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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Responsible Localization: Game Translation Between Japan and the United States

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor
of Philosophy

in

Communication

by

Stephen Mandiberg

Committee in charge:

Lisa Cartwright, Chair
Amelia Glaser
Brian Goldfarb
Nitin Govil
Elizabeth Losh
Stefan Tanaka

2015

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2015

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my advisors, past and present: Lisa, Stefan, Marita, Alex, Katie, and Clint. They gave me just enough rope to play with, but always prevented me from hurting myself. Thank you. The only way I know how to repay this debt is by giving my own students the same freedom, and the same patient guidance. I look forward to doing so.

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Stephen Mandiberg was the sole author of all material in this dissertation, and all materials listed below that have been published, submitted to journals, or are being prepared for submission.

Chapter 2, in part, is being prepared for submission for publication.

A version of Chapter 4 was accepted for publication in the journal *Kinephanos*, and should appear in 2015.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Responsible Localization: Game Translation Between Japan and the United States

by

Stephen Mandiberg

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

University of California, San Diego, 2015

Professor Lisa Cartwright, Chair

Responding to increasing flows of digital media texts across national borders during the late 20th century, video game production companies began to expand translation from linguistic alteration to extensive semiotic manipulation. The practices involved with moving a digital game over national and linguistic lines widened from

translating boxes, instruction manuals, and in-game dialogue, to re-designing audio, visual, and ludic aspects of games. Called ‘localization’ within the game industry, these translation practices are indicative of how globalization operates within the frictional boundary zone between local audiences and global markets.

This dissertation in Communication uses media studies, translation studies and theories of globalization to approach how these industry practices of video game localization operate as meaningful and meaning-making processes. Not simply important for game players, these industry practices are a critical part of how the national game industries of the 1970s-80s became the global game industry of the 2010s, and how individual workers effect change within the global system. Combining ethnographic observations of localization studios, interviews with localization specialists, and textual analysis of Japanese and North American versions of games, this dissertation is an account of localization as a practice that is being pulled in two directions: toward maximum profit as an industrial practice, and toward an ethical practice that can facilitate elements of social justice. Bringing together several different practices of ethical game translation and naming them *responsible localization*, this dissertation elaborates such ethical localization’s cultural benefits, describes how it is conducted at present, and shows how it might be conducted in the future.

Introduction

In many theoretical models within the field of game studies, national language assumes a less important role than play, narrative, rule sets, or the contexts of where play is happening, be it through handheld devices on mass transportation, on consoles in the home, or even live streamed over the Internet. Language is simply not supposed to matter; it is supposed to be an invisible layer that the player sees through in order to experience the game. And yet, as locally produced texts that travel to alternate regions around the world, video games are built upon, utilize, and are heavily influenced by language. This influence is incredibly varied depending on historic trends, console norms, and creator preferences, and it can be encountered in a large number of ways.

Sitting at home in Carleton College's Japanese language house, my home in 2000, I insert *Super Mario Bros* (1985) into the house Nintendo Entertainment System. One of the house residents had pulled the 15-year-old console out of her parents' garage and set it up in the lounge for communal use. I press the big square button on the console to launch it up. The first thing I see is the start screen, inviting me to press start on my controller and begin playing (with either 1 player or 2 players). What I don't see is Japanese. For that I would need a Japanese Family Computer, or Famicom, and a Japanese copy of *Super Mario Bros*. While *Super Mario Bros* was indeed originally created in Japanese and translated into English, the different linguistic versions are kept completely separate. The versions are made on different types of cartridge (a top loading rectangle and a front loading square – see: Figure 0.1).



Figure 0.1: Fully differentiated *Super Mario Bros* cartridges sold in their respective national markets.

These game cartridges are playable on different hardware (the Nintendo Family Computer, or Famicom, and the Nintendo Entertainment System, or NES). And both game and console are inaccessible outside of their respective national markets (Japan and United States). Although I'm living in the Japanese language house, and can watch imported Japanese movies with relative ease, I can't play Japanese games.

A decade later, near the beginning of my year of fieldwork in Japan, I enter a second-hand electronic store and pick up a used copy of *Tales of the Abyss*. I'm hoping to get a general handle on the game before interviewing the people who translated it. I bring the cartridge back to my 130-square-foot apartment, insert it into my partner's Canadian Nintendo 3DS system, and turn on the power. With a bright chime the system launches and I find myself looking at the home screen, but the system doesn't inform me that a game is available to play. I pull the cartridge out and put it back in: no change. I return to

the used game store and inform the bored-looking clerk that the game is broken. He pops it into his personal Nintendo 3DS, which instantly brings up the game's title screen. Despite using the same hardware, Nintendo's 3DS systems and games are locked to prevent cross-region play. My partner's Canadian system can play game cartridges from Canada and the United States – often cartridges that include English, Spanish, and French – but it can't play Japanese ones.

It's late 2013. I've finished my dissertation fieldwork and returned from Japan. I have no interviews with localization professionals scheduled. Wanting to take a break, I turn on my Playstation 3 console, insert the game *Ratchet and Clank: A Crack in Time* into the disk drive and launch it up. The game starts with little trouble, but I'm troubled. Everything is in Japanese, but I feel like relaxing with a game in English for the night. There aren't any options to change the language. It's just 'in' Japanese even though the game was made by Insomniac, a company located in Burbank, California, and I bought it through Amazon.com. Memory clicks in, I turn off the game, open the console's preferences, and change the region and language from Japanese to English (Figure 0.2). I restart the game and this time it's 'in' English. Many games – particularly those published by Sony – now contain multiple languages on a single game disk to facilitate simultaneous shipment to dozens of markets. Never does documentation mention this; and for most players the existence of multiple languages on their game disks goes completely unrecognized. The only reason I know to switch the system language is because I read about it on a localization message board.

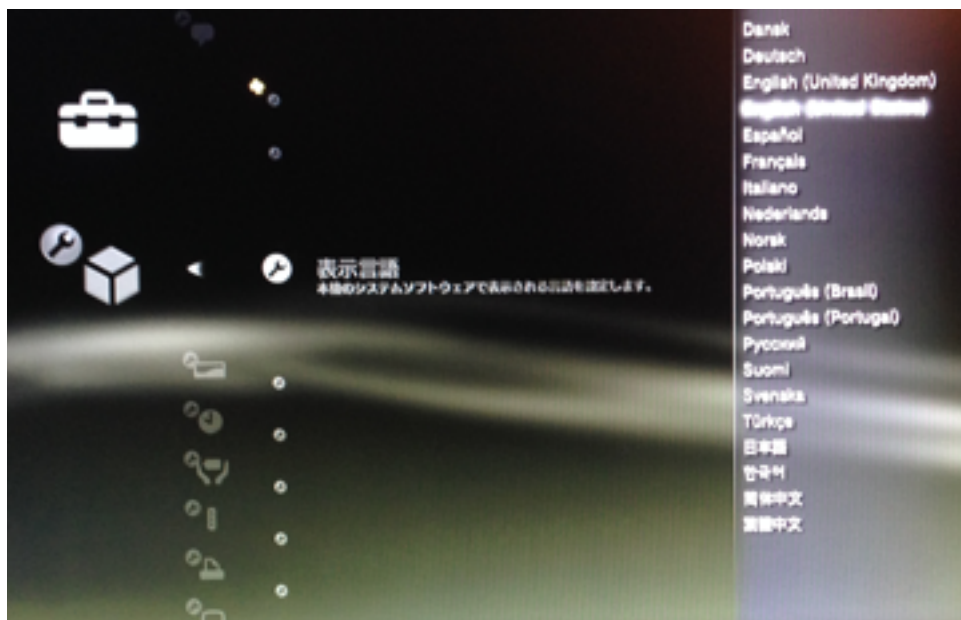


Figure 0.2: Playstation 3 system level language/locale select that changes the in-game language of certain games. Photo by author.

In each of these vignettes, I encountered a game in a specific language; in each of these vignettes, that language was only one of several; in each of these vignettes, my attempt to play games as either a bilingual or international player caused problems.¹ Responding to Anselm Strauss' call to "study the unstudied" (Strauss quoted in Star 1999), this dissertation approaches language in games and the practices of localizing video games between national languages and markets as invisible, yet critical objects through which to study global flows. Leigh Star, following Strauss, notes that studying

¹ While common (at least outside the United States), multilingualism is a theoretical and practical problem within both video game localization and theories of subjectivity. As Derrida (1998) writes in *Monolingualism of the Other, or the Prosthesis of Origin*, "1. We only ever speak one language. 2. We never speak only one language" (7). For Derrida, we only have one mother tongue, but that language we speak is an amalgam of experience and context, which is enforced "repressively and irrepressibly, to reduce language to the One, that is, to the hegemony of the homogeneous" (39-40). This "One" is both homogeneity and the monolingualism of the other. While Derrida's account is a personal one, leading the reader through his Francophone Maghrebien being, he claims it is not "autobiographical," "anamnesic outline," nor "intellectual bildungsroman" (70), but a generalized theorization of the problem of multilingualism within an overarching monolingual culture. Bakhtin (1981) discusses this dynamic opposition between language unification and multiplication in terms of cultural apparatuses seeking to stabilize language to solidify power, and the natural heteroglossia, dialogism, or multi-voicedness, within the world (270-1).

the invisible can lead to “a more ecological understanding of workplaces, materiality, and interaction, and [underpins] a social justice agenda by valorizing previously neglected people and things” (1999: 379; also see: Star and Strauss 1999). By approaching localization, a doubly invisible part of video games, I am able to reveal a more nuanced, or perhaps even an ecological, picture of global video game production practices and global flows; I am also able to argue that particular localization practices that productively play with difference are better than those that merely hide difference as an element inessential, or worse, unhelpful, for the business, culture, and experience of games.

Theoretical Contributions

As the 2012 *Wired Japan* cover exclaims (Figure 0.3), video games of the early 21st century are global, yet the the practices that make them can be highly nation-specific. Games are developed by software development companies located within particular national borders, and then they are laboriously translated for other national markets by localization companies that are often located within other national settings. Moreover, games are often published by multinational firms like Sony and Electronic Arts. Finally, games are played globally, but in language-specific versions that require specialized hardware made for and sold within specific national markets.² Video games

² Not all consoles are sold in all countries. China in particular has a history of banning the sale of game consoles (Carsten 2014). While state level decisions to sell (or prevent the sale of) hardware are important for an ecological understanding of commodity flow, it is a scale that this dissertation does not focus.

are not always conceived of as global commodities, but they are made to be able to move into different national markets.



Figure 0.3: The December 2012 issue of *Wired* sold within Japan.

In the previous paragraph I hesitated to use the word flow, because I wish to avoid the connotations of smoothness that word conveys. Following scholars of cultural globalization, I am interested in the friction (Tsing 2005) that is generated during the global movement of games as media texts. As Cultural Anthropologist Anna Tsing (2000) argues about flow, or the circulation of objects within global modernity, “[a] focus on circulation shows us the movement of people, things, ideas, or institutions, but it does not show us how this movement depends on defining tracks and grounds or scales and units of agency” (2000: 337). Rather, she continues, “[w]here circulation models have tended

to focus only on message transmission, one might instead investigate interactions involving collaboration, misunderstanding, opposition, and dialogue” (2000: 348). Following Tsing, I approach video game localization as a practice that entails friction occurring somewhere between the global and the local, and among Japan, the United States, and dozens of other countries into which English pivot translations help circulate Japanese games. I look not toward how well the message has been transmitted, but toward how individual and collaborative practices between distributed individuals and companies in the game industry facilitate changes that enable and disable this circulation. The aspects of games that are encouraged to circulate by game industry practices are soon called global, and the elements that practices of localization restrict are reduced to being considered merely local, or niche. Video game localization, then, is a practice that constitutes and is constituted by globalization.

In this dissertation I bring together game studies, translation studies, and critical communication theories of globalization to approach how video game companies *try* to attain frictionless flow through the translation and adaptation of video games, a practice called video game localization. What I show, however, is that friction is produced in the collaboration between distributed groups working to localize titles and in the specific choices and actions of specialists tasked with making these games flow to, sell well within, and be consumed as if they were originally made for that audience and market. Furthermore, I identify certain contemporary localization practices as ethical in respect to how they respond to both the source text and its creators. I propose that these ethical localization practices create experiences of productive difference.

Over the past two decades game studies has become a serious field of interdisciplinary research with many different methods and approaches. Game studies research includes questioning what makes a game, be it rules, story or space (Bogost 2007; Eskelinen 2001; Juul 2005; Murray 2004; Nitsche 2008); educational, phenomenological, psychological, and medical studies of how games effect players (Anderson and Bushman 2001; Anderson and Dill 2000; Anderson et al. 2007; Chou and Ting 2003; Ferguson 2008, 2010; Gee 2007a, 2007b; Sherry 2001; Stettler et al. 2004); and sociological studies of players and game culture (Boellstorff 2008; Castronova 2005; Dibbell 2006; Pearce and Artemesia 2009; Taylor 2006). Many works within game studies have focused on the universality, or international and intercultural understandability of video games as a medium. This dissertation, however, fits primarily with another set of scholars who approach the video game industry as part of globalization by focusing on the particularities of locally produced video games, local industries, and global interactions between local companies (Consalvo 2006; Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter 2009; Kerr 2006; Kline et al. 2003; Zackariasson and Wilson 2012).

While the foci and approaches within game studies are expansive, few scholars focus on game translation. This lack of attention is the result of the longstanding invisibility of translation within both the game industry and game studies (Mandiberg 2012). In part, this invisibility derives from the discursive practice of rendering translation invisible to hide the foreign origins of the text and to highlight a stable text (Venuti 2008). It also comes from the early focus within game studies scholarship to

identify the ontology, or essence, of video games, where the split between narratology and ludology left no room for questions of language and translation. If the essence of games was ‘narrative,’ the proper version was the original; if the essence was ‘play,’ then language simply did not matter.³

Like several recent scholarly works within translation studies (Bernal-Merino 2015; O’Hagan and Mangiron 2013), this dissertation seeks to address the lack of focus on video game translation. Responding to translation studies scholar Lawrence Venuti’s (2008) claim that translation is rendered invisible in texts and discourse, I attend to the industry practices of how video games are translated, and how translation exists within video games. By drawing from culturally and ethically oriented translation studies scholars like Jacques Derrida (1985, 1991, 2001), Emily Apter (2006), Antoine Berman (1992), Walter Benjamin (2004), Naomi Seidman (2006), and, of course, Venuti (1998, 2008), I am able to look beyond descriptive translation studies’ empirical focus on the efficacy of practices in transmitting messages between languages to approach the ramifications of particular practices and to raise the question of how to ethically translate games. Such an extension is particularly important for any study of video games due to the medium’s economic (Economist 2011) and political (Huntemann and Payne 2010) importance in the 21st century.

³ The invisibility of translation in game studies is particularly noticeable in bibliographical requirements. According to the Digital Gaming Research Association’s submission template instructions, the bibliographic entry for a game is “Developer. (Year). Title. [Platform, Version], Publisher, Release City/State and Country: played day month, year.” While games are playable in dozens of languages, each created by different groups of people, and each slightly different, there is no requirement to list the language in which the game was played.

This critical approach is also important because of scholarly critique directed at the concept of translation as a Western and Colonialist concept that, to quote post-colonial translation studies scholar Tejaswini Niranjana, “shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism” (1991: 2). For some scholars, translation’s historical ties to asymmetrical power relations is an important reason to jettison the term in favor of concepts like circulation and transfiguration. For Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar and Elizabeth Povinelli switching terms will enable a scholarly re-orientation toward studying power in globalization:

Focusing on transfiguration rather than translation—the refunctioning of a text as such for different demanding-sites—orients our analysis toward the calibration of vectors of power rather than vectors of meaning-value. We will care more about the distribution of power than of meaning, more about institutions of intelligibility, livability, and viability than about translation. (Gaonkar and Povinelli 1991: 396)

In contrast to Gaonkar and Povinelli’s call, I continue to use the term translation in this dissertation, as I feel it is important to stay close to the concept used by participant localization specialists. However, I also pay close heed to their critique of translation as being imbedded within systems of power. There is no such thing as a simple, linguistic translation of a text. Rather, translation reappropriates by bending old meanings to new ones; translation can in fact be integrative, performing cultural amalgamations that strengthen connections rather than weakening or diluting original meanings; and above all, translation is creative and productive by making new forms of expression along the way, not merely derivative reproductions of meaning and tone (Bassnet and Lefevere

1990; Benjamin 2004; Buffagni et al. 2011; Robinson 1991).⁴ The industry practices of game translation that I study in this dissertation do not merely change the linguistic meaning of entertainment products. Rather, following Niranjana, they shape and are shaped by asymmetrical global power relations.

It is through critical communication theories of globalization and circulation that I am able to point out just how localization matters in the world. In addition to focusing on the nuanced frictions as opposed to the effortless flows of globalization (Tsing 2000, 2005), I answer Gaonkar and Povinelli's (2003) call to look at particular technologies of global circulation. This dissertation foregrounds the distributed practices of video game localization (the context), not the meaning of any given game (the text). It looks at both the successes and failures of localization as key areas through which to understand both the reception of games around the world and the ways in which the game industry has itself become a culture of circulation (Lee and LiPuma 2002).

Games are never simply 'fun,' and translation is never simply about linguistic meaning. By combining translation studies and game studies scholarship, I am able to argue that translation is not simply a neutral means through which games emerge as mere 'fun' for another linguistic group, but is also an ethical practice through which games come to matter in the global world. Similar to the work of film studies scholar Abé Mark Nornes' (2007) on global film translation, my work looks at how the different practices of

⁴ My usage of derivative in this dissertation responds directly to discussions within translation studies and media studies that view derivative texts as less (creative) than original texts. Derivative has a very different meaning in other fields, like intellectual property studies, where control and ownership are important, but any derivative is a positive concept linked to the possibility of economic profit. See: Besen and Raskind 1991; Lessig 2004.

video game localization produce particular meanings and engagements between players and cultures. Drawing on critical theorists focusing on the ethics of translation, I argue that all localization practices are ethically meaningful, and that particular localization practices are more ethically appropriate in particular situations than others (Derrida 1985, 1991, 2001; Haraway 2008). While the bottom-line consideration of economics is critical to the video game industry, this dissertation ultimately contributes to the fields of game studies, translation studies, and theories of globalization by proposing that it is more important to consider game localization as an ethical practice that responds with different cultures and players in order to promote productive cultural difference across national lines.

What's In a Word? Translation vs. Localization

Translation is an ambiguous word. While many might immediately think of linguistic translation from one natural languages to another (for example: from Japanese to English), the word itself has a complex history with a bifurcation in the romance languages that did not happen in English (or in Japanese). In his essay “De la translation à la traduction,” Antoine Berman traces translation’s tangled history, writing that romance languages – like French – stopped using the word *translation* during the Renaissance, switching instead to the word *traduction*. According to Berman, “*Traduction* is an activity governed by an agent, whereas translation is a far more anonymous vectorial movement. All the words derived from *ductio* imply agents” (Berman 1988, 31; unpublished translation by Richard Sieburth). The new word, *traduction*, highlights the agency (and

change) involved in the act of altering a text from one language to another. *Translation* survives in romance languages – *traduire* in Berman’s French mother tongue – with a meaning related to transport: the transportation of things, bringing people before the court, geometrical spatial displacement, and so on. Berman continues, “Thanks to [translation’s] polysemy, the English language can integrate the operation of translation into the larger field of transformations and, conversely, interpret the latter in terms of “translation” (Berman 1988: 31; unpublished translation by Richard Sieburth). It is this polysemy that gives rise to rich theoretical contributions revolving around the English term translation.

Literary and linguistic scholars have extensively theorized translation through classification (Even-Zohar 1990; Jakobson 1987; Nida 1964; Popovič 1975), through practice (Torikai 2009; Vermeer 2004), and even as impossible (Benjamin 2004; Derrida 1985; Steiner 1998).⁵ The 1970s cultural turn in translation studies saw scholars switching from thinking about translation and linguistics to thinking about translation, culture, ethics and power (Apter 2006; Bassnett and Lefevere 1990; Bermann and Wood 2005; Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002; Vieira 1999). Theorists within science and technology studies are able to utilize the word translation to discuss communication between different groups through the use of boundary objects (Star 2010; Star and Griesemer 1989), and some scholars in this field even reconceptualize sociology as

⁵ Summarizing why perfect translation is impossible, George Steiner writes, “A ‘perfect’ act of translation would be one of total synonymy. It would presume an interpretation so precisely exhaustive as to leave no single unit in the source text —phonetic, grammatical, semantic, contextual — out of complete account, and yet so calibrated as to have added nothing in the way of paraphrase, explication or variant” (1998: 428). Despite the impossibility of “perfect translation,” imperfect translation happens on a daily basis everywhere in the world.

associations and translations between human and non-human mediators. As Latour writes, “there is no society, no social realm, and no social ties, but there exist translations between mediators that may generate traceable associations” (2005: 108; also see: Callon 1986).

