interface elements and abbreviations, where techniques of explication and functional substitution are used to ensure the clarity of gameplay mechanics and user settings.

It is argued that pragmatic adaptation in video game discourse serves not merely as a translation tool but as a fundamental systemic strategy for preserving the multimodal integrity of the digital product. The article offers an expanded vision of the localizer’s role as a cultural mediator capable of transcending complex semantic units.

Keywords: video game localization, pragmatic adaptation, heterogeneous texts, compensation, immersion, transcreation, Deltarune, translation strategies.

Problem statement. Since the emergence of the first video games in the late 20th century, they have rapidly increased their presence in our everyday life. This medium has proved to be one of the most effective forms of entertainment that provides consumers with an interactive multimodal environment, where multiple semiotic fields coexist, including visuals, audio, and textual elements. As digital products, video games can be easily distributed to different countries and traverse through cultural barriers to provide similar experience for all consumers worldwide.

However, achieving international success and appreciation of the game by the target audience poses a significant challenge. Video games require a specific kind of adaptation that has to take into account various features, among them the heterogeneous nature of text types, each presupposing specific approach to the treatment of the material and distinctive ways of this material adaptation.

The rapid expansion of the global gaming industry necessitates a theoretical understanding of modern translation strategies that ensure player immersion



and narrative resonance for local audiences in the context of cultural globalization. The emergence of a significant number of works devoted to the adaptation of computer games in the recent time testifies to the considerable interest of scholars in the given issue and the relevance of studying the problem. **Most notable recent studies** in this field focus on game classification and basic strategies for their localization [9; 10; 12; 14], the correlation between the notions of adaptation, translation, and localization of video games [1; 3], multimodal nature of videogames as a challenge for translation [4; 5; 9] as well as the translation of some particular phenomena from videogames into the target language [2]. Despite the undeniable popularity and practical need for high-quality localization of video game products, from the perspective of translation studies, the issue remains relatively under-researched and needs further analysis. **The aim** of the given paper is to explore the specifics of text types in video game “Deltarune” and also the strategies of their adaptation for the Ukrainian audience. The results of the research may be relevant for further development of theoretical foundations of Anglo-Ukrainian audiovisual translation as well as systematization of dominant strategies and characteristic features of adapting English-language role-playing video games for the Ukrainian target audience.

The research **material** is a single-player indie computer game “Deltarune” that belongs to the combat, role-playing, and puzzle genre. It is called “indie” as it was created by an independent developer Toby Fox, and can be played by one individual, thus called “single-player”. The first two chapters of “Deltarune” are distributed free of charge across the globe through downloadable digital copies. The only official languages available for the game are English and Japanese, the Ukrainian localization for the first free chapters was developed by the “Pereclaw” independent translation group with an open repository on GitHub. “Pereclaw” is an active translation union that specializes in indie games and is known for not just translating words, but trying to preserve the atmosphere and humour.

Results. In modern translation studies, localization is viewed as a complex, multifaceted process, within which pragmatic adaptation serves as a core strategy [5, p. 203; 15, p.164]. The latter involves adjusting the source text to align with the linguistic, cognitive, and cultural norms of the target audience [6, p. 232–233; 8, p. 96; 11, p. 528]. As a fundamental component of video game localization, pragmatic adaptation functions as a tool to overcome socio-cultural barriers and secure the intended emotional impact on the player.

The primary objective of the game is to maintain player immersion; by facilitating the instantaneous perception of complex dialogues and interface elements, adaptation allows the user to focus on gameplay and narrative resonance rather than linguistic decoding. Besides, in dynamic games or RPGs with limited time to choose a response, perception in the native language is instantaneous, which is critical for gameplay. No less important is the emotional aspect of game playing. When the game uses the player’s native language with familiar cultural codes, it creates a more intimate, deeper connection and immersion.

