Cultural Nuances in Game Speech: The Social Science Insights Challenge Transferred to AI-mediated Localisation

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Abstract. This paper analyses the application of Interactive Design in overcoming challenges related to transferring cultural nuances in game dialogue to AI-driven localisation practices, with a particular emphasis on user experience and the integration of technology in gaming. The findings indicate that AI-assisted localisation faces significant obstacles, especially in translating context-dependent elements such as idioms, humour, and wordplay, which can result in awkward, inaccurate, or potentially offensive interpretations. Additionally, capturing emotional tone, slang, and subtleties in character dialogues necessitates human intervention to maintain the immersive experience of the game. The paper also reflects on my professional point of view as a Localisation Specialist at SEGA of Europe, detailing the difficulty of preserving cultural authenticity while incorporating AI tools into localisation workflows.

Keywords: Cultural Authenticity · AI Localisation · Game Speech · Adaptive Localisation · Ai-mediated Localisation · Player Engagement · Speech Nuance · Artificial Intelligence in Localisation · Game Localisation.

1 Introduction

In the rapidly evolving gaming industry, the process of adapting game content for different regions and cultures has become vital. The importance of localisation in gaming extends beyond mere translation; it incorporates cultural adaptation and the immersion of intrinsic individual experiences, ensuring that in-game content aligns with local customs, ethics, transient trends, historical facts, idioms, and societal norms at all times. Zorrakin-Goikoetxea, I. (2022) [1] considers that transcreation, which is a form of translation, distances itself from the form and meaning of the source text to some extent, in order to adapt to the cultural needs of the target market. In this way, localisation enhances player immersion and engagement, as gamers are more likely to connect with content that feels native to their cultural context. She highlights the perspective of developers and a sample of players, exploring opinions and the extension of concept around audiovisual translation in communicating the same message in a different sociocultural context, where translators must determine whether cultural references will be understood in the target culture.

As developers and publishers aim to reach global audiences, ensuring that games resonate culturally and linguistically with diverse player bases is essential. Simultaneously, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into localisation practices is transforming how games are tailored for various markets, enhancing efficiency in the overall workflow, as much as significantly changing and setting the rules for a new global demand. The AI integration into localisation processes raises several debates inherent in traditional methods in what concerns scalability, efficiency, consistency, accuracy, cultural sensitivity and legal concerns. In the scope of AI-mediated localisation within the gaming industry, the application of interaction design (IxD) principles brings a crucial framework to enhance user experience.

What I have experienced is that despite AI's advantages, AI-mediated localisation is not without challenges, mainly because of understanding context-specific translations, such as idioms, humour, or wordplay, which can lead to awkward, incorrect or even offensive interpretations. Also, emotional resonance, capturing the emotional tone, slangs and subtleties of character dialogues for example necessitate a human touch to preserve the game's immersive quality.

Building on my background as a graphic designer and Animator, I have consistently applied the knowledge gained during my Bachelor's in Animation Design throughout my career. I focused on conceptualising and executing creative work tailored to specific niches, incorporating branding methodologies and audience-centered design principles to overcome a wide variety of customer related challenges and demands in Brazil. Over time, my expertise found a new dimension in the Localisation Quality Assurance (LQA) field within the gaming industry in London, where I engaged with AI-driven processes and user experience, but now with languages.

As a language specialist of SEGA of Europe's Localisation department, I act as a safety net for translation issues post-review for the Brazilian Portuguese language. I supervise text nuances, slangs, dialects, speech tones, grammar rules, idiomatic expressions, vocabulary, and terminology adaptations to reflect cultural references accurately. Although AI has been recently incorporated into our workflows, which comes with new concerns and challenges, it also compensates with considerable agility in our internal processes, especially considering the growing demand due to exponential market expansion across multiple territories. This poses a permanent change to our roles, opening the door to a hybrid position, orbiting editing, supervision and translation duties, with AI being a crucial assistant.

In terms of academy-industry partnership, my perspective is that industry professionals and academic researchers could collaborate in addressing existing challenges by conducting deep research on various methodologies for AI-mediated localisation processes, and how to safely approach it. This collaboration can offer valuable insights into how Large Language Models (LLMs) function, that could potentially be adapted to localisation purposes, surfing on market released models, where companies such as OpenAI, META or Google already spent heavy resources on. I will explore possible solutions in the conclusion section of this paper.