Translation, then, is a hugely complex term with implications that go well beyond linguistic alteration between natural languages, which in the romance languages is encapsulated within the more modern term *traduction*. In writing about video games and translation, I highlight what Berman calls a “vectorial movement” (1988: 31) by playing with the concept of ambiguity. Following scholar of play Brian Sutton-Smith’s (1997) claim that play is an ambiguous concept, I argue that translation (like play) is ambiguous. Translation in general, and practices of video game translation in particular are neither good nor bad. Rather, they are ambiguous in that each can enable or disable certain outcomes. Further, throughout this dissertation, I show how the ambiguous translation of games is a good thing as it need not only go in one direction. Just as Nornes (2007) learns to “love dubbing” as ventriloquism almost a decade after originally expressing his admiration for the layering of abusive film subtitles (Nornes 1999), I analyze game localization from both layering and ventriloquist viewpoints, showing how localization that maintains traces of the original and localization processes that effectively replace the original can each enable particular experiences for players and interactions between local audiences.

The term localization has a complex history that makes its industry usage somewhat problematic. The word in academic usage exists as far back as the mid 1800s

as a medical term related to understanding where particular physical functions are located in the body. For example “cerebral localization” sought to understand what parts of the brain were responsible for which emotions and functions (Mills 1888). Localization’s usage in the humanities and social sciences is much more recent. While a fear of ‘cultural imperialism’ was a major focus in critical communication studies of the 1960s to 1980s (Dorfman and Mattelart 1984; Mattelart 1984; Schiller 1992),⁶ by 1990 the term ‘globalization’ all but replaced ‘cultural imperialism,’ with scholars refocusing on the nuanced, cultural and economic intersections between the global and the local – public culture, local agency, disjuncture, differences, and resistance being popular examples (Appadurai 1996; Appadurai and Breckenridge 1988; Ivy 1995).

Within this shift to looking at local nuances, Roland Robertson wrote, “As will be seen, the distinction between the global and the local is becoming very complex and problematic – to such an extent that we should now speak in such terms as the global institutionalization of the lifeworld and the localization of globality” (Robertson 1990: 19). Drawing on the late 1980s Japanese industry term *dochakuka* [indigenization], Robertson (1995) used the term “glocalization,” or global localization, to refer to microsociological “interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local, or - in more abstract vein the universal and the particular” (Robertson 1995: 30). Robertson’s global-local interpenetration, or glocalization, led to 2000s works in anthropology, media studies and communication that focus on the granularity of local

⁶ While cultural imperialism stems from the extension of Frankfurt school critical theory and the critique of American Imperialism at a cultural level, in his critical introduction, Tomlinson (1991) argues the various articulations of cultural imperialism include media imperialism, discourses of nationality, critiques of global capitalism, and critiques of modernity.

objects of study in order to approach the subject of globalization (Condry 2006; Govil 2007; Tsing 2005; Nornes 2007). While this dissertation is highly indebted to these scholarly works, the localization industry usage of localization is rather different.

The scholarly focus on interpenetration, nuances, dialectics, and friction are largely absent from the business and marketing usage of the word localization. Again, according to Robertson in the 1995 article from which he pulled the term glocalization:

The idea of glocalization in its business sense is closely related to what in some contexts is called, in more straightforwardly economic terms, micro-marketing: the tailoring and advertising of goods and services on a global or near-global basis to increasingly differentiated local and particular markets. (Robertson 1995: 28)

Importantly, it is the functional business sense, not the more nuanced concept of interpenetrations, that is used within the game localization industry.

By the early 2000s localization was commonly used in business contexts to signify the practice of textual manipulation to enable sales of a product in a target market (Esselink 2000). According to the Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA), the Swiss-based association of software publishers and localization service providers that existed from 1990 to 2011, “localization involves taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale (country/region and language) where it will be used and sold” (quoted in Esselink 2000: 3). Interestingly, “linguistically and culturally appropriate” can mean any number of things from bare minimum alteration of the title of a game to fully adaptation of the content within the game, and “used and sold” are two very different actions where the bare minimum might include a pasted label on top of a box to enable sales in a target market, but it might also include extensive

alterations to enable a different experience of play within the target market. LISA and later groups of industry specialists – for example, the Globalization and Localization Association (GALA) and the International Game Developers Association Localization Special Interest Group (IGDA LocSIG) – attempted to create standards of practice, but changes of technology, industry preferences, and individual practices mean that what exactly happens through localization is shifting.

What localization means to and for the game industry professionals is highly dependent upon their situated context within the game production process. A bureaucratically high-up localization producer responsible for business decisions might say, “For me, certainly after becoming a producer, it's a business. It's a fun business! It's a business that allows you to work with heart, and allows you to work with very creative things, but it's a business. If it doesn't sell, it's done” (Judd 2013). While a practice related to a medium that he enjoys, localization is primarily a series of business decisions about how to strategically target a game and delete extraneous or problematic elements for particular markets and audiences. As a business, localization might be about replacing one thing with another, but very rarely is it about adding. The co-owner and marketing director of a localization service provider might tell me “Last year I was... in Paris with a few customers, and they all said that they kept a special archive folder in which they saved our emails, because even when there was maximum stress, our emails still had fun. And they even shared, they forwarded messages, like hey, have you read this one?”⁷ This localization expert owner reveals her consideration that localization is primarily about her

⁷ Interview with anonymous owner and marketing director, September 20, 2011.

company's relationship to its clients (software development and publishing companies); localization is about business deals and the trust that helps make those deals happen. A project manager working for a third-party localization studio outside of the game's development team might talk about a steady path of emails, scheduling, and splitting up a job into manageable chunks:

...they send me the job; I accept [the job]; I go over the assets; I pick the translators; I [email] them, hopefully they will accept [the job], sometimes I have to go to hunt a little bit; sometimes, I have to haggle deadlines with the clients; sometimes I have to convince translators that this is okay, just go with whatever it is because they think that the asset is... not even near as good as they should be, and I just have to say go with the flow, do your best, it's the only thing we can do; sometimes we get a really good assets and the translator comes to me and goes, wheeee! send more more more!, which is really the most fun days. I get the translation back, I briefly go over them, check that the, like TRC [technical requirement checklist] terms, spot check the TRC terms, the glossary terms, that they are correct; I clean the files, and I send them back to the client.⁸

She considers localization primarily a matter of scheduling and communication as she is responsible for hiring translators, sending parts of the game to translators, relaying questions from the translators to the development team, conveying orders from the development team to the translators, and above all trying to maintain the deadline. And a translator might tell me:

I [worked] in a coffee shop... Every day I would just look at the Excel sheet. I had already played the game although I had it with me just to check stuff. I just... wrote through it. After I got used to the characters it became more of a writing exercise where because of all of the jokes there's very little that can be directly translated. So you internalize the characters' voices and then you just recreate those in English. (Smith 2012)

⁸ Interview with anonymous project manager, September 22, 2011.

In this last instance, localization is synonymous with linguistic translation as his part in the more distributed process is limited to the alteration of textual strings from Japanese to English. Including planning, dealing and acting, localization is just as highly ambiguous a term and practice as translation. The shifting industry conceptualization of localization means that game localization is currently witnessing various changes of direction.

Throughout this dissertation I use both terms: translation and localization. I do not, however, consider them or use them as synonyms. Drawing from the polysemic richness within the word translation, which I otherwise refer to as ambiguity, I use translation to refer to a general concept of linguistic alteration, and the transportation of texts over national, regional and linguistic borders. In contrast, I use the term localization when specifically referring to one of two things: participant terminology, and the effort to adapt a commodity or text to local tastes.

First, in alignment with participant specialists' local nomenclature, I refer to the industry practice of translating video games between languages and over borders as localization. It is their process, and it is their word. However, this is not an easy separation as interviewees sometimes flip between the two words, referring to the process as localization, but their particular job as translator, or referring to the process of localization as a thing of the past despite the word being in their job title. When I flip between the words it is not due to mistaken input commands, but due to the slippage in usage within the culture and industry that is the object of study within this dissertation.

Second, I refer to localization in its close relationship with “domestication” translation strategies. For Friedrich Schleiermacher, (2004 [1823]) the translator must

choose to help bring the reader to a foreign text (foreignization) or adapt the foreign text for a local audience (domestication). With foreignization the translator keeps particular foreign concepts and objects, refusing to translate them, and thereby making the reader work to understand a foreign text and other. Food like sushi and ramen, and philosophical concepts like Heidegger's *Dasein* and Derrida's *sous-rature* are all examples. With domestication, consumption is made easier when the translator adapts the text fully into a local, or domestic, context. Sushi becomes raw fish on rice; ramen becomes noodles; *Dasein* becomes being there or presence; and *sous-rature* becomes writing ~~under erasure~~. In linking localization to Schleiermacher's domestication I mean to indicate how both make consumption easier by eliding the foreignness of a text. Important, however, is that foreignization has no analogous term that goes alongside localization.

Methodology

As a dissertation theoretically situated between humanities and social sciences, my research methodology mixes humanistic textual analysis and social scientific participant observation and interviews. Having become interested in the practice of game localization when game studies scholar Marinka Copier arranged a tour of a Dutch localization studio after hearing my conference presentation at the 2009 Digital Gaming Research Association conference, I formally collected data between 2010 and 2013 in Utrecht, Tokyo, Osaka, and Los Angeles. I observed work practices in three localization studios, and I conducted interviews with forty translators, localization directors, project managers, play testers, and producers working independently, at small companies, and

within massive corporations. Lastly, I played dozens of games in both English and Japanese.

Originally, I intended to embed myself within one localization company and observe the complex interactions that were necessary to localize a game from conception to development to simultaneous shipment to consumption. Like romantic anthropologists of the early 20th century, I would observe groups of people discuss money, planning, translation, and problems like the much cited fly on a wall; I would watch translators go through lines of code and talk to freelancers over email; I would play the game alongside the play testers, seeing how they changed it; and then I would complete a full play-through of both English and Japanese versions at the end, after the game had been fully translated. Mixing multi-sited workplace ethnography (Marcus 1998; Orr 1996; Plowman et al. 1995), by looking at the different sites where games are localized, with Kopytoff's (1986) suggestion to follow the life cycles of objects to fully understand their meaning in context, I would do my best to study and represent video game localization as a complex, multi-situated process of importance for both software development and global flow of commodities.⁹

Things did not go exactly as planned. While my goal was to observe and record work practices, analyze games, and interview specialists, my ability to do all three was greatly restricted by industry non-disclosure agreements, and by gatekeepers' fears that allowing me to watch, record, or interact would have negative repercussions on the localization companies. Despite promises of access, obtained over email and in person

⁹ Much as Guins (2014) successfully does in his cultural history of video games and their afterlives.

during preliminary fieldwork starting in 2010, several companies balked when I showed up knocking on their doors in 2012. The proverbial foot-in-the-door did not work. Non-disclosure agreements, or NDAs (as they are commonly called by media industry workers), are both a matter of everyday practice and an interesting restriction of their work and my research. Co-signed by both a discloser and recipient, an NDA is meant to protect the discloser's:

confidential, proprietary or trade secret information... whether of a technical, business or other nature (including, without limitations, information relating to [Discloser's] technology, software, source code, products, services, designs, methodologies, business plans, finances, marketing plans, customers, prospects or other affairs).¹⁰

For disclosing companies, NDAs are a risk preventative measure that helps ensure workers do not leak information outside of the company, and enables the companies to take punitive actions when such leaks occur.¹¹ While some companies had me sign a similar NDA and moved on, others companies and individuals professed fears that by letting me observe them at work, their clients (larger publishing companies) would be displeased and, complaining of the release of private information (e.g. letting me watch), the publisher would seek punitive action against the localization studio (legal damages or simply no longer hiring the company/individual). This was particularly problematic in Japan, where trust is built up slowly through processes of formal introductions and social

¹⁰ Anonymous company's NDA signed on August 30, 2013.

¹¹ On the surface, the NDA is both comforting and just. It helps bolster trust when risk might otherwise prevent interaction. The problem resides in the fact that the discloser is most often a company in a position of power and the recipient is a disempowered worker (or researcher like myself). In practice, then, the NDA works less to bolster trust and interaction for the sake of dialogue, and more to protect a powerful company's economic interests.

interaction.¹² As Alexander O. Smith helpfully told me, “nommunication,” or drinking communication, is very important for Japanese companies.¹³ While I was able to physically observe localization practices on a limited basis in the Netherlands and the United States, trying to build up enough trust to break through the NDA within the limited time frame of doctoral research was an impossibility in Japan. During my fieldwork in Tokyo it was only after a year of trust-building that some people finally agreed to participate in anonymous interviews.

Despite the problems I encountered with observing work practices, I obtained an overabundance of interview data. People wanted to talk to me, even if they were hesitant about NDAs. Once people got talking some of them just kept going, with the average interview lasting for about an hour, but some going on for much longer. On one memorable encounter we got kicked out of a coffee shop after almost five hours, not counting the twenty minute walk to and from the train station. I ended up leaving Japan with minimal workplace observations, but over 48 hours of recorded interviews with

¹² While doing research in Japan, I met another scholar of game localization who told me that it had taken him the better part of a decade to be granted full access. After years of balking, he was in Japan working at a localization studio as a participant observer with permission to write about his work and the localization studio's practices. Due to the many delays he encountered in receiving permission, he had to transfer from one doctoral granting institution to another.

¹³ Nommunication is a portmanteau of *nomu*, the Japanese verb for drink, and communication. According to Smith, “the real action happens in the evening when everyone goes out and gets drunk and they [Japanese workers at video game development companies] have heart-to-heart conversations about stuff that they can't say in the restricted environment. And then the next day they all show up at the meeting and everyone agrees because they've already established this, you know it's that predetermined consensus, and they've already worked out all their kinks the night before. The meeting is just an affirmation of what they've already decided... Really, it's that nommunication... There was a [project manager] at Square who was a heavy smoker and that's what he did. He would go in and smoke and talk to the directors and the writers. The people that nobody had access to, you know the people up on the pedestal. And when I figured that out I'm like I just need to convince him, and then he'll convince them... originally I went through the [project manager] and then when I figured out what he was doing I was going in the smoking room and using the drink machine in there so I could say hi and stop and talk to people, and once I was on recording sessions I would go out drinking and then that's when you really get nommunication” (Smith 2012).

participant translators, writers, editors, project managers, testers, and producers. And this does not include the unofficial and unrecorded discussions at weekly pub meetings where localization industry specialists would gather at an *izakaya* on the Tokyu Toyoko line in southwest Tokyo and drink until the last train sent everybody back home. Smith was right: noncommunication is important.

Localization specialists I met at various functions referred me to friends and coworkers, who referred me to yet others. My noncommunication fueled snowball sample method of participant recruitment allowed me to break through certain problems of the NDA, but I encountered limitations in that it did not lead me to a fully representative sample of industry localization specialists. The majority of specialists I encountered in Japan who agreed to participate were men. Women were conspicuously absent. This was troubling because of the relatively equal balance of men and women in the Dutch localization studio I studied.¹⁴ It was also troubling because many within the game industry believe diversity is an important value for game creation (Edwards et al. 2014). As a result of my overly homogenous group of participant localization specialists, I spend a significant amount of time in this dissertation engaging with questions of diversity and video games, and the focus of my final chapter is on how to bring resistant fan practices that hack games to enable female protagonists together with industry practices of localization.

¹⁴ In the United States and the Netherlands I interviewed a near even balance between 10 men and 9 women. In contrast, the gender balance of localization specialists I interviewed in Japan was quite different with 18 men and 4 women.

In preparation for interviews I played (but often did not completely play through) several of the games my participant interviewee previously worked on. Following interviews I often began to play alternate games that had been discussed unexpectedly during the interview. For example, before interviewing Brian Gray, whose work I discuss in detail in Chapter 3, I explored, but did not finish, *Final Fantasy X-2* (2003), *Kingdom Hearts 2* (2006), *Jeanne d'Arc* (2007), and *The World Ends With You* (2008), all of which he worked on as a translator. However, because he repeatedly mentioned the game *Shadows of the Damned* (2011) during the interview, I followed up by completely playing through that game in English and Japanese. We then met several months later for a second interview during which we discussed his work on *Shadows of the Damned*. Thus, while three games are analyzed in depth within this dissertation (one each in Chapters 3, 4 and 5), I played and analyzed many more during the course of my research.

In the end, I never followed a perfect example through its cultural life cycle from conception to development to distribution to consumption to afterlife. Instead, I mix and match several conflicting examples, and am able to pull out certain discrepancies of contemporary localization practice that in turn reveal interesting nuances of what happens, what specialists want to happen, and what could happen. Had I followed just one example, I would not have been able to pick up the various frictions that exist within industry practice. It is by understanding the friction, particularly the ways that individuals act ethically despite the overarching economic pressure to sell games regardless of ethics, that I am able to argue for what I name *responsible localization* in this dissertation.

Roadmap of the Chapters

Drawing on observations of localization practice conducted in the Netherlands, Japan, and the United States, interviews with specialists conducted in coffee shops, conference rooms, karaoke studios, and by Skype, industry literature about localization, and textual analysis of dozens of games, I show in Chapter 1 how video game localization operates as a *multimodal* and *distributed* process. By *multimodal*, I mean that game localization goes beyond the textual focus of linguistic translation to include the complex semiotic mixture of textual, audio, graphical, and ludic elements that compose video games; and by *distributed* I mean to emphasize the necessary interaction and collaboration between the various specialists working in different companies and different facets of game development, but working together to create singular video games.¹⁵ Similar to communication theories of cognition as distributed across a group, Chapter 1 shows how localization is reliant upon the distributed cooperative practice of individuals working within the platform holder, publisher, developer, quality assurance tester, and translation and localization occupational groups. Chapter 1 sets the stage for the remaining chapters of this dissertation by giving readers a firm understanding of both the general people, companies, interactions, processes, and problems involved in game localization.

Chapter 2 brings popular and industry accounts of the history of video games together with media materiality and academic histories of the cinematic ‘multi-language

¹⁵ Distributed can also refer to the matter of spatial distribution in that these localization specialists working on singular games can be located at the same company and even the same desk, but more often than not are located in different buildings, cities, countries or even continents and connecting through email and teleconferencing technologies.

version’ and television ‘format show’ in order to argue that video game localization as it is conceived of in the 2010s is untenable. While industry histories of video game localization focus on the progressively improving technical process, I compare game localization to previous forms of cinema and television translation and adaptation in order to show how the perpetual logic of improvement is an impossible dream. Ultimately, while video games – as digital texts – *can* be adapted through the multimodal and distributed practices of localization detailed in Chapter 1, these practices are too complex and expensive to be profitable, particularly for smaller markets and locales. The end result, I propose, is that localization, like with the cinematic multiple language version, will eventually cease to be practiced in lieu of other, cheaper forms of game translation (even if these new forms are still called ‘game localization’).

Having reached the turning point of the dissertation, the last three chapters come to terms with the problems of idealized localization by engaging with game localization as it is practiced in the early 2010s during the time of my research. In Chapter 3, I grapple with how Japanese to English game translators engage with a particular form of authorial responsibility. Applying theories of authorship within translation studies and critical theory to the process of translating a specific game in 2011, I argue that game translators – the specialist tasked with dealing primarily with the localization of textual assets – can and should use their ability to change the game to engage in what I call, through Haraldo de Campos, Jacques Derrida, and Donna Haraway, *responsible localization*. There are many ways of localizing responsibly, but for all of them, translating is not simply about making money for the publisher or patron. Rather, the responsible game translator

responds to and with the source culture as a means of ethically bringing together source and target cultures and players.

In chapter 4, I use the Japanese game series *Gyakuten Saiban* [Turnabout Courtroom], which is localized into English as *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*, to elaborate how residual traces of Japan – overlooked or ignored due to limited funding – are a generative form of responsible localization. Moving forward with the idea of seeing success within failure, Chapter 4 plays with the Derridian concept of the ‘trace,’ or writing ~~under erasure~~. Drawing from Derridian critical theory, studies of digital media and education, and cultural studies accounts of globalization, borders and mobility, this chapter proposes that players become hybrid citizens through encountering and learning from these traces of the other within consumed media. Far from being failures of localization, as industry professionals contend, this chapter elaborates how these traces should be seen as successes of responsible localization practice when the goal of localization is not simply immersion and full adaptation, but the generation of cultural interaction.

Finally, Chapter 5 brings together 21st century problems of gender representation in games, gender disparity in game production, and practices of localization, to imagine a future practice that takes responsible translation and economics as equally significant. Responding directly to the game industry diversity imbalances revealed in demographics reports (Edwards et al. 2014) and problematically seen in the lack of women localizers that I interviewed while conducting research in Japan, I re-direct responsible localization toward gender as a locale in need of attention. After discussing the 2010 game *Nier* as an

interesting example of game localization that responds to the rising age of the average game player, but fails to acknowledge the full diversity of game players, this chapter argues that the best use of the expensive, multimodal and collaborative localization (described in Chapter 1 and visible in *Nier*) is in responding with game culture to facilitate the incorporation of audiences that are under-targeted by industry publishing practices. Following the lead of ROM hacks in which fans manipulate the code of classic games in order to change the protagonists from men into women, this chapter ultimately proposes that responsible game localization can facilitate contemporary calls for diversity and social justice within gaming by localizing titles in terms of gendered and racial locales instead of simply linguistic locales.