As a widely-spread object of entertainment, video games come in different forms, sizes and genres (role-play, shooting, adventure, etc.). Depending on the genre, the scale and the form (physical or digital copy) of distribution, video games can comprise a variety of textual data, which includes among other things supplemental material, like packaging or manuals. Speaking about in-game assets, video games combine narration with software-related texts. From this standpoint, computer games are technical and artistic hybrids, in which the technological basis serves not only as a tool for creating an artistic product, but is also included in the artistic content and aesthetic properties of the work. A translator who localizes a video game encounters all types of texts characteristic of digital products, which fact largely determines the linguistic complexities of a lexical and contextual-grammatical nature in the process of game localization: translators work with different registers and different types of texts and must adhere to certain requirements for different genres of products [4]. Given the so-called ‘hybridity,’ the combination of artistic and technical text, game localization is more complex than the localization of software or websites, which are written predominantly in technical language and have less text to translate and adapt.

According to the approach by Bernal-Merino [9], all videogame texts can be subdivided into seven types from the standpoint of the context of their usage:

- Legal: involve texts that uncover the legal aspects of the game, such as terms and conditions of the users;
- Promotional: include texts used for advertising the game on the official websites or other media;
- Technical: usually found on packaging (printed or displayed) and presenting information regarding the required hardware and software, as well as logos and legal labels;
- Didactic: oftentimes located in manuals that contain instruction on how to install and load the video game; can be printed or displayed;

– Functional: in-game text strings displayed as a part of its interface (e.g. menus, hints, popup windows);

– Dialogues (written or oral): recorded lines / transcription of dialogues between characters inside the created world of the game;

– Narrative: descriptions depicting the world and characters of the video game, usually in a combination with visual content. Oftentimes found in the notes, papers, books and other written material found in the world of the game.

Legal, promotional, technical and didactic types of texts belong to supportive materials and do not pertain to the in-game assets while dialogues, functional and narrative texts offer a rich source for linguistic inquiry in terms of their pragmatic adaptation.

Functional texts in “Deltarune” game comprise various menus related to video game setting, chapter selection, skills, and inventory, shops, hero stats and abilities, saving the progress, and combat. It must be noted that adapting game mechanics and interactive elements in accordance with the rules of the target language and audience requests to ensure a seamless gaming experience is one of the cornerstones of translation adequacy and localization quality. Accomplishing this task requires both a deep understanding of the specifics of the game world and general technical competence. Despite the predominantly technical nature of the user interface text, its adequate reproduction is almost as important as the translation of dialogues and narrative messages, since the gaming experience depends on it. For example, ignoring the character limit in a line can lead to significant shifts that may complicate or even render impossible the use of the interactive field of the user interface. The analysis of the excerpts from three menus from “Deltarune” showcases the successful attempt of the translators to preserve the pragmatic potential of the original game in the Ukrainian translation.

Example 1: Engl: TP – Ukr.: PH; Engl: HP – Ukr.: P3; Engl: Target – Ukr.: Обстріл;

Example 2: Engl: Config – Ukr.: Налаштування;

Example 3: Engl: Equip – Ukr.: Зброя; Engl: Char – Ukr.: Герой.

The abbreviation “TP” in the first example poses a challenge for the translators given the lack of clarity in translation tradition. This particular abbreviation was contrived by the developer specifically for “Deltarune”, and it stands for “Tension Points”. It was conveyed into Ukrainian as “PH” that means “Рівень Напруги”, which is quite clear in the context of the game. Similar strategy is applied for the translation

of the abbreviation “HP” (=Health Points), which is universal in English-language gaming where it stands for the numerical representation of a character’s vitality. As “HP” is deeply embedded in gaming culture, translators face a choice: keep the English abbreviation (which many gamers already understand) or adapt it to the Ukrainian language. The Pereclaw Team opted for the abbreviation P3 (=Рівень Здоров’я), which seems a strategic pragmatic solution here as it avoids unnecessary Anglicisms, making the game feel like a native Ukrainian product. Besides, the abbreviation “P3” is only two letters long, which is crucial for functional texts where space is extremely limited. No less important factor is clarity: even a non-gamer can guess that “P3” relates to “Здоров’я,” whereas “HP” requires prior knowledge of English or gaming jargon. Thus, the Ukrainian translators performed a functional substitution, replacing a global English loanword with a localized abbreviation that maintains the same “short-hand” utility while adhering to Ukrainian linguistic norms.

