A literature review of Iranian publications on video game localization between 2009 and 2022

Alireza Vahedi Kakhki
Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman

Although video game localization has lately attracted the attention of researchers, with many papers and books being devoted to this practice, it is still an underdeveloped area of Translation Studies research in Iran. The present study provides a literature review of research carried out in Iran on video game localization since 2009 to address this gap. The reviews revealed that studies on Iranian game localization fall into translational, social, cultural and political, and historical categories. The review also showed that the translational aspect is the most explored area followed by social, cultural and political, and historical aspects. The historical aspect has received the least attention in the literature, specifically in academic publications. This paper offers potential areas for future research on game localization in Iran in each aspect.

Keywords: localization, video game localization, Iranian video game localization, video game translation in Iran

1. Introduction

Translation influences every aspect of human life (Hatim and Munday 2004), including its significant role in the entertainment industry. The video game industry is one of the most profitable in the world, with revenue of USD 150 billion in 2019, which exceeded the combined revenues of the film and music industries (as cited in Khoshsaligheh and Ameri 2020). In 2020, the worldwide PC gaming market and the worldwide mobile video game market were worth USD 37 billion and USD 77 billion, respectively (Clement 2021). Because today video games are not only instruments for entertainment but are also considered media that shape cultural and ideological perception (Toscano 2019), their importance is demonstrated from social, political, and historical perspectives.
Because of games’ cultural and economic significance in a given society, companies strive to prepare video games for users in their countries, and governmental agencies tend to adapt and regulate video game localization to align with cultural traditions. Adapting a video game to a specific locale is not just an issue of linguistic transfer and 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. (O’Hagan and Mangiron 2013, 19)

Internationally, research on video game localization began in the 2000s (Dietz 2003); however, there is a paucity of research in Iran in this field, although recently, as we will see, this topic has started to attract scholarly attention. This paper aims to provide an overview of the existing research with a survey of literature focused on the Iranian context.

This study sets out to investigate the current situation of Iranian video game localization from a broad range of perspectives, namely historical, social, translational, cultural, and political. By highlighting the main trends, methodologies and future research directions in this field, this paper attempts to map video game localization in Iran through the lens of Translation Studies. It should be mentioned that the research reviewed in this paper consists of articles published in academic journals and Masters’ theses in Translation Studies with no Ph.D. dissertations on game localizations located in an Iranian context. There were only two conference articles whose full texts were accessible; hence, other conference papers are excluded from this overview.

2. Game localization

The advent of digital media gave rise to a specific process to provide digital media for users in target countries. This process can be explained simply as adapting digital content for consumers who are linguistically and culturally foreign (Schäler 2010). Coined in the 1980s, the term localization does not merely refer to a linguistic phenomenon but encompasses adapting a digital product for consumers (Muñoz Sánchez 2017; Granell, Mangiron and Vidal 2017). This adaptive dimension of the product as a whole has led researchers to differentiate between localization and translation (Pym 2016). While translation involves moving a text from one mode to another so it can cross cultural and linguistic borders, localization deals with changing a product so it can fit within a particular target context (Mandiberg 2009). In the same vein, Scholand (2002) considers localization
a process that transcends a linguistic transfer of meaning and takes into account other variables such as history, culture, customs, and linguistic and numerical conventions. In localization, the product-related elements are considered outside linguistic and national boundaries (Mandiberg 2009). For Schäler (2010) localization involves linguistic and cultural adaptation of digital material as required by a specific locale. In localization, content is primarily multimodal and consists of text, graphics, audio, or video stored in various file formats (Schäler 2010). Moreover, translation is often subsumed as one of the sub-processes in a localization process which consists of analysis, preparation, translation, engineering and testing, and review (Schäler 2010).

A video game can be defined as an interactive form of multimedia entertainment for one or more individuals, powered by computer hardware and software, controlled by a peripheral, and displayed on a screen (Bernal-Merino 2014, 18). Its economic significance can be demonstrable on the basis of its annual revenue while its role as cultural vehicle is well acknowledged (Chen 2013). Video game localization is the process that deals not only with translating in-game texts (Al-Batineh 2021), but also with ensuring that gamers in the target culture enjoy the translated game as much as gamers in the source culture did the original products (Fernández-Costales 2012). Therefore, localization is not merely a linguistic phenomenon, and it deals with cultural and technical aspects of products (O’Hagan and Mangiron 2013). Hence, the concept “transcreation” was applied to explain the creative role of agents involved in a localization project so that the target gamer can enjoy the same gameplay experience as the original player (O’Hagan and Mangiron 2013, 109). The function of creativity in this context aims to provide foreign users with the information required to perform a specific task in a game (Zhou 2011).

