

Game Localization Guide: From Planning to Launch

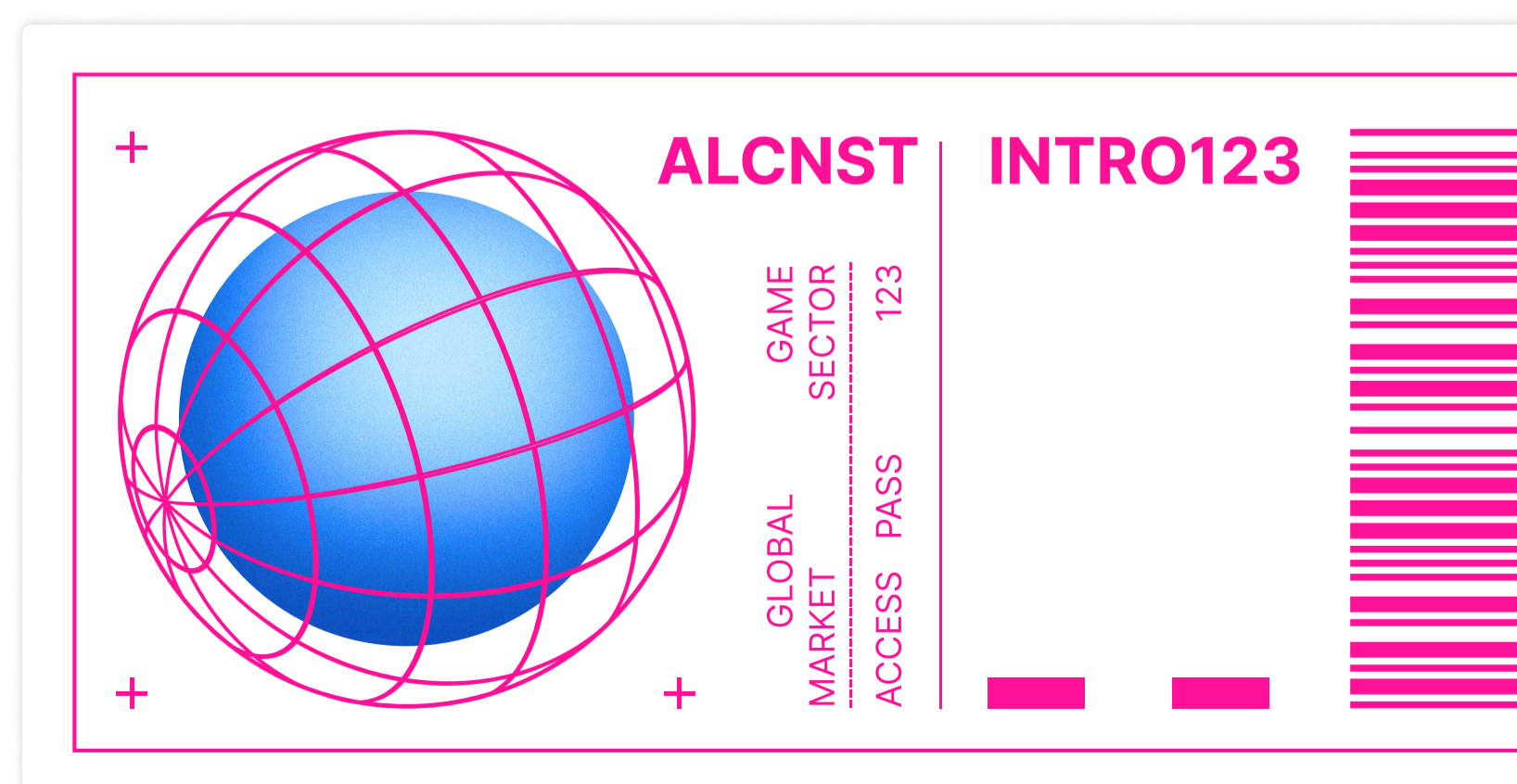
Intro

You've built a great game — now it's time to make sure it can attract players all over the world. To grow a strong international player base, your game needs localization.

You probably have many questions:

- What's a realistic budget and timeline?
- How can you check quality if you don't speak the language?
- How do you fit localization into your development process?

This guide walks you through every stage — from preparing your files to choosing a vendor. You'll learn how to balance quality and budget, avoid common pitfalls, and scale your localization process as your game grows.



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1.

Checklist: How to Prepare Your Game for Localization

The process of making your game technically ready for localization is called **internationalization (i18n)**.

Why bother with i18n? It ensures your game can handle different alphabets, formats, and layouts without breaking.

What happens if you skip this step?

- Broken layouts
- Missing characters
- Hard-coded text that can't be translated

Fixing these issues after localization is always **more time-consuming and expensive.**