Such shortened forms as “Config”, “Char”, and “Equip” (Examples 2–3) represent a specific difficulty due to their technical nature and the need to maintain interface intuitiveness. In the Ukrainian version, these elements are rendered through explication (expanding the truncated source forms into full-word equivalents): “Config” (=Configuration) is adapted as “Налаштування”, which serves as a functional equivalent for system settings. Similarly, “Char” (=Character) is rendered as “Герой”, and “Equip” (=Equipment) is replaced by the contextual equivalent “Зброя”. This approach ensures that the functional purpose of each menu is immediately transparent to the user, preserving the pragmatic adequacy of the RPG interface.

The term “Target” (Example 1), appearing during combat sequences, underwent a significant pragmatic shift through modulation. While the original labels the opponent as the focal point of the attack, the Ukrainian localization employs modulation, substituting the object (“Target”) with the process of the action: “Обстріл” (Shelling). This choice shifts the pragmatic emphasis from the entity being attacked to the intensity of the combat encounter itself. Although a literal translation such as “Ціль” would have maintained denotative equivalence, the translators’ choice illustrates a desire to enhance the dynamic atmosphere of the battle, albeit at the cost of a slight deviation from the original’s structural neutrality.

Another type of text widely used in this particular game is *dialogue and characters’ speech*. Dialogues in “Deltarune” are rich in various stylistic means,

which often call for creative, non-trivial solutions on the part of translators. The following examples show-case it best:

Example 4: Dialogue lines from a character called Temmie:

Engl: KRISP!! awa... ver sorz... tem already have partner... tem partner with... EG!!! [12]

Ukr.: КРИСП!! овва... дуж вибч... тем вже найшла пару... тем в парі з.. ЯЦЦЕМ!!! [7]

Example 5: Dialogue lines from a character called Blue Block with letter "O":

Engl: *The King wants to o-lluminate Lightners, but... we didn't o-gree with that. [12]

Ukr.: *Ко-ро-ль хо-че о-сунути небезпеку Світо-чів, та... ми з ним не по-го-джуємо-сь. [7]

Example 6: Dialogue lines from a character called Rouxls Kaard:

Engl: I am Rouxls Kaard, thou're greatest adversary! Thou may have clawedst past all those other-est conundrums [...][12]

Ukr.: Я – Правѣль-Картька, ваш'сь найвеличнійший супротивникъ. Хай ви й продряпалися крізь всеминуліє негаразди. [7]

As we can see in Example 4, Temmie's speech is non-grammatical with numerous spelling and grammar mistakes. It may be interpreted as a sign of the character's emotionality, which is further confirmed by the excessive use of capitalization (capital letters in such words as KRISP, EG, etc) and break in the narrative (aposiopesis). The Ukrainian version recreates this manner of speech by using shortenings and deliberate orthographic mistakes in those words where it is most appropriate in the Ukrainian language. Besides, we can notice capitalisation and multiplication of the punctuation marks (aposiopesis) following the pattern of the original variant. Pragmatic adaptation of these lines contributes to a successful reproduction of Temmie's character in the Ukrainian version of the game.

A rather interesting strategy can be seen in the recreation of Blue Block's speech (Example 5). The Blue Block character is shown as a blue block with a letter "O", which represents the type of toy blocks children play with. In the original text, hyphens and deliberate misspellings are used to emphasize the presence of the letter "o" in the character's speech, thus creating the visual image of the hero in a text format (*o-lluminate; o-gree*). The Ukrainian version also uses hyphens to highlight the letter "o" (Ко-ро-ль хо-че; по-го-джуємо-сь) together with orthographic violations ("о-сунути" instead of "усунути"). This approach can be viewed as a kind of multimodal adaptation, since the text is adapted to the visual image of the character (a block with a letter).