Reviewing the literature on Iranian video game localization marked 2009 as the beginning of research on video game localization in Iran. However, no other studies on this topic appear to have been published until 2013. As will be discussed further in the next section, the reviewed research literature can be grouped under four areas of focus.

The most significant area involves the translational aspect, applying and exploring translation theories on video game localization. This aspect covers textual topics (e.g., Touiserkani, 2015; Gonabadi 2017; Rad and Masoudzadeh 2021), with the main interest in translation strategies and translation process and the application of norms and polysystem theory to video game localization (Rezaeian and Khoshhal 2020; Touiserkani and Afzali 2014; Sheikh Bahaee and Mollanazar 2013). These research strands explore the applicability of polysystem and the norms that govern video game localization. Furthermore, non-professional localization of video games (Khoshsaligheh and Ameri 2017; Arzaani 2020) and the
motivation of non-professional localizers are examined, as game fans localize video games through accessing the ROM (Read-Only Memory), giving rise to a practice known as “ROM hacking” (Muñoz Sánchez 2009). The topic of the quality of the localized video games falls under this area.

The secondary area of focus is the social aspects of video game localization, where research shifts toward the audience and gamers (Khoshsaligheh and Ameri 2020; Afzali and Zahiri 2021). It has mainly investigated gamers’ preferences regarding the reception of localization and gamers’ perception of regulatory issues in Iran. The literature review shows that academic research on Iranian video game localization has mainly focused on these two areas, whereas cultural and political, and historical areas are understudied, especially in scholarly articles. These two areas are mostly explored in non-academic sources. This gap motivated the researcher to conduct a focused literature review, so as to bring it to the attention of scholars.

3. Methodology

Mainly using a descriptive approach, this literature review attempts to highlight the trajectory of the existing game localization research in Iran.

3.1 Literature search

To find appropriate literature for this study, I searched for scholarly articles in English and Persian via Google Scholar, Science Direct, and Iranian databases such as SID (Scientific Information Database). The keywords used in Google Scholar, Science Direct, and Iranian databases consisted of “game localization in Iran,” “ترجمه بازی های رایانه ای” (literally: translation of video games), “فارسی سازی بازی های رایانه ای” (literally: translating video games into Farsi), and “بومی / محلی سازی بازی های رایانه ای” (literally: video game localization).

In addition, to identify theses and dissertations for M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Iran and other scholarly publications, I searched both Google Scholar and Ganj, an Iranian database for registering, gathering, organizing, and distributing scientific and technological documents and research projects, including theses and dissertations. The keywords searched were “game localization” and “بومی / محلی سازی بازی های رایانه ای” (literally: video game localization). Ganj registers Iranian M.A. and Ph.D. theses that deal with English to Persian localization and they all share the keyword of localization, returning the same results, even if other keywords may be used.
The combined search results included scientific contributions in the form of theses from different universities and higher educational institutes in Iran with six M.A. and no Ph.D. theses and ten scholarly articles published in journals and conferences. Table 1 presents the number of articles published each year between 2009 and 2022 and the government statutes that are related to video games and game localization. In addition to the above-mentioned academic databases, the following non-academic sources were also searched:

- Seven websites: www.1pezeshk.com; psarena.ir; majlis.ir; khsh.farhang.gov.ir; saramad.farhang.gov.ir; statista.com; direc.ircg.ir (for further information about these websites please see the Note section),
- Statutes of the Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation (ICVGF) and the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (IMCIG), and
- Reports provided by the Digital Game Research Center (DIREC). DIREC was established in 2015 by the Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation to perform studies on video games in Iran to improve the quality of research on video games.

The above sources were used to provide information about the political, social and historical aspects of Iranian video game localization. The academic research projects that were identified were published between 2009 and 2022. Because so few strictly academic sources were identified for this study, this paper is extended to also cover non-academic sources that directly or indirectly dealt with Iranian video game localization.

