

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

**Blending Game Localisation in the Arab World: *Arafiesta* as a Case Study**

By

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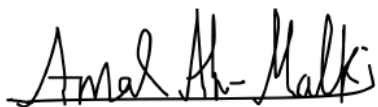
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## ABSTRACT

Blending Game localisation modifies the various channels of information in video games to suit the target culture norms. Game localisation is part of audiovisual translation where localisers translate, adapt, and manipulate game content from the source language into the target language. Game developers consider the localisation process necessary to be able to publish their games in foreign markets. This study examines the localisation of religious and obscene references in FiestaOnline among the linguistic, visual, and interactive layers by comparing it to Arafiesta, the Arabic localised version of the game. A total of 740 dialogue strings, which included religious and obscene linguistic elements, were collected, in addition to capturing several screenshots and video footages to compare visual and interactive features. A unique framework was schemed after combining three existent frameworks in order to analyse the data. Also, a list of questions was sent to the localisation company which they responded to via email. The research results show that localisers tend to utilise semantic misrepresentation among both types of references as the most frequent technique. Visual features have been generally retained, but the covering method has been commonly used among character appearances while interactive aspects fluctuate among retaining, deletion, and manipulation. Finally, the thesis concludes that blending game localisation can be implemented on game imports into the Arab world as the gaming market is generally increasing in the Middle-East and North Africa (MENA) region.

Word Count: 19670

## ملخص البحث

يهدف نمط توطين الألعاب المزجي إلى تعديل مختلف قنوات المعلومات في ألعاب الفيديو وذلك كي يتناسب محتواها وأعراف ثقافة الهدف، وبشكل عام، فإن توطين الألعاب فرع من الترجمة السمعية البصرية حيث يمارس فيه المواطنون الترجمة والتعديل والملاءمة على محتوى اللعبة لنقلها من اللغة المصدر إلى اللغة الهدف، ويدرك مطوّرو الألعاب أن مسألة توطين الألعاب ضرورة تقتضيها عملية نشر هذه الألعاب في الأسواق الأجنبية.

تبحث هذه الدراسة في قضية توطين الجوانب الدينية وتحوير الجوانب غير اللائقة في لعبة *FiestaOnline* وذلك من خلال دراسة العناصر اللغوية والبصرية والتفاعلية ومقارنتها بنظيرتها في اللغة العربية، ألا وهي لعبة أرافيستنا، وعليه رصد البحث 740 جزءاً من نص الحوارات تتضمن دلالات لغوية دينية أو غير لائقة، وبالإضافة إلى التقاط صور ومقاطع فيديو من اللعبة لمقارنة الجوانب الصورية والتفاعلية، كذلك، استلمت الشركة الموطنة للعبة قائمة من الأسئلة حول هذا الموضوع وأجابت عنها عبر البريد الإلكتروني، ولتحليل البيانات المرصودة، استُحدثَ إطار عمل لهذا الغرض مكونٌ من إدماج ثلاثة أطُرٍ تخدم هذا البحث. أظهرت النتائج أن المواطنين كانوا يميلون إلى استخدام التحريف الدلالي أكثر من نظيراتها في التعامل مع نوعي الدلالات كلاهما، أما بالنسبة للخصائص البصرية، فلقد أظهرت نتائج المقارنة توجهاً نحو الحفاظ على الصورة الأصلية للعبة في مجملها مع بروز توجه لستر اللباس للشخصيات الموجودة في اللعبة، وأما الجوانب التفاعلية فكانت متذبذبة ما بين الإبقاء عليها والحذف والتحوير، وبذلك يمكن الخلوص إلى النتائج القائل بأن توطين الألعاب المزجي قابل للتطبيق على مدخلات الألعاب في العالم العربي خاصة وأن سوق ألعاب الفيديو يشهد تزايداً في الآونة الأخيرة في الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

AVT: Audiovisual Translation

FPS: First Person Shooter

HUD: Heads-up Display

MENA: Middle East and North Africa

MMORPG: Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game

MOBA: Multiple Online Battle Arena

NPC: Non-player Character

RTS: Real Time Strategy

SL: Source Language

ST: Source Text

TL: Target Language

TT: Target Text

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## DEDICATION

*To my lovely family*

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Localisation stands, at best, at the limits of practical possibility, but it has the decisive argument in its favour that there will be no alternative” as David Fleming commented on localisation in his book *Lean Logic: A Dictionary for the Future and How to Survive it*. In the new global community, localisation is crucial in building bridges to connect many different cultures. One of the rising genres of localisation is game localisation that accelerated since 2006 when Mangiron & O’Hagan (2006) stressed the fact of the scarcity of research in game localisation despite the noticeable developments of research on games in general. Since then, a considerable volume of literature has been released on game localisation; nevertheless, this field has suffered from disregard in the Arab world. To date, only a few articles were published on this matter such as Mahasneh & Abu Kishek (2018) and Al-Mazoor (2018). Besides, most game localisation studies have been focusing on the two prominent types of game localisation: full and partial, whereas blending game localisation has been mentioned rarely.

### ***1.1 Research Aims and Questions***

This thesis aims to investigate blending game localisation through identifying the linguistic, visual, and interactive shifts resulted from localising the MMORPG game *FiestaOnline* into Arabic. The main objective of this research is to highlight the cultural influence in changing the original content; consequently, the two versions are analysed focusing on the religious as well as obscene references.

The investigation is conducted in a case-study form, and it will draw its data from comparing and contrasting linguistic excerpts, visual screenshots and video footages taken from *FiestaOnline*, the

original game, and *Arafiesta*, the localised version. In doing so, this study adopts a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

*FiestaOnline* is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) that takes place in a fictitious world. Players can progress in the game by completing different types of quests that are updated whenever players level up. In addition, there are events and side-activities players can participate in and receive rewards such as armour parts, weapons, and other items.

The study provides one of the first insights on how Arabic culture and norms influence game localisation. Also, it contributes to offering a deeper understanding of the reality of game localisation in the Arab world. However, the reader should bear in mind that this work is based on comparing two versions of one game in a case study form. In addition, pictorial and interactive components were not easily available in a corpus as the researcher had to roam in the game locations, take screenshots and record footages in order to be able to compare them.

On this account, the research attempts to answer the following two questions:

- How did the localisation company Game Power 7 localise various interactive, linguistic, and visual channels in their game *Arafiesta*?
- What are the commonly adopted strategies in censoring English religious and obscene references in *Arafiesta*– the localised version?

## ***1.2 Thesis Outline***

The thesis is composed of six chapters. While the first chapter introduces the reader to the study, the remaining parts proceed as follows:

**Chapter Two** starts by laying the foundations of the study. It provides a review of the literature in three sections; the first section discusses video games in general providing a definition of the field, a brief history of the industry, and video game genres. Then, the second section tackles the issue of culture and censorship. The final section reviews past and recent literature on game localisation.

**Chapter Three** introduces the theoretical framework design to the reader where a combination of several models, such as Delabastita (1989), Zitawi (2008), and Al-Adwan (2015), have been integrated to develop a plausible framework for the analysis.

**Chapter Four** explains the methodology followed in collecting data for analysis, tools used in the collection process, the process of categorising data, and the limitations of this study. It also provides a synopsis for the proposed case study.

**Chapter Five** encompasses a thorough analysis of several examples taken from the congregated data. All examples include a back-translation and a detailed commentary on the shifts occurred during localisation.

**Chapter Six** addresses the conclusions that were drawn from analysing the case study and summarises the results. Besides responding to the research questions, the chapter also lists the limitations of the study. In the end, the chapter provides recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### *2.1 Video Games*

People entertain themselves in various ways; some prefer watching films, others like to gather and have a conversation. Additionally, games are also categorised as a means of entertainment. In essence, games are leisure activities that engage users and are typically pleasurable experiences. In fact, games are not restricted to a specific age, sex, ethnicity, or religion. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a game is “a physical or mental competition conducted according to rules with the participants in direct opposition to each other” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). To an extent, this definition is applicable to video games; however, they can be played in a single player mode. Such games require electronic equipment like Personal Computers (PCs), consoles, or mobile devices to be played.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of games is their definition. Several scholars have attempted to present a comprehensive definition of the term to cover all possible types of games; however, there is still no consensus on a standard definition. This issue poses an extra layer of complexity when defining video games. Overall, scholars such as Bernal-Merino (2013; 2015) and O’Hagan & Mangiron (2013) rely on Juul’s (2003) definition of games, which states that

A game is a rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels emotionally attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable.

The aforementioned definition applies to all types of games regardless of their technical nature (i.e. electronic and non-electronic). Thus, video game developers opted for an independent term and definition to distinguish this unique form of entertainment from other games. More

specifically, such a definition would incorporate the main factors required for a game to be a video game. Bernal-Merino (2013, pp. 19-24) proposes the term “Multimedia Interactive Entertainment Software,” which, he believes, is “descriptive” and offers “a clear delineation of the parameters of the concept and products to which it refers.” This definition entails a very technical notion that each word represents an aspect that all video games implement so that they can be classified as video games. His fuller definition states, “a video game is a multimedia interactive form of entertainment for one or more individuals, powered by computer hardware and software, controlled by a peripheral... and displayed on some kind of screen” (Bernal-Merino 2013, pp. 24).

Video games are forms of multimedia since they rely on more than one media channel in delivering information to the user. These channels can be either auditory or visual and verbal or non-verbal. Video games require interaction from the user (i.e. the player has to push buttons to execute processes that would help progress with the game). The primary purpose of video games is to entertain, but that excludes serious games used for educational purposes.

Certain titles have a huge fan base among video games who are loyal to their beloved game and contribute towards its success. This attraction has been gradually increasing. However, such attraction would not exist without an eventful historical background that has contributed to the video game industry's development.

### ***2.1.1 The history of video games***

Video game development started in the mid-twentieth century. It is believed that a physicist named William Higinbotham created the first model of a simple game called *Tennis for Two* in 1958 (APS News). Later, the US game company Atari took this model and, in 1972, developed a game called



*Pong*, which adheres to the principles of Higinbotham's invention (History Eds., 2019). The game was fairly simple: it had two bars on the left and right of the screen with a ball bouncing in-between in resemblance to a tennis match. From that point, the video game industry began to expand. In 1983, the industry survived a crash in the US caused by the massive low-quality games' input without any proposed enhancements. Nintendo saved the video game market in 1985 by improving graphics, gameplay, and sound. The 90s witnessed the rise of consoles in the market and 3D game design, which led to opening the space for massive and creative game ideas that brought us to the point we are today. (History Eds., 2019). Due to the considerable area of creativity, game production companies started to introduce new ways of playing, different camera angles, gaming techniques that have never been utilized before, and a continuous enhancement of the graphics. Later, the world of gaming began to witness new games that follow different gameplay techniques; thus, categorisation emerged, which later became known as video game genres. Genres of video games depend on several factors, including camera angle, mode of play, and controls, to name but a few. Genres are discussed in section (2.1.3).

Even though the gaming industry is relatively new compared to other entertainment means such as films and theatre, it has succeeded in supplying and expanding its market with a large number of games. It used to be very challenging to play video games because the technology was not as developed and cheap as nowadays. With computers and consoles' prices going down and internet bandwidth improving, together with decreasing subscription costs, more people are attracted to gaming worldwide.

Gaming has reached a point where, for some, it has become a full-time career by streaming gameplays on streaming platforms such as Twitch, YouTube, and, more recently, Facebook Gaming. Lately, the industry has witnessed a dramatic increase in sales due to the COVID-19

pandemic and its associated lockdown mandates and travel restrictions. Activision Blizzard states that its net revenues have increased to 1.44 billion dollars and increased the number of players on *Call of Duty Warzone* by 60 million players since its release in March 2020 (“Lockdown and Loaded,” 2020).