Internationalization checklist

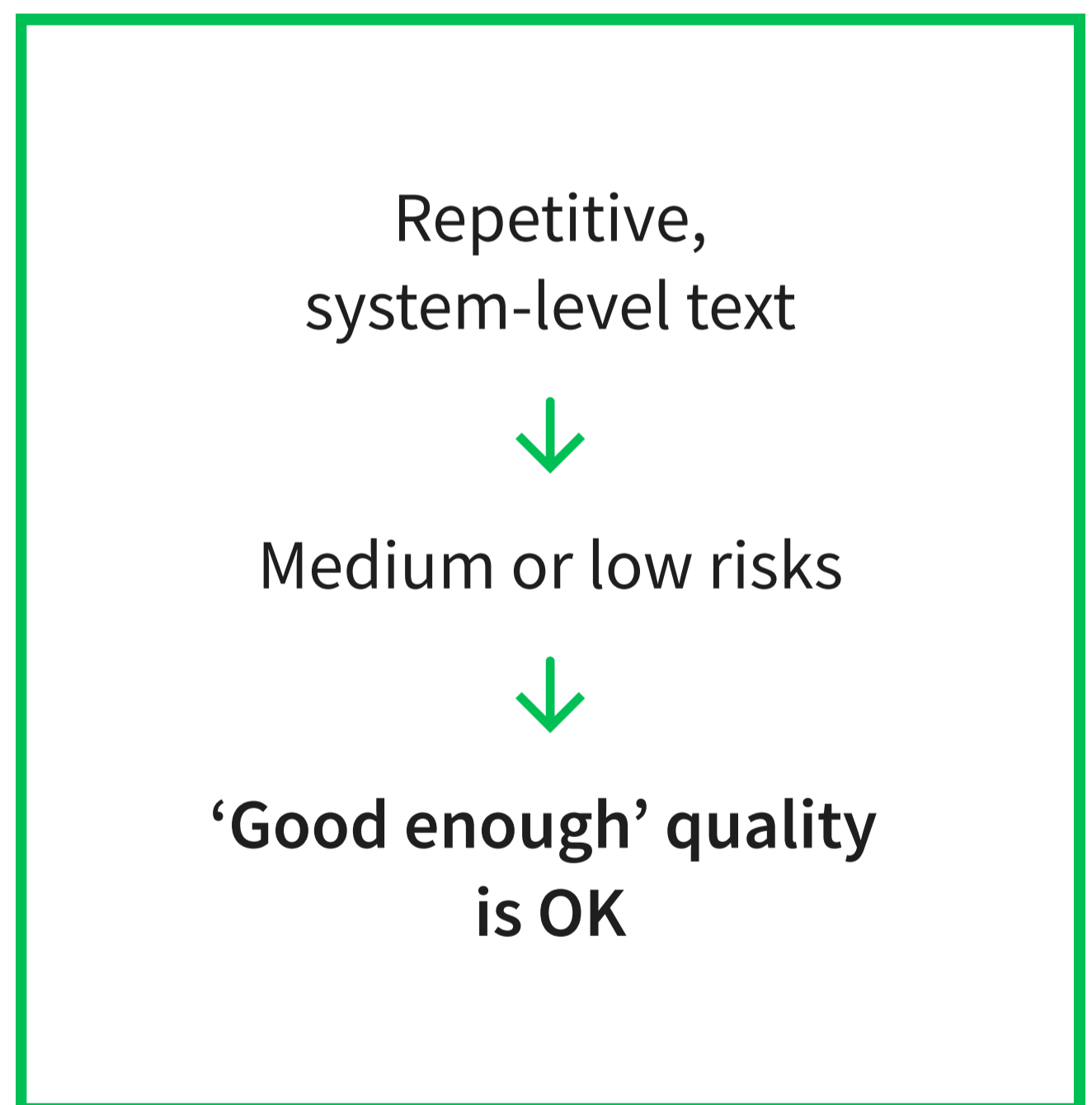
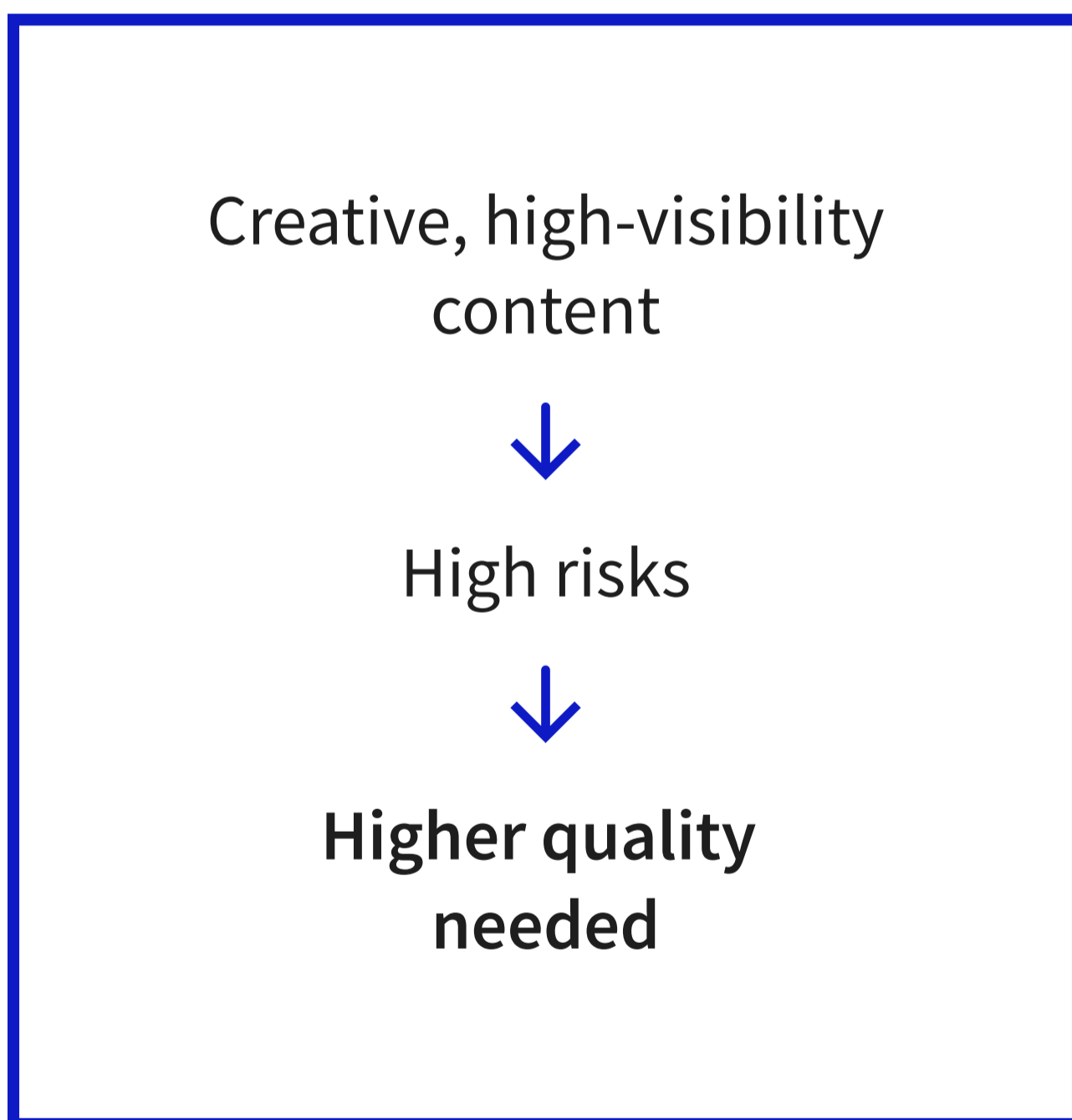
- ✓ **Separate text from code.** All in-game strings, UI text, and dialogs should be stored in external resource files, not hard-coded.
- ✓ **Don't split sentences.** To let translators fully understand the sentence and control the word order, use full sentences as keys and work with placeholders.
- ✓ **Use fonts with the correct character set.** Picking the inappropriate character set leads to blank boxes or wrong symbols.
- ✓ **Plan for scalable interfaces.** The source language is usually English, so translated text will expand in most European languages and shrink in languages like Chinese and Japanese.
- ✓ **Support right-to-left layouts if Arabic or Hebrew are on your list.** These languages require mirroring the interface.
- ✓ **Avoid embedding text in images.** Use layered graphics to keep the text editable.
- ✓ **Handle local formats correctly.** Dates, currencies, and decimal separators differ by region.
- ✓ **Run pseudo-localization.** You can play with machine translation for “fake localization” to catch UI display issues and hard-coded text.