This case study brings a solely personal perspective, where I use my experience to make a comparative among traditional and AI-mediated localisation, highlighting

social science concepts, real industry strategy solution insights to unpredictable challenges, and how the optic of interactive design can assist humans and AI in adapting skills and resources to current new work requirements, increasing reliability and efficiency with the use of AI in project planning and to aid companies' workflows, meeting the increasing global demand. I conclude this paper by examining the implications, challenges, opportunities, and some aspects of AI's future potential for efficiently adapting to the localisation and QA practices.

2 A Brief Social Science Insight

Understanding cultural and social language contexts is vital for game localisation, as it is not just simple word-by-word translation. Linguistic anthropology examines how language reflects culture, ensuring that language aligns with target audience norms. It means adapting dialogue, terminology, and even character speech patterns to align with the cultural expectations of players. For example, in Japanese RPGs, the localisation team carefully adapts honorifics, formal speech, and slang to preserve the game's cultural integrity while making it accessible to non-Japanese-speaking players. Without such adjustments, players may miss subtle social cues or misunderstand character relationships.

Sociolinguistics studies language variation across social contexts like region, class, and identity, and applying its principles can help to adapt dialogues and narratives to resonate with diverse player groups. In game localisation, this is crucial for ensuring that characters speak in a way that matches their backgrounds. A noble character in a medieval RPG for example should not use the same slang as a teenager of the 21st century. Similarly, Fehrmann, D. (2021) [2] explains how in games like Final Fantasy XIV, localisation teams focus on adapting characters' tone of voice. This approach ensures that characters' speech patterns resonate with their backgrounds and personalities, maintaining consistency across diverse players' emotional experience.

By applying social science insights, localisation teams can create gaming experiences that feel natural, immersive, and engaging for players worldwide, preserving the original tone, humour, and emotional impact across languages. Yu, K. (2024) [3] emphasises that localised content significantly impacts player engagement and satisfaction. Games that effectively adapt to local cultures and languages provide a more immersive and enjoyable experience, leading to broader market acceptance.

3 Cultural Nuances in Language

Language is inherently tied to culture, and words or phrases often carry meanings that cannot be directly translated into another language without losing their essence.

Consider the expression "not my cup of tea", which can exemplify how language reflects cultural nuances. This idiom in English conveys a specific sentiment about something not being to one's taste, usually in a light, non-confrontational manner. In other languages, however, there may be no equivalent expression that communicates this sentiment with the same cultural context. In Brazil however, where Portuguese is

predominantly spoken, culture is deeply connected to its extensive coastline and natural environment. Consequently, the expression is adapted to reflect this connection, resulting in phrases such as "This is not my beach" or "This is not my vibe". When using DeepL translation tool for example, the AI fails to understand the contextual meaning, providing a literal translation, as observed in Figure 1:

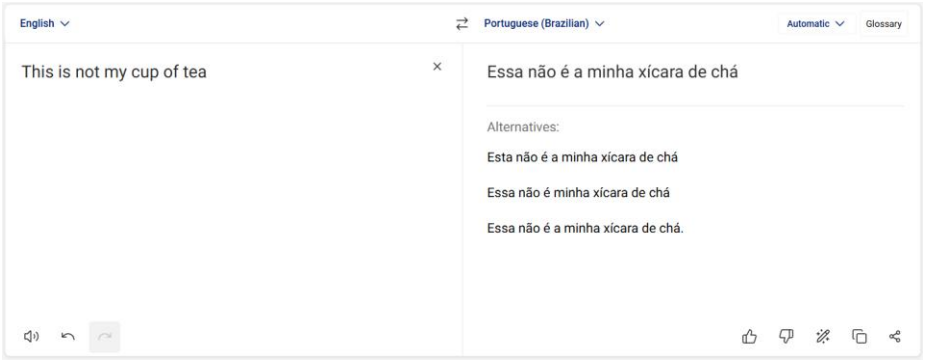

Figure 1. DeepL translator tool, web version.

In the French language, as a comparison, the term would translate to "Ce n'est pas ma tasse de thé" same as English, but more as a cultural recognition rather than having a specific French context, as it is known to be fairly recent in the French language [4].

When referring to politeness and social hierarchies, one of the biggest localisation challenges, the Japanese language levels of politeness and formality are integral. The language changes its basic lexicon and subtle grammar features depending on the social context, from casual conversations with close friends to hyper-formal interactions with superiors, like CEOs. Mishandling these nuances can lead to a loss of authenticity or even offense, thereby affecting the gaming experience [5].