### **2.1.2 Video games genres**

In the world of gaming, video game genres have been a topic of debate. Experts do not agree on one classification system (i.e. a game can be part of more than one classification system). In general, the idea of categorising games based on their genre has been borrowed from other fields of entertainment such as literature, music, and arts. Wolf (2000) highlights genre classification success among films and literature, which, as a result, influenced classifying video games accordingly.

What distinguishes video games is that they are interactive, meaning that the player is part of the story plot and makes decisions that escalate actions. In some games, decisions lead to the same result regardless of what players choose in the course of playing. In other games, like detective games, different choices affect the storyline and may provide different consequences. For instance, in the game *Ken Follett's The Pillars of the Earth*, the player's propositions would affect the dialogue, the storyline, rising and falling actions, and therefore result in different consequences, and ultimately different endings to the scenario.

Wolf (2000) listed 43 game genres based on the criterion of how the player interacts with the game (e.g. jumps on platforms, shoots target, solves puzzles, etc.); however, some video games may be classified into more than one genre. On the other hand, Rogers (2014) states that video games are divided into two genres: “story genre” and “game genre” (p.16). Notwithstanding the efforts of

establishing a standard classification, the emergence of new video games with unfamiliar gameplays makes categorisation difficult. Good examples would be developing the survival games such as Minecraft and Rust, which rely on gathering resources and crafting items to survive in an open-world and the creation of battle royale games like the infamous *Player Unknown's Battleground (PUBG)* and *Fortnite*. In some cases, a genre would be enlisted for one game only because that game would not fit into any existing categories, such as the Sims, which has acquired the genre life sim.

Overall, there are primary genres, and they laid the foundations for the long list of detailed subgenres. Basically, RPG (role-play game), RTS (Realtime strategy), FPS/TPS (first/third-person shooter), MMORPG (massively-multiplayer online role play game), MOBA (multiplayer online battle arena), simulation, sports, and puzzles are widely recognized and known among games players around the globe. It is worth mentioning that the genres mentioned above do not follow the same classification system. For instance, FPS and TPS are categorised based on the camera angle only, whereas MMORPG and RTS are related to the mode of playing (i.e. content, controls, goals).

## ***2.2 Culture and Censorship***

From the earliest stages of human history, individuals established societies that held them under one ruling system to organise themselves. Within a community, people share and acknowledge certain rules and traditions that they agree on. These traditions may include food, clothing, special events, and morals, to name but a few. People identify these sets of traditions as their culture, and they show their love of it by taking pride in it and practising its beliefs and actions. Therefore, culture, in its essence, is seen as a positive trait, and one cannot simply criticise any culture without

facing serious consequences (Calzada Pérez, 2003, p. 6). In an attempt to break down culture as a concept, Karamanian (2002) lists three domains that exist in cultures: “the 'personal,' whereby we as individuals think and function as such; the 'collective,' whereby we function in a social context; and the 'expressive,' whereby society expresses itself.” The personal, collective, and expressive traits have been a common ground for defining culture. The summary that Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) provide in their book supports this claim. After reviewing 164 definitions of culture, they found that most of these definitions referred to the following terms: society, human, customs, heritage, and behaviour (pp. 149-157).

However, not all cultures share the same beliefs; therefore, what is considered normal among certain communities might not be welcomed among others. From this standpoint, some media content may violate a specific culture’s beliefs as it could be classified as sinful or immoral. The content can be a printed (e.g. books or magazines), filmed (films or documentaries) or programmed nature (e.g. video games or software applications), or it can be certain festivals or celebrations. Whenever this kind of material is either presented to a community or produced within that community, culture ‘gatekeepers’ intervene to prohibit any material that opposes the traditions and beliefs in a process called censorship. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary identifies three bodies that can perform the act of censorship: “the institution, system, or practice of censoring” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a). The act of censoring involves removing or filtering content, and this process requires a system to be executed.

This section is divided into three subsections. Firstly, it discusses culture, religion as a primary component of culture, and norms, and their effects on the entertainment industry. The goal here is to provide context for this research; therefore, the Arabic culture and Islam will be the primary

focus. The second subsection investigates obscene themes concerning the Arabic culture, and finally, the issue of censorship is addressed.

### ***2.2.1 Culture, Religion and Norms***

The descriptions associated to “culture” provided in the introduction gives a broad view of the term in its essential, existential aspects from a linguistic point of view. However, it is worth mentioning that when it comes to defining culture, the relationship among people, time and space should also have a designated place in the definition. Funk & Wagnalls New World Encyclopaedia (2018), for instance, defines culture as follows:

A sum total of all contributions of a group of people, in a designated area, within a given time. It represents, more specifically, the aesthetic or intellectual achievement or appreciation of an individual or a society, and also the lifestyle of a society as passed on from generation to generation. (p.1)

In addition to that, cultures consist of levels. Dan (2020, p. 238) proposed her multi-layer and multi-level model of culture, which starts with “individual, group, organizational, professional, national, supranational, and global.” Each level contributes to the whole cultural system; therefore, a culture, on the one hand, cannot stand alone without interacting with other cultures, which is indeed apparent in the current digital age of globalisation. On the other hand, each culture preserves its values and traditions. Therefore, this research accounts for the Arabic context and attempts to illustrate how culture, including its faith, determines norms for its societies.

Although the term “Arab culture” might be controversial because each Arab country has some aspects that differentiate it from others, it is still globally recognised that the Arab world shares common cultural traits and has a common culture. This culture is spread over 22 countries divided between the continents of Africa and Asia, and its people share the Arabic language, with dialect

variations, Islam as the main religious belief with the existence of Christian and Jewish minorities, and some traditional values such as generosity, hospitality, and kindness. Al-Omari (2008) describes the Arab culture as a “high context culture,” which is characterized by the sophistication of communication and is highly dependent on the use of “non-verbal signs, intonations, idioms, euphemism, anecdotes and hidden meanings” (p. 47). He further describes the Arab world as “the original cross-cultural melting pot” (Al-Omari, 2008, p. 68). In spite of the prosperous pivots in the pre-Islamic history of the Arabs such as the rise of the southern Arabian kingdoms (e.g. Saba’) and the development “business culture” of the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula, internal political and military tensions dominated that period. (Holt, P., Lambton, A., & Lewis, B., 1977, pp. 3-19). The Islamic period of Arabs has witnessed a phenomenal rise in many perspectives. They were able to place themselves among the dominating powers in the world such as the Byzantines and the Persians. Islamic medieval times were seen as a “golden age” for Arabs as well as Muslims in several life aspects. Lyons (2009, p. 184) refers to Averroes’s [ابن رشد] conclusions on the strong support of Islam towards putting man’s intellect to use. Therefore, it is imperative to highlight that the Arab culture is a combination of the Arabic language and Islam in addition to values that have been inherited throughout history (Al-Qaradawi, 2001, p.12).

Belonging to a certain society means that a person should adhere to that community’s “norms.” The word norm is derived from the Latin word “norma,” which means a rule or a pattern. Merriam-Webster defines it as “a principle of right action binding upon the members of a group and serving to guide, control, or regulate proper and acceptable behaviour” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b). Therefore, it is a guiding system for society members to categorise actions as right or wrong in that society. The power of norms is not limited to the individual's behaviour; it also governs the written word and thus has authority over books and any other printed material. Simultaneously,

this phenomenon affects translation since it is part of the literature. The reason behind considering translation a literary work, excluding technical translation and its lookalikes, can be attributed to the creativity required to render a text from the Source Language (SL) to the Target Language (TL); therefore, translation is the art of text reproduction (Levý, 2011, pp.57-58). Hence, norms have power over the field of translation. In *Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS)*, Toury (1995) defines norms as (p. 62):

The translation of general values or ideas shared by a community – as to what is right and wrong, adequate and inadequate – into performance instructions appropriate for and applicable to particular situations specifying what is prescribed and forbidden as well as what is tolerated and permitted in a certain behavioural dimension.

Diaz-Cintas (2004, pp. 25 – 28) highlights the importance of norms in translation and audiovisual translation (AVT) as they are implemented throughout the process of producing audiovisual materials. Indeed, norms govern audiovisual translation because the difference between a written text and a movie or a video game would be the channel of information.

It is necessary for a certain media content to abide by the community's shared values; otherwise, the risk of that material being censored by any authority is higher. Perhaps one of the most controversial themes that is culturally-sensitive is obscenity. The following section discusses obscenity and suggestive themes and the act of censorship in societies in relation to the field of video games.

### ***2.2.2 Censorship***

Usually, people associate the word “censorship” with obstruction of a certain material because of political reasons since institutions in-charge, such as governments, have been the regulator and moderator of the process (Müller, 2004, p. 4). In fact, censoring is more inclusive to the extent that

it may cover issues related to morality. The issue with censorship related to moral values is that it is debatable when it comes to passing legislation and regulating the process. The reason behind such complexity lies in the “harm condition.” The liberal argument to that is “if someone’s behaviour does no harm, then it’s nobody’s business but his own and no question of morality comes into it” (Williams, 2015, p. 70). However, it might be argued that the act itself could lead to unwanted consequences that would cause harm to society (Williams, 2015, p. 71). For instance, a person addicted to watching pornography does not harm others, although it is morally wrong. The case may grow more significant to include domestic violence because of the pornographic fantasies that are aired through their content. In this case, the act itself is not harmful, but the results lead to an act of violence such as domestic issues, for example (Williams, 2015, p. 72).

Violation of moral values in audiovisual materials can be observed in different forms, such as showing obscene scenes, shooting, murdering, gambling, and offending a particular religion or faith—whether directly or indirectly. In all cases, these instances violate the moral system of the community. In the field of video games, several games have faced the consequences because of one or more of the reasons mentioned above. For instance, *Grand Theft Auto V (GTA V)* has been under the spotlight since its release in 2013. Unlike previous versions, GTA V includes sexual and suggestive themes and obscene actions that were not part of the previous versions. Sexual explicitness was not the only issue; the game has a gambling system in the form of gambling chips. To obtain chips, you need to buy them with real currency via microtransactions. This issue led to controversy in some countries such as China, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Portugal, which finally decided to ban the chips' purchasing (“Grand Theft Auto update banned,” 2019). In fact, Australia banned the game after a massive influx of negative customer feedback because of questionable



content, which includes prostitution, stripping, sexual and physical violence against women (“Sexually violent,” 2014).

In the Arab and Muslim worlds, many AVT materials have been banned. Al-Adwan & Yahiaoui (2018) list examples of films that have been censored due to violating the cultural and religious values in the Arab world, namely *Sex and the City*, *Passion of the Christ*, *Noah*, *The Danish Girl*, and *Persepolis* (p. 86). Sometimes, the content may change to satisfy the guidelines that are applied in a specific cultural context. A good example would be the case of *The Simpsons* and its Arabic counterpart *Al-Shamshoon*. Yahiaoui & Fattah (2020) demonstrate the effect of cultural discourse and censorship bodies in manipulating the script to fit in the Arabic cultural context. The examples above have contained religious references, taboo words, racial, sexual, or suggestive themes. The case is not any different in video games. Chandler (2012, p. 19) provides a famous example about the game *Kakuto Chojin*. This game included chanting that was originally verses from the Holy Qur’an, and the result was to recall all copies of the game in the Middle East and other Muslim countries. Another famous example is a Sony developed game named *Little Big Planet*. One of the songs in this game also included verses of the Holy Qur’an, and the company acted quickly by recalling the copies, removing the song, and redistributing the filtered ones (Krotoski, 2008). Interestingly, the remarks were not sent by any official institutions; the issue was raised and discussed on the Official PlayStation Community Forum. This incident explains the latest reaction that occurred on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2020 when *Player Unknown’s Battleground (PUBG)* released an update called *Mysterious Jungle*. In the update, totems were distributed along the map. Those totems would give items such as weapons, first aid, armour, and other surprises; however, to ensure the totem provides the player with what he/she wants, a kind of dancing ritual has to be performed. The Arab and Muslim communities were angered by this kind of act since Islam forbids

worshipping idols and any form of paganism. The company apologized on its Twitter account for Middle East and removed the content two days of its release (PUBG MOBILE Arabic, 2020).

