THE PROBLEM OF PRAGMATIC ADAPTATION IN TRANSLATING INTERACTIVE FILMS: THE CASE OF “DETROIT: BECOME HUMAN”

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The research focuses on the problematic aspects of pragmatic adaptation of an interactive movie (video game) when translating from English into Russian. It is based on the interactive movie “Detroit: Become Human” that became one of the best-selling video games on the UK and the USA market immediately after its release. It was developed by the French company “Quantic Dream” and released by Sony Interactive Entertainment specifically for PlayStation 4 (the latest model of a home video game console). The purpose of this research is to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the current adaptation of this game, assess it and suggest more appropriate creative solutions for its translation, where necessary. The methods used in this paper involve translation comparison, searching for creative translation solutions, pragmatic and semantic analyses.

Keywords: Interactive movie, Video game, Pragmatic adaptation, Audiovisual translation.

Introduction

Nowadays a great improvement in the translation of video games can be observed. Nevertheless, there is currently a strong need for an adequate pragmatic adaptation of interactive movies, which is one of the types of video games. This research deals with the peculiarities of utilizing pragmatic adaptation techniques during the process of oral and written translations of interactive movies from English into Russian. Several modern researchers in the field of philology pay great attention to both living spoken and written languages and their everyday expressions. Among the main scientists are such names as V. Komissarov, A. Lyudskanov, E. Malenova, V. Gorshkova, R. Matasov, and others.

A number of specialists in the translation sphere have made a great effort in order to improve the current situation with interactive movie adaptations. Naturally, not all of them were successful due to the lack of background knowledge of a particular English-speaking culture, its historical events and language peculiarities.

The aim of the current research is to analyze the Russian adaptation of an interactive movie ‘Detroit: Become Human’ released in May 2018, determine appropriate and inappropriate translations of some of its scenes and suggest more adequate interpretations where needed.

The practical significance of this research lies in the fact that an adequate pragmatic adaptation denotes a better understanding of the game, deeper penetration in its atmosphere and a closer connection between the player and the creator.

The theoretical basis of this study includes the works by Russian scholars listed earlier as well as foreign scholars’ research on the phenomenon of interactive movies, such as C. Therrien, M. Wolf, R. Rouse, and others.
Literature Review

When translating foreign content the main requirement for specialists is to have the translated text affect its recipient in the same way as the original does its recipient. Therefore, the use of pragmatic adaptation, which implies making changes in the text of the translation that helps to achieve the necessary reaction from the recipient, to be understandable for him and to satisfy him, is one of the main tasks for translators.

Adaptation is a way of translating text that makes it easier for the reader to comprehend and solves the communicative problem of transmitting information from the original source to the average recipient. The adaptation is based on the exclusion of the requirement of certain professional knowledge, educational or cultural background for the reader, in order for him to understand the translation. Consequently, the text that has undergone this method of translation becomes accessible to the unprepared recipient and allows him to immerse himself in the adapted material.

According to V. Komissarov [3], who was the founder of Russian translation studies, the text that has undergone pragmatic adaptation should be called «pragmatic text» [3]. To his professional opinion, the understanding of such texts depends not only on the adaptation itself but also on the recipient. The translator should always focus on the audience and analyze its particular features such as age, education, etc., in order to select the correct register and use such language tools that would be understandable to the reader, despite his background knowledge of the field in question in the original text [3].

V. N. Komissarov [3] has also identified the following three main types of pragmatic adaptation:

- addition - the explanation of certain words, for example, unfamiliar geographical names, companies, publishers, etc;
- omission - the omission of unknown or incomprehensible information without distorting the original meaning so that the recipient has a better understanding of the text;
- modulation - the assumption of what the author means and transmitting it through language.

Thus, in the process of pragmatic adaptation of the text, the translator always has a choice between what information could be omitted, added or changed so that the meaning of the original material is not lost.