Chapter 1 - Game Localization as Multimodal and Distributed Practice

It may be said that a novel is a combination of words that form sentences, paragraphs, and chapters. While games are more complex in terms of sensory modalities, they are similarly made up of divisible parts — millions of ‘assets’ called upon by the master program or application. Assets can be individual lines of dialogue, graphical elements like a character’s clothing, the graphical user interface, diegetic sounds like the character’s footstep, nondiegetic background music, haptic vibration of the controller, ludic elements like mini-games, and of course the thousands of coded rules that define the game’s logic.¹⁶ Each type of asset helps create one semiotic mode of interacting with the game – textual, visual, audio, haptic, and ludic – that combine to form the complex semiotic modality of video games, which I am here calling the multimodal text.¹⁷ By focusing on assets, game localization specialists engage in a more semiotically extensive, or multimodal, form of translation than their peers in book translation. This is not to say that book translation is simple, that it is not in itself a multimodal practice, or that it does

¹⁶ An important distinction between words in novels and assets in games is that words, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters are a hierarchical system, but the various, multimodal assets described are relational. The game (as software) draws upon assets to help the player traverse a game in a unique way depending on how the player acts. For example, in *Super Mario Bros*, depending on whether I choose to *jump over* a Goomba or *jump on* a Goomba, the game draws upon different assets and provides a different experience. In the latter case the game detects that the player has collided (from above) and the game reacts accordingly by launching Mario into the air with a unique sound while the Goomba turns over and falls off the screen (dead). While the ontology of words and game assets are, therefore, quite different, their practical way each forms its respective medium is similar.

¹⁷ Even though it is not a common media studies term, I use the term multimodal instead of multimedia to highlight the intersections between modes of interaction, which create a single medium. Whereas multimedia implies there are different media vying for user attention, multimodal implies a single medium with multiple but intertwined levels of interaction. Much like Bakhtin’s (1981) dialogism, multimodal here is a multivoicedness that highlights the intersection of modes. Multimodal also allows me to sidestep the question of media essence within new media (is a video game a medium or is the computer a medium? See: Manovich 2001).

not entail extralinguistic meanings; book translation is and does all of those things.¹⁸ My point is that game localization, as compared to book translation, entails a wider range and mix of semiotic modes, linguistic and extralinguistic. What makes games exceptionally multimodal is their engagement with multiple intertwined textual forms and sensory modalities (audiovisual time-based narrative mixed with user determined action, to name just one compound form found in games). The process of localization may begin with translating text and subtitling dialogue, but it extends to techniques such as voice redubbing, manipulating audio and graphical files, changing character designs, and even manipulating narrative flow and gameplay. This breadth of techniques and the degree of manipulation entailed exceeds that of book translation considerably, and such multimodal translation requires technical skills distributed well beyond the individual skill set of a single translator.

In this chapter, I first consider how experts from different groups within the game industry collaborate to modify video games' multimodal assets in the process of localizing a game for a different national locale. Translators are trained and employed to change written sentences of particular meaning, including tone and tenor, into alternate sentences of equivalent meaning and emotion. But for the most part these experts in written language have neither the training nor the professional experience necessary to modify the many semiotic layers that come into play with games. Translation and localization are thus discrete, though often overlapping and intersecting, occupational

¹⁸ Here multimodal can refer to the old debates between sense-for-sense and word-for-word (Dryden 2004 [1680], St. Jerome 2004 [395]), or between domesticating and foreignizing (Schleiermacher 2004 [1823]), but it can also include non-written elements like speech and graphics.

areas. They appear as discrete job categories though they overlap as skill sets required for the process of localization within the game production industry. Said another way, linguistic translators are not the only game industry workers devoted to game localization.

The second part of this chapter's argument is that game localization involves a distributed modality of practice. In using the phrase "distributed practice," I draw from Edwin Hutchins's *Cognition in the Wild* (1995), an ethnographic analysis of ship navigation, where he argues that navigation is a collective process involving multiple modalities of work including computation and interpretation. Hutchins' classic work is a widely recognized model for studying the how work is actually done in practice, and the extent to which skills, tasks and decision-making, even when highly specialized, are always complexly inter-related with other areas of expertise and practice. Practice is always, in a word, *distributed* among members of a functional group and within the environment where practice occurs, rather than deriving from the interests or decisions of an individual mind or a single industry interest or goal. This model allows me to shift my analysis away from the relationship between an original game and its localization, to attend to the complex network of activity among agents who engage together in the process of localizing a game. By drawing on distributed cognition as a rich potential model for ethnographic research in media studies, I shift my primary focus from text to context. This approach structures my observations in a manner that allows me to describe the processes of decision-making as they unfold in the localization studio, and the seemingly incidental meaning-making that occurs when a game is put into the hands of

workers who together approach the multimodal form of a given game. Rather than using the playable game as a measure of what took place, I use observations of localization practice supplemented by extensive interviews with localization specialists about their own work practices. Thus, I take note of the fully work practices that go into reshaping the game as it is localized for a new set of users who are understood to be linguistically, geographically, and/or culturally distinct from the game's original users. Emphasized in descriptions by Chandler and Deming (2012) and Kerr (2006) in their respective work on game industry practice and game studies, game production is distributed, with processes that can include hundreds of specialists focusing on different multimodal tasks. Though Kerr and Chandler and Deming do not draw explicitly, as I do, from the tradition of distributed cognition to study work practice, their accounts amply demonstrate that game production is a necessarily distributed and multimodal practice. I follow their precedent in game studies to ground my own account of game localization as distributed practice, drawing more overtly from a tradition of ethnographic work study to ground what will unfold as a mixed interpretation, analysis, and theory of localization.¹⁹

I begin by introducing the groups involved in creating and localizing games: platform holder, publisher, developer, quality assurance, and localization. I describe the work being done by each occupational group, paying particular attention to where practices and groups overlap. The practical borders between occupational groups are

¹⁹ My use of distributed practice in this dissertation is not intended to be confused with the similarly named learning strategy (otherwise known as spaced practice), a technique in which a student distributes study sessions over discrete periods of time. Authors besides Hutchins who have applied distributed cognition theory to ethnographic studies of media production work include: Goldberg 2002; Rogers and Ellis 1994. While not drawing from Hutchins and distributed cognition, Kumar et al. (2009) indicate similar distribution and integration of work when analyzing the interactions between actors at and between sites. The business term they use to refer to this is "task interdependence."

always blurred as a result of the agreements, negotiations and collaborations that must and do occur during the process of localizing any one game.

Having described the distributed actors involved in localizing, I precede in the second part of this chapter with drawing upon descriptive accounts from industry workers and my own ethnographic observations to elaborate upon my claim that game localization entails high degrees of both semiotic multimodality and collaboration. I describe how the distributed occupational groups collaborate to manipulate the multimodal assets that make up and remake games.

Finally, in the third section of this chapter I detail two particular configurations of localization practice that greatly change the form collaboration takes between the different groups involved. Localization may be done after the original game has been finished, a version of localization called this is called post-gold localization.²⁰ However, current practices also include simultaneously creating and shipping multiple localizations, a process referred to as simultaneous shipment, or sim-ship localization.²¹ These two practices' contrasting costs and collaboration result in different levels of multimodality being translatable, but they are not chosen based upon comparative multimodality alone. Rather, changing artistic, economic, and political conceptualizations of how localization

²⁰ The localization term 'post-gold localization' comes from the game industry term 'gold master disc.' Having finished development and testing, the 'gold master' disc is the final version of a game that is then sent out to a publisher to be reproduced and sold.

²¹ Often referred to as "sim-ship," simultaneous shipment – when all localizations are shipped around the world simultaneously – is popular in the 21st century because it allows publishers to capitalize on global advertisement synergies. Additionally, according to market researchers, allowing players to buy the game at the same time regardless of where they live limits piracy. Both are reasons why simultaneous shipment publishing strategies are popular despite scheduling limitations

influences local reception of the game (usually measured in game sales) have resulted in one or the other form of localization.

Distributed Practices: Groups, Companies, People and Roles

Collaboration and multimodality are evident in the very structure of the game localization process, which involves five separate but intersecting sets of agents with very different skill sets. Following explanations by game localization specialists within the game industry and academic literature (Chandler 2013; Chandler and Deming 2012; Dunne 2006; Esselink 2000; Honeywood and Fung 2012; Kerr 2006), I identify these five sets of agents as *occupational groups*, which I have mapped in the figures throughout this chapter: publisher, developer, platform holder, quality assurance, and localization.

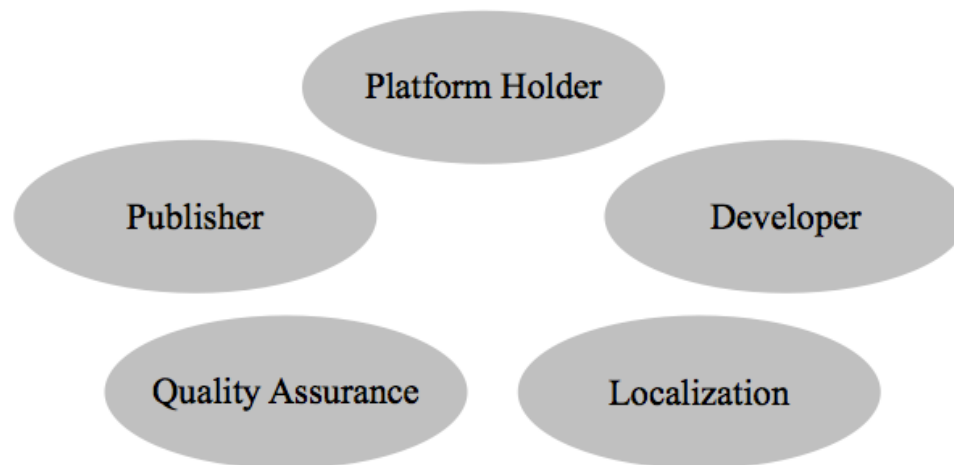


Figure 1.1: Occupational groups involved with game production. Figure by author.

By using the term *occupational group* my intention is to highlight the practical borders instead of the corporate borders that might be highlighted through using company

names.²²In the 1970s to early 2000s – the early years of video game localization – each of the five occupational groups had a separate role in the creation and distribution of a video game, and conducted that role in a particular order during the typical development process (Figure 1.2).

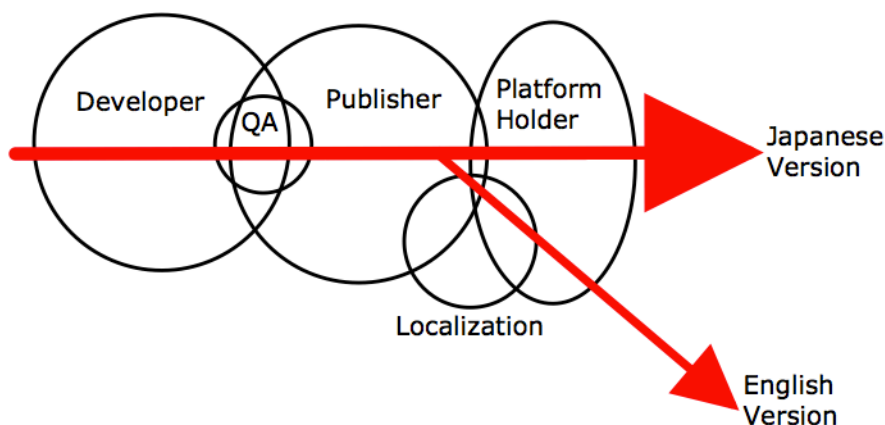


Figure 1.2: Historical process of game production - translation is included as a post-production practice. Figure by author.

The developer (a single person or a small team of programmers and artists) created a game; the publisher (a larger company with dozens to thousands of people) agreed to sell it; quality assurance, or QA, (from one to a dozen individuals, either freelancers or available workers) tested for bugs, which were fixed by programming specialists working within the developer occupational group; the platform holder (Atari, Nintendo, Sega, Sony or Microsoft) checked and approved the game; then the publisher distributed the game in stores where it was bought by an initial audience and played on the platform

²² I must stress, however, that the five occupational groups include various job titles and working verbs beyond publish, develop, assure, and localize. The ‘publisher’ includes distribution and the required marketing and advertising needed to sell a game. The ‘developer’ involves many different verbs needed to stitch together the game. ‘Quality Assurance’ can include both testing for code errors and suggesting new gameplay elements. Localization includes translation, rewriting, and editing. And finally the Platform Holder refers to an amorphous agent that can deny the release of a game and require any number of alterations.

holder's console. After the initial distribution, the game was linguistically translated and distributed into secondary language-locales, often after numerous months. For example, the Japanese game *Rockman 2* was released in December of 1988, localized into English, retitled *Mega Man 2*, and released in June of 1989, then in a tertiary step, localized from English into French, Italian, German, and Spanish by December of 1990. Of course, variations of practice and game-by-game incidents interrupted this smooth linear ideal. With many games the initial creation order was flipped when the publisher came up with a game idea; in these instances the developer was then employed to enact the idea. Oftentimes quality assurance, the publisher or the platform holder found serious issue with some technical, gameplay, or content element of the game, which sent the game back to the proverbial drawing board with the developer making significant corrections or changes. And of course, most games were not translated.

In the 2010s, game production specialists still refer to and think of the five groups – developer, publisher, platform holder, quality assurance, and localization – as separate: discrete moments in production; separate groups of workers; separate job descriptions; separate company affiliations. However, they are bureaucratically and functionally entangled.²³ All three of the major platform holders (Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo) produce and develop games for their respective platforms in addition to simply approving third party developed and produced products. Larger publishers like Square Enix, Capcom, and Koei Tecmo control development, publishing, and distribution. Finally, both

²³ This entanglement (and separation) is further confounded when Quality Assurance and Localization are considered to be a subset within either the Publisher or Developer. For example, Chandler (2009) integrates quality assurance and testing with the developer, but indicates that localization is an external affair.

quality assurance and localization can be conducted externally by third-party agencies, or it can be handled internally by larger development and publishing companies. Thus, while there are five different groups, the independence and entanglement is varied with each project depending on the different companies involved.

Beyond its bureaucratic entanglement, game production as a process is functionally entangled. In theory, these five occupational groups are located separately as autonomous moments of game production with their own processes and workers. However, as Chandler (2013) shows (Figure 1.3), game production is a cyclical practice that loops between pre-production, production, testing, and wrap-up in multiple cycles with specialized features being added in toward the end of production.

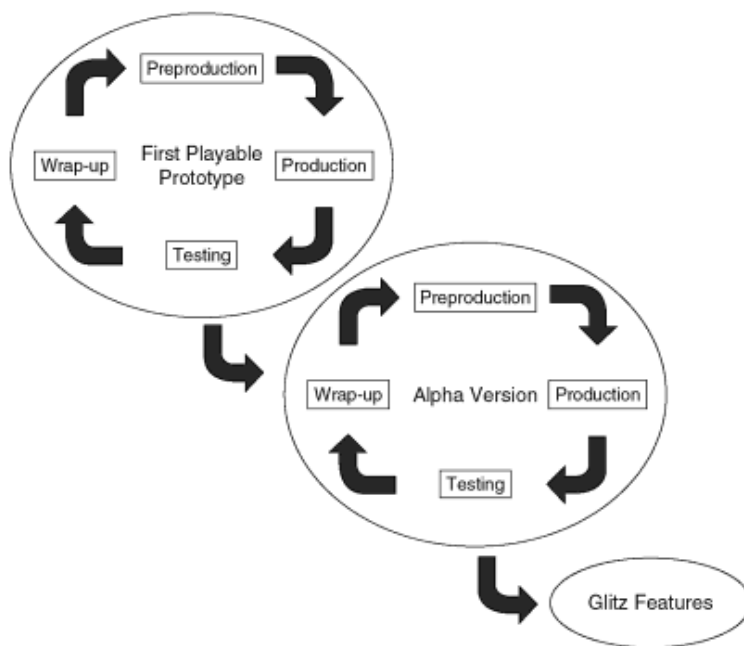


Figure 1.3: 21st century production cycles. Figure from Chandler 2013: 5.

The result of each cycle is a functional version of the game – prototype, alpha, beta or gold master version – that is directly influenced by the other occupational groups.²⁴ Because production works with cycles, each group has some input into the process at each stage, necessitating the integration and interaction of the separate occupational groups. The developer might be a separate company, but when the prototype is finished, the publisher, quality assurance and possibly even localization groups are able to supply input and influence the development of the alpha version.

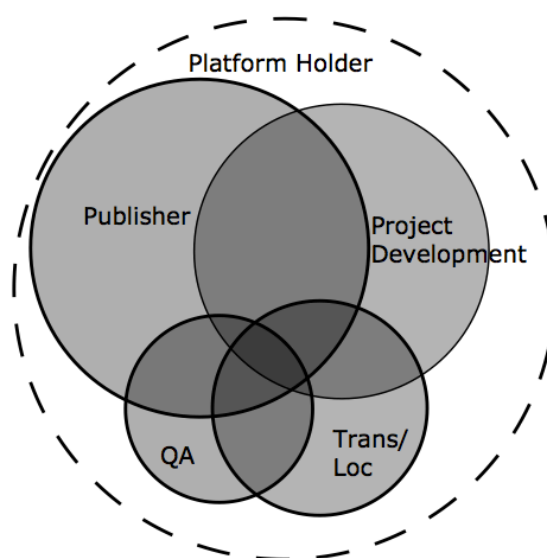


Figure 1.4: Functional entanglement of different occupational groups involved with game production. The dark area in the center is where maximum collaboration occurs. Figure by author.

²⁴ A prototype is an initial version of the game that feature initial elements of the game. Prototypes are often used to seek funding or publishing deals. An alpha build is an early version of the game that consists of many elements, but not usually the entire game. Alpha builds are more complete than prototypes, but still quite unpolished. As Chandler notes in Figure 1.3, “Glitz Features” are included in the drive from alpha to beta builds. A beta build is the entire game, but in a state that requires quality assurance to polish the game for final release. A gold master is the final version of a game that is then sent out for rating approval and eventually distribution.

As a result of this contemporary form of game development, the above map of separate groups (Figure 1.1) that work in a line to create a game (Figure 1.2) is best represented by a more complex venn diagram (Figure 1.4). In this diagram there is still linearity, but it is less prominent than the cyclicity. A project will be created by bouncing back and forth (or circling) between the various occupational groups.²⁵

Similar to Chandler's cyclical representation of game production, localization practices of the 2010s include functionally entangled groups where game authorship is distributed and cyclical. While I will discuss the intricacies of game localization history in the next chapter, briefly, localization's position within the game production process has shifted over the past three and a half decades. In the 1980s and 1990s, localization existed as a subsection of distribution, where it was enacted by the publisher or an external translation agency after the game was completed and distributed in a primary national market (Figure 1.2). However, since the 2000s, localization has become one part of the general distributed production of the original game. Certainly, some games maintain the historical, linear process (Figure 1.2) of original game and derivative translation, but even these games integrate localization processes earlier in the production cycle than previously (during the beta cycle as opposed to gold master), and the processes are enacted by specialists distributed in each of the five groups.

²⁵ The platform holder is an odd-group-out as an insubstantial circle around the whole process. The project holder is represented in this way because it only directly acts on any project when the publisher attempts to finalize the project, but it exists as a bogeyman within workers' minds during the entire production process. Will the platform holder be okay with X element? During the last project the platform holder had an issue with X, so we should avoid that this time?

It is the cyclical nature of game production (represented by Chandler in Figure 1.3), where different occupational groups work in tandem or in sequence to iteratively create a single game, which both enables and necessitates game localization being a distributed practice. In the following section I will more extensively describe the five occupational groups, paying particular attention to where they intersect with localization practices.

Developer: Project Development

Broadly contained within the occupational group of project development – alternately referred to by industry workers as “the developer” – are all of the writers, programmers, designers, and artists who digitally create the millions of different assets that combine to form a single game. Writers work on the script and dialogue; level designers build the worlds in which the game takes place; artificial intelligence programmers determine non-player character actions and responses; programmers code the core engine within which the game runs; 3D modeling artists create the characters and their surfaces; motion capture specialists work with humans in special motion capture suits in order to manipulate 3D characters so that they move in believable ways; sound designers create both the sound effects and background soundtrack within the game; voice actors record the game script as dialogue; and dozens of other specialists do their part to create textual, audio, graphical, and ludic assets that that combine to help form a believable, immersive and pleasurable world/story/game.