Although Yahiaoui & Fattah (2020) and Al-Adwan & Yahiaoui (2018, p. 98) agree on the difficulties that exist in translating AV materials from the Western culture into the Arab world, the incidents mentioned above illustrate how crucial it is to pay attention to video game localisation to avoid costly mistakes. The following section discusses the game localisation industry and its status in the Arab world.

### ***2.3 Game Localisation***

Companies constantly seek opportunities to include as many consumers as they can. In the age of globalization, where almost everything can readily be accessed, the gaming market has expanded to attract new markets in different countries. These markets demand a list of conditions for the products to suit the target audience; otherwise, it would be futile to advertise for a product that does not adhere to the norms of the targeted community. In fact, this is one of the pillars of content marketing. To make the product successfully, the company needs to “attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience” (Pulizzi, 2014, p.5).

Global opportunities are rapidly increasing in parallel with market growth due to the ease of reaching out to customers in the online environment. Singh (2011) states that companies are now able to “reach almost 1.9 billion online consumers worldwide via their global presence” (p. 18). Therefore, it is plausible to say that game localisation is worth expanding and developing since it can address several markets with different cultural and religious beliefs. Even though some companies attempt to internationalize their products and make a one-size-fits-all model, saving time and effort in the localisation process could risk product marketing and offend the target

society. In the following section, the definitions and overlaps of internationalisation and localisation shall be discussed and the concept of game localisation as a stand-alone model is highlighted.

### ***2.3.1 Internationalisation and localisation***

Internationalisation is commonly used in business as a process of creating a product that meets the consumer's expectations in different countries, bearing in mind that the internationalised content can be changed to fulfil the customers' satisfaction (Hayes, 2020). Perhaps this definition is viable in business and economics; however, it does not highlight which areas or sectors that have to be catered for in the process. Another definition provided by Knight (2003, p.2) entails more details of the internationalisation process; however, her take focuses mainly on education. She states that "Internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education."

Internationalisation could easily fit in any other area by taking out the "delivery of postsecondary education" and replacing it with whatever field is desired to be internationalised. For this research, it is essential to replace "postsecondary education" with "video games." Companies that are willing to internationalise their products can expand their markets by reaching out to more countries (Cuervo-Cazurra, 2012, pp. 446-447). Nonetheless, internationalisation is a gradual process, and it does not necessarily adhere to all countries in the world. Besides, companies would look for countries that share a close mentality to the original (Cuervo-Cazurra, 2012, p. 437).

The idea of internationalisation seems plausible when it comes to yielding products that are not culturally controversial, like a bar of soap or a cooking pot, but the level of complexity may

increase whenever the product is triggering any culture-related referencing. For this reason, internationalisation may be considered a primary step in which localisation entail re-designing products which will succeed in satisfying locales (Localization vs. Internationalization, 2005).

Localisation has been introduced in several fields such as business, economics, literature, and translation. In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the verb “to localise” simply refers to making something local (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Indeed, this is a broad definition of the term, and that is a good reason for each field that adopts this process to provide a definition which satisfies the technicality of that specific field. Since the current research is related to the field of translation, it is essential to quote and adopt the technical definition provided by Palumbo (2009), where he refers to localisation as “the process of adapting a product to a particular local market, from a linguistic, cultural and technical point of view” (p. 71). Interestingly, the term localisation has found its way into translation through the translation of computer software (Palumbo, 2009, p. 71); however, there is a pre-existing term with a similar function and connotation to that of localisation, and that is adaptation. Although adaptation can have a similar definition as localisation, it is best described as elastic since it can refer to a translation technique, strategy, or a particular connotation related to specific fields of arts such as music, theatre, or films (Palumbo, 2009, p.7). On the other hand, Milton (2010) claims that localisation is a type of adaptation.

In the technological world of computers, localisation has contributed to spreading software globally to reach as many markets as a firm can include to increase profits. Among those software applications, video games have found their way into the localisation industry. Even though video games had emerged in the 1970s, game localisation did not become mature enough to be an independent industry until the 1990s (Bernal-Merino, 2013, pp.221-233). The focus was mainly diverted towards business and software localisation essential to that sector (O’Hagan, 2015).

Nowadays, the localisation of video games is attributed to the discipline of Audiovisual Translation. The reason behind classifying game localisation as part of AVT is that it has borrowed, yet slightly changed, some of the concepts commonly practised in AVT. For instance, the use of voiceover (VO) in game localisation is often referred to as dubbing in AVT (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013, p.17). Moreover, video games have cinematic techniques implemented within their course, namely cut-scenes (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013, p.21), subtitles, and voicing (p.52) to name but a few. The roots of game localisation may be considered vague since it can be categorised in the broader translation studies as intersemiotic translation (Jakobson, 1959). It is also worth mentioning that game localisation uses the same techniques as the ones implemented in translating comic books since both involve pictorial elements (Bernal-Merino, 2013, p.97).

Game localisation is discussed extensively in the next section.

### ***2.3.2 Game Localisation in-detail***

The video game industry emerged back in the 1970s in the US (see 2.1.2), and it was followed by Japan, where arcade games were popular. Later, the Japanese producers saw a potential investment in the US market ("From 'Pac-Man' to VR", 2020). Previously, there had been no issue when releasing a video game in several markets since the content itself did not have much linguistic or cultural content that would create a barrier between different cultures. For instance, the arcade game *Space Invaders* had simple words and phrases that could be understood around the globe. Phrases like "hi-score" and "game over," and words like "credit" and "play" were not considered a language barrier for players.

## Figure 1.1

*Examples of texts in early games (game: Space Invaders)*



Translation was not considered a requirement until a Japanese game publishing company named Bandai Namco Entertainment released the world-famous game Pac-Man or Puck Man in the original Japanese version. According to several sources (Bernal-Merino, 2011; Bussey, 2019; Simeonov, 2019), *Pac-Man* was one of the earliest games that received a linguistic modification to suit the target culture audience—the US market at that time. The change came as a response to a request submitted by US representatives to Bandai Namco, and the reason was that the original title would create bad implications because the word “puck” rhymes with a well-known swear word. This incident is confirmed by the game creator and developer himself, Toru Iwatani, in an interview with Wired.com (Kohler, 2010). This case is the first example of what is today known as localisation.

**Figure 1.2**

*Versions of Pac-Man; US version is on the right and Japanese on the left*



According to O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013), game localisation refers to

all the many and varied processes involved in transforming game software developed in one country into a form suitable for sale in target territories, according to a new set of user environments with specific linguistic, cultural, and technical implications. (p. 19)

Nonetheless, Bernal-Merino (2013) claims that the field requires a dedicated term since the phrase “game localisation” refers to different processes that are not exclusively for translators or linguistic localisers to work on as people from different fields such as software development or programming have roles in this process (pp. 128-129). Hence, he chooses “the translation of multimedia interactive entertainment software,” and that entails a descriptive terminology (see 2.1.1) by substituting the phrase video game and incorporating its traits in the term itself (Bernal-Merino, 2013, pp. 141-142). However, it can be argued that the notion of game localisation has been in-use since its initiation within the Translation Studies; in fact, localisation has been introduced to

the jargon of translation as an independent entry (see Palumbo, 2009, p.71). What distinguishes this term from other words used in the field of translation studies and AVT is that “localisation” has been allocated to technological indications in translation; for instance, Chandler (2012) defines localisation as “the process of translating the game into other languages” (p. 8). Other examples may include, but are not limited to, software localisation and web localisation (Esselink, 2003). In this research, game localisation is adopted; however, Bernal-Merino’s term “the translation of multimedia interactive entertainment software” is used whenever deemed necessary.

It is worth mentioning that game localisation is an independent industry, and it follows a tailored process that is not arbitrary. Bernal-Merino (2015) states four unique factors that distinguish game localisation from any other operation in the field of translation (pp. 138-153):

1. “Story-building interactivity,” in which players engage and interact with the games. They are given permission by the developers to control the character and immerse themselves as soon as they start playing. In fact, games have developed to the extent that a story-line can be influentially affected by the player’s choices. A good example is the point-and-click game *Ken Follet’s The Pillars of the Earth*. The game provides the player with various options in each situation they encounter, bearing in mind that such decisions essentially affect the upcoming consequences. This type of game not only immerses the players into the game, but also give them a sense of responsibility for their choices.
2. “The fragmentation of interactive text” highlights the fact that the interactive texts have more difficult tasks to perform compared to the conventional written literature translation. Translators or localisers have to deal with spreadsheets that contain chunks of language. After being translated, these chunks are then written by game developers in a string of codes that correspond to certain graphical or auditory assets in the game.



3. “The translation of linguistic variables” foregrounds the coding variables that are used within the game. In computer science, a variable is “a storage location for data paired with an associated symbolic name” (Computer Science Wiki, n.d.). These variables may include a set of characters that change according to a command written within the game code that is performed by players; for example, in most FPS games such as *Call of Duty* and *Battlefield*, the weapon’s name that the player is carrying in-game is displayed on-screen in the Heads-Up Display (HUD). The weapon name changes whenever a player switches it with another one (e.g. Glock to M4A1 or AK-47), and that is due to the change in the variable data that is associated with the weapon itself.
4. “The localisation of voice commands and gestures” is associated with games that are played through voice commands like dancing games. Players have to follow these commands by moving, pressing, or shaking a controller, or they may need to perform certain moves whenever a motion sensor used such as with Xbox<sup>®</sup> Kinect or Nintendo<sup>®</sup> Wii dancing mat.

Under the umbrella of game localisation, there are two types that are acknowledged in the industry: full and partial (Chandler, 2012, pp. 9-10). “Full localisation” incorporates a full translation of the in-game texts, packaging as well as auditory assets, whereas “partial localisation” is dedicated only to translating in-game texts. Nevertheless, this classification is broad and does not provide an insight into what is performed in each type. Gilboa (2019) provides a different classification, which consists of three types: basic, complex, and blending localisation. While basic corresponds to partial and complex to full localisation, blending localisation is quite distinctive. She states that in blending localisation “the story should be

rewritten, and the graphics should be recreated in order to match the requirements of the target audience's culture" (p. 47).

Among the various fields that affect game localisation such as politics, psychology and others, the concept of culture in video games has captured scholars' interest. Chandler (2012) calls the process of changing content at a deeper level "culturalization" (p.20). She asserts that culturalization is a way of engaging players from different areas around the world in the game's content; in addition, this operation gives a safe space for players from different cultures not to feel offended or discriminated against (Chandler, 2012, p20). On the other hand, Di Marco (2007) provides a relatively sophisticated definition with different terminology. She calls this phenomenon "cultural localization," and defines it as

the adaptation of visuals, sound and scripts conceived in one language by members of one culture to another language and another culture, in such a way that they seem at once fully consistent with the assumptions, values and other boundaries and outlooks of the second culture, and internally consistent within the semiotic strategies of the original video game text, visuals and sound. (Di Marco, 2007, p.2)

Scholars like Chandler (2012) and Edwards (2011) have retained the word "culturalization," while Di Marco (2007) and Mangiron & O'Hagan (2013) preferred the term "cultural localisation." Regardless, the term "blending localisation" seems to be more appealing since the very definition of game localisation incorporates the cultural factor but on a general level. In contrast, the word blend indicates the sharpening, reshaping, or reforming an existent matter to suit the target embodiment. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, blend means "to combine or associate so that the separate constituents or the line of demarcation cannot be distinguished" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), that is, if reflected on gaming, players from different regions should not feel alienated from the game because of the content.