Table 1. The number of publications by year and by type

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(IMCIG) (ICVGF)
4. Results

4.1 Social perspective

Since the introduction of video games in Iran in the late 1980s, this industry has attracted many game players. According to the reports presented by DIREC, 16 million Iranians played video games in 2011 (DIREC 2021). In 2019, this number reached 32 million, which meant 38 percent of Iranians (DIREC 2019). It is expected that in 2022, the number of Iranian gamers will reach 42 million (DIREC 2021). In 2018, 9.8 million gamers were female (DIREC 2018) and in 2019, reports showed that 29 out of 100 Iranian women and 47 out of 100 Iranian men played video games (DIREC 2019). In total, Iranian gamers have spent USD 343 million on hardware and software for gaming in 2019 (DIREC 2019). Although this amount was spent on all video games, not necessarily only on localized video games, the localization of video games is expected to become a booming industry because of the growing number of consumers who spend a large amount of money on gaming, and the low English proficiency of Iranians (EF English Proficiency Index 2020). However, the literature reveals that many Iranian gamers are not satisfied with the localized versions of games (Khoshsaligheh and Ameri 2020; Afzali and Zahiri 2021), and the reception is quite negative.

Only two research publications have addressed the reception of video game localization in Iran. For example, Afzali and Zahiri (2021) analyzed 5000 Iranian gamers’ comments about the translations of in-game texts. The results showed...
that gamers like to play games with translated menus, game installer applications, system messages, and game manuals but preferred games’ original dialogues and narrations. Moreover, this study has shown that 15% of the gamers chose rom-hacked games, i.e., fan translation of games, 80% liked original games with no translation, and 5% preferred to play professionally translated games. In the same vein, Khoshsaligheh and Ameri (2020) examined 750 Iranian gamers’ profiles, gaming habits, preferences, and perceptions of the current situation of video game localization. This study revealed that gamers preferred localized games that have kept the foreignness of English dialogues by maintaining cultural-specific items like characters’ names and military equipment in English (as the source language). In addition, gamers preferred subtitling over dubbing because of poor lip-sync and censorship applied in dubbing, which is a prevalent audiovisual translation mode used in Iran. Most audiovisual products are officially dubbed in Iran to be broadcast, and subtitling is mostly associated with amateurism (Ameri and Khoshsaligheh 2019), as well as the enjoyment of hearing the original voice in subtitled versions. Moreover, gamers claimed that the original voice and translated subtitles helped them learn English. These gamers also reported low quality and bugs in the localized games.

The results of the studies carried out by Khoshsaligheh and Ameri (2020) and Afzali and Zahiri (2021) reveal the negative status of Iranian video game localization, judging from the fact that there are more gamers who prefer original (English) games and non-professionally localized games than gamers who prefer professionally translated games. One reason could be that professionally localized games do not meet the expectations Iranian gamers have of professionally made products. For instance, gamers have reported poor lip-sync in dubbed versions or a mismatch between voice qualities of the dubbing actor and the game character in terms of tension, roughness, breathiness, loudness, pitch register, vibrato and nasality (Bosseaux 2015). In this regard, researchers have even reported errors in translation and a lack of creativity in Iranian video game localization, where localizers have employed word-for-word translation, copying words and structures, or transcription in cases where Persian equivalents could be used (Jooyaeian and Khoshsaligheh 2022). Moreover, the gamers seem to prefer translated games that keep the foreignness of the original. Any mismatch of the dubbing voice and that of the game character seems to evoke a sense of “uncanniness”, as explained by Freud as “a province that belongs to all that is terrible – to all that arouses dread and creeping horror and tends to [evoke] whatever excites dread” (1919, 146). In this case, gamers may wonder whose voice they are listening to and feel alienation when they understand the voice that they are listening to does not belong to the body they can see (Bosseaux 2019). Reducing the sense of uncanniness can
enhance the quality of dubbing (Bosseaux 2019) and calls for further investigation by researchers.

Gamer attitudes toward localized games hold true in other Islamic countries as well. Al-Batineh and Alawneh (2022), for instance, have mentioned that Arab gamers opted for partially localized games, where in-game texts such as the user interface are translated, cinematics and audio are subtitled, while dubbing or re-voicing is avoided. Iranian gamers complained about poor lip synchronization of dubbing that hindered the enjoyment of the game, so they preferred the original voice.

The reviewed studies in Iran did not report the underlying reasons why gamers prefer the original or the foreignized versions of video games; in other words, what features gamers would require for a localized video game to be considered excellent are unknown. Moreover, from a reception perspective, the criteria of a successful localization project from the audience’s perspective are still open to investigation.

4.2 Historical perspective

Historically speaking, the video game market in Iran is approximately 40 years old, still relatively young and disorganized (report published by DIREC 2021). In parallel with the market, video game localization in Iran is a fledgling industry that requires special attention from researchers and authorities. The exact date of the beginning of video games in Iran is hard to pin down; however, according to the report presented by the Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation, it is believed that video games were first imported into Iran in the late 1980s after the Iran-Iraq war (Naderpour 2016; Khaniki and Barkat 2016). Unfortunately, the history of game localization in Iran has not been investigated in scholarly articles, and historical aspects of Iranian localization remain scant when also searched in the non-academic Internet sources (Mohamadipour 2020; Majidi 2011).