And last, in regard of cultural symbols and traditions, Lewin, K. (2005) [6] says that games often incorporate cultural symbols, traditions, and values that may not resonate universally. This process involves extensive research and adaptation of items, holidays, and writing systems to ensure the game feels authentic to the new target audience.

Furthermore, humour—especially puns and wordplay—relies on linguistic features that can vary by individuals, region, neighborhood, city, country, niche, culture, age, and generation, also shifting through forms as of homonymy, homophony, homography, and paronymy.

4 Traditional Challenges in Game Localisation

As game localisation goes beyond translation, requiring cultural nuances adaptation, linguistic accuracy, and technical adjustments to maintain authenticity, challenges permeate cultural sensitivity, UI constraints, voice-over synchronisation, and regulatory compliance.

In terms of Cultural sensitivity, the symbols, themes, or narratives acceptable in one culture may be inappropriate or offensive in another. For instance, according to Plante, C. (2025) [7] in the game "Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus," National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) symbols, including their leader's moustache, were altered or removed in the German version to comply with local laws and cultural sensitivities. Linguistic nuances are also another key point, where languages differ in structure, idioms, and idiomatic expressions. Translating humour, slang, or idiomatic expressions requires a deep understanding of both the source and target languages to maintain the original's intent and impact. Technical constraints differences, such as in text length between languages can lead to issues with interface design, voice-over synchronisation, and on-screen text display. Additionally, Regulatory compliance highlights the importance on different countries, varying regulations regarding content such as violence, gambling, religion and political themes. Ensuring a game complies with local laws is essential to avoid bans or legal issues, however this is too vast of a topic to explore within this paper and should be covered by another dedicated research.

5 Unpredictability and Decision Making

As a comprehensive process of adapting a video game to meet the linguistic, cultural, and regulatory requirements of a specific target market, localisation processes encompass cultural adjustments, visual changes, and considerations primarily based on previous experiences with the primary objective of an optimised interaction design for improved end-user engagement. There are numerous possibilities that require a range of strategic decisions and critical thinking, and such challenges can sometimes materialise as unprecedented scenarios.

Due to the nature of unpredictable events of game projects, it is utmost important to illustrate the necessity of continuous human oversight in localisation. This section will touch on two cases, highlighting the complexities and intricacies involved in the complex process of localisation.

Leone, M. (2005) [8], details the localisation of Cyberpunk 2077, illustrating the scale and complexity of adapting a game for multiple languages and cultures. Nearly half of the 5,000-person team worked on translating and adapting the game, stressing the resources required to address cultural nuances effectively. One significant challenge faced by the localisation team was managing late script changes, which required corresponding adjustments across multiple languages and necessitating additional voice recording sessions. These "pickups" were particularly demanding, as they aimed to maintain the narrative's strength while adhering to tight schedules. Additionally, the introduction of a Ukrainian language option in the 2.0 update led to unforeseen issues when anti-Russian statements appeared in the translation, highlighting the challenges in controlling content across vast localisation efforts.

Carpenter, N. (2025) [9] explores the intricate localisation process behind the game "Chants of Sennaar", focusing on the creation and implementation of fictional languages and word puzzles. In the article's interview with the translators of the game, the strategies and efforts they employed were based on a thorough understanding of their

target audience. For instance, since not every player is proficient in foreign languages, some translation approaches focused on being beginner-friendly and accessible to players. The Japanese translator mentions the challenge of having players act as interpreters, using pictures to form sentences. The translation was neutral and used simple words to help players figure out terms, considering word order in each language. Tips and hints were included for players who might forget grammar rules.

It is undeniable that these decisions made by humans illustrate that this process requires a deep integration of the game UI, cultural background, a thorough understanding of the target audience, exceptional knowledge of user experience aligned to company values, culture and vision; game design acknowledgement, access to a vast database of past localisation problem-solving from several previous titles, context in world politics and a creative mindset focused on the human learning curve process, altogether.

6 Artificial Intelligence and Challenges in Cultural Context

Artificial Intelligence is increasingly used to enhance efficiency in not just localisation workflows but also translating and adapting game content across many industries. While AI can handle straightforward translations, and perform a series of advantages as of speed, scalability, consistency of style and terminology across a massive volume of content, while efficiently focusing on cost reduction around increased demands, it struggles with context-specific nuances, idioms, or cultural references, necessitating human intervention to ensure quality, cultural relevance and avoid problems.