Thus, a new definition is to be proposed. Blending game localisation is the process of reforming a video game on the levels of linguistics, culture, and storyline. This process is executed throughout the existing media channels within that game so that players from the target culture will be able to experience convenience while playing, and, on the other hand, ensuring the game does not get detached from its primary objective. Convenience is rather important here since video games are all about having a joyful experience, except serious games, which are used for educational purposes. Nonetheless, it is important to maintain balance during the localisation process so that the product comes with a sense of originality without alienating the players from the cultural context they are familiar with. Accordingly, it is plausible to establish a factor that can be a pivot for game developers to sustain in the localisation process for other cultures, which is the factor of comfort. This factor would mainly focus on whether players feel comfortable playing a certain game or not; however, this is still a relatively new idea and can be further developed in the future.

Whether it is full, partial, or blending, game localisation has attracted increasing attention in recent years. While other languages and cultures have acquired a good volume of literature in game localisation, there is a scarcity of research that discusses the topic in the Arabic language. In the next section, a review of the current literature regarding Arabic game localisation will be addressed, followed by identifying the gap in the field.

### ***2.3.3 Arabic game localisation***

Video games have been a source of entertainment for many people; in fact, the number of players has been increasing phenomenally, and it is expected to reach 3 billion active gamers in 2023 (Statista, 2020). Undoubtedly, among the increasing number of gamers are people from the MENA region and Arab countries. It is a flourishing market for the gaming industry, since it is estimated that the top 10 countries in game revenues in the Arab world spent nearly 2 billion US dollars in

2018 (Zaiets, 2020). The reasons behind this expansion in the market can be attributed to the young population; almost 60% of the people in the MENA region are under the age of 25 (Youthpolicy.org, n.d.). In addition, mobile gaming has spread exponentially over the past years in the Middle East; indeed, 28% of all mobile game downloads come from the region (AMEinfo, 2020). These facts reflect how lucrative this market can be for game developers. Still, at the same time, it can pose a challenge for them since the Arab world has linguistic and cultural characteristics that are noticeably different from the US and Japan – the leading game producers in the world (see 2.2.1 & 2.2.2).

Despite these promising opportunities for the gaming industry in the Arab world, game localisation's academic field continues to have limited research on the topic. To the best of my knowledge, only two academic papers can be found through ProQuest and EBSCO databases. Mahasneh and Abu Kishek (2018) discussed Arabic game localisation from a functionalist perspective, and they reflected upon Square Enix's *Tomb Raider*<sup>TM</sup>. Their study examines the linguistic assets in the game, concentrating on the words and phrases localised into Arabic by applying a functionalist approach. They claim that

An adaptation of video games is difficult to achieve. This can be attributed to the risk of causing distortion of the experience, as a result of such translation approaches. Furthermore, modern video games are not about playing, but rather, they represent pieces of literature, narratives and life experiences attached to the playing experience, and that contrasts with early video games, which focused on merely playing, and where adaptation seemed to be more effective. (Mahasneh & Abu Kishek, 2018, p. 60)

Here, it can be argued that game localisation's primary purpose is to immerse players into the game in their language, which is achieved through good quality translation. Costales (2016, p. 197) concludes, in his study about the perception of translation in video games, that improving the game

experience is dependent on translation. In addition, early games did not require much translation or localisation in general; hence the game localisation industry has expanded with the development of gaming experience as observed nowadays in the market.

It is worth mentioning that Mahasneh and Abu Kishek (2018, p.61) highlight the need for cultural-oriented studies in video games. They clearly state that “The cultural layer is a wide subject in video games, which may require a dedicated study to practically tackle it from both graphic and linguistic aspects of games.”

The other work is that of Al-Mazoorah (2018), in which she discusses the translation of video games. She used Electronic Arts’ *FIFA™ 15* as a case study in which she mainly concentrates on the textual analysis by comparing the original and the translated versions using domestication and foreignization strategies. Also, she highlights the match commentaries used in-game. To the best of my knowledge, no work in the Arabic game localisation literature has explored localisation from a cultural perspective. Accordingly, this research attempts to fill this gap and pave the way for future research to develop game localisation in the Arab world.

## CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the cross-cultural spectrum of translation studies, several scholars have built their frameworks based on Toury's translational norms (1995, pp. 55-60). An excellent example would be Delabastita's (1989) taxonomy. He designed his scheme to explore translational relationships between films' various signs, structuring his taxonomy as follows:

**Figure 3.1**

*Delabastita (1989) proposed scheme*

transmission (channel) type of sign (code)		<i>repetitio</i>	<i>adiectio</i>	<i>detractio</i>	<i>substitutio</i>	<i>transmutatio</i>
V I S U A L	verbal signs	...	...	...	...	...
	non-verbal signs	...	...	...	...	...
A C C O U S T I C	verbal signs	...	...	...	...	...
	non-verbal signs	...	...	...	...	...

This design is mainly concerned with films, although he also includes TV programs in this category. He used *repetitio* to refer to identically repeating the same sign in the target language. *Adiectio* indicates an addition performed on the sign while *detractio* refers to reducing signs or parts of them. He defines *transmutatio* as changing the sign elements' order, while *substitutio* corresponds to substituting a whole code with a different one.

The proposed strategies *adiectio*, *detractio*, *repetitio*, and *substitutio* can be integrated into this research to help reflect upon the case study; nonetheless, there remains an issue with the two-dimensional construct, which only includes visual and acoustic channels. The interaction channel of communication (i.e. users can interact with games and be part of their stories), which this scheme does not account for, is an essential constituent of video games. However, he clearly states that “this list is only selective and that the scheme could account for more options than those I have just outlined” (Delabastita, 1989, p. 200). Thus, there is a place for adjusting this taxonomy to better suit this research.

Kaindl (1999) adopted Delabastita’s scheme into his research; however, he provides examples where translation affected the textual content and the typographical and pictorial elements. Kaindl (2010, p. 39) further asserts the importance of including “pictorial elements” in the analysis in addition to the “linguistic text.” Approaching Delabastita’s design from a multi-semiotic perspective provides space for more inclusion of non-verbal signs. In fact, Delabastita himself emphasises that his scheme is only a preliminary step towards developing a more sophisticated model which includes “further specifications” to the modes of translation (Delabastita, 1989, p. 201). Nevertheless, Kaindl (1999, p. 285) claims that “there is still a lack of translation-relevant analytical methods for nonverbal elements such as pictures, music, graphics, etc.”

In the Arabic context, Zitawi (2008) implemented both Delabastita’s scheme and Kaindl’s (1999) observations on comics into her research which involved analysing the Arabic translation of Disney comics. She managed to implement the following strategies in her analysis: reordering, addition, repetition, visual manipulation, omission, deidiomatising and explicitation. While the first five correspond to Delabastita, she introduced the last two strategies. The deidiomatising process tends to simplify a source idiom when translated into TL by “replacing it [the English

idiom] with a less idiomatic expression” (Zitawi, 2008, p. 146). Her second strategy, explicitation, suggests that the translator explicates the target text to facilitate children’s understanding of the story. This strategy is adapted from Vinay and Darbelnet’s explicitation technique of rendering implicit information in SL as explicit in TL. It could occur on various linguistic levels such as grammar, semantics, or pragmatics (as cited in Munday, 2016, p. 92). Zitawi looked into 108 Disney comic stories that were translated into Arabic in various Arab countries. She concluded that translators’ strategies were centred around “Islamic and Arabic morals and social conventions” (Zitawi, 2008, p. 151).

Zitawi’s model (2008) has offered a practical implementation of Delabastita’s schematics (1989) in terms of analysing the pictorial elements; however, her model still needs some modification to cover all video game elements. For instance, reordering, or *transmutatio*, is not sufficient since video games, especially MMORPG, are partially sequential. That is to say, several game features such as graphical assets and interactive aspects exist in-game simultaneously, and ordering may occur only in the main quests. While players should follow the main quests in a sequence to understand the story, they might accept side-activities at different times.

Euphemism is another essential factor when localising video games into Arabic. The case study presented in this research has undergone observable euphemising procedures. Al-Adwan (2015) proposed an updated model of euphemism of Willams (1975) and Warren (1992) for subtitling. The scheme includes widening, implication, metonyms, demetaphorisation, borrowing, semantic misrepresentation, and omission. The two latter strategies have been introduced “to strengthen the model’s effectiveness” and, accordingly, have been presented in the data analysis (Al-Adwan, 2015, p. 19).



Some of Al-Adwan’s strategies can be found in video game localisation; however, they are not implemented as a whole; instead, they are utilised as techniques in certain instances. This circumstance can be attributed to the nature of the game localisation process, which may involve manipulating graphics and audio assets, whereas the proposed euphemism model filters out the linguistic elements only. Overall, it is beneficial to include some strategies of Al-Adwan’s model into the present study as euphemism techniques.

After observing the former schemes, an integrated design shall be proposed, considering the three channels of information in games: visual, auditory, and interactive. These channels can transmit information via verbal or non-verbal signs. Consequently, the new framework shall integrate Delabastita’s (1989) scheme with the updated annotations from Kaindl (1999) and Zitawi (2008). Al-Adwan’s (2015) design is also necessary for this research since it provides an insightful explanation of the euphemism strategies when transferring audiovisual content for the Arab audience; accordingly, some of the euphemising methods that are believed to be most pertinent in respect of the case study shall be included as techniques.

**Table 3.1**

*The proposed game localisation analysis framework*

Dimension (Channel)	Sign Type	Strategies			
		Addition	Omission	Repetition	Manipulation
VISUAL	Verbal	Text addition	Text deletion	Literal translation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Widening</li> <li>• Semantic misrepresentation</li> </ul>

	Nonverbal	...	...	Image retaining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Covering</li> <li>• Pictorial Replacement</li> </ul>
INTERACTIVE	Nonverbal	...	Deleting side-activities	Retaining events and side-activities	Manipulating events and side-activities

Each axis junction in this table represents a technique drawn from observing the preliminary data collection from the case study and exploring the models mentioned above. While the visual-verbal processes correspond to conventional translation standard practices, visual-nonverbal methods delve into the graphical assets, whether pictorial or typographical, in the game. Although typographical elements are written language texts (i.e. they are verbal), they are hard-coded in the game and represented as images.

Also, the textual element of the interactive channel can be either spoken (acoustic-verbal), written (visual-verbal), or typographical (visual-nonverbal), and that is the reason for not inserting an interactive-verbal sign. The overall acoustic channel has been omitted since the presented case study has music and sound effects without any influential parts to the storyline whatsoever; moreover, there are no acoustic-verbal excerpts (i.e. spoken dialogues) in the game.

In general, the linguistic techniques represented in this framework have been taken from the adopted schemes. To elaborate, they are defined as follows:

1. Text addition (visual-verbal): The concept is commonly known in the field of translation studies. It is as simple as adding words to the Target Text (TT) that do not have equivalents in the Source Text (ST) to convey meaningful language.
2. Text deletion (visual-verbal): Parts of the ST are omitted in the TT for cultural, political, social, or other purposes.
3. Literal translation (visual-verbal): translating ST elements literally or word-for-word.
4. Widening (visual-verbal): The process of moving a term from specificity into generalisation (Al-Adwan, 2015, p. 11).
5. Semantic misrepresentation: This technique's main objective is to reproduce "offensive references" to euphemise the content. Consequently, the produced items are "semantically non-equivalent" (Al-Adwan, 2015, p. 17).