This is your first real milestone towards a smooth global launch. Follow these steps, and you'll save time, money, and headaches later.

2.

Translation Quality Levels Matched to Your Content

It may come as a surprise, but not all text in games demands 100% flawless translation.



The trick is to match the right service level to the type and purpose of your game content.

Service Level 1: Machine Translation Post-Editing (MTPE)

Machine translation edited by a native-speaking linguist.

 Best for:

Large, continuous projects

Structured or repetitive content such as:

User guides

UI elements

Item descriptions

System messages

Patch notes



Delivers good readability with significant cost and time savings.



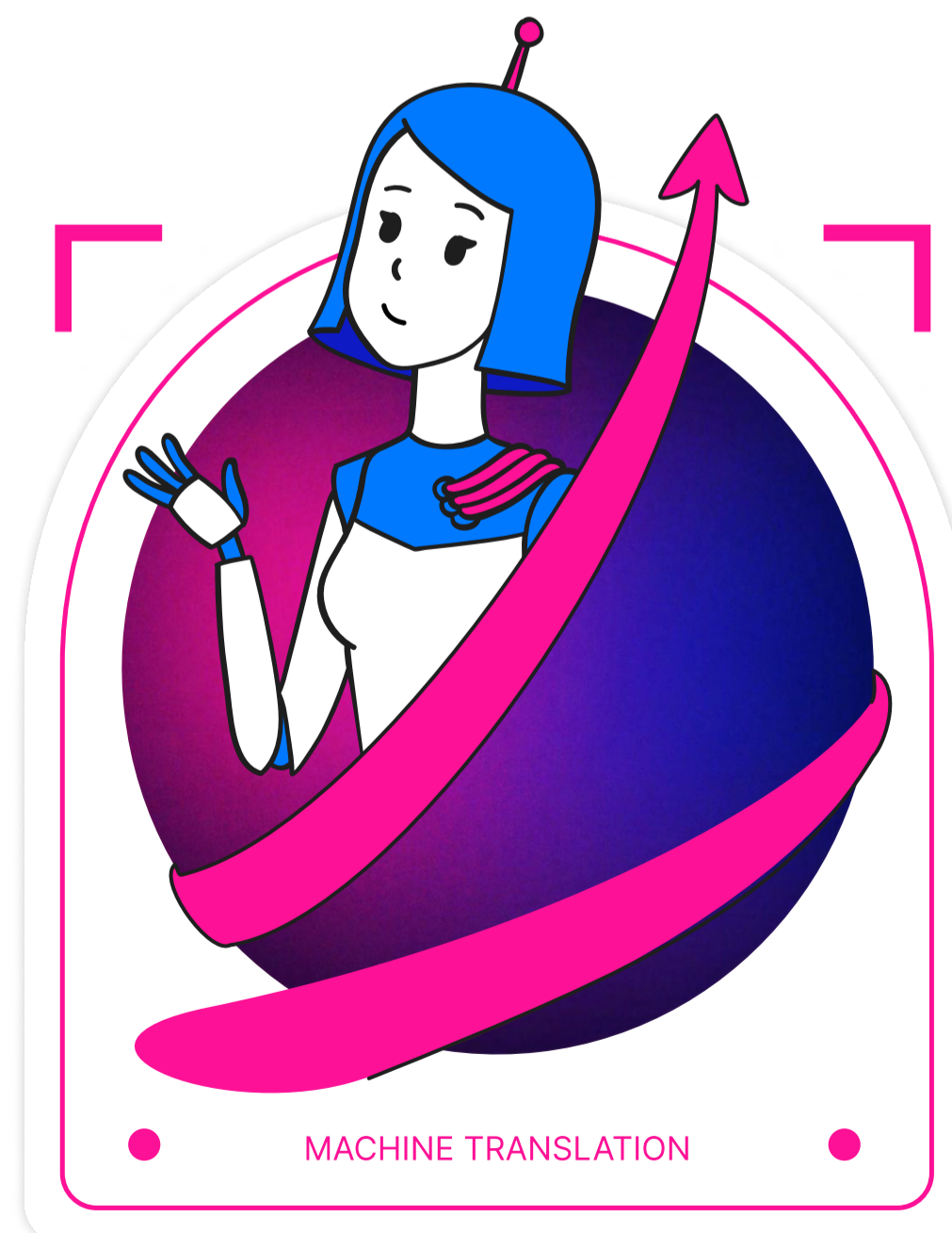
Not ideal for creative or emotionally rich text.