This contemporary distribution of tasks and specialists is not authorship in the modern sense where one heroic individual thinks up, produces, and is responsible for a

text (Barthes 1977; Foucault 2003). Rather, game development is a distributed act of collaboration among many different people. Complicated, blockbuster games – colloquially called AAA [triple A] titles – are increasingly common in the 2010s. These complex games require not one, but multiple large development teams with hundreds of specialists, each working on different sections of the game. *Assassin's Creed III* (2012), for example, was officially developed by Ubisoft Montreal, but Ubisoft's other studios around the world assisted with the completion of the project (Kieken et al. 2013). While Ubisoft utilized its own distributed studios, equally common is the practice of outsourcing development of certain parts of a game to external developers. For example, the development of certain segments of *Deus Ex: The Human Revolution* (2011) was outsourced to separate, external developers, but the outsourcing of labor was then hidden from the view of players (Cheong 2011).²⁶

While development companies employ multiple authors to create the complex games of the 2010s, it is important to understand that even if a game is developed by a single person it is still a collaboration. Older games like Gregory Yob's *Hunt the Wumpus* (1972) and smaller, independent and art games of the early 21st century like Jason Rohrer's *Passage* (2008) are both examples with only one visible author. However, even these games necessarily work on top of hardware, the software used to create the game, and through many other layers of scaffolding. Games, as software, are “inherently multi-authorial” (Riggill and Mcallister 2013: 141), as they work on top of and through

²⁶ The outsourcing of labor within the white collar field of game development is both new and interesting, particularly due to the fact that the outsourcing is then hidden from record and protested when discovered.

mechanical, technological and cultural affordances that influence game production.

Within this project, I am particularly interested in exploring how localization specialists in the various occupational groups are critical to the game creation process.

Some developers, particularly those creating their first game, ignore localization (Matz 2012), instead focusing on their game as a local, monolingual production. When localization goes unplanned, the eventual process is inefficient; it takes translators more time, and it can even be impossible depending on how the developers have created the assets and coded the game. The rising cost of development and the promise of up to 50% of the game's revenue coming from distribution in other language-locales (Edwards 2014), are both encouragement for most developers to aid localization processes in two major ways: programming to facilitate the later adaptation of the game's code, and directly making changes in preparation for the localizations

Developers, as an occupational group, intersect with and aid localization primarily by coding a general "product so that it can handle multiple languages and cultural conventions without the need for re-design" (LISA quoted in Esselink 2000: 25). Referred to as "*internationalization*," these proactive coding practices require more work by the developer, but greatly aid with localization, saving time and money for larger projects. Coding conventions that developers might follow include avoiding culturally specific words, acronyms, and ideas; allowing for changing date formats and other regionally standardized elements; programming for adjustable text boxes to facilitate longer languages; avoiding directly putting text onto images; and facilitating an exportable game script so that it can be translated.

Each of these initial internationalization practices makes implementing localization alterations significantly easier. Without adjustable text boxes a translator must work hard to fit longer languages into small boxes. Translating from Japanese and other character-based languages makes this particularly difficult as compound words of a small number of *kanji* like 応援団 [*ouendan*] can expand to compound words and multi-word phrases like ‘cheer leading squad’ in English. Without coding for adjustable text boxes the five character word ‘cheer,’ might be the best a translator could do; with proper internationalization the text box adjusts to accommodate ‘cheerleading squad.’ Furthermore, most translators do not have the specialist skills necessary to re-draw an in-game graphic with writing on it – a diegetic signpost, for example. If the developer has coded the writing on the sign as a separate layer, however, the translator can quickly translate the word with few problems.

Publisher: Publishing, Marketing, Distribution

Publishers like Activision Blizzard, Capcom, Electronic Arts, Konami, Koei Tecmo, and Ubisoft are larger parent companies that provide funds to developers, distribute games (physically or digitally), create the marketing push to help advertise and sell games, and direct localization by determining what type of localization should be conducted (if any). Their size varies, but publishers are by far the largest of the occupational groups, with thousands of employees conceiving, marketing, and distributing dozens of simultaneous projects. Within a particular project, however, the

number of individuals working from inside the publisher occupational group might be less than the number working on the project from the other occupational groups.

The publisher and developer occupational groups are entangled in one of three relationships: internal, affiliated, or external. First, some studios like Nintendo's Entertainment Analysis and Development division, Square Enix's Product Development Division 1, and Ubisoft's Ubisoft Montreal development studio are directly linked to the publisher as integrated, internal divisions of the overarching publisher. Second are subsidiary development studios owned and closely linked to singular publishers, but corporately external. Third are independent development studios that seek funding from different publishers as opportunity provides. One example, Cavia (discussed in depth in chapter 5), is a development studio that worked with different publishers including Capcom, Square Enix, Sega of America, Konami, Atari, Bandai, and others. In all cases, as the economic backer, the publisher holds a large amount of authorial, decision-making power, even if people working within the publisher never directly code a single asset of the game.²⁷ In some instances games are conceived when a publisher hires a particular internally affiliated or external developer to create a project. In other instances the game begins in the minds of specialists within an independent developer; the developer then makes a deal with a publisher to provide for the practical and economic means of distribution on a particular platform.

²⁷ Kickstarter and other alternate funding structures might be breaking with the hold publishing has over the game production cycle, but these successes so far remain on handheld and desktop systems, not on the more expensive consoles that remain dominated by larger publishing companies.

In addition to the relationship with the developer, the publisher is important for localization due to the power of its market researchers. These specialist researchers try to maximize a game's return on investment by targeting the game toward what they see as an appropriate and lucrative audience. While the developer might imagine a game for one audience (35-year-old housewives), the marketers might re-direct production so that the game is aimed at a different idealized audience (17-year-old male high school students). Additionally, as part of publishing and distribution, marketers are in charge of creating promotional materials targeted at the idealized audience. Thus, marketing includes pre-production market research that informs development (including translation/localization) by encouraging particular game genres, art styles, or gameplay options; marketing also includes post-production promotional strategies that increase sales in particular regional markets. Of course, these are not necessarily separated pre/post-development, as promotions can lead to in-game materials. For example, Sony Computer Entertainment Japan, Insomniac, and CoroCoro Comic teamed up to create a marketing campaign and in-game CoroCoro Comic themed weapon skin for Insomniac's game *Ratchet and Clank* (2002). In this instance, the publisher (Sony) worked with outside promotional material during game development and then had the publisher's affiliated, but not internal, American development studio (Insomniac) add a re-skinable weapon during the development of the game (Hasegawa 2012). Many games of the 2010s include promotional deals with individual distribution companies so that players who buy the game through the online site obtain an additional downloadable element within the game. For example, the American localization of *Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch* (2013)

included a promotional deal with Amazon.com where players who bought the game through the online site were emailed a special Griffin character code in order to obtain an additional character unavailable to other players. Promotional marketing that requires interaction between marketing, development team, and external advertising location is a common element of general game sales, but it is increasingly becoming an important part of localization in order to maximize profits in target territories.

Finally, it is localization producers and market researchers within the publisher who decide whether (or not) to localize a title, and how much investment is necessary. The publisher occupational group might localize a game for a number of reasons including the business oriented desire to localize a certain number of games in a fiscal year, the request of an individual localization producer that wants to tackle a particular game, and even a contract stipulating all games with a certain developer must be localized. The amount of money a publisher decides to spend on localization leads to a number of different degrees of localization types. If market researchers predict a game will not sell well in a particular market, the publisher might decide on a cheaper, partial localization with an external agency that is given the bare minimum of context and a quick deadline. If the title is expected to sell well, the publisher might supply funds for a more expensive, full localization that alters text, sounds and graphics, by bringing on translators (in-house or external) in order for them to work with the development team and create a game that is not simply translated, but created for multiple languages. Price is a major differentiation between partial and full localizations, as hiring an agency (with freelance translators) to translate the text can be an inexpensive endeavor, but getting a

localization studio (either internal or external) to work with the game extensively is a much more expensive prospect. With both partial and full localizations the translation can be conducted after Chandler's production cycle (Figure 1.3) has circled through several iterations and all that remains is the inclusion of glitz features; localizing at this late stage results in different linguistic versions that are released months apart. However, partial and full localizations can also be performed during the earlier production cycles so that the localizations are released simultaneously around the world.

Participant specialists within the localization field referred to their work and job as a 'service' provided to their client: the paying customer: the publisher. The influence of market logics on game production and market research on decisions throughout the entire production cycle particularly encourage such a client/service relationship. As a former producer at Sony explained, almost every major decision is made with the input of market researchers attempting to figure out what will sell best, not simply what happens to be any single artist's vision.

Despite the client/service provider relationship with power often residing on the publisher side of the project, producers and marketers are no more of a locus of authorial control than specialists within developer occupational group. While the game producer – bureaucratically located within the publisher occupational group – might have the final word, individual practices do not necessarily occur according to the producer's choice, or even within the producer's understanding. For example, one translator informed me that what enabled him to change '*arigato*' [thank you] into "I love you," a particularly significant dialogue alteration, was the large degree of trust that he had built up with the

producer during the course of creating and localizing the game (Smith 2001, 2012). The producer did not understand English enough to agree with the change on a linguistic level, and market research influence was non-existent, as the decision was made in private. The loosely controlled, distributed authorship within game production is facilitated not only by market research and economics, but the relationships of trust between individual specialists located in the different occupational groups.

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance consists of both play testing to discover bugs in the game code and linguistic testing to find issues with the written script. Prior to the 2010s, this involved a group of people playing through the completed game, either an alpha or beta release in order to work out bugs before the game was shipped. In the 2010s, however, play testers receive and play small sections of the game that have been partially completed. As such, testing of level 4 might happen before level 1 and the play tester might never go through the entire game from start to finish. Accompanying the shift from polishing a nearly finalized product to working on an unfinished game involves a corresponding shift from finding bugs to providing general feedback about aesthetic elements. Play testing most often occurs in the game's originally programmed language (most often Japanese or English) and includes linguistic testing and aesthetic and ludic polishing. Localized versions receive secondary rounds of linguistic testing, but only when funds are provided by the publisher. Whether secondary linguistic testing is granted as much authority as primary gameplay testing depends on how much the publisher

wishes to spend, and how well market researchers expect the game to sell in the foreign region.

In terms of company affiliation, quality assurance is generally the responsibility of the publisher where, like marketing and translation, more testing will happen if the return on investment is likely. Larger publishers generally have an internal quality assurance division that handles game testing: having in-house product testers keeps risk of an information leak to a minimum. However, publishers also rely on the services of external testing agencies, particularly for testing different language versions. For linguistic testing the publisher has all of the requisite linguistic testers on staff, hires them and flies them all to a convenient place, or employs a third-party testing company that either has all of the requisite linguistic testers on staff or can hire them to their own secure location.

While quality assurance seems to have little to do with translation, testing can act as a form of editing for the localization. One former play tester told me that he was able to make significant changes on a major publisher/developer's game while testing the game's English language localization. This is particularly important when one considers localization as translation into the generic desires of the local audience, as the tester can have the power to provoke significant changes that distance the game from its original cultural contexts and meanings for the sake of what players in the new locale are believed to find more fun. Thus, play testing influences both the general game production and the production of localized versions. This is yet another element of distributed game creation.

Platform Holder

“Platform holders” is the somewhat distant term often used by those working within the game localization industry to describe the three major console makers (Sony, Nintendo, and Microsoft) who directly and indirectly influence the game production process.²⁸ The platform mechanically and technically influences the game (Montfort and Bogost 2009); I propose that the platform holder's particular mores as a company can also affect game production and localization.²⁹ Nintendo regulates the content of its platforms intensely, and has done so since the Nintendo Entertainment System of the 1980s. Nintendo requires that games developed for its platforms avoid adult content such as cursing, nudity and sex (Schwartz and Schwartz 1994: 23-5). Sony and Microsoft do not police their platforms for content to quite the same extent as Nintendo, however, they require signature attributes in their games. For example, the Dutch translation of the English word ‘button’ is different for the Sony and Microsoft platforms. While Microsoft uses the term *knop*, Sony differentiates its platform by requiring the alternate term, *toets*.³⁰ Necessitating a different word seems like a negligible demand, and for most players it probably goes unnoticed. However, product differentiation through translation has implications for both brand differentiation and standardization. For translators, the

²⁸ Other companies (Facebook, Valve, Apple and Google) are increasingly important, but will not be the focus of this chapter due to a lack of data.

²⁹ In arguing for the importance of the platform, Montfort and Bogost (2009) propose that video games are best understood through a metaphor of layers where each layer influences the layers above it: the most important, platform, is on the bottom, above it in successive layer are code, form/function, interface and reception/operation. Thus, the processor type, influences the code language, which influences video display method, which influences controller shape and button scheme, which influences the game’s reception and operation. All the layers are then surrounded by a slightly amorphous “culture and context.” What I point out here as “company mores” might be considered a part of the surrounding “culture and context.”

³⁰ Interview with anonymous translator, September 20, 2011.

creation of a standardized platform glossary is important, as they must switch between projects on the various platforms. Different translator mindsets are required, and are produced, by the particular platform-holder ethos embedded in the platform in use. In both examples noted here, the platform holder's company policies – not just the platform's mechanical and technical specifications – have a real influence on game production and localization practice and culture.

The influence of the platform holder can be more direct than these examples suggest. One translator informed me about a proposal he made to publicize the game localization process by live streaming himself and an editor linguistically testing the game. Many individuals from the developer and publisher groups voiced support of the translator's idea, suggesting that this type of effort would provide good publicity and that it was a good thing to open up the overly secretive production process to the public. However, the platform holder refused to acquiesce to this attempt to make public the editing process. The game had not yet been approved by the company, so the platform holder insisted on maintaining secrecy over what it saw as a risky endeavor.

Platform holders are the last group to approve or disapprove the final distribution of any game during the gold master review process. Thus, they have significant influence over the game's final form even if they may not often take direct action during the bulk of the creation process. Interestingly, there appears to be a kind of anticipation of the platform holder's possible concerns throughout the production process. Publishers, developers, and even translators anticipate what will happen in the final review throughout the entire production process, making their assumptions about the platform

holders' desires and concerns a powerful force in creative choices the whole way through. Developers will hold back non-standard features, publishers will self-censor, and even translators will choose to make an offensive curse inoffensive out of the fear that the platform holder will object.

Translation and Localization

By using the term localization, game industry workers distance their processes from linguistic translation. For them, the term localization emphasizes how the movement of games between world languages and regions can include linguistic alteration, audio and graphical manipulation, censorship, and even the addition or subtraction of gameplay elements. Game localization is an expansive form of multimodal translation as a general practice. However, the work conducted by dedicated translators and localization specialists within this last occupational group is primarily the personal manipulation of words, and secondarily the recommendation of changes to other semiotic registers.

Early game translation from the 1970s to early 2000s tended to mirror standard literary translation practices. An individual worker was responsible for changing the game's textual assets – names, dialogue, and text-based user interface – from one language into another. A second person then inserted the altered words back into the game's code, which could then be sold as a new, translated version. This translation work in the 1980s was often done by the person within the company who happened to be most skilled in the target-language. Only rarely was this person a specialist in translation

(Hasegawa 2009; Sheff 1994). By the early 1990s companies began to hire workers specifically to translate games, even if these young university graduates were trained in computer science and had no formal training in translation. The basic process, however, did not change. For example, in 1993 Ted Woolsey, a translator working in the US office of developer/publisher Squaresoft, was faxed Japanese text from the Japan-based office, which he translated into English. Woolsey then faxed his translations back to Japan where somebody inserted the changed dialogue back into the game files. When the Tokyo office had problems implementing his translations – a common occurrence given the incredible restrictions on both byte size of words and screen size of words with games of the early 1990s – the office faxed back Woolsey back with the requirement that he shorten or change particular words, phrases, and/or the entire game's word count. Woolsey revised his translations to make them fit back into the game; when they finally fit, the translation was considered done (Whiting and Woolsey 2012). Veteran game translator Alexander O. Smith paints an even bleaker picture of the restrictions delimiting his first experiences translating games around 1997:

I started with no access whatsoever, with a few other people at the office in the US using gamesharks to try to hack [the] game because [we] weren't given debugs, [we] weren't given scripts, [we] weren't given anything, and [we] were translating off of the screen. (Smith 2012)

The historical version of game translation practice that Woolsey and Smith each describe was a highly restricted, post-production process delinked from the four occupational groups described earlier. Occurring outside the time of game development and programming proper, as if it were merely derivative, translation did not count as

important labor in industry terms and had little claim toward being an integrated or authorial practice.³¹

Rather than staying with this historical phase of game translation practice, this chapter focuses on the processes initiated in the 2000s and extensively used in the 2010s in which translation was linked directly into the production cycle and the previously introduced four occupational groups as a broader practice of localization. At this point, translation (rebranded as localization) began to count to the industry as a real and important part of the process of game-making practice, and was no longer seen as merely incidental to making over a game for a new linguistic audience. The work of localization becomes recognized as a form of practice in the industry, and as a meaningful (if not strictly or self-consciously creative) aspect of game production.

To facilitate the cooperation between the different occupational groups (the movement from Figure 1.2 to Figure 1.4), multiple skill-varied localization specialists are now situated in each of the groups. These various localization specialists must now work together across the groups to produce multiple localized versions of games. To show how this translation and localization process is one of distributed collaboration, I will describe the various interactions that occurred while localizing Square Enix's 2010 game *Nier*. Far beyond the single translator visible in games of the 1980s, *Nier*'s complicated localization process involved two dozen individuals: twelve people involved with localization at Square Enix, seven people from the localization agency 8-4 Ltd, a French

³¹ The contextless, restrictive form of translation described by Smith (2012) still happens, particularly with languages that have smaller markets and when freelance translators are employed. This differentiation is important when considering power dynamics between languages and nations.

translator, a German translator, two English casting agents, and the English voice director. Beyond the two dozen localization specialists listed above and in the credits are the English voice actors and actresses, and the programmers at Cavia that followed through with the suggested coding alterations. *Nier* was a highly collaborative localization: in terms of Figure 1.4's venn diagram, the two dozen specialists are primarily situated within the dark, central area where publisher, developer, quality assurance and what is now referred to as localization overlap.

The Japanese to English localization included six people working within the publisher, Square-Enix: the Localization General Manager who worked as a bureaucratic head, the quality assurance director located in the United States who directed quality assurance, two Translation Supervisors, and two team members tasked with coordinating with the external localization specialists (Kennedy 2013). Six additional people were located within Square Enix's European branch office, where turned the English version was subsequently localized into French and German. For *Nier*'s localization, the internal localization team (officially employees of the publisher, Square Enix) primarily coordinated between project development, and the external quality assurance and localization groups. However, this team also spearheaded certain technical, programming-intensive switches. For example, the translation supervisor facilitated a large user interface switch in the weapon upgrade system from a prefix/suffix word combination system into a dual prefix system in order to facilitate linguistically gendered European languages and an easier translation (See Figure 1.9).

Seven specialists within the external localization company 8-4 Ltd worked with the internal team to translate the game. Four core members – a project manager, lead-translator, editor, and checker – and three additional support members who were brought on when extra hands were needed (Ricciardi 2013).³²

The project manager, or coordinator, interfaced with the internal localization coordinators at the publishing agency (in this case, Square Enix) and the voice director and voice casting agents at the voiceover company (Tea For Two). He obtained materials from the developer (Cavia) through the localization coordinators at the producer/distributor (Square Enix), and sent the script and available contextual information — this included design documents and character summaries — to the lead translator. The lead translator linguistically altered the Japanese textual strings – dialogue, interface, instructions, and other textual assets – into English textual strings (see: Table 1.1). In contrast to the 1990s practices, 8-4 Ltd’s process involves multiple people so that each person can focus on one particular part of the localization process. This specialization means that 8-4 Ltd’s lead translators can focus on translating both the literal meaning and the core tone of the original Japanese, but it gives them a pass on worrying about writing stunningly well-written English sentences. Many of the lines translated are clunky, and as one project manager notes, the final text “might not even share a word with what the

³² The three support members listed in the credits did small amounts of translation not handled by the lead translator, and helped with additional coordination between the various companies.

original translator did” (MacDonald 2013).³³ The translator’s task is to produce a first draft that is then polished by multiple other individuals.

When the translator finished with ‘roughly’ translating the words and sense of the original Japanese, he sent the files back to the project manager at 8-4 Ltd who then sent the translated text to the editor and the checker. The editor was responsible for altering the English translation into something more natural to an English native player. In contrast, the checker was responsible for editing the translation in order to catch errors and contradictions between the Japanese and English localizations that might have been creating during the localization process. While the order of who gets the translation first depends on scheduling, 8-4 Ltd’s preferred order is editor and then checker. This gives the editor freedom to alter the text as he or she deems necessary to create a natural-sounding, fluid translation; it also means the checker can come in after and make sure that the editor did not actually change the core meaning. If the checker gets the translation first there is a greater chance that the editor’s work will change the core meaning of the text, losing accuracy for the sake of a natural-sounding text. For 8-4 Ltd, the checker and the editor work as a check and balance mechanism to increase playability, but also maintain fidelity to the original vision of the game. This check and balance system, where the translators are given the ability to extensively alter the game’s text, is quite different from game translation in the early 1990s, where technical restrictions like word count and screen size delimited what could happen with the

³³ It is important to understand that this project manager’s comment highlights the separation of jobs, not a lack of commitment to good translation. Good game translation must convey a similar feeling, but it need not translate word-for-word (see: Mangiron and O’Hagan 2006).

translation. Finally, the translation that has been both edited and checked comes back to the project manager who was responsible for going over the text a final time before sending it back to localization specialists working within Square-Enix.