Rouxls Kaard's speech (Example 6) demands the highest degree of creativity from the translating team. This character speaks in pseudo-Early Modern English, which emphasises his comicality and excessive desire to appear respectable. Typical of him is the use of the archaic or archaic-stylised pronouns (*thou; thouse*) and obsolete inflections (-est: *otherest*) as is seen in the example above. Graphic and phonetic adaptation incorporating orthographic and phonetic elements reminiscent of 19th-century Ukrainian literary tradition (such as the use of the letters 'ѣ' and 'ѵ'), which is employed by the translators, is a classic technique for visual stylisation in the old style. It helps to create a strong association with 'antiquity' and 'high style' for Ukrainian players. At the same time, the translators invent their own 'strange' forms of words (ваш'сь; всеминуліє) that sound grand but are grammatically absurd, which makes the player laugh at how desperately the character is trying to sound intelligent. The strategy of diachronic stylisation based on functional replacement made it possible not only to convey the temporal marker of antiquity, but also to preserve the pragmatic humour of the image – through the deliberate inappropriate use of obsolete forms, the translators recreated the effect of 'pseudo-intellectuality' inherent in the character's speech in the original.

One of the most striking features of the characters' speech in Deltarune is jokes and puns. Let's look at some examples and the way they are rendered into Ukrainian.

The Queen constantly uses terms related to computer architectures or smartphones.

Example 7:

Engl.: 'I'm A Mobile Boss.' [12]

Ukr.: 'Я – Мобільна Босиня.' [7]

In English, this is a pun on the term 'Mobile Boss' (a boss in a mobile game). But in the context of the game, she says this while literally riding on a mobile throne. The translators kept the word 'mobile (мобільна)' because in Ukrainian it has the same double meaning: both as the ability to move around and as a reference to gadgets. In this case the translators successfully used a complete equivalent. It is interesting to note that The Queen capitalizes every word (as in programme titles or code). The translators keep this capitalization in the Ukrainian version. This is not a pun in the classical sense, but rather a pragmatic adaptation of visual speech style that is perceived as a linguistic joke.

Another character called Sans traditionally jokes about skeletons and bones.

Example 8:

Engl.: *I'm working myself to the bone.* [12]

Ukr.: Я працюю до **посиніння кісток.** [7]

In English, the idiom ‘work to the bone’ means to work very hard. The pun lies in the fact that Sans is a skeleton. Since the phrase ‘працювати до кісток’ is not common in Ukrainian, the translators added ‘до посиніння,’ which refers to the Ukrainian phrase ‘працювати до посиніння,’ but kept the word ‘bones (кісток)’ to preserve the original connection to the character’s appearance. The analysis of Sansa’s speech demonstrates the successful use of phraseological transformation, which preserves both the comic effect and the visual connection to the image of a skeleton.

It is obvious that without pragmatic adaptation, the speech of the characters and their jokes remain ‘dead text’ for foreign players. Adaptation brings jokes to life, making them understandable within the Ukrainian cultural code.

Narrative texts are essential for “Deltarune” as they enhance the experience of the user by providing additional information about the surroundings, describe a certain item used in combat, or acquaint the user with some artifacts, such as book titles or other written material in the game. The texts are not presented in an automatic way, as the user has to interact with certain in-game elements in order to view the narrative texts. For instance, if there is a need to learn about a specific item in the inventory, the user will interact with the title of the item and see its description. Such textual elements pose a certain challenge for the translators who need to keep in mind several important aspects: meaning, style, context, technical issues, etc. In many cases, the use of traditional translation methods proves insufficient, and the translators resort to compensation technique that involves significant changes in the original text in order to achieve the desired pragmatic effect. Let us consider the following examples related to inventory items, specifically – items that can heal the playable character during a fight:

Example 9: *Revive Mint*:

Engl.: *Heals a fallen ally to MAX HP. A minty green crystal.* [12]

Ukr.: Живодайний зелений кристал. Відродить впалого союзника з МАКС РЗ. [7]

Example 10: *Top Cake*:

Engl.: *Top Cake. This cake will make your taste buds spin! Heals 160 HP to the team.* [12]

Ukr.: Круть-Торт. Такий крутий, що аж смакові рецептори закрутяться! Зцілює 160 РЗ всій команді. [7]

Example 11: *Hearts Donut*:

Engl.: *Hearts, don't it!? It's filled with divisive, clotty red jam. +??HP* [12]

Ukr.: Від нього аж почирвонієш! Повний густого огидного червоного повидла. +??РЗ [7]

In Example 9, the name of the item ‘Revive Mint’ is based on a play on words: *mint* as a plant (м’ята), also *mint* as an adjective meaning ‘new, fresh, in excellent condition’, and *minty green* is a colour associated with pharmacy freshness and healing. In Ukrainian, the word ‘м’ятний’ is associated only with taste or colour, but does not have the meaning of ‘integrity’ or ‘perfect condition’. The lost connotation of the English adjective ‘minty’ (combining colour and the idea of renewal) was compensated by the epithet ‘живодайний’, which explains the healing effect of the item, ensuring that its game function is adequately perceived by the Ukrainian recipient. Besides, in this example, the word ‘heals’ is rendered with the help of the Ukrainian word ‘відродить’, which is not a dictionary equivalent of this lexeme. Since it refers to a ‘fallen ally,’ the verb ‘лікує’ sounds a bit weak. ‘Відродить’ reflects the mechanics of the game more accurately (the character’s return to battle from zero health). It also adds a touch of fantasy to the text, which matches the atmosphere of the ‘Dark World’ in Deltarune.

A vivid example of pragmatic adaptation through the creation of an associative connection is the translation of the item called ‘Top Cake’ as ‘Круть-Торт’ (Example 10). In English, ‘top’ means both ‘the highest point’ and ‘the best’. But the main thing here is that this cake was made by the character Top Chef, who looks like a spinning top and always spins around its axis while talking to the player. Therefore, the word ‘top’ is also an ironic reference to the chef’s shape. Since the English pun is based on the ambiguity of the word ‘top’ (the best / spinning top), the Pereclaw Team translators applied a strategy of semantic compensation. Using the root ‘-крут-’, they preserved the reference to the physical property of the character and at the same time conveyed a high assessment of the quality of the item (круть :: cool), ensuring the integrity of the perception of the game text. The use of a hyphenated spelling creates a dynamic, almost fairy-tale image of the object.

The description of the item called ‘Heart donut / Чирвоний Пундик’ (a heart-shaped doughnut) in Example 11 is a striking case of paronomasia. In the original, the descriptive phrase ‘Hearts, don’t it!’ functions as a double phonetic pun. On the one hand, it is an acoustic reference to the name: the rapid pronunciation of the phrase ‘Hearts, don’t it’

almost completely duplicates the name of the item itself (Heart donut). On the other hand, the phrase phonetically imitates the expression ‘Hurts, don’t it!?’ ironically alluding to the ‘anatomical’ shape of the doughnut and the cruelty of its consumption. While translating this example, the Pereclaw Team resorted to complex pragmatic adaptation. Since it is impossible to directly reproduce English consonance in Ukrainian, the translators applied a strategy of semantic compensation through the use of the root -чирв-. The deliberate violation of the linguistic norm (writing “почирвонієш” instead of “почервонієш”) acts here as a pragmatic marker. It actualises the name of the card suit ‘чирва’ (hearts), which is fundamental to the semiotics of the game world in the first chapter. In this way, instead of the English pun ‘pain / heart,’ a Ukrainian associative model ‘colour / suit / physiological reaction’ is created. This allows the ironic tone of the original and the effect of ‘language play’ to be preserved. Thus, instead of directly copying English consonances, translators create a new associative network based on the specifics of Ukrainian card terminology and orthographic deviation. This example proves that the text of a video game is not just a set of sentences, but a semantic web. The translation solution (replacing “e” with “и”) works here as a ‘glue’ that connects the name of the item, its description, and the general lore of the game (the world of cards).