 Quality:

Good — functional and natural, though not always nuanced.

 Cost:

30–50% lower than full human translation.



Service Level 2:

Human Translation

Native-speaking linguists translate your content from scratch and adapt it to the local culture.

 **Best for:**

Storylines

Dialogue

Lore

Push notifications

All marketing content



Handles cultural sensitivity, humor, and voice consistency.

 **Quality:**

High — polished, consistent, and culturally adapted.

 **Cost:**

Standard rates, with 70% discount for translation memory matches and repetitions.



Service Level 3:

Human Translation + Linguistic Testing

Full human translation followed by in-context testing inside your game build.

 Best for:

Context-heavy games

Complex UI

Languages with unique layouts*



Ensures every string fits visually and linguistically in the final game.

 Quality:

Highest — catches layout and functional issues in context.

 Cost:

Standard rates for translation + hourly rates for linguistic testing.



* Arabic, Hebrew, sometimes Japanese and Chinese

Choosing the Right Mix

Picking the right service level isn't just about saving money — it's about placing your budget where players will notice it most.

Most studios benefit from a **hybrid setup**:

- **Human translation** for story, dialogue, and creative text.
- **MTPE** for user guides, patch notes, item descriptions, sometimes UI.
- **Linguistic testing** for context-heavy games or right-to-left languages.

A good localization partner will help you **make informed decisions** by:

- Running small test translations to compare quality between MTPE and human translation
- Sharing data on the performance of different MT engines for your language pairs and genre
- Offering hybrid setups to balance cost and quality
- Consulting from a ROI perspective — so you invest where it matters most

Case Study: Vizor Games — Hybrid Localization in Action

◆ Client:

Vizor, a game developer and publisher with over 2 mln DAU.

⊕ Goal:

To reduce game localization costs by 30% without losing translation quality.

↙ Before:

All of their 11 languages were localized exclusively by Alconost’s native-speaking linguists.

↘ After:

The client decided to keep **full human localization for German and Japanese** as their most valuable locales and **introduce MTPE** (machine translation post-editing) to other languages.

↻ 6 months fast-forward:

- Vizor cuts monthly localization costs by up to 35-50%
- 4 out of 6 Vizor games are translated with MTPE
- MTPE is used for 9 out of 11 languages
- Top ratings for localization quality on both the App Store and Google Play

🔥 The result:

A scalable, hybrid workflow combining MTPE efficiency with human precision — and a localization process ready for fast, continuous updates.



VIZOR

GAMES





★

NA NA

816 816

HYBRID	LOCALIZATION	NA	NA
IN ACTION	NCT03467816	816	816

3.

Translating Humor in Games

Humor is one of the hardest parts of game localization. A joke that lands perfectly in English might confuse players in Japanese or offend audiences in German.

The problem is, humor often relies on cultural knowledge, wordplay, and references that might not work in other languages.

3 strategies to keep humor in localization

Define your flexibility upfront

Tell your translators how much freedom they have with humorous content:

- Can they rewrite jokes entirely, or must they stay close to the original?
- Is the humor tied to specific plot points, character personalities, or visual gags?
- Are there cultural references that must be preserved?

Give translators full context

The more translators understand your characters and world, the better they can recreate humor that fits naturally.

- Explain the intent behind each joke in your localization notes
- Share character bios, personality traits, and voice direction
- Include scene setup and situational context
- Provide reference images when relevant

When jokes can't be creatively rewritten

What if creative adaptation isn't possible, and literal translation is the only option? **Use footnotes or in-game comments** to bridge the cultural gap:

- Add brief explanations for cultural references that are crucial to the story
- Example: A joke about Thanksgiving turkey might need a short note about the tradition since Thanksgiving isn't celebrated in most countries
- This may feel less immersive, but it helps players understand why it's funny



If a joke feels forced or confusing in the target language, **remove it**. A bad joke does more harm than no joke at all.