On the other hand, techniques followed in visual localisation have a shared basis with linguistic modification. The only difference is that image localisation adheres to the visual-nonverbal channel. These techniques can be listed as follows:

1. Image retaining (visual-nonverbal): Preserving the original pictorial elements in the localised game.
2. Covering (visual-nonverbal): Zitawi (2008, p. 143) explained this technique under the pictorial manipulation strategy. It is changing that occurs on female characters when certain parts of their bodies are exposed. The method here is to make the uncovered parts opaque to make the image modest. She asserted that a robust reason for this strategy is the censorial bodies in the Gulf region.
3. Pictorial replacement (visual-nonverbal): Replacing the original pictures with new ones. This technique corresponds to Delabastita's (1989) *substitutio*. So far, the pictorial

manipulation techniques mostly pay attention to the society's norms. After asking Game Power 7, the localisation company, about the existence of any authorities, rules, or institutions governing the localisation practices in the Arab world, they responded that there is no ruling body that enforces censorship on the incoming game content. Based on that, the claim of adhering to the norms seems more convincing in this sense.

The interactive channel includes elements of events and side-activities in which they are recognised as one unit. Players trigger specific functions in these activities that result in several results, such as winning a prize, levelling up or acquire a title. Although the interactive aspects include visual and linguistic elements, they are interrelated and behave like one body of action.

Localising interactive features can be categorised under one of the following techniques:

1. Deleting side-activities: It happens when a side activity is highly inappropriate to the degree that it cannot be retained or changed. Including such action will result in risking the game to be banned or receive negative reviews; thus, losing users.
2. Retaining events and side-activities: If the events adhere to the target culture norms, then there should be no issue in preserving their content in the localised game.
3. Manipulating events and side-activities: This technique is required when an event or a side-activity seems controversial, yet it can be adjusted to the target culture audience. Some changes take place when implementing this technique to satisfy the target users.

The current case study retains the original music and sound effects; thus, the acoustic channel will not be listed in this scheme; nevertheless, this design can adapt to various case studies by including more techniques and adding more mediums.

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

This chapter shall start with a brief synopsis of *FiestaOnline*. Then, the next section will be devoted to describing the methodology used in conducting this research; thus, it will include a restatement of the research aims and questions and an account for data collection and analysis.

### *4.1 Synopsis*

Fiesta Online is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) in the fictitious continent of Isya. Players can choose from five different classes: Fighter, Cleric, Archer, Mage, and Trickster. If players manage to reach level 60 in one of the mentioned classes, they can access the Crusader class. Every type has unique skills and spells gradually acquired as characters level up in the game. The game has several quests, such as story quests, repeatable quests, kingdom quests and epic quests. While some can be accomplished solo, others such as kingdom quests need players to group up in a party of different classes to finish these quests successfully. Players are required to be cooperative in the party because each class has a specific role. For instance, fighters are called tankers, which means that they can endure vast amounts of damage without being easily killed, while clerics are healers, buffers, and de-buffers whom other classes need to survive the campaign.

The game's main story talks about a being that exists before 'gods' in this fictitious world. His name is "Legel." This being created everything, and he was pleased to see nature's harmony. Events start to escalate when other gods begin to feel jealous of Legel. They tried to banish him into the darkness, and they succeed; however, Legel managed to harness his power in a replica of himself called Bijou. After several past events, the gods become angry and unleashed chaos upon

the world of Isya. This story is only available in a written form on the game's website, and players start their tutorial in the chaotic world, where Pagel, the god of greed, is attacking.

When players finish the tutorial, they are transferred to the actual world of Isya, and their journey begins to save this world from the gods and their marauders. Isya consists of major cities such as Elderine and Urugua, transitional locations such as valleys, forests and other sites, and dungeons. These places are connected via portals where players can move from one location to another.

#### ***4.2 Methodology***

This section is devoted to discussing the methodology implemented to acquire a greater realisation of the changes that occurred to the localised version of the game in terms of religious and obscene references. Since the shifts in *Arafiesta* manipulated verbal, pictorial, and interactive elements, the game exhibits the perfect example of blending game localisation. Consequently, this opportunity is worth studying considering the multi-channel localisation performed on the game.

This study aims to explore the localised version of *FiestaOnline* to answer the research questions provided in chapter 1, that is, to find out what changes took place and explain the reasons behind manipulating the original in light of the Arabic culture.

As a consequence, the research adopted a mixed approach to investigate the case study. It should be stated that the linguistic data of both game versions is massive; therefore, the researcher used religious and obscene keywords to extract the most controversial context. The process was executed in four steps; first, collecting data via a unique tool called SHN Editor by Csharp (<https://forum.ragezone.com/f593/shn-editor-1043822/>). Second, the collected data was organised in a Word document and an Excel spreadsheet simultaneously. The key to use Excel was to record the number of shifts proposed in the framework chapter (see Chapter 3) that happened in each

excerpt. Third, each keyword entry was written in a separate sheet; then, all instances were collected in a comprehensive table. Finally, all quantities were extracted in a column chart to pursue the ability to analyse and provide explanations.

The observation was the only possible method to record the incidents since there was no visual corpus available for the pictorial channels. The process was to create a profile and enter the game. Then, the researcher started exhibiting various locations in the game and take screenshots from both versions. Next, similar screenshots were put next to each other to be compared and spot any pictorial changes.

The interactive channel was more challenging to assemble than the linguistic and pictorial elements. Capturing video footages was a viable option to be used in recording the interactive features as well as visiting the game websites. The idea was to watch the footages and take notes of the observed changes. Also, seeing the games' websites was mainly to surf the forums and look for changes in the events and side-activities. It is worth noting that taking screenshots and capturing video footage were done via Microsoft Xbox Game Bar.

The analysis highlights the shifts between English and Arabic with a back-translation provided for non-Arabic speakers. Examples were categorised based on the techniques listed in the Chapter 3. Each example, or group of examples, were organised in a table with an English, Arabic, and back-translation followed by thorough explanations in order to elaborate on the changes.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

The analysis is divided into two sections: linguistic and pictorial. Each section's discussion is centred around the strategies proposed in the framework. Also, every technique is supported by examples followed by a thorough discussion.

### *5.1 Linguistic Elements*

Arabic culture is considered conservative due to its unique combination of moral values and Islamic values (see 2.2.1). Therefore, any religious connotations are highly sensitive and may cause discomfort among Arab players. Indeed, some references might be generally religious, that is, not directly related to Islam; nonetheless, they are not welcomed among the Arab consumers, and that can be seen in the case of PUBG mobile (see 2.2.2). Perhaps censorship that takes place on satellite channels has affected game localisation in the Arab world and can be considered solid proof that controversial religious elements are not preferred. In addition to that, inappropriate contexts such as explicit love relationships, references to kissing and marriage are considered obscene for certain age groups such as children and teens in the Arabic culture; consequently, the localisers have modified some of the contexts to suit the target culture.

After the localisation process performed by Game Power 7 on *Fiesta Online*, noticeable changes have occurred to “filter out” any controversial religious and obscene contexts in *Arafiesta*, the localised version. The filtering process has affected the context to the degree that parts of dialogues have been manipulated, deleted, or sometimes new syntactic units added to remove the controversial elements and keep a stable and understandable dialogue. Dialogues were not the only element that underwent modifications, a number of item names, non-player characters (NPC) and mobs (enemies) were also changed.

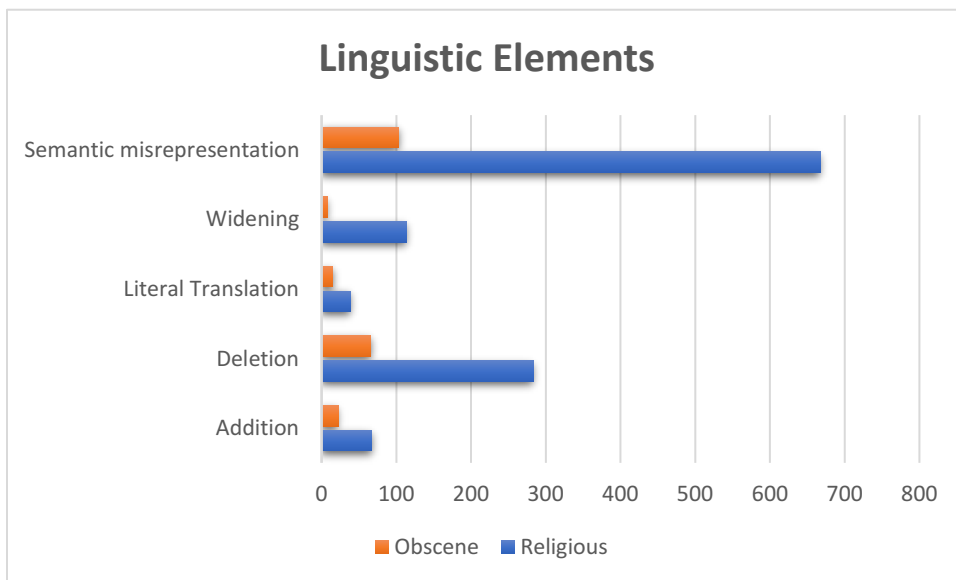


Due to the huge number of linguistic elements in the game database, several controversial words have been selected and used as keywords to pinpoint the modified segments. In this research, the words God, spirit, soul, holy, priest, pray, and spell were the keywords used to congregated religious references. In contrast, love, boyfriend, girlfriend, kiss, and marriage were chosen as sensitive entries.

Overall, 604 dialogue excerpts have been reported to contain religious references and 136 obscene references. After careful observation of each context, localisers made 1170 adjustments to the religious references and 214 to the obscene and inappropriate instances. Multiple adjustments can occur within the same excerpt, and that explains the difference between the number of excerpts and the adjustments. These modifications are divided as per the five techniques: Addition, deletion, literal translation, widening and semantic misrepresentation.

**Figure 5.1**

*Number of religious and obscene linguistic elements*



### 5.1.1 Addition

The following table represents the number of instances where addition is utilised in both religious and obscene references:

**Table 5.1**

*Total number of addition instances in each reference category*

ADDITION	Religious references	Obscene references
<b>Total number</b>	67 (6%)	22 (10%)

On the whole, it seems that localisers have less preferred addition to other techniques. In the segments observed, all addition cases were almost utilised to compensate for deleted syntactic units, often sentences.

**Table 5.2**

*Addition – Example no.1*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
Monsters' spirits cannot be cleansed while they are alive. <b>It is an unfortunate truth about spirits and monsters who have fallen into darkness.</b>	لا يمكن الحصول على طاقة الوحوش إلا بعد هزيمتها، ولهذا نحتاج إلى أبطال شجعان مثلك	Monsters' energy cannot be obtained unless defeated. <b>That's why we need courageous heroes like you!</b>

In this example, localisers modified the first part by using more “neutral” language to eliminate any religious hints like replacing “monsters’ spirits’ with “monsters’ energy and “cleansed” with “defeated.” Nonetheless, this modification is semantic misrepresentation and shall be discussed later. Interestingly, localisers omitted a complete sentence of the original, which is assumed to be highly controversial, and added a new sentence. While the original talks about spirits falling into darkness, the localised version added a new sentence with a motivational tone using the term “courageous heroes.” Localisers not only eliminated a religious-connotated unit but also exploited the instance to promote “courage” as a moral and noble value. This claim can be supported by Game Power 7 response in the question list they received. When answering a question about adopting certain guidelines, they confirmed that they have guidelines to make video games suitable for the Arab culture.

**Table 5.3**

*Addition – Example no.2*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
<p>Yes..</p> <p><b>Her body cannot come back, but we believe that her soul will safely return to the village if we pray to the sacred Abalita Tree.</b></p>	<p>أجل..</p> <p>إننا نذكر السكان بأهمية الحفاظ على الطبيعة من التلوث فهي أهم ما نملكه، ونعلم أولادنا ذلك كل يوم..</p>	<p>Yes..</p> <p><b>We remind residents of the importance of preserving nature from pollution. It’s the most important thing we possess, and we teach that to our children everyday..</b></p>

This linguistic part was taken from the full dialogue of the mission *Holy Tree Festival*. The whole context of the mission was fundamentally changed to be يوم الطبيعة [lit. ‘Nature Day’] in the

localised version. Some dialogue strings were translated with equivalents and misrepresentations; however, localisers resorted to omitting the string mentioned in the table above and replace it by a new string that conforms with the updated context. Also, localisers performed the same technique of not just replacing the speech with suitable language, and they also inserted values such as “reserving nature.”

