

Translating Witcher: Investigating Conflict and Cooperation Between Localization Industry and Gaming Communities

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This paper investigates conflict and cooperation between gaming communities and the localization industry upon evidence from the discussion on and around the translation process of the acclaimed RPG series *Witcher* into Turkish.

The Witcher case offers a telling example of fan poaching (Jenkins 1992), the conflict and cooperation between industry and fan translator communities, and fannish production- professional production. Investigating discussion around the “failure” of official localization, the “heroic” initiative by the non-professional translators following the netnographic analysis of fan comments in the Donanımhaber, a prominent technology forum of wide participation, forum *The Witcher* translation threads, user comments in-game media, Oyunceviri, a pivotal virtual community of non-professional translators, paratext pages dedicated to *The Witcher* games language patch releases, this paper aims to revisit “fan production” and “poaching” and “fan empowerment” on the *Witcher*’s survey in Turkish. So far, very little attention has been paid to fan–industry conflict - cooperation in game localization (Craig 2014; O’Hagan 2017), and this paper attempts to provide new insights into the fan-industry relationship through lenses on fan empowerment and novel forms of fan poaching (Jenkins 1992). This paper also attempts to broaden the perception of fan productivity, and further discuss fan participation and production in localization practices.

The focus of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it discusses how non-professional “participation” and “empowerment” can initiate and shape the localization process on a discursive level. Secondly, it investigates fan reactions to the localization industries’ translatorial choices and how the gaming community reacts to “unfavourable” choices of the industry.

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In a broader sense, Turkish localization sphere is marked by free labour (Terranova 2000) driven fan production. Turkish fans are often vocal in their call for Turkish language support (Karagöz 2019; 2022), and they often negotiate with the developers for their call. The fans, organized on virtual communities, also fan-translate the content in the lack of official localization, co-construct localization agencies to offer professional translation solutions or officially cooperate with the independent developers to release their patch along with the game; therefore, it may be hypothetically argued that virtual gaming communities critically shape the localization industry and practices in Turkey (Karagöz 2019).

What makes the Witcher series' survey into Turkish even more interesting in the Turkish localization sphere is the making of the translation process by fans. *The Witcher* (CD Projekt Red 2007) and *The Witcher 2* (CD Projekt Red 2011) were fan-translated in 2013 through unsolicited fan translation (O'Hagan 2009), while the third game of the series, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt Red 2015) released without Turkish language support, was later updated with an official Turkish language support file upon fans' call. The survey of *The Witcher 2* offers a unique case of cooperation, while the latter offers an explicit case of fan-industry conflict.

According to CD Projekt Red accounts (2012), "some of their fans contacted them, saying that they would love to help us localize the game", including a project leader of ten volunteers of the Oyunceviri community short after *Witcher 2* was released. Halil İbrahim Düzgün, the project leader, reports that he is a fan of RPG, and he was a *Witcher* fan as of the release (CDPR 2012). According to him, "They (CDPR) provided all the necessary documents, detailed walkthroughs with detailed script files. Even a person who didn't play the game, can understand the dialogues by reading these documents." (Witcher 2012), illustrating how fans and industry cooperate at a material level.

The fan-translated version has received positive feedback from the gaming community. As *The Witcher* is a text-rich role-playing fantasy-oriented game, it offered various challenges for translators, including translation of the names of characters, landscapes, skills, and abilities. The fan translation communities' choices have also been well appreciated and adopted by the community; the localization cycle in *The Witcher 2* was driven by fans and shaped in line with their preferences and taste, further implying the effects of direct and indirect fan participation and player productivity (Wirman 2009).

On the other hand, upon persistent calls for the release of the forthcoming game in Turkish, "the developers did their best and contacted 23 Studios, the team of which is also fans of *The Witcher* series" (Oyungezer 2016). *The Witcher 3 Wild Hunt* was localized by 23 Studios. In fact, the localization office is quite competent in localization work; the office has business affairs with Sega, Netflix, and Sony, with a rich portfolio of over 40 AAA games. The office has also strong ties with the gaming community in Turkey. However, the localization project has received a vast number of negative comments from the gaming community. Netnographic evidence from the threads on the fan translation in Donanimhaber forums, Oyunceviri pages, and comments sections of news websites indicate that negative fan reaction has practical and emotional grounds. On the practical level, the fans overwhelmingly argue that the official localization did not respect the "translational choices" of the former fan translators, adopting an "over-domesticated language", replacing communally approved skillset names, phrases, and names of the characters.

On the emotional level, the fans insist that it was "them" who pursued their call for the release of the game in Turkish; the game had already been translated by a non-professional team, W3TR, respecting former translational choices. Instead, the

developer chose a professional team bypassing the fan base. The fan reaction implies a mixture of disappointment, a sense of betrayal, deception, and anger.

The non-professional team W3TR also argue that they contacted the developer for the localization work, and they did not receive any reply for a long time; the group later released an alternative re-translation of the game. Contrary to the official one, the version by W3TR received an overwhelmingly positive reaction from the community. Therefore, the inconsistency between the developer's expectations – choices and the community's expectations triggered further fan production and negative reaction towards the official one, including emotional reactions.

The findings from *The Witcher* case also imply that gaming community participation in the localization process may raise important questions about borders of fan productivity where fan translation is often neglected. Drawing implications from a discussion over “expertise/ownership” of the fan object, “cooperation/conflict with industry”, and “gratitude” for the free labour by peer fans, this paper offers that fan discussion over fan–official localization may provide fruitful insight for future research.

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