On-screen language in video games: a reception perspective on translation
– popular science summary –

During one of the scenes in *Fight Club* (1999), when the protagonist receives a call from a payphone booth, a vaguely perceivable label can be spotted, saying "No Incoming Calls Allowed". Those of you who have watched the whole movie (and who know English) may appreciate the value of such a device, assuming it was a clever foreshadowing of the film's final showdown. Such seemingly insignificant (since they are so easily missed) details are actually deployed on a usual basis in movies and series we watch or video games we play – speaking volumes of the care put into those productions, making them more convincing and cohesive. Despite that, those kinds of (sometimes very much so) meaningful pieces of maybe unassuming information are often curiously… omitted in localisations, disabling people who don't know English from understanding the message. Why is that so? Can it be changed? Could this have an impact on the sales of such productions abroad? And most importantly… do viewers even realise that? Do they care about it?

Screenshot from a video game "Tom Clancy's The Division 2" (2019)

Project aims, research plans, implications: This project sets off to explore one aspect of just that – whether game players do notice such pieces of "on-screen language" (visually represented messages in audiovisual products). In practical terms, the project sets off to measure the perception of such visuo-verbal components and attitudes towards their localisation as well as how frequently players spot, engage with and process those stimuli in localised interactive media. It plans to utilise interviews, questionnaires and Internet surveys, as well as eyetracking – specialised infrared cameras, measuring the eye movement of players going through a logical computer game. This will show us whether players pay attention to these meaningful (and quite ubiquitous) pieces of often untranslated "on-screen language". One implication could be that if players do engage with these elements, regardless of the element language, that could serve as a reason to start localising such elements more often (maybe even suggesting that there is some important market niche for that).

Reasons to investigate this subject: Although it seems to be a rather fundamental translational decision-making phenomenon to study, what is notable is that little work has so far been done to investigate it. What is more, unlike movies, video games may be able to offer certain medial plasticity necessary to implement on-screen language localisation in an optimal way – with video games, there are at least a couple of solutions. Moreover, video games (and their localisation, by extension) are currently a multi-billion-dollar industry (and still growing). They are run by developers big and small, artists, educators, e-sportspeople, cutting-edge technology researchers and, most importantly, gamers. Thus, they have become almost an obvious object for researching. This study will not only help deepen our understanding of this nuanced layer of communication between the creator, medium and its consumer, but it may also help to increase accessibility and minimise the intercultural and interlingual asymmetries between the viewers of original and localised language versions – from the perspective of users themselves.