**Table 5.4**

*Addition – Example no.3*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
That kind of person? She is a priest taking care of the village!	شخص مثلها؟ لم تتحدثين بهذه الطريقة... إنها الحكيمة المسؤولة عن المدينة	A person like her? <b>Why are you talking like this...</b> She is the Wise who is in charge of the city

Although the major shift in translation here occurred to replace the word “priest,” the localisers explicitate the dialogue by adding لم تتحدثين بهذه الطريقة [lit. ‘Why are you talking like this’]. Presumably, localisers did not want the players to detach from the main conversation because in the mission *A suspect?* The player’s character has an admonishment tone when talking to Milly, one of the NPCs, about a lost cup for another character in the game. Moreover, the addition that happened here can be interpreted as conveying the moral value of respecting others.

### 5.1.2 Deletion

Deletion has ranked second in the frequency of usage. Some deleted segments have been compensated for by adding lexical units; however, localisers omitted many instances without offering any replacement. The following table shows the total number of deleted segments among the extracted data:

**Table 5.5**

*Total number of deletion instances in each reference category*

<b>DELETION</b>	<b>Religious references</b>	<b>Obscene references</b>
<b>Total number</b>	283 (24%)	66 (31%)

Generally, deletion took place whenever a segment was highly controversial and could not be manipulated. Nonetheless, the localised dialogue seems readable and coherent after omitting some elements. One possible explanation of maintaining readability after deletion can be the manipulation performed on other segments within the same conversation so that the final product would not be confusing or detached.

**Table 5.6**

*Deletion – Example no. 1*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
Please deliver this letter of <b>love</b> and rose to Bran. This is my last request.	أرجوك أوصل هذه الرسالة وباقية الأزهار إلى داميان. هذا طلبي الأخير	Please deliver this letter and this flower bouquet to

<b>I can't do it myself because my heart is about to explode...</b>		Damian. This is my last request.
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This segment is taken from the mission *Nina's Decision*. Localizers resorted to deletion to reshape the segment to fit in with the new context introduced in the mission. The original mission talks about a love relationship between *Nina* and another NPC; however, the message is diverted to congratulating that NPC for having a new-born baby in the localised version. Having a lover in the Arabic culture is considered taboo; Arab people prefer dedicated relationships such as engagement and marriage. Nonetheless, even these relationships are taboo until a person reaches the appropriate age to take responsibility.

**Table 5.7**

*Deletion – Example no. 2*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
That does seem to make sense. <b>Neek, God of Darkness</b> The scale seems to get bigger and bigger.	يبدو هذا منطقيا جدا.. إن الأمور باتت مكشوفة أكثر فأكثر..	This seems very logical... Things have become much clearer...

The word “God” and any reference to deities have been entirely changed. Localisers either omitted the references or manipulated the context to sanitise controversies. In *The gradual unfolding of the truth*, which this segment is part of, localisers replaced *God of Darkness* with قوة الظلام [lit. ‘Power of Darkness’] to filter out the reference to deity. Consequently, all dialogue strings in that mission have been affected. Such references were deleted to harmonise the whole context.

**Table 5.8***Deletion – Example no. 3*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
This type of Evil <b>Spirit</b> only chose Ancient Elf Souls because it wanted to create a monster.	هذا النوع من الشر اختار فقط أطياف الأقرام لأنها أرادت أن تحولها إلى وحوش	This type of evil only chose elf ghosts because it wanted to transform them into monsters.

Deletion can offer a good alteration of meaning by merely omitting a minor constituent such as a noun or an adjective. Here, localisers took advantage of the word “evil” and removed the contentious term “spirit.” Not only did this movement abolish an unwanted element, but also offered a smooth transition to the next constituent. Moreover, the new context here concurs perfectly with the whole conversation in the mission of *Ancient Souls 3*.

**Table 5.9***Deletion – Example no. 4*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
<b>You startled me!</b> <b>Wait.. Aren’t those the Spirit Dust I need to fix my glasses? Wow!</b> This is fantastic! Now I can finally get them fixed!	شكرا لك! وأخيرا سأصلح نظارتي!	Thank you! Finally, I can fix my glasses!

Some segments can be deleted if they have no essential part in the plot, they have already been introduced and localised in another place or can result in confusion among players. When players accomplish the mission *Please help! 1*, they receive the response stated in the above table. Although the quest requirements are already disclosed to players at the beginning of the quest, the original version restates one of the items after completing the mission. Also, the item “Spirit Dust,” or غبار الطلع [lit. ‘Pollen’], is not included in the translation because it is not one of the quest requirements. Perhaps it has been added by mistake since the mission asks players to bring “Old Soul Dust, Dim Soul Dust, and Lustered Soul Dust.” The deletion occurred here to avoid confusing players, especially those who like to follow up with the story.

**Table 5.10**

*Deletion – Example no. 5*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
(He is suddenly smiling at you) <b>Oh my god.</b> You came here just for me. I am afraid I was rude to you earlier.	(يتبسم بوجهك فجأة) لقد قطعت كل تلك المسافة من أجلي فقط. أعتذر عن ردة فعلي السابقة	(He is suddenly smiling at you) You came all that way for me only. I am sorry for my previous reaction.

The phrase “Oh my god” is not plot-related and can also create some ambiguity since the original version emphasises mythical gods’ role, which is not the case in localisation. The solution to overcome this minor issue is to omit the phrase.



**Table 5.11***Deletion – Example no. 6*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
Hi. <b>Priest</b> Median, the Hunter’s Union is short on people so I’m here to help.	مرحبا ميديان، أنا هنا بالنيابة عن حلف الصيد	Hello Median, I’m here on behalf of the Hunter’s Union.

The word “priest,” الطيب [lit. ‘Doctor’] in the translation is already mentioned and localised earlier in the quest *Analysis Continues*; therefore, it is assumed that the localisers omitted the term here to avoid repetition.

### 5.1.3 Literal Translation

There is a general tendency in the localised version of avoiding literal translation. This preference can be attributed to the nature of the ST, which contains highly-controversial terms. In fact, it is the least utilised technique according to the analysed data.

**Table 5.12***Total number of literal translation instances in each reference category*

LITERAL TRANSLATION	Religious references	Obscene references
<b>Total number</b>	39 (3%)	15 (7%)

It should be noted that literal translation is often associated with another technique to produce a coherent and cohesive segment. In other words, translating constituents literally come as a subordinate movement to construct the TT properly.

**Table 5.13**

*Literal translation – Example no. 1*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
<p><b>Alca is a beautiful spirit of water and a monster. Many adventurers have been fooled by her beauty.</b></p> <p>Worried, Alberstol’s Healer Runadilla asks you to defeat 30 of these monsters called Alca.</p>	<p>كثير من المغامرين وقعوا ضحية لجمال ألكا فهي جميلة جدا، ووحش قاتل</p> <p>تطلب منك الصيدلانية رولانا في بيروسا أن تهزم 30 ألكا</p>	<p><b>Many adventurers have fallen victims to Alca’s beauty; she is very beautiful and a vicious monster.</b></p> <p>Pharmacist Rolana in Berusa asks you to defeat 30 Alca.</p>

Although there has been a change in structural order, localisers have managed to maintain the original context. Nevertheless, the example illustrates the lack of independence in literal translation. The controversial phrase “spirit of water” has been omitted in parallel with translating the other constituents.

Regardless, translating strings of text literally can stand alone on rare occasions. Take the following instance:

**Table 5.14***Literal translation – Example no. 2*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
I like your <b>spirit!</b> I was just about to go looking for you, so I could tell you what we have learned.	روحك المعنوية مرتفعة اليوم! كنت أبحث عنك لأطلعك على آخر الأحداث!	<b>Your spirit</b> is high today! I was looking for you to inform you about the latest updates!

The connotation “spirit” in the example indicates cheering up the morale, not a ghostly entity; however, it has been translated as it does not violate the Arabic culture norms or create a questionable segment. Moreover, utilising literal translation in localising this term agrees with the presumed hypothesis that the company has tried to promote moral values and motivate players.

Despite the localisers’ efforts to sanitise any inappropriate strings of texts, some segments have slipped through unchanged, as illustrated in the following example:

**Table 5.15***Literal translation – Example no. 3*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
Oh... <b>The cold eyes, the lovely face... Ahh...</b>	عينها الباردتان.... وجهها الجميل...!	<b>Her cold eyes... her lovely face...!</b>

Since the mission *Curly’s Sad Love 1* narrates the story of the NPC Curly having a crush on another character, the flirting intention cannot be disputed here. They have tried toning down the dialogue

by deleting the interjections “Oh” and “Ahh,” still the description provided about the eyes and the face is flirtation. This issue may be the result of not having clear standards for game localisation in the Arab world.

In some dialogues, sensitive words were translated literally. The difference that made this retainment possible was the context, as represented in the following case:

**Table 5.16**

*Literal translation – Example no. 4*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
I think this brought you a little closer to me, <b>I love strong people.</b>	ليس بعد! لكنك بالتأكيد رفعت مكانتك عندي فأنا أحب الأقوياء!	Not yet! But you indeed raised your standing to me. <b>I love strong people</b>

Notwithstanding, the word “love” is not often retained in the localised version of the game, but the context here has contributed towards keeping the term as it is. NPC *Tiara of the Hunters’ Union* in the quest *Furious Prince* is showing respect by including this statement in her conversation with the players.

#### **5.1.4 Widening**

In the case of widening, localisers tend to use it with single words or phrases. Also, consistency has been a feature of this technique because the same original term is widened in almost all occurrences with several exceptions.

**Table 5.17***Total number of widening instances in each reference category*

<b>WIDENING</b>	<b>Religious references</b>	<b>Obscene references</b>
<b>Total number</b>	114 (10%)	8 (4%)

Among all extracted segments, religious contexts related to the words “spirit,” “soul”, and “spell” were commonly widened, whereas contexts with obscene references had the least number of widened words.

**Table 5.18***Widening – Example no. 1*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
Maxuter asks you to get an ingredient for Anti-venom. Find the Nucleus of a Fire <b>Spirit</b> . (Fire Spirit is in Burning Rock.)	يطلب منك التاجر ماكستور أن تجمع مكونات مضاد السم اعثر على نواة <b>طيف</b> النار (يتواجد طيف النار في جبل الحمم)	Merchant Maxuter asks you to gather anti-venom ingredients. Find the Nucleus of a Fire <b>Ghost</b> . (Fire Ghost exists in Lava Mountain)
Keast! Here’s the <b>souls</b> I’ve collected.	كاريس! لقد جمعت لك <b>الأطياف</b>	Karis! I’ve collected the <b>ghosts</b> for you.

Referring to souls as observable entities is not acceptable in Islam since they are considered one of the creation mysteries, and no human being can provide a description or make contact with the souls. In the case of spirits, replacing this word can be attributed to the prohibition of paganism.

Spirits have been worshipped throughout the history among various nations, but Islamic teachings refute these rituals. For localisers, these terms are slightly more challenging since they need to develop a creative replacement and simultaneously keep the players immersed in the story to prevent the risk of alienation. As a result, any contexts that include the words mentioned above risk the consequence of being altered. Regardless of using various techniques in replacing these terms, the generic term “ghost,” or *طيف* in Arabic, has been used frequently to widen them. The word “soul” [lit. ‘روح’] refers to an invisible entity that give life to beings. It is often connotated with religious perspectives, thus replacing it with a generic word (i.e. going from narrow to wide) can resolve the controversy here.