Case Study: Illfonic games based on movie franchises

Client:

Illfonic, an independent video game developer making multiplayer games for PC, PlayStation, and Xbox

Challenge:

- Games packed with lore, humor, and distinct style
- Compliance with platform-specific terminology

Our approach:

- **Translators familiar with the lore** from those movies (we chose long-time fans from our talent pool)
- **Constant attention to context:** our translators ask all necessary questions to ensure tone, intent, and humor land correctly. And we make this process fast and painless for the client
- **Simple workflow:** client sends tasks in .json format — we handle all translation on the platform internally — we deliver localized .json files back
- Adapted terminology to **meet Sony platform requirements**

Goal:

Improve localization quality and process after switching from a previous provider

Results:

- **Immersive, creative localization in 7 languages** for in-game content and in **21 languages** for store titles and descriptions
- **Fast and consistent delivery:** 2-3 days for regular updates, 24-36 hours for urgent requests
- **Zero complaints** from players about translations
- **Smooth passing** of Sony's QA process
- **Scaling up and down with no commitment:** from small ongoing updates to a massive 182K character game localization and back to small volumes



4.

Localization Timeline: From Kickoff to Launch

A localization project typically goes through five stages:

Stage 1: Preparation

Timeline: 2-3 days

What happens:

- You provide source files, reference materials, and context
- Team builds or revises glossary
- Project setup in the translation management system (TMS)

Your involvement:

Provide reference materials and answer setup questions.

In the MTPE (machine translation post-editing) workflow, at this stage we also test AI models on your content and pick the best-performing ones – this takes another few days.

Stage 2: Translation

Timeline: Varies by volume; the MTPE workflow usually is twice as fast as full human translation

What happens:

- Translators work in TMS with access to glossary, style guide and translation memory
- Project manager monitors progress and coordinates questions
- You receive clarification requests about ambiguous text or context

Your involvement:

Answer translator questions (through the project manager or right in the TMS)

Stage 3: Quality assurance

There are automated QA checks built into localization platforms, but we also recommend **proofreading and localization testing** to guarantee a smooth, error-free user experience.

Timeline: Depends on the volume and chosen services, usually up to 10-14 business days (*with volume under 170K*)

Your involvement:

Minimal (unless issues are flagged)

What happens:

- Automated checks for terminology, formatting, and technical errors
- Proofreading by second linguist (if included)
- LQA testing in game build (if included)

Stage 4: Build and deployment

Your dev team integrates the localized files as soon as QA is complete.

What happens:

- Export of translation files from TMS (manually or automatically via integration)
- Your dev team imports files into the game engine
- Localized builds created for each language

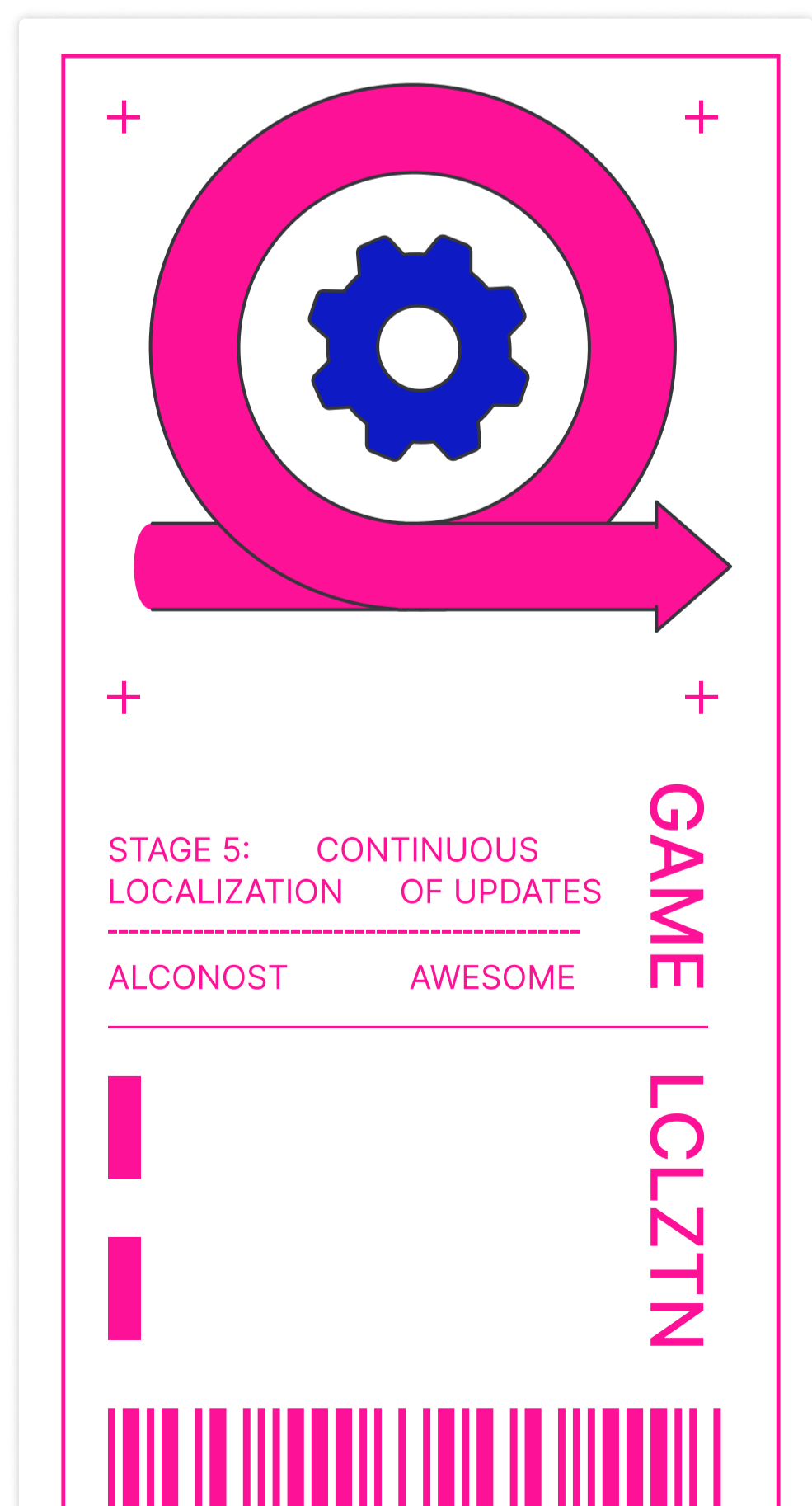
Stage 5: Continuous localization of updates

This can be regular updates on a schedule or occasional major updates.