Despite the considerable advancements in Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Machine Learning, AI can still struggle to understand the deeper layers of social sciences and human communication. In localisation, context is key, and AI tools generally focus on direct word-for-word translations based on statistical patterns learned from vast datasets. For instance, an AI-driven translation tool can recognise the phrase "Not my cup of tea" as a simple negation, but some of the AI tools could not capture the subtle, culturally rooted sense of politeness and avoidance of conflict that accompanies this phrase in English-speaking cultures.

As of a practical example, incorporating "not my cup of tea" in AI in a language like Polish, there might be no direct equivalent, and an AI tool can translate it as a literal phrase or give a valid option but bring the wrong context, missing the nuanced sentiment within a peculiar situation, also considering their sense of importance in historical context and customs.

Again, DeepL translator tool provided literal translations as observed in Figure 2:

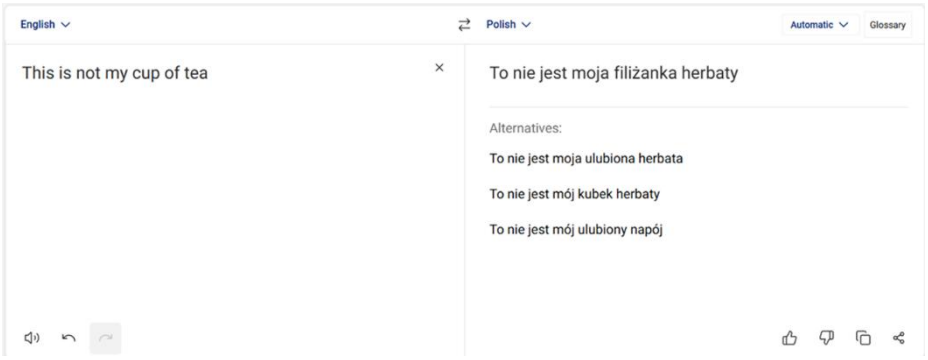

Figure 2. DeepL translator tool, web version.

As per Polish, these expressions could vary between for example "To nie dla mnie", as to "This is not for me.", a simple and direct way to express disinterest; "To nie moja działka" as "This is not my field.", used when something is outside your area of expertise; or "To nie moje klimaty", as to "This is not my vibe", a more informal way to say something doesn't suit your taste.

I also conducted two types of tests: one focused on isolated English expressions, and the other on a full story. The full story included the phrase "This is not my cup of tea", along with several other English expressions, to examine the target expression within a detailed and high context descriptive text, using different nuances and tones. The test was reviewed by a SEGA of Europe Polish Language Specialist, who provided feedback on the level of satisfaction in what concerns quality, grammar, context, and language felt natural and human-like. It was noticeable in every five lines, there were three same expressions, it looked there was a lack of vocabulary and an inability to use other words to describe the situation to some extent, due to repetition, as seen in Table 1:

Table 1. Polish expressions sample by ChatGPT 4o mini.

	English	Localisation by AI	Specialist`s Comments
1	Barry said "**it's not his cup of tea**" to live a conventional life.	Barry powiedział, **że to nie jego bajka**, ta cała konwencjonalność.	It looks similar but we should avoid repetition and sound more natural.
2	Terry made a face like he'd licked a lemon. "**Definitely not my cup of tea**", he muttered, shuddering, this time with genuine revulsion.	Terry wykrzywił się jak po cytrynie. — **Zdecydowanie nie moja bajka** — mruknął z odrazą.	They are talking about Mrs. Dunlop that is not in Terry's taste, therefore we can use another translation for this expression.
3	Shaz looked at her phone. "*Oh, bugger all's happening now*". I'm off to paint toenails and listen to other people's dirty laundry. "**Now that's my cup of tea**", she grinned, disappearing into the salon.	Shaz zerknęła na telefon. — **Nic się nie dzieje*. Idę robić pedicure i słuchać cudzych brudów. — **O, to już moja bajka** — rzuciła z uśmiechem, znikając w salonie.	Translation changed to "*this is something for me*" as she is talking about things in a positive way. Also, there is an incorrect translation highlighted in italic, after the asterisk.

Similarly for Korean, a test involving multiple tools showed that AI can struggle with context-dependent expressions. Korean, as an Asian language, has several peculiarities when compared to English or Latin-based languages. For example, as opposed to the Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) structure primarily observed in Romance languages, Korean necessitates the Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) word order. In addition, honorifics, politeness, and relative seniority play an imperative role in rendering the Korean language highly dependent on context. Lastly, case marking particles in Korean are essential for indicating the grammatical roles of words within a sentence. Unlike English, where word order often determines the function of words, Korean relies on these particles to clarify whether a word is the subject, object, topic, etc.