Based on the information provided by two websites,¹ Iranian game localization dates back to 2001–2002, and the first game localized in Iran was FIFA (EA Sports 1993), a soccer match game which is considered a pioneer for Iranian game localization. Later, several companies tried to localize games for the Iranian market. They did so by replacing audio files of the original voices contained in the DIALOGUE file in the software with Persian translations (Majidi 2011). At first, the novelty of game localization led to financial success and attracted the attention of other companies; for instance, voice talents of the state-run IRIB (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting) dubbed the Harry Potter (Lego Software 2001)

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¹. www.1pezeshk.com and psarena.ir
game into Persian. Based on the information provided on the game packaging, the game was localized and distributed in Iran in 2007.

However, this success did not last long, and problems arose gradually. With technological advances, games with larger file sizes and more dialogues replaced simple games. The DIALOG file, which contained the speech between characters, was removed from game source files, and the audio files were placed in a file that needed to be discovered. This was largely likened to cracking software, the process of modifying a software program. The second problem was the large number of audio files whose translating, dubbing, and testing required more time and more human and financial resources. In fact, because of time restrictions and low budget, professional voice talents did not participate in game localization, and non-professionals performed the dubbing; therefore, the quality was compromised. As a result, gamers preferred the original games, and illegal copies were frequently distributed. As a result, these problems made many localization companies leave this industry, and today only a few companies localize games into Persian (Majidi 2011).

Today, the production and distribution of games is supervised by the Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation, a subdivision of the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. This organization was founded in 2005 by order of Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei so that it could distribute, control, and localize games according to Iranian-Islamic culture. Video games were considered a cultural and social threat that targeted Iranian society (Mohamadipour 2020). Such claims are based on the idea that video games contain strong language, nudity, sexuality, and violence, which are not approved by Islam (Mohamadipour 2020). The authorities believe that the cultural load of games, i.e., taboos such as violence, drug use, and sexual content, which are primarily against Islamic tradition in Iran, can have a negative impact on Iranian gamers. Games that had been distributed in the Iranian market initially underwent no censorship and included scenes and concepts such as swearing, using strong language, not following the hijab, etc., that were in sharp contrast with Islamic beliefs in Iran. Therefore, many organizations and individuals in Iran, even Marja2 showed their opposition to the current distribution of video games. Consequently, the government established the Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation in 2007 to control the content of foreign video games and games produced by Iran-

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2. A single mujtahid, a leading religion authority, recognized as the main source of imitation for Muslims (Griffith 1979).
1. Developing strategies and policies on video games to be delivered to the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution
2. Micro-planning in video games considering aspects of entertainment, education, and supplementary education material
3. Supporting and encouraging the provision, production, import, export, and distribution of video games by the foundation itself and private sectors; hindering unsuitable games
4. Employing domestic and foreign resources to develop and improve the video game industry
5. Setting necessary qualitative and quantitative video game import and export examination standards
6. Guaranteeing the moral and property rights of video game producers and consumers
7. Making plans and supporting training courses and research projects to strengthen theoretical, practical, Islamic, and Iranian bases in the area of video game localization
8. Providing appropriate conditions for fostering and encouraging the creativity of Iranian youth
9. Holding, supporting, and participating in national, regional, and international festivals and conferences
10. Providing appropriate conditions for technical, scientific, cultural, and artistic competition among video game developers
11. Developing ties and cooperating with other countries, especially Islamic countries (majlis.ir)

This foundation aims to distribute Islamic identity and Iranian culture, localize games, improve the quality of domestic products for consumers, control imported games, and enhance technical knowledge in Iran for developing Iranian games. However, due to the above-mentioned duties, which can be considered limitations, this industry in Iran did not thrive as expected. For example, banning unsuitable games and importing video games to be localized in Iran requires censorship so that the game can meet Islamic criteria in Iran. The censorship tends to introduce bugs in the games and reduce the quality of games (Khoshsaligheh and Ameri 2020); For example, a scene of the game GTA (Rockstar Games 1997) depicts a girl kissing a boy. This scene is removed in the localized game; however,
without this scene, viewers will not be able to identify this boy, whom they must kill in the next mission. In the localized version, the gamers would not understand whom they should kill, and they will fail the mission they are supposed to accomplish (Afzali and Zahiri 2021).