Timeline: 2–3 days for regular smaller updates, 24–36 hours for urgent requests.

What happens:

- New content syncs to TMS manually or automatically
- Same translation team handles updates for consistency



Overall timeline examples

Small mobile game:

- 25,000 characters
- 5 languages
- full human translation

Preparation (1 day)



Translation (4 business days with 1 translator per language)



Optional QA (3 days)



Integration (1 day)



~6-9 business days

Mid-size narrative Steam game:

- 350,000 characters
- 8 languages
- full human translation

Preparation (3 days)



Translation (10 business days with 5 translators per language)



Optional QA (15 days)



Integration (3 days)



~6-8 weeks



Need it faster? Add more translators to work in parallel, or prioritize key languages for phased release.

5.

How to Check Localization Quality

Game localization quality has two core components:

Linguistic quality:

- Is the translation accurate?
- Does it sound natural?
- Is terminology consistent?

Functional quality:

- Does text display correctly?
- Are there issues like text overflow, formatting errors, or missing translations?

Your concern:

"How can I verify translations in languages I don't speak?"

There is a solution. Let's see how you can:

- Prevent many issues before translation starts
- Catch errors with automated tools
- Verify the final result with professional testing when needed

Stage 1: Pre-localization preparations

Prevent quality issues before translation begins.

Screen your translators

Check credentials and past work. If you work with a vendor, they handle this screening process.

Provide context

Share screenshots, character and item descriptions, and answer translator questions. Good translators will ask questions about context.

Clean up your source text

Remove ambiguities from the original text. Clear English creates clear translations.

Create reference materials

Build a glossary and style guide. Your vendor can help create these.



Use English as your master language even if the game was originally written in another language. Getting qualified translators from English is easier than from most other languages.

STAGE-1

HOW	TO CHECK	0123
LOCALIZATION	QUALITY	0120
PRE-LOCALIZATION	PREPARATIONS	3013
		0123

Stage 2: Automated quality checks

Run automated tools for basic verification after translation. These don't replace human review but catch common errors quickly.