In a case study involving Byun, J., a Korean Language Specialist at SEGA of Europe, many expressions were given as examples to four different AI tools for translation, from where each tool was prompted to provide the five best interpretations. As a sample, I have picked the expression "가슴 시리다", which according to Byun, J. translates in English as "an acute emotional pain that makes one feel as if they have frost in their heart that makes it shiver".

An example of the results can be observed in Table 2 (italic considered best output):

Table 2. Korean expressions sample by 4 AIs.

ChatGPT 4o mini	**Gemini 2.0 Flash**	**Perplexity 2.42.1**	**DeepL Translator**
It makes my heart ache.	**My heart aches.*	My heart feels frozen with pain.	Chesty
There's a chill in my chest I can't shake.	There's a coldness in my heart.	I feel a deep chill in my heart.	Breastfeeding
**It cuts right through the heart.*	I feel gutted.	**My heart is aching with a bitter coldness.*	Chestnut
It's that kind of sadness that lingers in your chest.	I've got a heavy heart.	I have a heart-wrenching feeling that cuts like ice.	
Makes the heart go all cold, doesn't it?	My heart is breaking.	My heart is pierced by a cold sorrow.	
Score 7/10	**Score 5/10**	**Score 9/10**	**Score 0/10**

Byun, J. provided the scores to assess the accuracy of these AIs in translating from Korean to English. He stated that Perplexity proved to be the most narrative, whilst not losing the reference to "chill through the heart" from the Korean source text. Both ChatGPT and Gemini did an acceptable job at delivering the nuance in the source text yet end up either being too loquacious or too straight to the point. DeepL completely misunderstood the source text and additional information and presented irrelevant lexical items.

Another key challenge arises from games that incorporate local puns and jokes. AI faces significant obstacles in this area. While AI can process language, it often struggles with the subtleties and cultural nuances inherent in humour. This limitation can lead to translations that miss the mark, resulting in a loss of the original joke's impact or, worse, causing confusion or offense. Translating local puns and jokes in video games presents

significant challenges, as humour can be deeply embedded in niche, cultural and linguistic contexts. Relying on wordplay, they inevitably often lose their intended effect when organically translated directly into another language [10]. The difficulty increases when humour stems from phonetic similarities, historical allusions, or double meanings.

AI can fail to recognise the layers of interpretation involved, as for example in English, the phrase "letting the cat out of the bag" conveys revealing a secret, while in German, the equivalent is "die Katze aus dem Sack lassen", which maintains a similar meaning. However, in Chinese, a literal translation would be nonsensical, requiring an alternative such as "**说漏嘴**" (shuō lòuzuǐ), meaning "to speak carelessly and reveal a secret". When it comes to regional humour, these challenges become even more pronounced. This complexity extends into individual humour preferences, where jokes can resonate differently based on personal experiences, cultural background, or even generational trends. AI, which primarily relies on statistical analysis and pre-existing datasets, may struggle to navigate these intricate variations. As a result, without human intervention, AI-localised jokes risk feeling either forced, confusing, or, in the worst case, entirely unfunny to the target audience.

Additionally, adapting fundamentally different language systems, such as Japanese, is naturally challenging due to differences in writing systems and cultural contexts. Kanji characters often carry complex meanings that require additional space when translated, complicating accuracy and readability. User interface (UI) design is strongly impacted, as space constraints and text expansion must be carefully managed. Therefore, AI-based translation tools, which lack the visual context awareness of the UI that human developers possess, increase the risk of error if adaptive localisation is not planned.

7 The Future with AI in Localisation

AI is revolutionising localisation by enhancing the entire workflow, not just automating translations. Duyar A. (2025) [11] expresses that it speeds up timelines, improves accuracy, and redefines how businesses approach localisation. The potential for AI-human collaboration in game localisation workflows is transformative, offering a blend of efficiency, accuracy, and cultural relevance. This collaborative approach leverages AI's ability to handle repetitive tasks such as initial translations and terminology management, freeing human translators to focus on refining content for cultural authenticity and maintaining the game's original tone, terminology and intent. AI technologies, particularly Neural Machine Translation (NMT) and generative AI, have significantly enhanced translation accuracy and speed, allowing for faster localisation processes and cost reductions.