**Table 5.19**

*Widening – Example no. 2*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
<p>Enchanter Master Wishis of Elderine asks you to collect Fireball Magic Scroll in order to complete the Fireball <b>Spell</b>. (Search Luminous Stone)</p>	<p>تطلب منك المدربة كارمن في إيلدور أن تجمع مخطوطة كرة النار من أجل اكمال مهارة كرة النار (ابحث في كهف الأنين)</p>	<p>Trainer Karmen in Elidor asks you to collect Fireball Scroll in order to complete Fireball <b>skill</b>. (Search Whining Cave)</p>
<p>Why doesn't it open? Maybe <b>someone put a spell</b> on the cask itself... Could you take it to Hilda and ask her? She knows about <b>magic</b>.</p>	<p>لم أرى حقيبة كهذه في حياتي.. يبدو أن أحدا ما ألقى عليها تعويذة حتى تبقى مقفلة.. هل يمكنك أخذها إلى هيلينا؟ فهي خبيرة بالسحر</p>	<p>I have never seen a bag like this in my life. It seems that someone has <b>cast a spell</b> on it to remain locked. Could you take it to Helena? She's a <b>magic</b> expert.</p>

Although the word “spell” is in the context of witchcraft, it does not appear to be controversial. This conclusion can be drawn from the second example where the localisers have retained the witchcraft-related terms such as “magic,” “spell,” and even used the verb “cast” despite that the original segment had it in a more generic tone by using “put.” This incident highlights the inconsistency issue in localisation, and it will be further discussed in the conclusions.

**Table 5.20**

*Widening – Example no. 3*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
Kid Woz in Elderine asks you to speak with him about picking out a gift for his <b>girlfriend</b> . (Search Elderine)	يريد ويلز الصغير التحدث إليك من أجل اختيار هدية مناسبة لصديقته (ابحث في مدينة إيلدور)	Junior Wills wants to talk to you about picking out a proper gift for his <b>friend</b> . (Search the City of Elidor)

Generally, boyfriend/girlfriend relationships are not permissible in the Arabic culture, notwithstanding that the names of these relationships have equivalents in Arabic, namely عشيق for boyfriend and عشيقه is girlfriend. In most cases in the audiovisual world, translators reside to widening them and using “friend” instead. By omitting such references, players would not depict any inappropriate relations related to the characters or the plot.

### **5.1.5 Semantic Misrepresentation**

Semantic misrepresentation has the lion’s share in the localised version. Any lexical unit that has been replaced with evident manipulation that diverts the meaning yet holds the entire dialogue structure firm is categorised as semantic misrepresentation.

**Table 5.21**

*Total number of semantic misrepresentation instance in each reference category*

<b>Semantic Misrepresentation</b>	<b>Religious references</b>	<b>Obscene references</b>
<b>Total number</b>	667 (57%)	103 (48%)

**Table 5.22**

*Semantic misrepresentation – Example no. 1*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
<p><b>Roumen was one of the warriors who saved Isya during the War of the Gods.</b></p> <p>I will tell you more about it later.</p> <p><b>My fear is that Roumen's spirit,</b> which brought hope and courage to me, has disappeared completely. The huge number of monsters roaming nearby are a result of this.</p> <p>Nothing like this has ever happened during my 20 years as chief.</p>	<p>كان بطل رومينا أحد المحاربين الذين أنقذوا إزوريا من حرب طاحنة. سأخبرك عنها لاحقاً</p> <p>أخشى أن طيف البطل قد اختفى كلياً، وأعداد كبيرة من الوحوش بدأت في الظهور لهذا السبب</p> <p>لم أرى شيئاً كهذا منذ زمن بعيد</p>	<p><b>Roumena's hero was one of the warriors who saved Izorya from a devastating war.</b></p> <p>I will tell you about it later.</p> <p><b>I am afraid that the hero's ghost</b> has completely disappeared, and large numbers of monsters have begun to appear because of this.</p> <p>I didn't see a thing like this a long time ago</p>

Perhaps the main objective of this noticeable change is to replace “the War of the Gods” since mentioning any deity, or multiple deities, does not conform with the Arabic culture norms that



corresponds with Islam as a monotheistic religion. The second modified element was the name “Roumen.” In the original version, Roumen is a small village named after its chief, who is one of the Hedins Alliance six warriors. This alliance took an oath to fight against the gods of darkness. Since the localised version diverted the whole story to exclude any reference to deities, these characters were also manipulated or omitted.

**Table 5.23**

*Semantic misrepresentation – Example no. 2*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
As long as this exists, <b>the power of the gods</b> will continue to grow.	طالما أن هذه الطاقة موجودة، لن نستطيع مساعدة الأشجار!	As long as this <b>energy</b> exists, we can't help the trees!
<b>God? Which god?</b>	ماذا؟ قوة قديمة؟	<b>What? An ancient power?</b>
There has been a discovery of a sticky substance. I've examined it and it's the <b>Tears of Gods</b> . This has the power to enhance the strength to anyone who comes in contact with it.	لقد اكتشفت أمر تلك المادة وهي دموع الأبطال. هذه المادة قادرة على إعطاء قوة كبيرة لكل من يلمسها	I've found about that substance, which is <b>Tears of Heroes</b> . This substance is capable of providing a great power
Guiltian of Adealia says that he is studying the relics with the trace of <b>Chaos War of Gods</b> . Talk to him.	يقول العمدة جلوتين أنه يقوم بدراسة الآثار القديمة للحرب التي جرت بين الملوك في قديم الزمان.. اذهب وتحدث إليه	Mayor Gluteen says that he is studying ancient relics <b>of the war that occurred among the kings</b> long time ago. Go and talk to him.

These examples show how keen the localisers were to filter out the word “god;” however, each context imposed a different translation of the same word so that each segment can emerge as

coherent and cohesive. Also, the words طاقة [lit. ‘energy’], أبطال [lit. ‘heroes’], قوة قديمة [lit. ‘ancient power’], and ملوك [lit. ‘kings’] possess a similar function of representing a powerful object as such.

Misrepresenting “god” was not enough in some cases; therefore, localisers changed the associated lexical units by adding, deleting, widening, or even misrepresenting these units. For instance, in the first example, the sentence “the power of the gods will continue to grow” was a double-layered semantic misrepresentation; firstly, the word طاقة [lit. ‘energy’] replaced “the power of the gods.” Second, the reference to the growing power of the gods has been removed and compensated by لن نستطيع مساعدة الأشجار [lit ‘we can’t help the trees’].

**Table 5.24**

*Semantic misrepresentation – Example no. 3*

Original	Localisation	Back-Translation
I see...	فهمت قصدك..	I understand..
I heard that <b>only minimal number of spirits keeps their physical form.</b>	سمعت أنه حدثت إصابات عديدة للسكان بسبب هذه الدببة	I heard there were <b>many casualties among residents because of these bears.</b>
It seems that <b>more monsters are being created in the Guardian's Holy Shrine</b>	يبدو أن هناك وحوش تتجمع في وكر الأفاعي.	It seems that <b>monsters are gathering at the Snakes’ Den.</b>
(You got it..) <b>Yes, I admit.</b> Actually, <b>I love Joanna. But I’m always too careful and she would only see me as a coward...</b>	لا بأس.. إنها مجرد مشكلة عابرة.. في الحقيقة، هناك خلاف بيني وبين الصيادة جوانا وأريد أن أقدم لها اعتذاري	No worries.. <b>It is just a transient problem.</b> In fact, <b>there is a dispute between me and Hunter Joanna, and I want to offer my apology.</b>

Semantic misrepresentation can happen on the contextual level. That is, a complete change of the context to clear out any controversial references. In the first segment, localisers resort to manipulating the reference to spirits; nonetheless, this modification seems not arbitrary. The mission *Open wounds of Olverstol 2* talks about wild bears attacking a town, so the localisers might have exploited this context to modify this segment.

The alteration in the second segment has resulted in a logical context since the verb تتجمع [lit. ‘gather’] connotes an addition in the number of objects, which corresponds to the verb “create” in its essence of increasing the quantity. Yet, contextual misrepresentation may require a change across several segments to produce a harmonised context. The third case could be a good example of that; the mission's original name was *A Man’s Devoted Love*, and the main idea was focusing on a love relationship between two NPCs. However, the name and context of the mission have been changed to appear as a friendship in the localised version. Localisers changed the name to الصداقة الحقيقية [lit. ‘true friendship’] and made the last segment as if there was a dispute between Joanna and Huey (the two NPCs). Surprisingly, this change promotes the noble values preserving friendship and offering apologies, as hypothesised earlier (see 5.1.1).

## ***5.2 Pictorial Elements***

Despite the researcher’s attempt to acquire permission to include screenshots from the game, Game Power 7 refused this request. In addition, Gamigo, the original *FiestaOnline* developer company, promised to provide the researcher with permission, yet they did not send any documentation that would give the study clearance to include screenshots. Consequently, the strategies used in localising graphical assets shall be discussed via descriptions only.

The image retaining, covering, and pictorial replacement techniques opted for graphic elements shall be addressed in the following sections.

### ***5.2.1 Image Retaining***

The game contains a plethora of graphical assets, both static and dynamic. While static objects are fixed and do not take any physical response from other objects (i.e. any interactions from players do nothing to these objects, dynamic assets are movable and interactive. For instance, walls are static in *FiestaOnline*, and if a player tries to destroy them, they will not react to any attack performed on them.

Generally, static objects such as buildings, streets, trees, water bodies, and others have been preserved in the localised version. In addition, many NPCs and mobs have been retained in the localisation. Keeping all static objects might be attributed to the difficulty of changing them since they are identified as images in the game; however, these are not to be mistaken with drawn pictures such as portraits that exist in-game. On the other hand, dynamic graphical assets can be manipulated via specific tools designed by game developers or localisation companies.

Perhaps that explains why some controversial static objects have been kept as they appear in the original version. For example, in the city of Elderine, ايلدور (Elidor) in the Arabic version, there is a castle near the world portal that have statues at the top edges of the castle. These statues resemble the stereotypical image of angels with wings and loose dress. The issue does reside in the angel image since the localised version contains items such as Goddess Wings, جناح هيلدا [lit. 'Hilda's Wings'], which are angelic wings that can be worn by characters and increase specific stats; instead, the appearance seems inappropriate. The angel statue has an uncovered belly, and players can clearly see the exposed statue in the localised version.

Inappropriate imagery is not the only issue found in static assets. Religious symbols and representations may also raise concerns amongst players. One example would be the image of the cross. During character creation, whenever the player chooses the cleric, العطار [lit. 'Apothecary'], the character turns up in armour with crosses on the chest plate and the poleyns – parts of the armour covering the knees. The crosses have been kept as in the original, although the character's graphical asset is dynamic and can change its armour in the game. In addition to that, some pigs dwell around the portal area in Elderine; even though pigs and any pork products are taboos in the Arabic culture, they have been preserved in the localisation.

Changing static images can be very tricky as localisers might not have access to the entire game content. Such issues might trigger inconsistency and raise concerns about the advancement of tools used in localisation. Besides, lack of standards and governing institutions in the Arab world may be another reason for these occurrences.

### ***5.2.2 Covering***

Besides preserving graphical assets, some objects have been changed to conform to the norms of the Arab culture. Conceivably, clothing is one of the most important features when it comes to appropriateness. Modesty is preferred in Arab societies, but that does not necessarily mean conforming to the Islamic dress code. Dress code in the Arab world, regardless of religion, concentrate on the idea of not being sexually appealing or provocative in which parts of the body are uncovered or visible under see-through clothing. Women's thighs and legs, for instance, should be covered by opaque, or at least near-opaque, clothing. Shoulders have also to be covered, although some Arab countries may be more tolerant in this case. Uncovering bellies or parts of them is prohibited as it may resemble a sign of indecency or, even worse, prostitution. As for the

chest area, leaving it exposed is seen as a sign of indecency or rudeness, and that also applies to men. Roughly, personal appearance should not come forth as seductive.