Facilitated by increased storage capacity of CDs and DVDs, spoken dialogue has increasingly been commonplace in games since the 2000s, and this dialogue can be re-dubbed for localized versions. Once translated, *Nier*'s spoken dialogue was given to the independent voice over director who worked with actors hired by Cup of Tea Productions in order to record the dialogue in English. In order to ensure both accurate translation and lip-syncing the 8-4 Ltd coordinator often sat in on the voice recording sessions and altered translated dialogue on the fly where necessary in order to match lip-syncing and other timing issues (Ricciardi 2013).

Finally, when both the translated English script and the re-dubbed English dialogue were finished at the external localization agencies, 8-4 Ltd and Cup of Tea Productions, the publisher began the pivot translation from English into German and French. The English linguistic assets were shipped to the German and French translators who were responsible for fully translating the English written text and subtitling the English spoken dialogue.³⁴

While translation of linguistic assets is still outsourced to external individuals separated from the project (situated at the peripheral, non overlapping light area of Figure 1.4's venn diagram), most work to localize a game is now integrated into production

³⁴ With such a processual translation that moves from Japanese to English to FIGS (French, Italian, German and Spanish) there is risk that meaning will be lost during one of the steps, or the decisions to alter things in the secondary English will create a gap between the initial Japanese and tertiary FIGS languages. As such, good coordination between the different groups handling the localization is a necessity.

(located in the central, overlapping darker region of the venn diagram). An example of the difference would be that the French and German translators of Nier are located in the periphery, largely reacting to the changes made by the English and Japanese localization specialists; in contrast, the specialists at 8-4 Ltd and Cup of Tea, even if they are freelancers, is located in the central area of the venn diagram as they are working with the specialists within Square Enix. Localization as a distributed practice is not one of original work and derivative translation, but of collaborative creation.

Multimodal Practices: Assets and Processes

In his seminal work on translation classification, Roman Jakobson (1966) proposes that words are translatable in three ways: intralingually, interlingually, and intersemiotically. According to Jakobson, intralingual translation is rewording within a language, interlingual translation – also called translation proper – is translating one language into another, and intersemiotic translation is the transmutation from verbal to non verbal signs (Jakobson 1987: 429). Most translation discourse, and almost all translation training, focuses on Jakobson’s second type, interlingual translation, where a text in a source-language is translated into a target-language. For game localization, however, intersemiotic translation (Jakobson’s third system) is also important.

As stated earlier in this chapter, game localizers focus on assets, not on words, or Jakobson’s “verbal signs,” as the semiotic unit in need of translation. While some freelance game translators might get paid by the word, game localization as a broader practice must also deal with non-verbal assets like the graphical user interface, diegetic

sounds, background music and mini-games. The following sections detail both the multimodal semiotic registers needing to be changed – paratext, written text, spoken dialogue, graphics, and gameplay – and the collaboration required to enact these localization changes.

Paratextual Manipulation: Paraphernalia, Marketing, Box and Docs

The first layer to be localized includes the instruction manuals, boxes, advertisements and other paratexts necessary to legally and practically sell the commodity in its new local market.³⁵ Documentation like manuals and boxes are translated by either external or internally located translators who go through a pdf document, linguistically altering each word and paragraph into the target locale. Additionally, imagery and layout within the manual can be changed to highlight different elements of the game. For example, the 33 page manual for the Japanese version of *Ni No Kuni* (2011) includes five pages introducing the voice cast. Each page features one to three individual voice actors with a short bio, a small image of the character they voice within the game, and a color headshot. With only 24 pages, half of which are in English

³⁵ In defining paratexts, Gerard Genette writes: “[a] text is rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations. And although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption” (1997: 1).

Depending on what the “text” is within a game, there are many ways to understand the game's paratexts. For example, from a strictly ludological perspective essence of a game – its pure text – is the gameplay, and every additional element, from story and background music to documentation and advertising, would be understood as a paratext. In following my general desire to side-step the ontology debate within game studies, in this section I refer to the non-digital elements of video games as paratexts. By this I mean the parts that are not included within the disk or downloaded software as these are the parts that “ensure the [game's] presence in the world, its ‘reception’ and consumption.” There are certain critiques to that can be made toward this definition (digital documentation; developer audio tracks in the game), but for here the definition should suffice.

and half of which are in French (to enable sales in both Canada and the United States), the North American localization's manual is incredibly sparse. As the localized manual is 12 pages shorter but does double language duty, it features the basic information necessary to install and play the game, but does not feature the story, the characters, or either the French or English voice actors. The extensive bios were removed by localization.³⁶

A second form of paratextual manipulation is conducted by marketers within the publisher who can direct the game's tone and target audience in each locale by localizing the box and advertisements to depict completely different imagery and wording. For example, the box cover for the Japanese localization of *Shadows of the Damned* (2011) depicts the protagonist holding a damsel in distress (right side of Figure 3.1), this cover fits with the more sexualized tone of the back of the box that calls the game a “sexy adventure” (Figure 3.2B), and is highlighted by the game disc (Figure 3.6) and *Playbox* paratext (Figures 3.3 and 3.4), both of which depict the same damsel in distress as a Playboy-esque model. In contrast, the box cover for the North American localization (left side of Figure 3.1) focuses on the game's road trip and buddy film themes, which are represented on the cover by the protagonist and his talking gun, and on the back by the phrase “One Hell of a Trip” (Figure 3.2A). While both localizations include the scantily

³⁶ There is an interesting, but unexplored tie here involving Gee's claim that gamers “don't read things like manuals but just start playing game, often looking at the manual or other guides later” (2007b: 98). For Gee, manuals contain too much information to be useful for a player starting out; what players (as learners) need is “on demand” or “just-in-time” information (2007b: 142). *Ni No Kuni's* Japanese and English manuals provide an interesting complication to Gee's claims that indicate a possible difference between Japanese and North American norms of gaming experience. While the North American manual embraces Gee's claim to the extent that it only includes information about installing the game, pushing all ‘just-in-time’ information into the game space, the Japanese version maintains the manual as a paratextual source of information, willing the player to seek out information outside of the game itself.

clad damsel in distress and talking gun within the game, the different advertising strategies decided upon by the publisher led to differently localized paratextual elements.

Written Text: Narrative, Dialogue, User Interface

While paratextual translation is important for publishers wishing to sell the title in a foreign marketplace, linguistic translation of the game's text from one regional language to another is the cornerstone of making a game playable within the target market. Written text is everywhere in games of the 2010s. It is on the starting screen when you first play the game, in the instructions and display menus, and in the dialogue by both player characters and non player characters within the game's diegesis. However, translation here is not as simple as a single translator sitting in front of a word processor document translating sentence by sentence, getting paid by either the word or page (as might happen with a book or essay translation). Rather, the game's text is translated through an extensive process that connects the publisher, the development team, the localization team, translators and even play testers.

First, a member of the publisher or development team extracts the written text from the game code either manually, or more commonly through the utilization of a proprietary translation software.³⁷ Who does this depends on which occupational group is handling the project and what the specialist's job title happens to be. This might be a localization manager, a localization director, or simply the person tasked with the job.

³⁷ Popular proprietary translation software include SDL Trados, MemoQ, XLOC, LocalizeDirect, Square Enix's Moomle software (Taniyama and Shibayama 2012), and the in-development cloud based translation tool TransCloud (Ballesteros 2012).

Having been extracted, the written text can be translated within the same proprietary application, but is more often exported as a Microsoft Excel document, which has been and continues to be the industry standard (particularly with agency and freelance work).³⁸

The localization manager coordinates with the localization group by emailing the text to be translated. How much text is sent depends on whether the project has been previously finished (post-gold localization) or is a day-by-day process where the text is being written and translated at the same time (simultaneous shipment). With post-gold localization a single, massive Excel file containing all of the dialogue can be emailed to the translator; in the case of simultaneous shipment smaller Excel files are sent and updated on a daily basis.

As seen in Table 1.1, the localization manager extracts the text and inputs it into an Excel sheet so that each textual asset is separated as a single ‘text string.’ In the sample table each row is associated with one single text string that might be the game's title, a submenu title, a message saying ‘the next day’ to move the story along, an individual character's single utterance, or any number of other types of written text. There might be a certain rhyme or reason to the order of these text strings, such as a conversation that goes from A to B to C corresponding with row 1, 2 and 3. Unfortunately, the structure might also be a collection of utterances a single non-player character says throughout the story, which would mean there is no logical connection

³⁸ It should also be noted that while XLIFF is a common file format for exchanging data according to the LocSIG Best Practices document as well as forum discussions almost every interviewee referred to Excel documents as the standard. Even if the translator herself utilizes a particular Computer Assisted Translation software like the proprietary software (XLOC, Trados, MemoQ, etc), according to most interviewee translators the data comes and goes as an Excel file.

between the rows of the file. Finally, unlike the dialogue in the example that consists of seven individual, but connected lines of spoken dialogue, the sheet might be a long list of item names and descriptions.

Table 1.1: Sample Excel sheet for multilingual translation. Table courtesy of Peter Garza, Koei Tecmo Games.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1	ID							コンテキスト・使い方・ト書き				CONTEXT
2								ja				en
3	ステージ	シーン	分岐	背景	話者	テキスト	音声	背景	ト書き	話者	演出	背景
4	STAGE	SCENE	BRANCH	SET	SPEAKER	TEXT	AUDIO	SET	DIRECTION	SPEAKER	READING	SET
5	I1	s1	1	cas001	witch	I1_s1_01_witch	I1_s1_01_witch	お城・王座の間	女王が鏡に向かってしゃべる。	女王	冷静に	Castle - Throne Room
6	I1	s1	2	cas001	mirror	I1_s1_02_mirror	I1_s1_02_mirror	お城・王座の間		鏡		Castle - Throne Room
7	I1	s1	3	cas001	witch	I1_s1_03_witch	I1_s1_03_witch	お城・王座の間		女王	激怒	Castle - Throne Room
8	I1	s2	1	hut001	sw	I1_s2_01_sw	I1_s2_01_sw	小人の家	白雪姫が小さいベッドを見る	白雪姫		Dwarves' Home
9	I1	s2	2	hut001	dwarf1	I1_s2_02_dwarf1	I1_s2_01_sw	小人の家	空いた扉でライフルを構える。	小人1	静かに	Dwarves' Home
10	I1	s2	3	hut001	dwarf2	I1_s2_03_dwarf2			画面外。無線の声。	小人2		Dwarves' Home
11	I1	s2	4	hut001	dwarf3	I1_s2_04_dwarf3			画面外。無線の声。	小人3		Dwarves' Home

	M	N	O	P	Q
1				JAPANESE	CHINESE (TRAD.)
2				ja	zh-Hant
3	ト書き	話者	演出	内容	内容
4	DIRECTION	SPEAKER	READING	MESSAGE	MESSAGE
5		Queen	cold	鏡よ鏡、世界で一番美しいのは誰	
6		Mirror		白雪姫が世界で一番美しいです。	
7		Queen	furious	なんだと？！	
8	Snow White looks at the tiny beds	Snow White		あら！小さいベッドだね。	
9	A dwarf appears at the open door and readies his rifle.	Dwarf1	whisper	侵入者発見。ソープ、入口に。ゴースト、裏の出口を守れ。侵入者が出たら、撃て。	
10	Offscreen. Voice through comm.	Dwarf2		了解。	
11	Offscreen. Voice through comm.	Dwarf3		了解。移動中。	

	R	S	T	U	V	W
1	ENGLISH (US)	FRENCH (FRANCE)	GERMAN	ITALIAN	SPANISH (SPAIN)	IMAGE
2	en-US	fr-FR	de	it	es-ES	
3	内容	内容	内容	内容	内容	絵コンテ・ファイル名
4	MESSAGE	MESSAGE	MESSAGE	MESSAGE	MESSAGE	STORYBOARD/FILENAME
5	Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all.					I1_s1_cut01
6	Snow White is the fairest of them all.					I1_s1_cut02
7	Say what?!					I1_s1_cut03
8	Whoa! These beds are tiny!					I1_s2_cut01
9	Intruder found. Grumpy, up here with me at the entrance. Dopey, cover the rear exit. If the intruder comes out, shoot to kill.					I1_s2_cut02
10	Roger.					I1_s2_cut02
11	Roger. We are oscar mike.					I1_s2_cut02

	X	Y	Z	AA	AB	AC	AD	AE	AF	AG	AH	AI	AJ	AK	AL	AM	AN	AO
1	TEXTURE		POSITION		LIMIT		TIME		STATUS		INFO							
2																		
3	スプライト?	ファイル名	X	Y	横	縦	文字制限: 日	文字制限: 英	開始	終了	尺	仕様・未使用	コメント					
4	SPRITE?	FILENAME	X	Y	WIDTH	HEIGHT	FULL-WIDTH	ALPHABET	START	END	DURATION	USED/CUT	COMMENT					
5	no		100	200	1080	150			00:00.0	00:05.0								
6	no		100	200	1080	150			00:05.0	00:10.0								
7	no		100	200	1080	150			00:10.0	00:10.8								
8	no		100	200	1080	150			00:00.0	00:05.0								
9	no		100	200	1080	150			00:00.0	00:05.0								
10	no		100	200	1080	150			00:05.0	00:06.0								
11	no		100	200	1080	150			00:05.0	00:06.0								

The issue of context is always a problem when translators approach games – complex, multimodal texts – through the linear and limited form of an Excel spreadsheet. In this example, additional, color-coded columns are supplied by the project manager (within the developer group) to provide the translator (within the localization group) much needed context when translating individual text strings. The line ID (the first set of columns) is separated into a number of readable contextualizations including stage, scene and actual line ID that the application will draw on (columns F and G). The next two sections provide extensive Japanese and English contextualization including who is speaking (columns J and N), their voice or motivation (columns K and O), and extra directions (columns I and M). The third section is for each translation of the line, including Japanese, Chinese, English, French, German, Italian and Spanish (Columns P through V). Finally, columns W through AJ provide additional technical information including how long the line can be (columns AF to AH) and any additional comments (column AJ). While the above example is a generous example in that extensive contextual information is included, freelance translators often receive completely contextless Excel files that only list the line ID, the original line that needs to be translated, and a blank column to write a translation (columns F, P and R in Table 1.1). In such contextless situations, translators neither get an indication of who is speaking nor a logical flow of any sort.

When a project manager within the localization occupational group receives the script from a publisher or developer, she will either send it along to a single translator, or separate it into manageable chunks and send it to multiple translators. The option

between a single or multiple translators depends both on the size of the project (number of lines) and the required deadline. For localization studios with dedicated translators the project manager simply forwards the Excel file to another person in the office. When working with freelancers, however, the project manager must remove the game's identifying information. The possibility of leaking information is a pervasive problem within the game industry. To prevent the risk of information leak, certain publishers or localization agencies erase contextual information that would reveal what game is being created: thus, the title, character names, game genre, and other context providing information might be deleted before being sent to a freelance translator, who has to translate the text blindly knowing only the line ID and the original line in need of translation.

Upon receiving an Excel sheet of the game script the translator can begin working on the job as if it were a typical linguistic translation by translating string by string, and line by line. When given an Excel file with explanatory rows like the one in Table 1.1, the translator attempts to imagine a context for the individual text strings. However, with audio, graphical, and ludic context stripped, the translation work can be more difficult. Gendered words and homonyms cause particular trouble when there is a lack of context. For example, are the dwarves in lines 9 through 11 of Table 1.1 male or female, and does that change their words?³⁹ Another common issue for the translator is the limited amount of space on the screen available to insert a translation. While a 4 character Japanese word might fit a smaller box, the English translation will be significantly longer and may not.

³⁹ On the difficulty of translating grammatically gendered words, see: Nissen 2002.

When facing difficulties translators have several courses of action available to them. First, they may request clarification from the project manager, their immediate boss, who may or may not be able to provide the necessary clarification. If the localization project manager deems the issue unimportant they may request the translator to handle the issue to the best of his or her ability. However, if the project manager is unable to answer properly, but thinks the issue is important they will relay the question to the publisher. Again, the publisher may or may not be able to answer the question, and may or may not relay the question all the way back to the original writers on the development team. Because the chain is long and takes a significant amount of time and effort on many parties, translators learn to limit their questions to those they deem essential. Furthermore, some translators believe that if they ask too many questions of the project manager, localization producer, and writers they might reveal themselves as inept. Wary of this issue, these translators ask questions only when absolutely necessary, and stay under a self-determined maximum number of questions per day, week or project.

For many translators, particularly freelancer or agency translators, the difficulty of finding more information from the original writer means they must do the best they can and hope that either an editor or a quality assurance tester will figure out the problems eventually.⁴⁰ However, translators working internally within either a larger company (where everybody has signed the company NDA) often rely on their coworkers to help

⁴⁰ It is important to note that while the previously mentioned localization agency 8-4 Ltd builds translator, editor, and checker roles into the system, thereby making sure the final translation will be both accurate and well written, such a multi-person system is prohibitively expensive to many other localization agencies.

them through trouble spots. One translator at a localization studio called this practice of seeking help from his fellow translators getting “fresh eyes” (Figure 1.5)

Sometimes when you are really busy you can see a certain text for like ten minutes or an hour and... you can't see the woods for the trees, and so sometimes when we think, ah, I can't really find a solution you ask for fresh eyes, I call it. Somebody who has a new perspective on things perhaps... If you have any doubt, or have a problem that you can't seem to solve on your own then you just ask a colleague to have a look and see if they can come up with a solution, which kind of works well in our little islands [formation of desks in the office]. So we know each other quite well and we're working together for quite a long time, so we can give each other feedback and help each other out which is quite nice.⁴¹

Trouble spots for this translator are particularly when he gets bogged down in the details, but they are also, as noted above, when translators have questions that cannot be answered. For this translator distributed collaboration is equal to seeking “fresh eyes.”

While the practice of getting fresh eyes was regular at this translator's studio, it is important to note that fresh eyes as he describes it above is actually a best practice working within a worse situation. Two years previously, when I first was introduced to their company, two translators worked together on every project. The translator explains this shift from two to one translators noting that:

The workload became such that [two translators per project] wasn't really possible anymore, or it was possible [but] we'd have to say no to clients, which if you ask me purely from a linguistic translator point of view, I would say is not a bad thing per se, but I'm not the one managing the company and dealing with finance and stuff.⁴²

When I first encountered this studio distributed collaboration occurred when two translators worked simultaneously on a single project: a constant state of “fresh eyes.”

⁴¹ Interview with anonymous translator, September 20, 2011.

⁴² *ibid.*

For this translator the act of translation is best with more than one person, however multiple people looking at the same text is prohibitively expensive within the current industry cost structure. Thus, he does his best given those limitations and calls his fellow translators to look over his work at times of need. This translator is certainly not alone as many translators I interviewed discussed seeking help in one form or another.

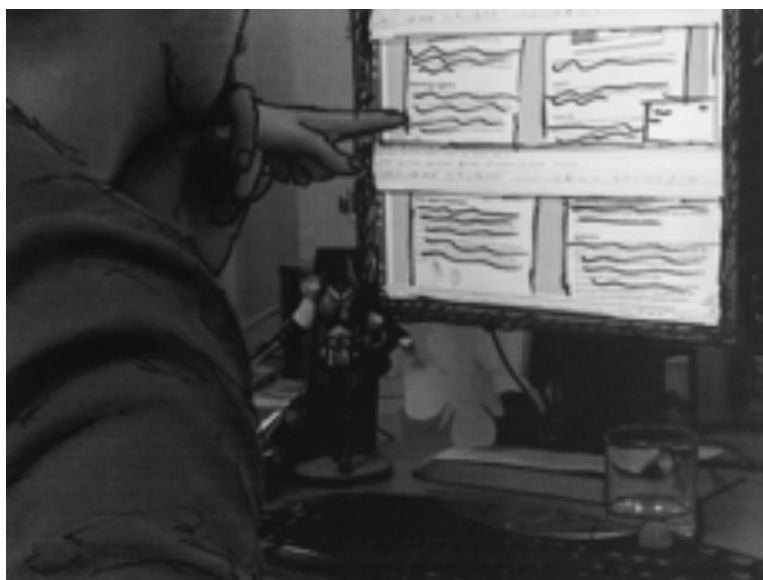


Figure 1.5: As one localization specialist translates a document, a second individual with “fresh eyes” points out a problem. Photo by author, but image has been modified to protect subject anonymity.

The practice of helping coworkers by walking between desks is limited to larger company environments, and is not available to freelancers working at home.

Unfortunately, seeking outside help usually breaks the strict NDA that the translator signed, as asking help requires revealing contextual information, which can enable outsiders to figure out that the translator was working on a particular title. While some in the industry assure me that the NDA is not that strict, nor important, I have yet to find a translator who will admit to breaking it, which indicates that even if the threat is only

implied, it seems to restrict actions, particularly of freelance translators. The translator in my previous example sought fresh eyes at particular moments when simultaneously translating with a co-worker was impossible; here restrictions push translators to find distributed collaboration through other places.