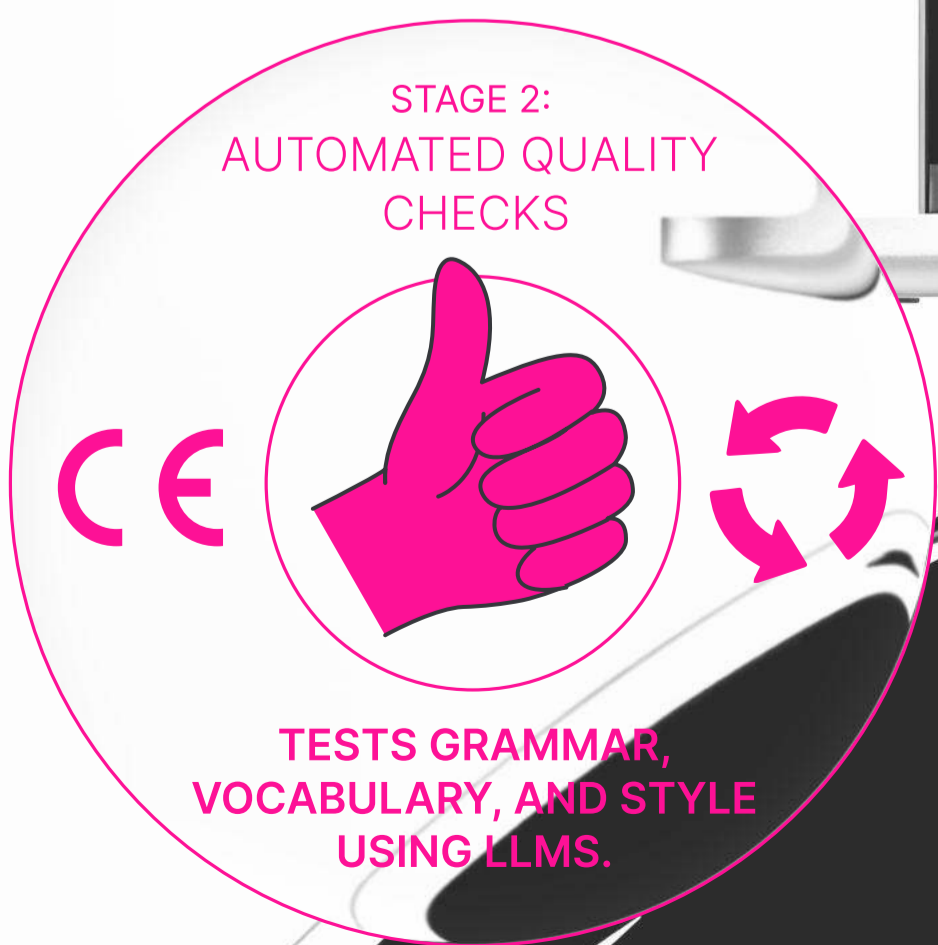
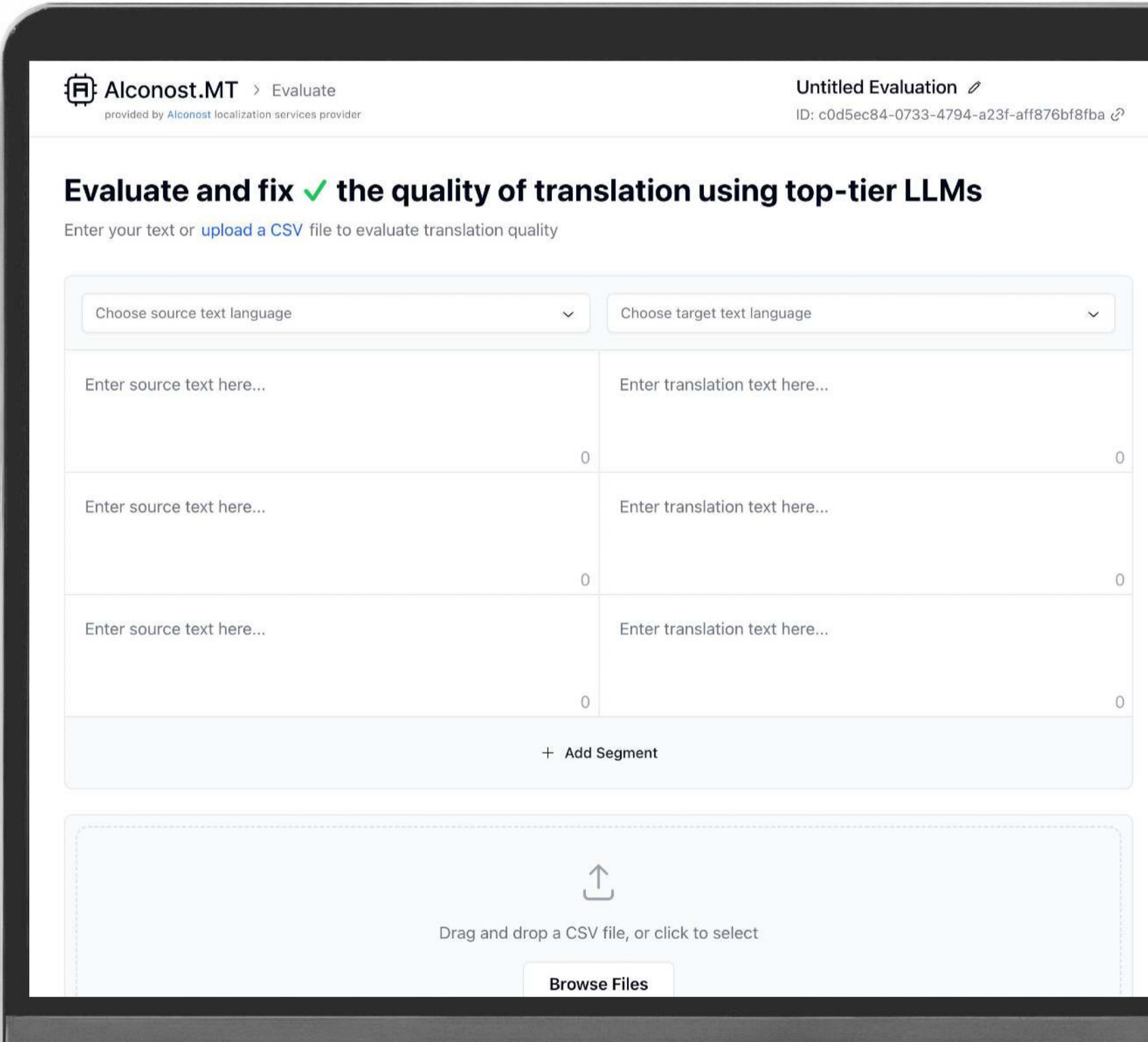
We at Alconost recommend these tools and use them in our own work. You can also use them for independent QA checks.

Xbench

Catches technical errors: extra spaces, missing negations (like overlooking "not"), incorrect number formatting, inconsistent terminology.

Alconost.MT/Evaluate

Tests grammar, vocabulary, and style using LLMs. This free tool also explains errors and suggests corrections.



Stage 3: Proofreading and localization testing

Order **proofreading** when you need extra verification. Proofreaders check possible typos, grammar, syntax, punctuation, and consistency throughout the translation.

You may also need native speakers to test the localized build — this additional service is called **localization testing**.

- ✓ Proofreading focuses on text; localization testing focuses on how it appears in-game.

What testers check:

- Text expansion or truncation
- Correct font display
- Untranslated or incorrect strings
- Layout errors, especially for right-to-left languages
- Broken links and unresponsive buttons

When you need localization testing:

- Games with complex UI
- Games with extensive lore and terminology
- Arabic or Hebrew localizations (sometimes Asian languages)
- Projects with strict string length limits
- Projects where translators received minimal context

6.

The Localization Team

Default setup for a small project is a team consisting of a project manager and translators.

For larger projects, the team may involve more roles:

Role	What they do
Localization manager (PM)	Assembles the team, sets up workflows, monitors deadlines, ensures quality, and serves as your main point of contact
Translators	Localize the content adapting tone and terminology
Language leads	Coordinate the work of several translators and the consistency of translations in a particular language pair
AI engineer	Tests AI models, fine-tunes prompts, tracks the performance of AI translation models
Localization engineer	Helps set up integrations with localization platforms and develops custom integrations if needed
LQA tester	Reviews localized builds, reports linguistic issues, and verifies fixes
Resource manager	Recruits translators for rare language pairs and tracks the performance of all the translators

7.