Moreover, the censorship may lead to misunderstanding of the game’s story and decrease the player’s enjoyment of the game (Afzali and Zahiri 2021), as the above example shows. In addition to these limitations, other issues hindered this organization from achieving its goals. These problems include ineffective control over the video game market, excessive cultural and social restrictions, unreasonable content ratings, lack of knowledge of how to appropriately use the provided budget, inefficient use of budget, and turning the video game market into a medium for promoting political, cultural, and social concepts. Moreover, as will be discussed in the following section, other organizations can control video games in Iran. This foundation has established a center for research in gaming in Iran called DIREC. The information provided by this research center is of great help for this study.

There are still underdeveloped research areas and unanswered questions about the history of video game localization. Considering the model proposed by D’hulst (2010), the following scope of research on game localization history in Iran can be offered:

– Who: Addressing this question means directing one’s focus to the translator as an individual. In other words, future research can explore the professionals or governmental bodies dealing with localization in Iran and their educational and motivational backgrounds. Localizers’ ideology and policies and their job satisfaction and social status can be subsumed under this category.

– What: What has been translated and what has not? What were the criteria for selecting texts to be translated? Applying this area of interest to game localization, we can address questions like: based on what criteria is a game chosen to be localized? Is it the market’s needs, cultural situation, policies, or other reasons? Do professional and non-professional localizers have different criteria for choosing a game?

– Where: Where were the localizations made, and where were they distributed? Are the games localized and distributed for free, or are they distributed officially by governmental administration?

– Why: Why do translations occur or why do they appear the way that they do? Is there any difference between professional and non-professional localizations? If so, what are the differences and why?

– When: Investigating the origins of translations, modes of temporal categorizations of translations, and the clines of translation. This point explores the chronological aspect of game localization, which has not been studied.
- With what means: How have patrons and powers that can prevent or further reading, writing, and rewriting of translation (Lefevere 1992) treated translators and their work, subsidy mechanisms, etc.? Who controls the localization process? Who provides money and resources for the localization?
- What effects: What are the effects of translations, their functions, and their uses in a given society? Is professional localization successful? What hinders the success of professional localization?

4.3 Political and cultural perspective

Today, video games are not merely used as entertainment; they also serve other purposes (Anvari 2014). For example, they can unconsciously promote a specific ideology or create and advertise cultural values (Khaniki and Barkat 2016). Therefore, policymakers in different countries may screen imported games or produce games that adhere to or advertise local culture and ideologies. Due to moral, religious, and political considerations in Iran, there are strict criteria for developing and distributing content (Mollanazar 2011). According to Article 15 of the Statute of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, any content that is intended to be distributed officially must meet religious criteria. Regarding video games as digital content, game localizers in Iran must meet the requirements of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic guidance. This Ministry applies its standards through the Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation. This foundation can be considered a patron – that is, a power that can prevent or further reading, writing, and rewriting of translation (Lefevere 1992). One of its most important goals is strengthening and advertising Iranian-Islamic culture and identity through video games. To achieve such a goal, this organization has its board of directors; among its members, there does not appear to be an expert in localization or translation.

In addition to the Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation, the leading policymaker, approximately three dozen other regulatory organizations control video games in Iran directly or indirectly (Shamsi and Jalali 2013). These organizations aim to promote Iranian-made games and Iranian-Islamic couture in Iran. Among these organizations, ESRA (Entertainment Software Rating Association), which rates the content of entertainment software and was developed by the Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation in 2007 (Shamsi and Jalali 2013), is of

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4. Refer to the Introductory part and Article 2 of the Statute of Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation (n.d.)
5. Refer to Article 2 of Statute of Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation
6. Refer to Article 4 of Statute of Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation
higher status. ESRA sets the criteria for video games and considers four features to classify video games: body and movement, body and psychology, affective, and social (Shamsi and Jalali 2013). It is worth mentioning that two age thresholds are defined in Iran. The first threshold is determined by Islam, according to which females reach the threshold at the age of 9 and males at the age of 15.8 This threshold obliges people to fulfill their religious duties such as performing daily prayers and fasting during Ramadan. When they have passed this threshold, they are allowed to marry. The second threshold is defined by the law, according to which both males and females are considered adults when they reach the age of 18.9

The content is rated based on the following age ranges:

- Older than 3
- Child (older than 7)
- Early adolescence (older than 12)
- Mid-youth (older than 15)
- Single Adults (older than 18)
- Married Adults (older than 25)