*FiestaOnline* is an MMORPG that takes place in a fictitious world and follows the Japanese Anime style, where clothing is visually attractive but also provocative at the same time. In the localised version *Arafiesta*, localisers were able to manipulate certain NPCs and characters' clothing to convert their image into a modest one. Female characters, in particular, underwent marked changes in order to adhere to the practised norms in the Arab world. Nonetheless, this modification was not full-dress; instead, it aimed at coating the aforementioned body parts while maintaining the character's full guise.

For example, in Roumen, Ancient Templar Maria, or الحكيمة ماريانا [lit. 'The Wise Mariana'], and Storage Keeper Raina, or أوريليا [lit. 'Urilia'] both have their shoulders uncovered in the original, whereas in the localisation, shoulders have been covered by colouring them. The colouring scheme has served a good job in covering and in corresponding with the characters' dresses to a degree of having a sense of originality. Moreover, the Covering has affected the portraits that pop up whenever players interact with these characters and converse with them.

Other NPCs such as Element Helper Remi, المساعدة أريا [lit. 'Helper Aria'], Vietree, فيونا [lit. 'Fiona'], and Item Merchant Nina, التاجرة نيمار [lit. 'Merchant Nimar'], have got their legs covered by colouring them so that they appear as if they are wearing tights under their dresses. Localisers have also used the covering technique to opaque underarms along with shoulders, namely the NPC Healer Poring, روندا [lit. 'Ronda'], in Uruga, أروما [lit. 'Aroma'].

In the character creation menu, characters in all classes are dressed in shiny armours, yet female protagonists have exposed spots in their body armour, except crusader or ضرغام [lit. 'lion' or

‘brave’], such as thighs, chest, underarms, bellies, and hips. These parts are all covered in the localised version using appropriate colouring to correspond with the overall look.

### ***5.2.3 Pictorial Replacement***

While most graphical changes have been under the covering technique, the pictorial replacement has a sporadic presence in the game. One example has been recorded to have a pictorial replacement in the game. When playing with the cleric class, a skill that can be learned at the level 110 named God’s Benevolence, ضوء الخير [lit. ‘Goodness light’] has a cross drop emotion. The cross emblem is replaced with a crescent in the localised version.

## ***5.3 Interactive Elements***

Interaction is an important feature of video games. In fact, it is a distinctive feature that makes gaming different from any other audiovisual material. In *FiestaOnline*, there are two types of interactive elements based on the event that occur in-game: seasonal events and permanent interactive systems. While seasonal events occasionally happen, hence the name, permanent systems are integrated with the gameplay and act as side-quests or leisure places. They provide players with more content to experience in the game.

### ***5.3.1 Deleting Side-activities***

The deletion was the localisers’ last option to perform. Almost all of the original content has been either maintained or manipulated to accommodate the Arabic culture norms. Nonetheless, one side-activity has been completely obstructed, and players cannot enter that activity area, although its building is still standing. The site is called the Lucky House, and it is located in Alberstol Ruins, أطلال بيروسا [lit. ‘Birusa Ruins’]. It resembles a casino as it includes slot machines, dice games and

lucky capsules. Players convert the in-game currency to unique coins by a Coin Exchanger device used in the Lucky House.

First and foremost, gambling is prohibited in Islam, whether it is a game or real life. Second, places like casinos in the Arabic culture are often depicted as places for sinners who waste their money on gambling, drinking alcohol, and prostitution. Third, video games have the risk of being banned in the Arab world if they have a gambling system integrated into their gameplay (see 2.2.2); therefore, it is safer to filter out this side-activity to stay in the green zone.

### **5.3.2 Retaining events and side-activities**

*FiestaOnline* offers several side-activities that do not violate any norms in the Arabic culture. They even encourage moral values such as teamwork, corporation, and respect for others. For instance, the Guilds', الكتائب [lit. 'battalions'], system allow players to meet under one banner, fight together in-game and establish friendships amongst each other. Also, players in the same guild can have the opportunity of winning free items whenever they level up.

Furthermore, the Master and Apprentice, نظام الرعاية [lit. 'Care System'], option has been retained in the localised version. This feature allows players to have a trainer/trainee relationship in the game in which the trainer shares his or her experience with the trainee, and both players help each other level up by gaining experience. Like the guild system, master and apprentice enhance relationships between players as they cooperate to help each further progress in the game. Both versions reward players for engaging in such relationships by giving them experience points boosting and free items.



### 5.3.3 *Manipulating events and side-activities*

One of the techniques followed in localising *FiestaOnline* is changing the content of events and side-activities to concord with the Arabic culture norms. This method has been applied in situations where events and side-activities seem to adhere to the Arabic context. Yet, they need a reformation in some aspects related to religious references or obscene instances.

The most obvious example of side-activity manipulation would be the wedding system. In the original version, players can wed each other by talking to NPC Dreian Uriel, ماتيلدا [lit. 'Matilda'] in *Arafiesta*, who can be categorised as a wedding organiser. It is a complete simulation of a wedding ceremony in which the groom-to-be has to possess a wedding ring, proposes to the bride, and send invitations to other players to attend the matrimony. Although marriage is generally encouraged in the Arab world, and certainly not a taboo, children and early adolescents are not supposed to mimic or talk about it. Since this game is free to play with only microtransactions for items in-game, any person can join the game regardless of gender or age. Therefore, keeping the wedding system as the original might be inappropriate for specific age groups.

As a result, Game Power 7 manipulated the content to come out as a friendship bond. They called it عهد الصداقة [lit. 'friendship pledge']. This change can be seen as serving a multi-goal function; firstly, by abolishing marriage references, players would feel more comfortable engaging in this activity. Second, there would be no misinterpretations if two players of the same gender agreed to have a friendship bond because homosexuality is a forbidden relationship and a taboo topic.

The wedding system was not the only manipulated side-activity; seasonal events were also changed to comply with the Arabic context. The majority of the Arab world are Muslims; therefore, it is uncommon for them to celebrate Christmas, Halloween, Valentine's Day, or Easter.

Nonetheless, localisers managed to include these festivals in *Arafiesta* but with several modifications to neutralise these events. For instance, Christmas has been widened to be احتفالية الشتاء [lit. 'Winter Celebration'], and all items and activities associated with this event have also been either misrepresented, widened, or omitted. The localisers changed Christmas Stocking Chocolate to شوكولاتة الشتاء [lit. 'Winter Chocolate'] and Christmas Fireworks into مفرقات نارية [lit. 'Fireworks']. Some names acquired more than one translation, namely the Christmas Tree. It is referred to as شجرة الهالات [lit. 'Tree of Aruras'] to point out the decorated trees added in Roumen, Elderine, and Uruga during the festive times. On the other hand, a piece of furniture, which players can win or buy during the event, by the name Christmas tree was translated to شجرة العيد [lit. 'Festive Tree'].

The same changes have been implemented to other celebrations; for example, localisers adjusted Halloween to be حفلة التتكر [lit. 'Disguise Party']. Apparently, they have been attempting to align the translation with the general concept of these festivals. Easter eggs have been translated as بيض مسلوق [lit. 'boiled eggs'] in order to coincide with the item's graphical asset as well as its icon in the player's inventory.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

In this study, the aim was to assess the commonly adopted strategies in localising *FiestaOnline* on three levels: linguistic, visual, and interactive. The study was undertaken to explore the translation of religious and obscene references from the original version, *FiestaOnline*, into the localised edition, *Arafiesta*.

The research findings reveal that localisers tend to utilise semantic misrepresentation among both reference categories. Since these references are volatile (i.e. they change from dialogue to dialogue), it is improbable to use a fixed equivalence for all instances; thus, such circumstances explain the tendency to use semantic misrepresentation in the localisation process. The results also show that linguistic references, in general, are more likely to change compared to pictorial and interactive elements.

While image retaining dominates the visual localisation, localisers still have employed covering particular body parts to obstruct provocative parts that can be observed on female characters. Mostly, shoulders, legs, thighs, underarms, chests, and hips are covered in the localised version, as leaving them exposed is considered immodest. The pictorial replacement has been recorded once where an image of a cross is replaced with a crescent. Despite the eagerness to filter out any controversial assets, whether religious or obscene, some elements have slipped through unchanged.

Both interactive aspects— events and side-activities events and side-activities varied in their fate.. Overall, they can be divided into three types according to the potential controversy they might create: first, non-controversial, such as the Guild system and Master/Apprentice bond, have been completely preserved in the localised version. Secondly, semi-controversial events needed

adjustments to be suitable for the target audience, namely Christmas, Halloween, Easter, and Valentine's day. Moreover, the wedding function, as a side-activity, required specific changes to be presentable. Finally, a controversial side-activity, a simulation of a casino called Lucky House, has been removed from the game system.

The results also show that the localisers favour exploiting any modification in the content to promote moral and noble values such as friendship, cooperation, honesty, respect, and kindness. Highlighting these values seems to satisfy *Arafiesta* players. On the localised version official forum, one of the players opened a topic entitled "does the game abide by the Islamic norms?", asking if the changes made in-game is just a random decision by the company or adherence to the Islamic standards. A supervisor responded that this claim is correct, and he or she added that it was a step towards providing an appropriate gaming environment for players in the Arab world (see: <https://bit.ly/2NQsfnA>). In fact, the localisation company Game Power 7 has provided the same response in a list of questions given to them by the researcher, which they have been answered via email. The query was: "What was your top priority in localising the game (*Arafiesta*), and they responded:

Each one of those mentioned elements is a major part of the game, but to be specific, we go through them step by step; first the story, is it suitable for Arab culture? Are there any ideas or messages in the game that might be harmful to our audience? If not, we go to the next step, the visuals, then the texts. We also take into consideration other factors while localising a game; one of them is customers' behaviour in the region (Reference? personal correspondence ....).

Overall, the study strengthens the idea that blending game localisation can be implemented in the Arab world. Indeed, it is a relatively new industry in the region. It poses unique challenges for localisation companies; however, *Arafiesta* experience has illustrated the possibility of developing

this field in both professional and academic areas. In their response to the question: “In comparison to the global market, do you think that game localisation in the Arab world will flourish in the near future?” Game Power 7 replied:

The shortest answer is yes. If you monitor the gaming market statistics in MENA and especially in the Arab countries, you will notice a rapid increase in the demand of games. This encourages global game developers to enter this huge market by going through localisation process. (full reference)

### ***6.1 Limitations***

The scope of this study was limited in terms of visual data collection. Graphical assets are not arranged in a corpus that can be quickly sorted. Therefore, the researcher mainly relied on observing graphics via entering the game in both versions and roaming the areas there in order to observe the graphical elements and see the differences. This method was time-consuming and might not be as precise as watching all pictorial elements in a piece of software where filters can be applied to sort this data. Is this the only limitation?

### ***6.2 Further Studies***

This study is just the tip of an iceberg waiting to be explored in the field of game localisation in the Arab world. A highly recommended future study would be establishing a basis for standard Arabic game localisation guidelines. Other potential studies might look at in-game subtitling, games with acoustic-verbal channels, and Arabic game localisation quality assurance. It should be noted that the examples proposed lie within the field of audiovisual translation; however, game localisation research is, by all means, need other fields to intervene in this process due to its multidisciplinary nature. Game localisation requires designing training programs, and that typically involves pedagogical and curricular studies. Also, software for graphical manipulation

developed especially for game localisation is crucial, in which computer and software engineering are requirements to accomplish this task.

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