One interviewee told me that she would use Proz, an Internet forum used by translators, were she not working at a larger company. However, she then informed me that forums like that are problematic due to the presence of lurkers seeking out information about unreleased games (of which she works on many). Because of the fear of releasing information and therefore breaking her NDA she would need to hide any traceable contextual element of the thing she needed help with, which would limit how useful the forum actual could be. Explaining this all too common problem with a lack of context, an English to Italian translator told me about seeking help with a translation where the original game was Japanese but he was working with the pivot English version. The English version had added in significantly altered content in one section and he was seeking to change it to something an Italian audience could better understand. Because the NDA prevented him from explaining the details involving the project when asking for help, he could not mention the fact that the project was originally in Japanese. Instead, he had to simply indicate that the ‘original’ was an English phrase that made no sense to him, and his proposed method in Italian was something rather different. The respondents indicated that he should remain faithful to the ‘original’ English. The NDA prevented the translator from giving necessary context, resulting in the helpers being unable to understand the quandary that the source being translated was not the ‘original’ version of

the game, but an unfaithful pivot translation. For professional translators, these difficulties plague the translation process in general, and they are exacerbated within the game localization process due to the industry structure that includes NDAs that prevent a level of communication necessary to “best” translate a game. In terms of distributed cognition and what I am proposing is the multimodal and distributed collaboration of localization practices, however, these difficulties and how translators deal with them by figuring out how to creatively and responsibly collaborate are what make game localization the global industry practice that it is in the 21st century.

Upon translating the complete text, the translator sends the Excel file back to the project manager who either sends the text to an editor, or straight back to the publisher. Whether or not an editor goes over the script is dependent upon cost and amount being paid by the publisher for translation. If the return on investment is expected to be low, less money will be spent on translation, which means that the funding for an editor to check for final grammar, style and clarity will be either unavailable or minimal. One translator informed me that certain companies do not edit the translations they outsource, which caused him to be extra careful when translating and even spend extra time editing his own work. A second translator informed me that because of the lack of editing available from the agency, he employed an editor out of his own funds even though it significantly cut down his own profit from the job. However, certain companies like 8-4 Ltd have extensive editing processes. As described above, 8-4 Ltd employs a translator, an editor, and a checker for any given project. While the translator is responsible for the initial, rough translation, the editor is tasked with polishing the translator’s words to

create a natural, localized and easily read English version. In turn, the checker makes sure that the editor has not lost the sense and meaning of the Japanese text. Of course, 8-4 Ltd charges for the additional editing and checking, and one localization producer informed me that for games with a low expected return on investment he employed cheaper localization agencies that did not edit, but also charged less for their services.

Spoken Dialogue

Similar to audio-visual media like cinema and television, the third semiotic level that game localizers translate is the spoken dialogue. With the translation of spoken dialogue, the words must be rendered as a transcript, translated, and then re-dubbed into dialogue. While translators approach dialogue in much the same way as they do written text (through an Excel file), the use of polygonal characters with lips that ‘move’ complicates re-dubbing voices significantly. Like poor film dubs, in order to avoid bad lip-syncing issues game localizers struggle to adapt the text so that it accurately synchs with the lip movement of the characters on screen. This struggle goes several steps beyond simply translating word-for-word on paper.

Alexander O. Smith used a two-step process to translate the spoken dialogue for *Final Fantasy X* (2001). Initially, he translated the transcription of the Japanese dialogue, paying careful attention to use natural sounding lines – for example, he avoided more literary phrases that might be common for text, but odd to hear. Then, as with the example of *Nier* described at the beginning of this chapter, Smith focused heavily on manipulating the spoken text to fit with the game's cinematic cutscenes by sitting in on

voice re-dubbing recording sessions where he re-translating the dialogue on the fly when it either did not sound natural, or did not fit with character mouth movements (Smith 2012).

When voice translators like Smith direct voice re-dubbing in a studio the most common issue they encounter is making sure that the voice actor speaks when the character's lips move, and finishes speaking when the character's lips stop moving, exactly within the window of time that the speech is performed on the screen.⁴³ As when a text translator cuts down words to fit smaller on-screen boxes, the voice translator directs voice actors to say lines more slowly to take up more time, or to say lines more quickly to fit a smaller window of time and character lip movement provided within the cinematic.⁴⁴ If the voice actor cannot physically say the line quickly enough, then the voice director/translator can use software to manipulate the recorded line and shrink it to fit, but this technological solution can garble the line beyond recognition. One translator informed me that a common strategy is to put in a random, unrelated comment when the character's face is toward the camera and their lips are moving, but then to have them say all of the important information when their back turned toward the camera.⁴⁵ This is a common post-production strategy used in filmmaking to avoid reshooting. Another solution to the lip movement issue is to rewrite the line so that it will fit with the lip movement on screen. As such, the voice director/translator acts as a script editor,

⁴³ While this is a new topic to game studies and writings on game localization, it is a common concept within film studies and discussions about film translation (Biodrowski n.d.; Durovicová 1992).

⁴⁴ Interview with anonymous voice director and translator, September 21, 2011.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

sometimes necessarily sacrificing translational accuracy for the sake of a believable screen experience.

Smith provoked both positive and negative reactions from within industry and fan communities when he altered *Final Fantasy X*'s climactic phrase “*arigato*” [thank you] into “I love you” to this end (O’Hagan and Mangiron 2004; Smith 2001, 2012). Smith told me that he originally translated the line as “thank you,” but he feared that players would complain when the character’s lips moved out of sync with the words (Smith 2012). Because of these fears, Smith eventually came up with the idea of translating the line to “I love you,” which requires the mouth to move in roughly the same manner as “*arigato*.” Furthermore, Smith defended his choice, providing the rationale that an American audience would expect the happy ending provided by “I love you” as opposed to the more neutral and reserved “thank you” that Japanese audiences would find plausible. Changing lines to match lip movements is difficult, as it requires talented translators able to think of both the proper translation as well as similar lines that fit.

Due to the difficulties of relying on human translators to change lines to fit lip movement, some developers have begun to look toward alternate, automated processes that instead match lip movement to dialogue. For example, in *StarCraft II* Blizzard’s developers utilized FaceFX, a program that changed a polygonal character’s lip movement to match any given dialogue (Barnes 2012). Using FaceFX gave spoken dialogue translators complete freedom to have the characters say whatever was necessary, relieving some of the difficulty of translating and matching dialogue. FaceFX is a hint at tools and processes on the horizon, but it is a tool that requires specialized expertise and a

proprietary tool that costs money. As a result, the difficult task of making the dialogue fit moving lips is still more common in the mid 2010s.

Regardless of which is the dominant practice, both require collaboration between different specialists. Translating to match lip movements requires collaboration between a very astute translator, voice actors willing to try different phrases, and a technician to manipulate the speed of the recorded dialogue. FaceFX is much simpler for the translator,⁴⁶ but it first requires coders within the developer occupational group program to integrate the necessary (and expensive) third-party software. Moreover, software interventions like FaceFX require additional programmers fidget with settings to ensure that the character's diegetic face actually matches properly with the lines. According to Barnes (2012), certain languages worked out of the box for *StarCraft II*, but others required extensive tinkering before they worked properly. In all cases, the automated process was still one in which distribution of cognition was at play, and in which practice was situated across an array of human subjects engaged at different levels of production.

Graphical Alterations

Graphics are the fourth semiotic level altered through localization that I have identified. The process for altering graphics depends on the type or form of graphic in question. Graphics with changeable text, user interface changes, and character alterations

⁴⁶ It might be argued that by automating the lip-syncing process FaceFX removes the translator's authorial ability to choose how to re-interpret and replace words to fit lip movement. However, it could just as easily be argued that FaceFX gives the translator freedom to choose anything. The technology itself enables either eventuality; the localization process with any particular game could go either way.

all involve different processes and are more or less difficult for localization specialists to change.

The most common and easiest to localize are graphical assets that include some sort of linguistic text. Examples include splash screens and signs within the game's diegesis, both of which were manipulated during the localization of *Gyakuten Saiban* (2001) to *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* (2005). Larger splash screens like 大江戸戦士 トノサマン [*Oedo Senshi Tonosaman*] (Figure 1.6), diegetic signs like トノサまんじゅう [*tonosamanjyu*]⁴⁷ (Figure 1.7), and courtroom phrases that flash on the screen in comic book style like 意義あり! [*igi ari!*], were all translated and re-drawn by artists for the North American localization. *Oedo Senshi Tonosaman* was localized as Steel Samurai, *tonosamanju* both in conversation and on the sign turned into Samurai Dogs, and the courtroom phrases were translated and graphically altered into “Objection!,” “Hold it!,” and “Take That!” While some translators might have the required proficiencies in Photoshop to localize graphics by themselves, most do not. The distribution of specialized workers into both the localization and developer groups means that collaboration must happen to translate graphical assets.

⁴⁷ *Tonosamanjyu* is a portmanteau of *tonosaman* (a fictional superhero within the game world) and *manjyuu* (a warmed bun with red bean paste inside that is popular in Japan at festivals and in the winter). *Tonosaman* itself is a combination of *tonosama*, an feudal honorific for lord, and the popular superhero name ending -man.

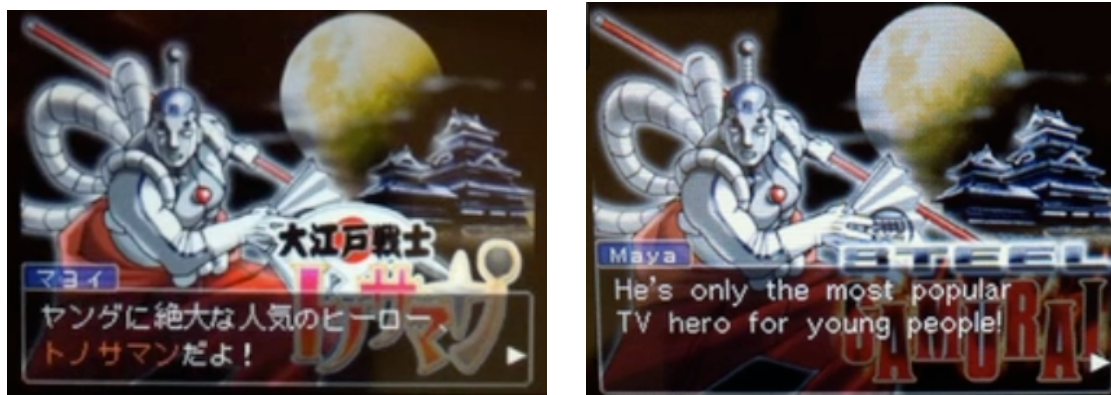


Figure 1.6: Splash-screen of Oedo Senshi Tonosaman from *Gyakuten Saiban* (left) and the localized Steel Samurai from *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* (right). Screen captures by author.



Figure 1.7: *Tonosamanju* in *Gyakuten Saiban* (left) and *samurai dog* from *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* (right). Changed words circled by author. Screen captures by author.

With *Phoenix Wright*, the alterations occurred in a four step process: first, the external translator and internal localization teams decided together whether changing the graphics was necessary; second, the head of localization located within the publisher side determined the economic feasibility of each change – some changes were too expensive (see Chapter 4); third, artists within the development team redrew the graphics; and fourth, coders within project development inserted the changed graphics back into the game. This complicated process is required for each and every graphical alteration, and as

each is a significant expenditure of both time and money graphical assets are only changed when necessary.

Altering the user interface is a second form of graphical localization. For example, the localization of Capcom's *Okami* (2006) included the modification of vertically oriented Japanese text boxes into horizontally oriented text boxes to facilitate the left to right writing style found in most European languages (Figure 1.8). Throughout the course of the game, the player obtains 13 different brush techniques that the player must draw on the screen to execute. For example, the 一閃 [*issen*], or Power Slash, technique requires the player draw a horizontal line across something within the game world. In order to remind the player what techniques are available, the game features each of them on a single ‘scroll’ in one of the menu screens.



Figure 1.8: Vertical scroll in Japanese (left) and horizontal scroll in English (right).
Screen captures from *Okami* by author.

The original Japanese features vertically ‘hanging’ scrolls with the techniques’ names written from top to bottom. In contrast, the North American localization features horizontal scrolls and left to right wording. While the words themselves were translated in the same manner and at the same time as the rest of the game’s textual assets, the

images on the scrolls were modified by artists, and the manipulation of the scrolls themselves were handled by UI programmers modifying assets within the program itself.

Usually, freelance translators and external localization companies do not have a strong enough relationship with their client to suggest the expensive and time consuming UI changes. To show this, I must return to an example described above in *Nier*, where the internal localization team within the publisher, Square Enix, suggested the more extensive, code level alterations to switch the ‘word’ upgrade system. With *Nier*, the expense of simultaneously localizing into English, French and German limited the possible UI changes.

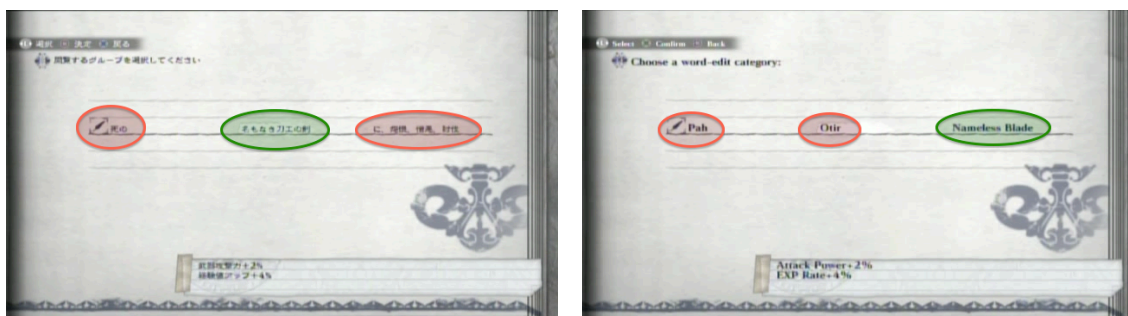


Figure 1.9: *Nier* word system in Japanese and English - ‘words’ surround ‘weapon’ in the Japanese (left); both ‘words’ precede the ‘weapon’ in English (right). Changed words circled by author. Screen captures from *Nier* by author.

According to Christopher Kennedy, the Translation Supervisor within Square Enix, he asked the developer Cavia to switch the structure of the ‘words’ from [prefix phrase] + [weapon/ability] + [suffix phrase] in Japanese to [prefix word 1] + [prefix word 2] + [weapon/ability] in English/French/German. For example, [*shi no*] + [*na mo naki toukou no ken*] + [*ni enkon, zouo, toubatsu*] turns into [Pah] + [Otir] + [Nameless Blade] instead of the literal translation of [death’s] + [nameless sword-maker’s blade] + [with enmity,

hatred, suppression] (see Figure 1.9). According to Kennedy, creating nonsense ‘prefixes’ like Pah and Otir, which would not disagree with the gender of any swappable weapon/ability was the best and easiest solution when dealing with English, French and German. As a result, the switch was made for all three linguistic localizations despite it being significantly different from the Grimm fairy tale inspired Japanese original phrases, which include “*ongaku wo aisuru Roba to*” [with Roba who loves music] and “*shiroyukihime no doku ringo to*” [with Snow White’s poison apple]. *Nier*’s UI alteration was not suggested by the external localization company 8-4 Ltd, but was conceived of by the internal, publisher side localization team out of the necessity to finding a working localization that could fit three varied languages (English, French and German), after which it required the developer’s UI programmers to make the coding switches.⁴⁸

Beyond images with words and UI elements, the third form of graphical localization is when character representations or actions are changed for the target locale. A common example of graphical manipulation is the re-skinning of characters. Because each polygonal character’s ‘skin’ is itself a painted on asset, changing that skin can mean changing a small element of a character’s clothing (deleting a Nazi swastika), adding clothing onto a nude character, or even changing the look of the character completely. In seeking to aim to different audiences clothes can be put on or be taken off of characters. For example, the North American localization of *God of War* (2005) features topless women lounging in a bed. In order to aim the game to a lower age group within Japan the

⁴⁸ O’Hagan and Mangiron (2013: 185) describe *Dragon Quest VIII* (2006) as a groundbreaking example of the UI graphical localization. The Japanese version of the game as a non-graphical UI that consists of words alone; in contrast, graphical icons and a highly visual user interface were both created for the North American localization.

Japanese localization process re-skinned the women to be wearing bras. A second form of character manipulation is where cut-scenes are altered in some form. For example, the Japanese localization of *Kingdom Hearts 2* (2003) depicts a character pointing a gun at his own head, threatening to blow it off if demands are not met; in contrast, the North American localization represents him pointing the gun at the ground, but making the same threat of suicide. Like with re-skinning, marketers within the publisher group deciding that a localization should be targeted at a younger audience in the target-locale is a common cause for cut-scenes being censored, deleted, or altered.

Both of the above examples of graphical localization are relatively easily enacted. Character re-skinning involves a graphic artist within the developer to change the graphic for a particular localization, and then the program can call upon that particular, changed asset. In turn, changing cut-scenes that are created using the game engine might be slightly more difficult and involve a different set of agents within the developer group, but a large portion of it is automated as the game engine is doing most of the work. In contrast, Full Motion Video or more highly rendered cutscenes using computer generated imagery (CGI) are far more difficult and expensive to manipulate, but even they can be changed. For example, Blizzard's *StarCraft II* (2010) features localized graphical changes within highly rendered cinematic cutscenes (Barnes 2012). Unlike the game engine rendered cut-scenes, these painstakingly human-created highly detailed cinematic movies are the product of dozens of hours of specialist work: changing them for a localization involves additional work by the specialists. More extensive and expensive graphical changes are almost always initiated by the publisher with the direction of marketing and

cultural sensibility specialists (Edwards 2006, 2011), or by the platform holder during the final review process.

Ludic Changes

While textual manipulation happens with almost any localization, re-dubbing happens with many, and graphics manipulation is uncommon, ludic changes – where gameplay is changed to fit its target market – are quite rare. Despite the general rarity of most forms of ludic localization, the deletion of particularly violent or gruesome gameplay moments is becoming relatively common. Like the graphical manipulation of suicide and nudity described above, these ludic changes can be seen as a form of self-censorship, or “culturalization” (Edwards 2006, 2011), called for by the platform holder or publisher groups during the late stages of production, and enacted by the developer group.

English to Japanese localizations often limit the level of violence within the game through ludic changes. An example that caused particular consternation and different solutions in different localizations around the world was the “No Russian” level of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009). In the level the player attempts to infiltrate a terrorist cell, and must either actively participate in, or tacitly witness a slaughter of civilians at an airport. Attempting to stop the slaughter by attacking the terrorists results in death, but the player has the ‘choice’ to fire on the civilians, or to simply not fire his gun at all and watch while his teammates kill the people. Discussed by some as an emotionally difficult moment, and others as merely a further example of meaningless violence, the level

featured different types of ludic localization in different target markets (Burns 2012; Horiuchi 2009; Ingham 2009; Peckham 2009; Warmoth 2009). The version released in most regions including the United States warns the player of what is coming in advance and allows the player to skip the level. Both Germany's and Japan's localizations force pacifism:⁴⁹ the game will end in failure if the player fires upon anybody, terrorist or civilian. For the Russian localization this level was simply removed.

This aspect of localization has very obvious cultural and political connotations. Yet, unlike earlier elements that are localized – textual, audio and graphical – changes of gameplay like these are kept almost completely outside of the purview of translators, and are only partially the job of “localization specialists.” Instead, marketers, quality assurance, legal experts, and culturalization specialists initiate these changes that are then enacted by project development.

The above example suggests a level of gameplay elements that explicitly entail cultural knowledge. The deletion of gameplay elements that the industry understands as requiring cultural knowledge is involved in another form of ludic localization. Often this area is a critical matter of marketing decision-making. For example, *Ryu ga Gotoku 3* (2009) was localized into the North American market as *Yakuza 3* (2010) following the removal of numerous mini-games and side quests. A former Sega localization producer

⁴⁹ *Fallout 3* (2008) is another example of forced pacifism through localization. The North American developers originally coded the game to allow the player to either disarm or detonate an atomic bomb located in the remains of a small post-apocalyptic wasteland. In contrast, to align with local cultural sensitivities, the Japanese localization of *Fallout 3* removes the choice, forcing the player to either ignore the bomb or disarm it (Snow 2008).

who did not work on the title justified these deletions in an explanation that suggests both cultural specificity and marketing as explicit aspects of the company's decision:

Of course, in an ideal world it would be great if you could [translate the mini-games] and let them remain in the game. However, is it really worth it? That was a business decision... Sega of Japan didn't think *Ryu ga Gotoku* would sell in the Western market. At all. Sega of Japan knew that *Ryu ga Gotoku* was way too Japanese... so, no, they didn't think it would sell. Which means from the very beginning their priority was if you are to do the localization, make the total budget as small as possible... Speaking of the *kabakura* [mini-game] system – which was the part that got Western players upset – if you want to localize that part you need to [translate and record] a whole bunch of voices... and the concept of *kabakura* is not available in the US or Europe. So you simply cannot understand the main purpose of this *kabakura* system. So, the question is: if you do the localization of this part, will that sell the game? And the answer was no, so they simply removed it. The core of the *Ryu ga Gotoku* is the... life and pride, the style of yakuza. So those mini-games and *kabakura* system are great additions to have, but they're not necessary. So [Sega] just removed them. (Hasegawa 2012)

His reasoning for eliminating the side quests and mini-games from the North American localization highlights the limited budget available for the localization, the difficulty (in terms of time and extent) that localizing the elements would require, and the fact that the removed mini-games were not the core of the game. According to this localization producer, marketers predicted poor sales in general and the cost required to do the localization of the mini-games was unlikely to lead to better sales, so the culturally particular elements were deleted to save time and money. The implications for the thesis of this dissertation is of course not to make a case for industry benefits, but to show how economic solutions such as these entail activity around the practice of translation as always cultural and politically situated and specific while at the same time forging a transnational game product and industry.