Specialists tend to use pragmatic adaptation method not only in the translation of literary texts but also commercials, movies, TV series, computer games, etc. This type of content is called the audiovisual text.

E. Malenova [4], who is a specialist in the field of translation studies, believes that the audiovisual text, translated as a literary one, would be perceived by the recipient completely differently, since “a significant impact on the result is provided by other semiotic systems, which are tightly bound to text component of the film: visual syntax, visuals, noise-musical features, important inscriptions, etc.” [4]. Thus, the translation of an audiovisual content should not be processed as a translation of a written one.

Specialists in film adaptation distinguish several approaches to audiovisual translation.

The first approach is called “text-centered” [2] and is aimed at decoding the audiovisual text only from a linguistic point of view. According to this approach, the film dialogue is a combination of several factors: “the speaker, the meaning, the channel of transmission and the receptor of the original” [2, 135]. Such kind of a translation helps the translator to focus solely on the textual component of the media content, which is not always acceptable for movies due to technical limitations since the implementation of the translation can be presented to the viewer in different forms: dubbing, subtitling, voice-over translation, audio description, etc.

The next approach is called “cultural transfer” [1] and is based on additional communicative load. The process of this translation method is presented to the author as a set of translation techniques used in the framework of the strategy of pragmatic adaptation of the original in situations “when both cultures know the same referent, but in the working languages of translation different meanings are used” [1, 147]. This approach considers the translation of media content as a kind of literary translation.

It is also necessary to highlight the “linguocultural” [5] approach contributed by the translator R. Matasov [5]. In his book on film translations, he wrote that “the subject of film/video translation is the
linguistic system of film text, which is inseparably linked with the components of the non-linguistic system that is part of it” [5].

It is noteworthy that the attitude of translators to the methods of audiovisual text translation is gradually changing, as more and more specialists immerse themselves in this area. Now the film dialogue is usually translated not as a text separated from the visual component of the film, but as a whole.

Methods

The empiric material of the current research as it was already mentioned above is an interactive movie called “Detroit: Become Human” released in May 2018 by Sony Interactive Entertainment. Researching this case study I chose to undertake the method of linguistic sampling and conduct my research basing on some features of both qualitative and quantitative analysis. In order for this study not to be biased in any way, the scenes from the interactive movie for the research were sampled randomly, so that in the end I could see a clear and credible picture of the original Russian adaptation performed by SIEE (Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe). Moreover, with the aid of the translation comparative method analysis, the selected translated units from these scenes were classified into three categories: addition, omission, and modulation. Furthermore, I utilized the method of searching for creative translation solutions and through the use of it identified the contrast between the connotation of the original material and the translated one. By using the method of pragmatic analysis I specified the targeted audience of both original and translated material.

Results

The results that were achieved in conducting the current research are based on the thorough analysis of several randomly chosen scenes from the “Detroit: Become Human” interactive movie. The outcomes of this analysis show that the already existing Russian adaptation of this particular game carried out by SIEE is adequate despite the fact that it contains significant shortcomings. The Findings also present the critical review of its successful and unsuccessful creative decisions and translation choices. Having evaluated the empiric material, I suggested more appropriate versions of the translation of particular inadequate moments providing them with comments that explain my personal disagreement with the given solution.

Conclusion

The adequate pragmatic adaptation has an immense influence on the perception of the translated text by the recipient, as it provides deeper penetration into the atmosphere of the material. It is also of great importance not to overuse the methods of such adaptation and apply it only where needed.

It is worth mentioning that interactive movies have special gameplay, where the plot development is determined solely on the choices the player makes at specific moments of the game process. That is why the appropriate application of pragmatic adaptation is an essential factor for a translator to acknowledge and to follow.

It is important to highlight that this research is delimited by this particular interactive movie (“Detroit: Become Human”) and its techniques and results might not be fully applicable to any other video game adaptation, nevertheless the prospects of this study are to explore whether its methodology could be employed in translation of other types of audiovisual content.
References