Although other Iranian organizations, except for ESRA, do not supervise the localization process directly and ESRA is assigned as the organization to rate video games, localizers must meet the rating criteria so that the localized products can be distributed in the Iranian market; otherwise, any of these organizations can take issue with the localized product. Moreover, every month, 30–40 foreign video games are illegally imported into Iran, while the total number of Iranian-made video games in their entirety does not exceed 40 games (Shamsi and Jalali 2013). Unfortunately, the number of distribution companies and mechanisms is unknown because copyright is not observed in Iran, and most copies are illegally imported into Iran (Shamsi and Jalali 2013). Moreover, reports show that Iranian gamers do not care about the content rating of games because they can easily access illegal copies with low prices, which causes low-price unrated games to reach Iranian gamers, most of whom prefer illegal copies distributed without authorities’ approval (Shamsi and Jalali 2013). Such games are not made based on the criteria set by the Iranian government; therefore, to be officially localized, they must be screened (Shamsi and Jalali 2013), as discussed in 4.2.

In Iran, little research has been conducted in this area. Focused on pre-released trailers of a video game, Touiserkani and Afzali (2014) addressed the con-

8. https://fa.wikishia.net/
9. https://www.pasokh.org/fa/question/view/11049/%DA%86%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%B3
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straints of translating video game trailers, the norms of localization in translating videogame trailers, and the ideologies that the use of these norms indicates in society. Their study showed that translators had used informal language, which is claimed by Bastin (2005) as a game localization feature to enhance a sense of fun. However, possibly, the translators have just tried to keep the style of the original text rather than emphasizing the fun aspect of video games. The researchers have also reported euphemism as the indicator of society’s ideology toward video game translation. Still, euphemism is not limited to video game translation, and it is also used in other types of audiovisual translation in Iran, especially for dubbing (Sedighi and Najian Tabrizi 2012), to meet cultural and religious criteria.

Similar issues have also been reported in other studies in different Islamic countries (Al-Mazrooa 2008; Al-Batineh 2021). For instance, Al-Batineh (2021) reports censoring video games in Arab countries and even banning games such as Mafia 3 (2K Games 2016), which cannot be released because of insults, both implicit and explicit, to Muslims. A feasible solution for avoiding censorship could be internationalization (Al-Batineh 2021), which aims at separating the culturally dependent content of the user interface that may require modification from the core of the application and their storage in one or more resource files that are linked to the application (Hall 1999, 298).

While religion-related considerations in Islamic countries are deemed necessary in video game localization, elsewhere, the market and profits maybe considered the primary motivation for localizing games into minority languages. For example, Fernández-Costales (2017) reported that Spanish companies do not consider the cultural, artistic, and user-centered criteria while localizing and instead focus mainly on the market and profits. In contrast with the previous study, Di Marco (2007), albeit limited to European contexts, has shown that, in addition to textual materials, game localizers in Italy even modify the depiction of characters to enhance the enjoyment and immersion of the game so that the expectation of users can be met. As in Islamic countries, censorship is a common issue in Europe and is performed by the Pan European Game Information (PEGI); however, PEGI is mainly sensitive to sexual and violent elements (Fernández Costales 2012). The sensitivity to nudity and violence is also observed in Chinese contexts where female characters are redesigned to cover body parts like legs, and violent scenes containing blood are modified (Dong and Mangiron 2018). In Baltic countries, there seems to be no specific legislation body that controls the distribution and localization of video games; however, some video game developers in these countries distribute video games in the national language and one or more other widely spoken languages, such as English and Russian (Koscelníková 2021).
Further studies on the Iranian context could focus on the role of patrons like the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance or Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation, the positive or negative influence of applying such complex standards (mentioned above) to localization, and game localization as rewriting, which is understood to be “metalinguistic processes, including translation, which can be said to reinterpret, alter or generally manipulate text to serve a variety of ideological motives” (Hatim and Munday 2004, 347). In addition, the challenges posed by various organizations for localization in Iran is another area of research; for example, future research can explore the procedures that must be taken to grant permission for distributing localized video games. The strategies used by translators to compensate for censored scenes are still unexplored. As mentioned earlier, Iranian localized games might be censored due to issues such as violence or sexuality, which may lead to loss of necessary information for the gamers. Researchers could study whether there are any solutions adopted by translators/localizers to provide gamers with the information which they are missing.

4.4 Translational perspective

Most studies conducted from a translational perspective have focused on norms and system theories which are well explored in Translation Studies. Rezaeian and Khoshhal (2020) explored the applicability of polysystem and Skopos theories in video game localization. They advocate that these two theories offer good scope in theorizing localization in Iranian contexts because localizing video games is dependent upon the needs of the target audience and the role played by the economic, cultural, political, and social systems of target countries. However, these researchers have only explained the potential of applying these frameworks to video game localization, and no empirical examples were provided.