The circumstance I described above is of course one of erasure: a portion of a game is eliminated. As Derrida has shown, erasure is a critical aspect of meaning formation, and likewise is central to the production of culture. While erasure due to audience or cost is certainly present in many game localizations, some ludic changes – like direction markers and difficulty levels – are additive. For example, Hasegawa notes that arrows pointing out the next destination and other contextual hints were added to some English to Japanese localizations during the 2000s to reduce the difficulty of open world gameplay for a Japanese audience accustomed to more linear progressions (Hasegawa 2009: 122-3). Of course, publishers have required the simplification of games being localized for the North American market as well. When *Final Fantasy IV* (1991) was originally released (as *Final Fantasy II*) in North America its level of difficulty was subject to explicit reduction at the localization phase in order to match publisher perceptions of Western players. Working with marketing data, player surveys, and cultural assumptions, members of the localization team assume that American players were imaged to be unwilling or unable to enjoy the more difficult Japanese version (Edge Staff 2006).⁵⁰ Like with the decision to erase ludic elements, these ludic manipulations begin within the publisher and quality assurance groups due to assumptions about target audience taste preferences. However, it is important to remember that although decisions are made through assumptions about audience and platform holder desires and limitations by both marketers and translators, these decisions have ramifications that connect to

⁵⁰ The easier, American version's challenge was further reduced, and then sold in Japan as *Final Fantasy IV Easytype* (1991).

larger, discursive cultural essentializations. Much like Foucault (1995) has argued that the internalization of an external discipline leads to the change of subjectivity, when industry professionals make assumptions about what players think and want, and change the game according to these assumptions, their actions change the situation on the ground, thereby changing player subjectivities.

The claim that difficulty must be lessened or increased during localization is, interestingly, accompanied by the generalization that American or Japanese players are better or worse players. This claim is an essentializing justification for the marketing determined alteration (Hasegawa 2009; Kohler 2005: 224, 2008).⁵¹ By essentializing, I mean that American and Japanese are reduced to essential types. Marketers reduce players into unified types where all Japanese players are the same, all American players are the same, and they are incompatibly different in terms of skills and desires. As Edward Said compellingly shows, Orientalism occurs through a strategy of “flexible *positional* superiority” (1995: 7) where the West/Self situates the Orient/Other as a perpetually unchanging, primitive imaginary. No matter where or what happens the Other is re-positioned as essentially different and essentially lacking. Essentializing discourses and practices might enable sales through the creation of a solidified, targetable audience, but they do so by reductively delimiting individuals into essential, cultural types.

⁵¹ This discussion of localizing difficulty for different cultures is, importantly, different from the more general literature on game difficulty, which assumes all players are different and either provides multiple difficulty levels for the player to choose from (easy, medium, hard), or tries to program adaptive difficulty to match the player’s abilities (computer controlled opponents in racing games get better when you are in first and perform worse when you are last, providing the player with the ability to catch up). For example: Chen (2007) draws from Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) concept of “flow” to create games that smoothly progress in difficulty; also, Gee (2007) discusses game difficulty in terms of education and learning.

A final form of gameplay alteration is the addition of gameplay elements for a target locale. Many car racing games include local tracks or cars in addition to the base set of options available for local players. For instance, the racing game *Forza Motorsport* (2005) includes locally manufactured automobiles within localized versions, so that players can drive cars sold in their particular locale (Edwards 2014). Another type of additional gameplay is the creation of extra material for post-gold localized versions. For example, the Japanese localization of *Dirge of Cerberus* had an online mode, which was removed from the North American localization due to difficulties of integrating the online component within the United States (Fox 2013).⁵² To make up for the loss of the online mode, Square Enix created time-attack battles, an additional offline gameplay mode, for the North American localization. An external localization studio might recommend changes based on their cultural expertise of the target-locale. However, changes are usually instigated by market researchers within the publisher. This is due to the cost of ludic changes. Researchers argue that expensive gameplay changes will help the game sell within its target market; specialist coders, artists and designers working within the developer group are then made responsible for creating the new gameplay modes and elements.

⁵² While contemporary consoles connect to the Internet out of the box, the *Playstation 2* console required an additional network adapter that was released several years after the console originally went on the market. Also unlike contemporary consoles where the console holder provides the online gaming network, online modes for earlier consoles were the responsibility of developers and publishers using third-party servers. What likely led to Square Enix removing the online mode for *Dirge of Cerberus*' North American localization, then, is the cost for both initiating and maintaining the server within the United States and Canada.

Practical Differences of Localization Types

While game localization can include the multimodal translation of paratextual, textual, audio, graphical, and ludic assets, not every game features the translation of every type of asset. The literature on software and game localization separates localization into three types: non localization, partial localization, and full localization (Esselink 2000; Chandler 2013; Chandler and Deming 2012).

Non localization, also referred to by specialists as “box and docs” translation, means that the digital application remains in its original language, but the accompanying paratextual manual and box are translated to enable the game’s sale on the foreign market’s store shelves. For *Super Mario Bros* (1985), the box and manual were translated into German, French, Spanish, Italian and Dutch to be sold throughout Europe, but the game itself remained in English (Bernal-Merino 2011). A more recent example from English to Japanese is the Madden NFL series: because American football is much less popular in Japan than in the United States, purchasers of *Madden NFL 11* (2011) get a box in Japanese and find a Japanese manual inside, but the game itself is the same as the one released in the United States.⁵³

Partial localization refers to when both the paratextual and written text within the digital game are fully translated, but other assets remain unchanged. Partial localizations frequently subtitle the foreign language voice dialogue, saving the cost of audio re-dubbing. Graphical alterations may happen, but only for elements that marketers believe

⁵³ Apple’s AppStore is home to many other games that have been given a contemporary spin on the box and docs translation. For example, Index Corporation’s iOS port of Atlus’ Super Famicom game *Shin Megami Tensei* (1992) has a store description in English, but the game itself is in Japanese. The Description reads, “! WARNING This game is not translated and displays Japanese text only.”

will prevent the game's sales in the target market. Thus, partial localization will make legally or culturally mandated changes, like the prevention of nudity or the deletion of Nazi elements for a game sold in Germany, despite the additional costs.

Finally, while full localization hints at a ‘fully’ multimodal translation that localizes everything, in practice it only promises the translation of paratexts, written text, and spoken game elements. However, projects dubbed “full localization” by localization specialists are far more likely to include graphical and ludic alterations than non and partial localization types.

While the non, partial and full localization typology breaks down the full gamut of localization types into an easy to understand three part structure, it is a client-side, service-based understanding of translation. The publisher (client) pays for a certain degree of localization based on what it wants to spend, which in turn is based on what the market research indicates the publisher will obtain as a return on investment. Inexpensive “box and docs” or partial localization will work for a lower expected ROI, and the more expensive full localization is only justifiable when the investment will lead to a significantly larger return.

Heather Chandler and Stephanie Deming suggest that any localization process can be represented by a triangle of *quality* (Figure 1.10). The sides of the triangle are made up of *features* (scope of the multimodal localization), *schedule* (time given for localization)

and *resources* (money available to pay for localization), where one of the three parts is either abundant or lacking.⁵⁴



Figure 1.10: Chandler and Deming's (2012: 58) adaptation of the 'iron triangle' or 'project management triangle.'⁵⁵

For many games the schedule (time) drives localization, as publishers rush to release games into the market to meet yearly holidays like Christmas. With a tight schedule one of three things happens: localization of features (multimodal scope of the localization) and resources (money) decrease to allow for the tight schedule; resources are increased to facilitate an average featured localization; resources are drastically increased to facilitate a full, multimodal localization. Alternately, if schedule is not the limiting factor translators can be given an abundance of time with the result of higher quality and full, multimodal localization at an equal cost. This latter situation is most common with the

⁵⁴ In a far more understandable phrasing, Elizabeth Losh points out that in digital design circles the iron triangle is described as "fast, cheap, and good... pick two" (personal communication, February 18, 2015). It can be fast and cheap, it can be fast and good, and it can be cheap and good, but it cannot be all three.

⁵⁵ Chandler and Deming's triangle is drawn from a project management term alternately called the 'iron triangle' or the 'project management triangle,' which is often attributed to Martin Barnes. In the triangle *quality* is determined by the interrelation of *scope*, *cost*, and *schedule*. Translators have simplified this triangle to simply indicate that *quality* is dependent on the variables of *time* and *payment*. See: Bold 2012.

post-gold distribution method, which will be discussed below. Finally, independent games that do not benefit from a wealthy publisher tend to have a lack of resources (money) to throw at localization, but time is not a factor, so scheduling is drawn out in order to attain the most features available for the least amount of money.

The concept that features/schedule/resources = quality is an essential way that game industry professionals helps approach localization. Understanding the triangle helps unpack the reasoning behind the client/service based understanding of the three localization types (non, partial, full). However, such a business orientation does not approach the different practices taken by the translators, nor does it acknowledge the different structural entanglements that exist between developer, publisher and localizer. In short, it is far too focused on what the publisher/client pays for and not enough on what happens during the process, or how the particular translational type might affect reception. For example, according to one Dutch localization specialist I interviewed, younger players prefer full localizations with Dutch dialogue, but hardcore fans want to play a partially localized game with English dialogue (which they assume to be the game's original language). This chapter concludes by describing two shifts in localization strategy that have led to different structures of collaboration, which in turn have led to different levels of semiotic modality in the resultant translations.

Corporate Strategies and Global Shifts

As described above, collaboration and multimodal translation are a part of localization practice throughout the video game industry. However, shifts in corporate

strategy from the 1980s to 2010s have led to different degrees and forms of collaboration, which in turn has led to different levels of semiotic modality in the resulting translations. One major shift in practice tendency has been from creating a modifiable base game with heavy manipulation for each local market, to creating a more widely accepted and less modified game. A second, nestled shift in practice has been the move from post-gold localization strategy – where a game is created and distributed in one language before it is localized into a second language – to a simultaneous shipment strategy – where localization into many languages occurs before any version of the game is distributed. Both of these particular localization processes are important elements toward an understanding of how localization has functioned and continues to function in the production of video games. These processes are also crucial to an understanding of how localization is tied to the global mobility of games as cultural commodities.

GILT: From Internationalization to Globalization

According to the Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA), localization is one of four processes in the creation and distribution of software within the world. Together, the four terms *globalization*, *internationalization*, *localization* and *translation* combine to form the acronym GILT, a turn-of-the-century phrase that describes the four tiered industry process used to sell software around the world. Within the model, *globalization* is primarily about the need of transnational corporations to sell products around the globe. However, it is simultaneously about the heterogeneity of local taste preferences that makes selling commodities difficult. *Internationalization* is the practice

of programming software so that it can be easily adapted to local contexts. In turn, *localization* involves taking a piece of malleable software and tailoring to fit with local consumption preferences. Finally, *translation* is the well-known practice of altering one language into a second language so that it fits with the locale's dominant language preference.

Within the game localization industry, GILT is made up of a host of conventional practices that have been adopted for the entangled purposes of entertaining an audience and selling the game to recover a maximum return on investment. Internationalization practices aim for maximum flexibility by programming a game without hard-coded elements like text on images, and with expandable text boxes so that languages that require less visual space (Mandarin Chinese) or more visual space (German) can both fit in on the screen as readable text. Localization uses the provided flexibility in order to maintain local preferences that range from the order of dates and spelling, to deleting elements that might cause backlash, such as violence, sexuality, and religious references within certain regional markets. Translating tends toward the local language and idioms for an easily consumed, entertaining experience. All of these practices contribute to selling the game around the world, or globalization, by making a product that fulfills player expectations. On paper, then, internationalization facilitates localization and translation as linked processes, and all three are combined so that a game, as a commodity, can smoothly flow throughout the global economy.

GILT is a particular organization of localization practices that is visible in Sony Entertainment's early 2000 business practices. Describing these practices in an interview,

industry veteran and localization producer Hasegawa Ryoichi explained how the game *Ratchet and Clank* (2002) was created and localized. According to Hasegawa, while it was the American developer Insomniac that programmed the game, it was the combined effort by those developers with producers and marketing specialists from Sony Computing Entertainment Japan, Sony Computing Entertainment America, and Sony Computing Entertainment Europe that enabled the game to sell in the various regions. The decision makers from Insomniac and Sony's three regional headquarters had a mini summit meeting in Seattle to hammer out *Ratchet and Clank*'s essential vision: a humorous story about the friendship between a young male protagonist and a small robot. Before agreeing upon a core vision of the game the team invited variation outside of the core vision. The different regional producers and marketers were able to raise particular issues about localization and translation from that initial moment, which meant that internationalization could be planned and technical constraints avoided. Following the meeting, regional producers were responsible for taking the core product and localizing it for their regional markets. For example, while the North American version of *Ratchet and Clank* was developed for a late teen audience, Hasegawa and SCEJ were able to re-direct the Japanese localization toward a young teen (tween) audience that matched with Sony's efforts to open up the PlayStation 2 to a younger age bracket. While the game is a 'single' global product, it has variations in different regional locales thanks to the structuring meeting and subsequent divergences.

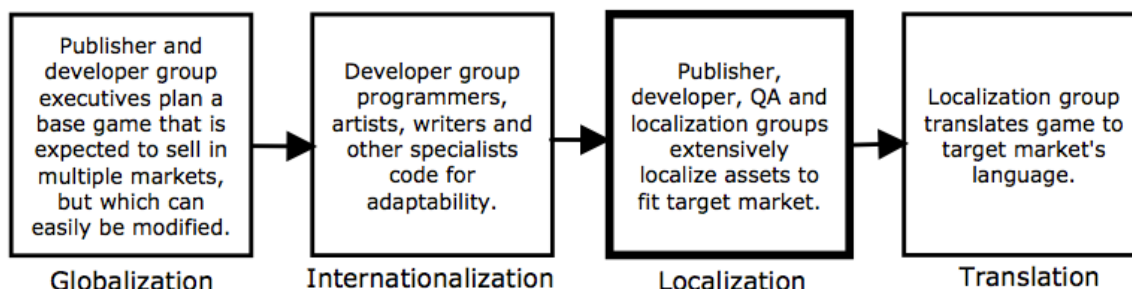


Figure 1.11: Because game creators did not know how player expectations would be different in foreign markets, they took advantage of games as digital media by creating a modifiable game and adapting it to the target market. Figure by author.

The planned internationalization (allowing adaptability in both code and content) made possible the extensive localization and translation efforts of each region; these efforts resulted in Sony's late 1990s to early 2000 global hits (including *Crash Bandicoot* (1996), *Spyro the Dragon* (1998), *Ratchet and Clank*, and others). For Sony at the turn of the 21st century GILT was a coherent, standardized practice (create core vision, enable adaptability, then change for the local audience) with the distinct purpose of selling as many units as possible in each region.⁵⁶

While GILT conventions made sense in the historical context of the 1990s to 2000s and aptly describe the localization practices of those decades, they no longer fit the game industry's practices in the 2010s. During an interview in 2013, a ten-year veteran translator and writer of the game industry noted that localization is dead: it doesn't matter

⁵⁶ Anne Allison (2006) describes practices with the creation and movement of Japanese popular texts during the late 1990s

anymore (Gray 2012).⁵⁷ He then claimed that companies were now “globalizing.” At first this statement confused me because of his job as a translator and localization specialist, and because my understanding that ‘globalization’ merely meant the global sale of products for the game industry. Upon further discussion, however, I came to understand this translator’s comment to point to a changed conceptualization of GILT conventions and their entanglement in the 2010s.

For this translator, globalization now refers to the practice of planning and programming a game with the intent of simultaneously hitting multiple markets *with as little alteration as possible*.⁵⁸ Instead of the 2000s Sony version of GILT, which mandated both that the game be programmed so that changes could be easily made to service different markets around the globe, and that changes be made to best hit those markets by altering the game, this new practice emphasizes making a universally understandable base product that does not need to be localized extensively. Previous GILT processes enabled industry specialists to become experts in finding the best toggles for selling games to local markets.

⁵⁷ The translators full quote is: “What is localization? Well, by definition it should no longer exist because it doesn't really exist any more... The idea behind localization was that you were taking a finished product and you are... making it region acceptable, right? You are taking something that already exists and you are changing it so that it works somewhere else. Which is really why it should be by now a dead term, because nothing really gets localized anymore. Things get globalized. You have a product that is in development and you're working with translators, and usually with contractors and multiple countries to get something done. So you're not really localizing anything. You're globalizing it. You're working on it with multiple people of multiple cultures in multiple languages at the same time to get a product you can deliver to many countries at once.” (Gray 2012).

⁵⁸ I also believe his comment reveals a more cultural understanding of the term globalization that goes beyond mere ROI [return on investment]. Rather than addressing the friction, difference, hybridity, and particularity of local strategies and environments (Appadurai 1996; Chang 2001; Consalvo 2006; Featherstone 1990; Robertson 1995; Tomlinson 1991; Tsing 2005), the “globalization” of GILT in the 2010s has become a form, and practice, of homogenization reminiscent of social and cultural critiques of the 1960s to 1980s (Dorfman and Mattelart 1984; Mattelart 1983).

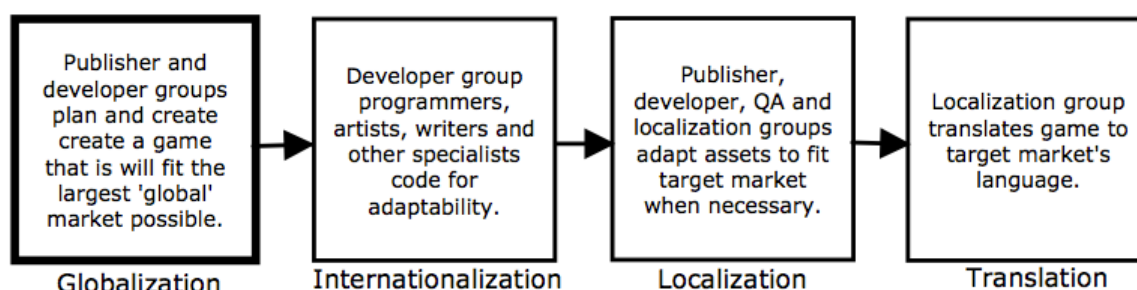


Figure 1.12: With three decades of experience localizing games, game creators have particular assumptions of how foreign markets will receive games. They use this knowledge to create a core game they expect will sell in foreign markets without heavy localization. Figure by author.

Within this new model of GILT, industry specialists claim to know the toggles that need to be flipped in order to sell products globally, and any particular need to localize can be viewed as a failure of proper planning. The intent is to cut down on what is necessary to localize for any given release, thereby making it easier and cheaper to sell any given game around the globe. While internationalization followed by localization worked particularly well in the 1990s to 2000s, when Japanese, English, French, Italian, German and Spanish (FIGS) were the only relevant languages for the gaming industry, it no longer works. Now, Japanese, English, and FIGS are joined by over a dozen other languages including Dutch, Polish, Portuguese, Brazilian Portuguese, Danish and other Nordic languages, Russian and other Cyrillic languages, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, various forms of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish (Khasawneh 2012). For most publishers and for most games it is simply not an economically sound decision to multimodally localize a game into 20 different languages.

Thus, for titles of the 2010s like Capcom's *Dragon's Dogma* (2012) the developer, publisher, and localization groups attempt to create a base vision that will sell around the

world without significant change between regions. While this costs less overall, it also seems to result in the dominance of a Western/American/English led vision of the game, as the core vision of *Dragon's Dogma* is the English language track and localization led by 8-4 Ltd.⁵⁹ The English version/vision tends to dominate for two reasons: first, due to the centrality of English as a working language within many software companies; second, because many translations work through English as a pivot language. A key reason the industry moved away from GILT practices during the 2010s is because of the rising importance of the simultaneous shipment distribution method where a single game is released to many regional markets at the same time instead of the older, tiered, post-gold release schedule (Figure 1.2) where the 'original' language version is released months to years before the secondary languages.

Post-Gold vs. SimShip

The publisher decision between Post-Gold and Simultaneous Shipment publishing schedules is the second major shift in 21st century localization practice that greatly influences how collaborative a game's localization process will be and what multimodal assets will be changed in the process of localization.