Budget and Delivery Time

To get a **quote and approximate turnaround time**, you need to send your game content to a localization vendor — or at least provide them with a word/character count.

Localization costs depend on:

- **Volume:** Typically counted in characters (including spaces) or words.
- **Language pairs:** All our translators are native speakers, and their rates vary by region — for example, English-to-Swiss translations cost more than English-to-Portuguese ones.
- **Service type:** Full human translation is naturally more expensive than AI translation with human post-editing (MTPE).
- **Repetitions and TM matches:** We offer **70% discounts** for translation memory (TM) matches and repeated strings.



The cost is calculated on the volume of source text, not of translated text. This makes calculation and negotiations transparent before any commitments.

Reduce costs with:

- **MTPE** for high-volume but low-impact content
- **Varying depth of post-editing** depending on the importance of content
- **Updated TM and glossary** for consistent terminology and future discounts

Optimize delivery time with:

- **Multiple translators** for large translation volumes to ensure quick delivery
- **Integrations** to automate upload and download of translations
- **Fixed schedule for frequent updates** so that translators can start working on new content ASAP



PART 7:
BUDGET AND
DELIVERY TIME

ALCONOST



8.

How to Choose the Right Localization Vendor

Selecting a localization partner is as important as choosing your game engine — it defines your workflow, quality, and long-term scalability.

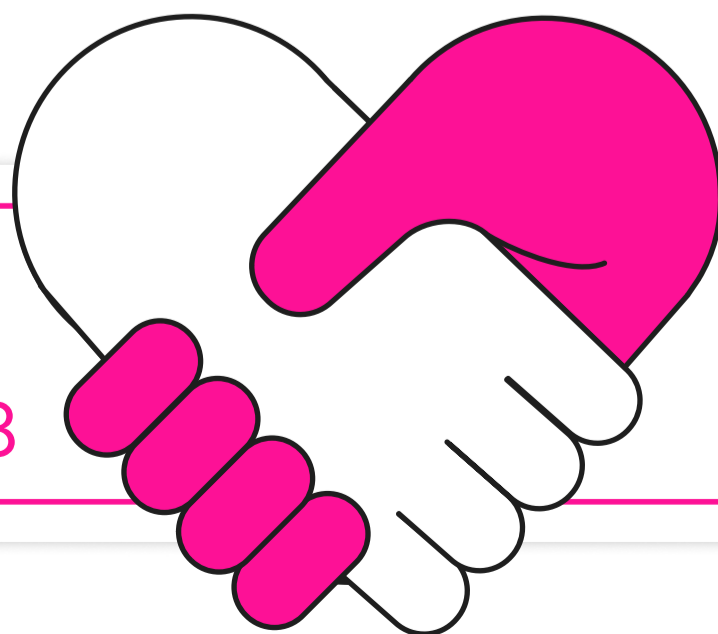
Here is how you can evaluate potential localization partners:

- ✓ Ask for detailed information, proposals, or a quote for your project
- ✓ Place a small translation order to get a feel of their working style
- ✓ Check their rating on independent review platforms
- ✓ Ask for references of clients with projects similar to yours
- ✓ Learn about the team that will be working on your project

Signs of a reliable localization partner

Every project is different. However, there are some universal signs that promise a smooth and productive collaboration:

- They're flexible and adaptable to your processes.
- They deliver projects on time.
- They give you convenient payment options.
- They maintain consistently good translation quality.
- They communicate proactively and clearly. Do they ghost you or take days to reply? Get a new vendor!



9.

Common Concerns About Starting Localization

Let's go through the major concerns gaming studios have and see how we at Alconost address them.

"We don't know where to begin"

Here is how we can help you **start with ease and clearly understand** the process:

- Free consultation to map out your needs (no commitment)
- Clear timeline, milestones, and dedicated project manager
- Step-by-step guidance and support throughout the project
- Open communication from start to finish

"Will this slow down our releases?"

We make sure the localization process is **well integrated with your existing workflow** and doesn't cause new bottlenecks:

- Carefully plan and set project milestones before the start
- Build a process to deliver translations even under tight deadlines
- Set a schedule for frequent updates
- Build a workflow to handle large volumes of translations
- Handle integrations and all technical setup

"How do we make sure we're making the right choice?"

Test us with a **pilot project!** Send a content sample and pay only for test translations.

- ✓ All our translators are native speakers of the target language
- ✓ Regular check-ins and adjustments
- ✓ Transparent communication throughout
- ✓ Correcting translations to your satisfaction

Ready to launch your game globally?

What we bring to your project:

Alconost has already helped 1,000+ games to increase traffic and revenue with localization. Will your game be next?

- **Process built for dev teams.** Our process fits your workflow, not the other way around.
- **Tech-oriented team.** We automate processes, test and optimize AI models, and handle integration with your tools.
- **Flexible solutions.** We adapt to your timeline, budget, and specific requirements.
- **Quick scaling.** Add 20+ languages or increase volume immediately — we have all the resources to help your growth.
- **Domain expertise.** We only hire translators with proven industry experience.
- **Reliable quality.** Multi-stage QA process, three ISO certifications, native speakers.
- **More game-related services.** We offer multilingual voiceovers and produce game trailers.

Want to grow your international player base? Let's talk.

Get in Touch