Using an approach focused on norms of video game localization in Iran, several studies have revealed source-oriented strategies in video game localization, privileging source text norms over those of the target language, and adequate over acceptable translation (Sheikh Bahaee and Mollanazar 2013; Jooyaeian 2019; Khoshsalighe and Jooyaeian 2022; Gonabadi 2017; Rad and Bagheri Masoudzadeh 2021).

Interestingly, the globalization of Iranian video games has favored the norms of the target culture. This is demonstrated by the study by Sharifi (2016), who explored the globalization of Garshasp: Temple of the Dragon (Fanafzar Sharif 2012) – an Iranian video game – and the results show that the translators have translated more acceptably than adequately. For example, “وظیفه دارند وجب به وجب جنگل را جستجو کند” has been rendered as “They have been ordered to search every inch of the jungle.” The expression “وجب به وجب” means “the width
of an open hand from the thumb to little finger”. This has been rendered as “inch”, which is a common expression in English. Moreover, as Sharifi (2016) has demonstrated, oblique translation, a procedure often used when literal translation is impossible (Vinay and Darbelnet 1995), was the most widely used procedure in translating Garshasp: Temple of the Dragon (Fanafzar Sharif 2012) into English. This shows that translators have tried to take into consideration the norms of the target culture. From a polysystem-theoretic perspective (Even-Zohar 2005), these studies show that video game localization in Iran has acquired a secondary position in the Iranian polysystem. This might be the case since producing video games in Iran does not have a long history, and translating game texts is a nascent activity; therefore, translators in localization seek ready-made models from original (English) video games to follow. This issue holds for non-professional translators as well. To explore agency in non-professional video game localization, Khoshsaligheh and Ameri (2017) investigated translations by non-professional translators for the game Uncharted 4: A Thief’s End (Sony Computer Entertainment 2016). The results showed that the translator, whose motivation was to improve his English skills, tried to be faithful to the original text and explain the meaning in parentheses. However, there were linguistic errors in the translation. Arzaani (2020) concluded that rom-hacking in Iran is still a nascent activity, and its quality could improve with the help of a professional in this field.

However, other studies show contrary results, as was the case by Touiserkani and Afzali (2014) who investigated norms governing localizations in Iran, using video game demo videos. The researchers explored the constraints of translating video game demos and the localization norms in translating video game demos. Their study showed that translators have primarily used situational and cultural adequacy and creation from Bastin’s (2005) model; therefore, the localizers have favored target-culture norms and tried to choose equivalents that are functionally and culturally acceptable for the Iranian gamer. For example, “bastard” is translated as “کثافتعوضی [literally: Filth and Mean]” and “I didn’t risk my ass for nothing” is translated as “یهوقتبیخودیخودمونروبهخطرننداختهباشیم [literally: we didn’t risk our lives for nothing]”. These two examples are less offensive and euphemized equivalents in Persian, which can be used in the same situations and serve the same function as their English equivalents.

Regarding translating procedures, results showed four types of procedures in translating video games: (1) change of the tense, (2) addition, (3) deletion and (4) wrong translation (mistranslation, which cannot be a procedure, but rather designates mistakes made by the translator). Moreover, translators have used colloquial language and euphemisms, which act as the norms in translating video game demos in Iran. In a study carried out by Sharafian (2017), results showed that translators have favored acceptable translation and opted for initial norms in
the target language. These researchers have concluded that translators must try to adhere to acceptable translations for successful localization. The target-oriented norms are also observable in research by Fazli, Mollanazar, and Farahzad (2009). They investigated the localization of 10 games into Persian and found that Iranian localizers preferred to totally remove scenes considered inappropriate in Iranian culture, instead of adapting them to the Iranian culture. Results also showed that violence was not an important factor in screening and localizing games, but the hijab was a significant factor that could influence the whole localization project. In another study, Zaare (2016) explored challenges in translating video games in Iran and strategies used by Iranian translators in official video game localization. The corpus of their study consisted of 400 sentences from 4 video games originally made in English and their Persian translations. The result has shown that rendering cultural concepts is the most significant challenge and the translators opted for domestication as the most frequent strategy.

Interestingly, according to Khoshsalighe and Ameri (2020) and Afzali and Zahiri (2021), Iranian gamers prefer foreignized translations when localized into Persian. This highlights, unsurprisingly, that gamers’ tastes in translation and the government’s preference for rendering texts of games do not converge. It seems the government does not take into account the expectations and needs of the audience; this is proven by studies by Afzali and Zahiri (2021), who mentioned that gamers complained about using language that is too formal in the games, and Touiserkani (2015), who noted that the translator had used politeness in video games to express euphemism and show the power of the main character.