The analysis of the description of game items translation shows a departure from literalism in favour of pragmatic intent. The localizers did not simply translate the words, but adapted the text to the context of Ukrainian gaming culture and the technical requirements of the interface. The analyzed examples also illustrate a systematic approach to localization by the translation team, who see the ‘big picture’ of the game (the connection between the object and the character) rather than simply translating individual sentences.

Conclusions. The research into the Ukrainian localization of “Deltarune” by the Pereclaw team confirms that video game translation is a complex, multi-layered process that goes far beyond simple interlingual substitution. It has been established that the game’s text is fundamentally heterogeneous, comprising functional, narrative, and dialogic elements. Each type requires a distinct pragmatic approach: while functional texts prioritize clarity and interface constraints, narrative and dialogic texts demand high levels of transcreation to preserve the original idiolect and humor. The Ukrainian localization of “Deltarune” serves as a prime example of successful domestication and transcreation securing immersion. It proves that high-quality localization must treat the game as a multimodal hybrid where text, mechanics, and character lore are inextricably linked.

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Козачишина О. Л., Мішанчук М. В. Прагматична адаптація гетерогенних текстів в українській локалізації відеогри «Deltarune»

Стаття присвячена комплексному дослідженню стратегій прагматичної адаптації гетерогенних текстів у межах локалізації інді-відеогри «Deltarune» українською мовою. Актуальність роботи зумовлена стрімким розвитком світової ігрової індустрії та нагальною потребою у теоретичному осмисленні новітніх перекладацьких стратегій, що забезпечують імерсивність ігрового досвіду для локального реципієнта в умовах культурної глобалізації. У статті проаналізовано неоднорідну (гетерогенну) природу ігрових текстів, які є складним синтезом функціональних, наративних та діалогічних елементів. Така типологічна складність вимагає від локалізатора застосування диференційованого підходу до обробки матеріалу, що виходить за межі традиційного лінгвістичного перекладу.

Основну увагу в роботі приділено методам прагматичної адаптації, що застосовуються для подолання лінгвокультурних та когнітивних бар'єрів. На прикладі локалізації, виконаної незалежною спілкою «Pereclaw», у статті розглянуто прийоми компенсації фонетичної гри слів, фразеологічної трансформації, модуляції та діахронічної стилізації. Зокрема, досліджено специфіку відтворення авторських неологізмів та каламбурів, де перекладачі вдаються до навмисних орфографічних девіацій та залучення елементів староукраїнської мови для автентичного відтворення псевдоархаїчного мовлення персонажів. Окремий акцент зроблено на адаптації інтерфейсних елементів та абревіатур, де застосовано прийоми експлікації та функціональної заміни для забезпечення зрозумілості ігрових механік.

Доведено, що прагматична адаптація в ігровому дискурсі виступає не просто інструментом перекладу, а фундаментальною системною стратегією збереження мультимодальної цілісності продукту. Наукова новизна дослідження полягає у залученні нового матеріалу – гри «Deltarune», де кожне перекладацьке рішення розглядається у нерозривному зв'язку з візуальним контекстом, ігровими механіками та авторським лором. Стаття пропонує розширене бачення ролі локалізатора як культурного посередника, здатного до транскреації складних смислових одиниць.

Ключові слова: локалізація відеоігор, прагматична адаптація, гетерогенні тексти, компенсація, імерсивність, транскреація, Deltarune, перекладацькі стратегії.

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