Duyar highlights how AI systems use advanced algorithms and machine learning to process large volumes of content quickly and efficiently. They analyse context, predict translations, and suggest cultural adaptations. Neural networks in Machine Translation, like NMT, are a key innovation for the localisation practice. These systems leverage large datasets to look way more natural and context appropriate. AI excels in

automation by streamlining workflows, managing terminology, and considerably ensuring consistency in translation projects.

In the evolving landscape of game development, AI is becoming a pivotal tool in localisation. However, while AI has advanced in processing and translating languages, it sometimes falls short in grasping cultural nuances. The International Achievers Group (2024) stresses that AI operates based on patterns of data and lacks the lived experiences that inform cultural sensitivity, also indicating that LLMs inherit cultural biases from their training data, as shown in a University of Sydney study on GPT-3 reflecting U.S. values, leading to translations that reinforce stereotypes or exclude minority perspectives. These aspects underscore the crucial need for exploring AI-human collaboration in game localisation workflows [12].

8 Conclusion

Due to the AI struggle with contextual understanding and cultural nuances, human oversight becomes critically essential to maintain authenticity, balancing AI and human expertise, while keeping it economically competitive. However, the AI tools have revolutionised the processes by speeding up workflows, enhancing localisation efficiency by handling repetitive tasks, allowing humans to focus on more complex tasks such as cultural adaptation, reference research, creative strategies and quality assurance. Advancing with AI in localisation requires integrating social science perspectives to provide training with diverse datasets, which improves its ability to handle idioms, humour, and context-specific expressions. Additionally, human-centered AI design prioritises user feedback and iterative design, which leads to more ethical and effective AI-driven localisation.

8.1 Exploring Possible Solutions and Improvements

This paper explores the needs of a hybrid system, where the key for successful and effective AI-mediated localisation centers on the integration of interaction design principles, social science insights, and the collective efforts of researchers, linguist specialists, QA and Localisation professionals, and developers, as a multidisciplinary collaboration among academia and industry.

I would like to emphasise the integration of human input into AI models on:

- **Context-Aware Mechanisms** – Incorporating deeper context-aware mechanisms, such as **sentiment analysis** (a technique in NLP, a branch of AI that focuses on helping computers understand, interpret, and generate human language; it helps the machine to find out whether text is positive, negative, neutral, or how strongly a sentiment is expressed) or **speaker-intention models** (a task in NLP that focuses on identifying the purpose behind speaker's words, whether it is a request, a command, a question, or being sarcastic), which could allow AI systems to detect tones and undertones.

- **Localised Corpora for Training Data** – Corpora are big data sets of real-world language. Bilingual corpora are types of corpora that contain the same content in two different languages. Usually, each sentence or phrase in one language is directly aligned with its translation in another language. These are useful for training translation systems like AI models, because the system learns how words and phrases in one language map to another. Expanding the range of bilingual corpora to include everyday conversations, slang, and regional variations could make AI systems more capable of understanding and translating informal language. This will help the system better handle colloquialisms, slang, metaphors, abbreviations and idiomatic expressions.
- **Collaborative Localisation Specific Platforms** – Encouraging collaborative translation platforms that combine AI with contributions from native speakers can help bridge the gap in tone and cultural context. Also, AI-based QA tools for LQA could automatically review and check translations to maintain consistency and prevent errors during translation and QA in different stages of the project, establishing different filtered layers of AI processes. They leverage technologies like Translation Memory and NMT to provide real-time feedback, improving the AI's accuracy over time.

Furthermore, industry actors can contribute with empirical knowledge in what concerns multilateral negotiations and legal compliance regarding practical daily life actions and real consequences due to human decision making and emotions around the matter to change a multinational environment. However, the ability to engage in long-term exploration is often limited by time constraints and the immediate demands of business operations. Academic institutions, on the other hand, are well-positioned to undertake rigorous research, pushing practice further and help guide the company towards evidence-based decision-making—conserving resources and improving outcomes. This initial case study represents just an early step in a much broader research trajectory focused on localisation challenges and AI collaboration.

Additional investigations should assess the performance of agent-based AI systems and adapted data pipelines, including standalone expressions, technical content such as string codes or line breaks around narrative text, regulatory compliance and legacy material such as glossaries, voice tone or terminologies. Moreover, comparative studies of different prompting techniques and the integration of framework solutions will be critical on how multiple AI systems can cooperate to enhance quality and security. This paper contributes to laying the groundwork for such inquiry, advocating for a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach to innovation specifically to AI-driven localisation.

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