These results reveal no consensus on the position of video game localization in the Iranian polysystem. The practice of non-professional translators is still unexplored, genre-specific studies of video game localization are still required, and larger samples of participants are needed to explore their motivation, agency, and steps in performing non-professional localization. No article has been published describing the tools which are used for game localization in Iran and the editing, post-localization, or voice recording processes. No studies have explored the role of translators in official localization procedures or the position of authorized agencies in the localization process. In fact, it remains unclear whether Iranian localization companies follow typical localization processes such as those described by Zhou (2011), involving Translation of text, Modification or recreation of audio, Integration of localized materials into the game, Quality assurance, Submission to manufacturers, and Project administration. There is also little information on how the attributes that characterize video games, namely graphics, sound, interface, gameplay, and story (Newman 2004), are approached in localization.
As mentioned earlier, most Iranian localization constitutes text translation or censorship of scenes. Still, other attributes such as localizing graphics, for example, the physical features of characters, the themes of specific places, or the soundtracks of games, have not been explored. The competence of localizers/translators is another research focus calling for special attention, especially in Iran, where the reception of localization is abysmal. In addition, there are other unexplored issues regarding quality assurance procedures applied by the localization manager in Iran. The decision-making of translators and officials, training courses completed by translators in localization, and the imposing of censorship are largely unknown. The activities carried out by non-professional localizers are still underdeveloped; the strategies used to render texts, their preferences over foreignization or domestication, and the underlying reasons for this preference are open to investigation.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to review the literature on video game localization in Iran. To this end, this paper identified all relevant articles and theses published on the topic in both English and Persian. Overall, the published literature shows that game localization is not a flourishing industry in Iran, and that Iranian gamers prefer original games (in English) to localized versions. Several reasons could account for this fact. First, translation has not received the attention it deserves and does not seem to be given much consideration by the Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation and other organizations that deal with this industry, as evidenced by the fact that no translator or expert in Translation Studies is a member of their boards. Ignoring the crucial role of translation in localization has led to mistrust on the part of the audience, who generally prefer the original, unlocalized game because it lets them enjoy the game more. Second, a tangled web of regulatory organizations controls the localization market, each with its own criteria. Many officially approved organizations can hinder or facilitate video game localization. Although the Iran Computer and Video Games Foundation has been established to address such issues, game companies may still be confused because there is no authoritative regulatory organization, and companies do not know to which organization they must refer. One thing on which the organizations agree
is that the content must not conflict with Islamic-Iranian tradition. Therefore, strict censorship is imposed, and video games, whose main aim is generally entertainment, turn into an arena for expressing ideological concerns.

Another reason for unsuccessful localization projects in Iran could be the dearth of translation research in this field. Little research has been conducted on translational aspects of localization, and most of them have concentrated on norms and strategies of translation. From a social perspective, only two papers have explored the reception of localization and the audience’s needs. Ignoring the needs of gamers is in contrast with the goals of video game localization because the localization of video games is, by definition, translating video games for sale considering the needs of consumers in the target territory (O’Hagan and Mangiron 2013). Regarding the preferences of Iranian gamers for dubbing or subtitling, the audience were dissatisfied with inappropriately dubbed voices for characters in video games (Afazali and Zahiri 2021), so they selected subtitled versions (Khoshsaligheh and Ameri 2020). From a political perspective, religious and ideological considerations significantly influence the success of a localization, which seems to be a negative point from the audience’s viewpoint as they mainly chose original or partially localized games.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the field of video game localization is developing rapidly due to the rapid growth of technology, and more complex games in different genres are constantly developed. This development provides new research opportunities for scholars in translation and localization in Iran. What has been discussed in this paper is merely a snapshot of game localization research in Iran. More comprehensive studies will help us gain better insight into this growing field.

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**Gameography**

*FIFA International Soccer* (Electronic Arts 1993)
*Mafia III* (2K Games 2016)
*Uncharted 4: A Thief’s End* (Sony Computer Entertainment 2016)
*Garshasp* (Fanafzar Sharif 2012)
*Grand Theft Auto* (Rockstar Games 1997)
*Harry Potter* (Lego Software 2001)

**Address for correspondence**

Alireza Vahedi Kakhki
Department of Foreign Languages
Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman
Pajoohesh Square
Kerman
Iran
alirezavahedikakhki@yahoo.com

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