As described earlier, the initial translation and distribution model of the game industry in the 1980s-90s was a tiered method similar to the translation of books and

⁵⁹ An interesting side note is that the Japanese localization of *Dragon's Dogma*, which featured English voices and Japanese subtitles, angered fans, resulting in publisher and developer Capcom creating an expanded version of the game, *Dragon's Dogma: Dark Arisen* that included Japanese dialogue. The more localized *Dark Arisen* was better received in Japan and the original, indicating that while publishers might want to move to a vision of 'globalization' that is bolstered by English and standard elements of North American culture, 'localization' is not quite dead.

movies. An original version is created for one regional market and culture (with or without foresight to ‘internationalize’ by programming robustly to facilitate easier translations later), and then other versions are created through translation/localization (Figure 1.2). In the 1980s-90s translation began well after the game was completed and sold in its original market. After sales figures informed the publisher that the game was a success in its original locale and marketers determined that the game was likely to sell in a new market the publisher either assigned internal localization specialists to translate the game or hired an external localization agency.

The turn-around between releasing games in different markets has shrunk since the 1990s. For example, games in the Final Fantasy series were localized on average in 6-8 months in the 1990s (VI, VII, VIII), but this time is shortened to 2-3 months with games released in the 2010s (XIII, XIII-2, XIII-3).⁶⁰ Facilitating this shorter turn-around time is a slight alteration where localization begins before the original has been fully completed. For example, the localization of *Final Fantasy X* began near the moment the Japanese version was finalized, but before it was distributed in Japan. In order to facilitate a fast turn-around the text in need of translation was split between textual and audio translators, and the resulting localization was quickly released in the North American market approximately 5 months after the original Japanese release (Smith 2012).

⁶⁰ The delay for each game is as follows (in months): *Final Fantasy I* = 30; *Final Fantasy II* = unreleased; *Final Fantasy III* = unreleased; *Final Fantasy IV* = 4; *Final Fantasy V* = unreleased; *Final Fantasy VI* = 6; *Final Fantasy VII* = 8; *Final Fantasy VIII* = 7; *Final Fantasy IX* = 4; *Final Fantasy X* = 5; *Final Fantasy X-2* = 8; *Final Fantasy XII* = 7; *Final Fantasy XIII* = 3; *Final Fantasy XIII-2* = 1.5; *Final Fantasy XIII-3* = 3.

In the 2010s, the post-gold localization strategy is used for smaller, independently produced games where the developer did not plan to release the title into multiple language markets, and with mobile and web-based games where localization takes place only if the original has seen significant success in its initial market (Hasegawa 2012). However, some larger titles also utilize the post-gold method. A notable example from the 2010s that took an exceptional amount of time is Level 5's *Ni No Kuni: Shiroki Seihai no Jyoo* [Second Country: Witch of the White Sacred Ash] (2011), which was released as *Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch* (2013) in English, French, Italian, German and Spanish approximately 14 months after the game's initial Japanese release. *Ni No Kuni's* localization began after the Japanese version was released, and the five localizations took a significant amount of time due to the extensive level of alterations that took place. According to Oli and Rushton (2013), two members of the team from Shloc Ltd who conducted the English localization, translating the game was a large and time consuming process that included 1 week of familiarization, 2 weeks of glossary creation, 24 weeks of translation and editing, 4 weeks of voice recording, and 12 weeks of localization quality assurance. In addition to the full translation of roughly 750,000 characters (340,000 words) translators and re-dubbing the script, the translators significantly altered all names and characterizations within the game, and painstakingly translate the 340 page diegetic manual, which required digital graphical manipulation and the reinvention of a complex cypher (Figure 1.13). While internationalization certainly took place in the development process, facilitating an easier localization process, the publishers approached *Ni No Kuni*

as a complex game in need of extensive alterations. The post-gold localization strategy was employed to better facilitate these extensive localization alterations.

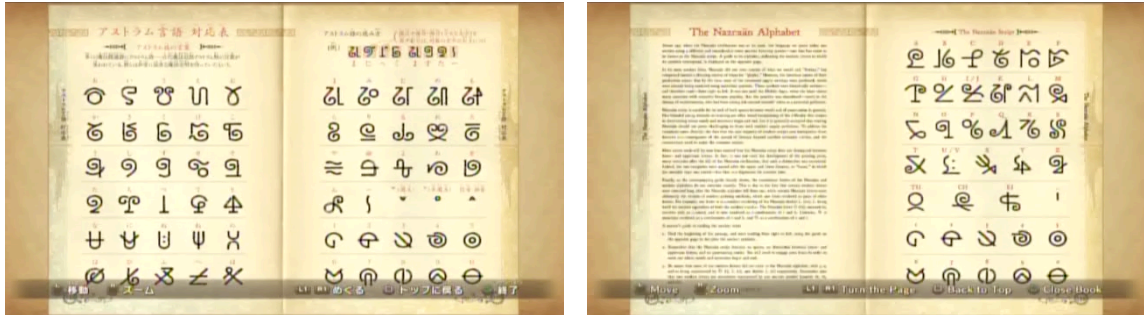


Figure 1.13: Magic Master (Japanese, left) and Wizard's Companion (English, right) language cyphers. Screen captures from *Ni No Kuni* by author.

The international edition is a modified type of post-gold localization method that utilizes progressive iterations.⁶¹ These international edition localizations include significant changes made between versions including bug fixes and the addition of more language tracks, levels and bosses, all of which are standard alterations with modern localization practice. What makes them interesting, and also grants them the title “reverse localizations” by O’Hagan and Mangiron (2013), is that the localization eventually returns to its origination source, most often Japan, where an additional version of the game (the ‘international edition’ or ‘final mix’) is released including the bug fixes and new languages, levels, and bosses that were not yet created when the game was originally released in Japan. One translator elaborates on both the strengths of the international edition as well as its ethically positive elements:

My feeling on [the international edition] is that's the correct way that globalization should be happening right now... You take it upon yourself

⁶¹ While more popular in the mid 2000s when various companies produced International Editions, the most recent title is Square Enix's *Kingdom Hearts: Birth By Sleep Final Mix* (2011) for the PSP.

as a developer of content to say [the game will be released] four, five, six months later to [the new] territory, but... it's going to be localized well into [the] language, and we're going to [make] additional content, and [you] fix a whole bunch of bugs, and make it so that the six months is worth it... And it's what the International Edition is... it's a product that comes back to Japan after having gone around the world with all the bugs fixed, new features added, twice as many voices in the game, in the case of the Kingdom Hearts series they often add entire releases of games into the mix... I love international editions cause they're exactly the way games should be made for a global audience. You're kind of putting together a game to make a better piecemeal and it keeps revolving and getting better. (Gray 2012)

While translation generally goes in a single direction from center to multiple peripheries (even if the path goes through nodal pivot languages like English), the international edition localization avoids this singular directionality by maintaining the possibility of returning to the center and thereby disabling the argument that the center/original is necessarily best.

In contrast to post-gold localization, the simultaneous shipment method involves simultaneously releasing a game around the world in multiple languages, which in turn requires localizing the game during or at the very end of the production cycle. Because spearheading a simultaneously shipped game requires collaboration between dozens of clusters of specialists within the publisher, developer, localization, and quality assurance groups, first attempts are often fraught with problems, everything that can go wrong does go wrong, and the game is released riddled with linguistic bugs or an unfinished audio track (Matz 2012). However, after years of experience, localization experts like Heather Chandler and Stephanie Deming schedule by working backward from the planned release date (2012, 73). When localizing an English game into French, German and Spanish,

Chandler and Deming suggest a four-month process that begins with freezing the English assets, then consists of organizing the assets for translation. They suggest 2 weeks time for textual translation, 2 weeks time for voice over translation, 1 week for voice actor casting, 3 weeks for voice over recording, several days for asset integration, 4 weeks for linguistic testing, 3 weeks for functionality testing, and 6 weeks for waiting on approval by the publisher. After approval is granted the English, Spanish, French and German versions can be shipped simultaneously.

While Chandler and Deming give 4 months, it is important to note their localization schedule does not allow time for audio, graphical, or ludic changes. In their 2012 book, Chandler and Deming write how such multimodal changes take place, but they do not focus on the time it might take to make them. In contrast, during a 2012 talk, Chandler noted the importance of pushing back the localization process into the pre-production phase where manipulatable coding could be encouraged, planned content could be analyzed for cross cultural legibility and appropriateness, and audio, graphical, or ludic changes could all be enabled well before the standard 4 month rush to quickly localize the game (Chandler 2012). Through such an earlier, integrated scheduling, localization could affect the final product, thereby creating the most ‘appropriate’ game possible.

Of course, simultaneous shipment as a practice depends on the particular groups collaborating to create the game and the degree of modification occurring during localization. Blizzard's *StarCraft II* and Capcom's *Dragon's Dogma* were both localized through a simultaneous shipment based method, but the particulars of the projects, the

type and degree of collaboration involved, and how extensive the games were multimodally changed was quite different.

In his 2012 Game Developers Conference talk, William Barnes of Blizzard described *StarCraft II*'s localization as a process where translators in each of the game's 13 languages were given "Carte Blanche" to access and change the game as they saw fit for their particular region. Thus, *StarCraft II* was translated more along the lines of a traditional GILT process with power given to the localization side. In addition to manipulating the textual assets of the game this enabled localizers to change in-game graphical assets like visible posters and graffiti, and even assets that might not be visible by the standard player.⁶² In order to facilitate the process, builds of the game were sent out to localizers either daily or every few days. Requested changes were carried out by programmers within the development team. Additionally, changes in any given localization often reverberated to other languages. When one country translated the opening cinematic sequence's computerized text, localization specialists in other languages followed suit by deciding the alteration was a good idea and requesting the switch in their language. For *StarCraft II*, interaction between languages was not a simple centralized process that moved from English out to other languages, but a much more decentralized communicative network. *StarCraft II*, then, reveals one possible future of game localization, where decentralized, perhaps rhizomatic, processes cut across corporate and national power structures with non-hierarchical interactions (Deleuze and

⁶² One example Barnes (2012) gives is of changing a single bottle of alcohol. The bottle is located on a shelf in the game's cantina, but is invisible to the player during the majority of play. It is possible that during one cutscene the bottle is visible in the background.

Guattari 1987). Sadly, Blizzard's localization practices are exceptional in that they are good, but also in that they are exceptions to the standard. As I will explain throughout the remaining chapters of this dissertation, typical monetary restrictions limit game localization. The result is that I do not believe the rhizomatic future hinted at by Blizzard is likely.

In contrast, when the external localization studio 8-4 Ltd worked on Capcom's *Dragon's Dogma*, they received limited access to the game itself. The project manager was able to see the very early, rough build of the game, but the translator, checker, and editor were never granted access to a playable build of the game (MacDonald 2013). While the project manager was able to provide some contextual information due to his limited interaction with the early build, the majority of the textual translation was done without knowledge of the game world or the basic plot. Due to the lack of access the project manager had to send notes back to Capcom requesting clarification on many words. For instance, 門 [*mon*] was problematic as there was no given context for each individual usage, but it was known that both giant gates and small doors existed within the game. According to the project manager, "the distinction is important in that kind of world, because you're not going to call it a door if it's 60 feet-high and you're not going to call it a gate if it's actually something you're going to open [with a knob]" (MacDonald 2013). While 8-4 Ltd had to deal with this lack of context for their translation, it is important not simply to demonize Capcom for not giving them the required information. As the project manager informed me that available context:

depends on the project. We did *Monster Hunter Tri* with [Capcom] as well. And for that game it had already come out in Japanese, so we had the game, we had a debug ROM that we could skip to anywhere we wanted to, we could look at any piece of armor, we had books, official guides that had all the armor listed, everything. Tons of information... [Capcom tries] to get us what they can, but sometimes, yeah, with their games that are still in development... they're super secretive. (MacDonald 2013)

As Mangiron and O'Hagan (2006) have argued, game localization can be understood as “transcreation” because it relies upon the ‘creativity’ and ‘imagination’ of translators who are forced to work within a severely ‘restricted’ translational environment. Following this belief that game translation needs more creativity and less rote translation, a localization specialist at Square Enix informed told me of his company's hiring process:

Once you've submitted a resume with your credentials, you [take a] creative writing test. They don't test your Japanese first. They test your English first. Your creative writing skills. They give you a Square Enix character, [and tell you to] write 1000 words about this character's adventures in Japan. (Fox 2013)

Thus, the pool of available Japanese to English translators only consists of those who can satisfactorily write an engaging story in English using one of Square Enix's popular characters. More important than a demonstration of accurate translation skills is a demonstration of both familiarity with the company's franchise characters, and an ability to write creatively.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, like many industrial practices, game localization is a collaborative practice that takes place with the joint interaction of specialists within the platform holder, publisher, developer, quality assurance and localization groups. This

distributed collaboration between groups is necessary to facilitate the multimodal alterations required to localize the linguistic, audio, visual, ludic, and paratextual assets that make up video games. However, while the work to translate video games between locales can entail the collaboration of many specialists, on-the-ground practices are neither regular nor regulated. Differences in interaction stemming from how occupational groups are organized, differences in the distribution of labor, and differences in intent can all affect localization practices and results.

In the following chapters of this dissertation I will explore some of these practical and theoretical differences. Of particular importance for me, and what I will explore in Chapter 3, is how this distributed collaboration means that localization specialists are important authorial figures. In Chapter 2, however, I will elaborate both the standard industry history of game localization as a progressive development, and my own history that links game localization to a broader history of media translation that includes films and television shows.

Chapter 2 - Game Localization Histories

As a daily practice that has both political and ethical implications, translation is regulated by many prescriptive and descriptive arguments about what it does, can do, and should do.⁶³ Taken in total these (often conflicting) arguments are ultimately ambiguous about what exactly is ‘good’ translation, and this ambiguity is revealed when contemporary translators of literary and cinematic works have to choose a translational method to fit the project: sense-for-sense or word-for-word; keep with a foreign aesthetic or adapt for the local audience. The history of translation is a constant back and forth between mutually exclusive prescriptive claims, but prescription ultimately gives way to translator choices in practice, as individual translators decide what is appropriate in any given context.

Counter the theoretical and practical ambiguity of translation in other media, game localization for the game industry primarily involves changing as many of the multimodal assets as necessary to provide a similar experience to players in a secondary market. While nuances of ethics, and translation studies terminology like foreignization, domestication, sense and word are certainly in some game translators’ minds, the overwhelming semiotic complexity of video games and the desire to actively adapt each of those semiotic layers has influenced game localization history. Like video games themselves, which keep on ‘evolving’ with better graphics and longer games, video game

⁶³ The concept of ambiguity was discussed in more detail in the Introduction. Additionally, on the matter of ambiguity of play and the position of games in culture, see: Caillois 2001; Fron et al. 2007; Gee 2007b; Juul 2003; Sutton-Smith 1997. Regarding the ambiguity of translation, see: Bermann and Wood 2005; Derrida 1985; Eco 2003; Pym 2004; Robinson 1991; Sakai 1997; Venuti 2008.

localization ‘progresses’ by adapting more and more multimodal assets, thereby providing audiences in different linguistic and cultural communities the same experience.

This chapter describes and then problematizes the standard logic of progress that is embedded in the video game industry histories of localization. These histories based on technological progress follow a model of teleological improvement where the present state is always justified as an inevitable conclusion. Instead, I rethink the historical practice of game localization by changing how we approach chronology and by recontextualizing these practices in the history of media translation more generally. First, I push the origin point of game localization back from the 1980s to the 1960s. I show that game localization is not (and has never been) merely a matter of multimodal semiotic alteration (the linguistic, audio, visual, and ludic changes described in Chapter 1). Rather, it is a mediation of migration and adaptation in the active practice of political and ethical bordering and border crossing. I follow the ‘cultural turn’ in translation studies (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990) and the work of theorists like Bermann and Wood (2005), Seidman (2006), and Nornes (2007) who argue that translation of written text and films is always cultural and contextual, and never ‘simply’ a matter of linguistic fidelity. I make the claim, then, that game localization is not about linguistically mirroring an original text or experience, but about adapting the game so that it can migrate between locales. Second, unlike most game histories that currently exist, I situate game localization in the context of 20th century media translation by showing that it has important similarities to both early 20th century cinematic multiple language versions and late 20th century television format shows. While the multimodality of video game localization makes it interesting as

a form of translation, by drawing on the history of film and cinema translation, I show that the same multimodality means the goal of changing everything is an impossibility for most language-locales. Larger markets can push toward progressively changing more and more, but smaller markets cannot. This argument then opens the way for me to argue in coming chapters that localization should instead be utilized at specific moments to negotiate the borders between locales when appropriate.

Industry History

As an intertwined part of video game production, any history of video game localization must be situated within a more general history of video games as an industrial medium. Critical, however, is not reproducing the standard logic of technological progress that is highlighted in most popular and academic histories of video games.⁶⁴ In these accounts, the first video games, *Tennis for Two* (1958) and *Spacewar!* (1962), were programmed as diversions by scientists and academics in research laboratories and on university time-share computers (Burnham 2003; Yudin 2013; Sandqvist 2012). Following almost a decade of initial popularization within universities and research facilities, games were relocated into arcades with *Computer Space* (1971) and *Pong* (1972), and then into the home with consoles like the Magnavox Odyssey and Atari 2600 in the mid 1970s. Consoles in the 1970s were sold in singular national

⁶⁴ Historical accounts that I draw from are numerous. Popular accounts include: Burnham 2003; Donovan 2010; Herz 1997; Kent 2001; Kohler 2005; Poole 2000; Ryan 2011; and Sheff 2004. Academic accounts include: Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. 2008; Kerr 2006; 2012; Kline et al. 2003; Lowood 2006; Malliet and de Meyer 2005; Montfort and Bogost 2009; O'Donnell 2012; and Sandqvist 2012. Where applicable I cite specific sources.

markets and not across borders, meaning that there was no ‘global’ industry, but rather, numerous national industries (Donovan 2010; Sandqvist 2011). Within most popular histories, the simultaneous rise in popularity of games in many North American, Asian, and European countries during the 1970s indicates a ‘golden age’ in which games are highlighted as the newest, globally consumed medium.

This golden age is said to have ended with the crash of 1983, a massive economic recession of the video game industry that was geographically centered within the United States and believed to have been caused by a number of factors including an over-saturation of gaming consoles and individual games (Ernkvist 2008).⁶⁵ According to standard accounts, the gaming industry was ‘rebooted’ in 1985, when the Japanese Nintendo Family Computer (Famicom) was released in the United States and Europe as the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES).⁶⁶ A key difference of the post-crash period is that consoles (Nintendo and Sega in particular) were sold in multiple national markets. This post-crash, global industry continued into the present with a “more-faster-better” logic⁶⁷ in which more features, faster processors, and better graphics help sell eight

⁶⁵ One complication to note is that the ‘crash of 1983’ was, according to Ernkvist (2008), one of four crashes that took place between 1972 and 1983. Ernkvist argues that the four crashes coincide when there is a confluence of three factors: “disruptive technologies, delimited differentiation, decreased entry barriers and destructive liabilities of newness and smallness” (2008: 189).

⁶⁶ An important note is that while the crash of ’83 and release of the NES in ’85 were crucial to the game history centered within the United States, they are less important for other national industries. Despite this US centric element, most accounts still refer to both dates as pivotal moments largely due to the importance of Nintendo in redirecting the game industry in the 1980s and 1990s (Chatfield 2010; Donovan 2010; Ryan 2011; Sheff 2004; Uemura et al. 2013). Regardless of whether the crash was critical to history or not, Nintendo changed the post-1985 game industry by instituting regulation policies on its platform, which greatly influenced how the game industry developed until independent game makers challenged the publishing industry dominance with digital distribution methods of the 2000s and 2010s.

⁶⁷ I draw the phrase “more-faster-better” from Levy (2007). However, also relevant are Friedel (2007), who writes of a teleological drive toward “improvement” within culture, and Kline et al. (2003), who describe how the game industry’s market ties to capitalism push a constant stream of “more.”

successive generations of consoles. Consoles evolved from the 1st generation Magnavox Odyssey in the early 1970s to the 8th generation Nintendo Wii U in 2012, and Microsoft Xbox One and Sony Playstation 4 in 2013.⁶⁸ By focusing on a technological progression through 8 generations of consoles, this internalist history is able to highlight the current \$56 billion dollar a year global video game industry as a type of culmination (Economist 2011).⁶⁹

This much-repeated account is problematic in that it presents a vision of a global industry as if untroubled by borders, boundaries, cultures and languages.⁷⁰ For example, Tristan Donovan explicitly attempts to write a global history of games by “giving the US its due without neglecting the important influence of games developed [in] Japan, Europe and elsewhere” (Donovan 2010: xiii). In avoiding a US-centric history, Donovan devotes numerous chapters to showing the individual importance of England, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Russia, and Japan for the historical development of video games.

⁶⁸ This console progression was accompanied by a similarly linear, but less easily demarcated technological progression of personal computers.

⁶⁹ Perhaps even more than cinema or television – where local production is highlighted for marketing, legal, and tax break purposes – video games are touted as a global entertainment medium. For example, the December 2012 Japanese issue of *Wired* (Figure 0.3) proudly displays “Global Gaming” on the cover in English, and in a much smaller font in Japanese it notes that the issue is about *geemu no sekai hyoujun*, or world standards of games. English, apparently, is one of those standards. Further, four articles in a section called “The Age of Global Gaming” elaborate the industry ties to North American, European, Japanese, and Korean in particular, but around the world in general.

⁷⁰ As with this chapter, there have been numerous attempts to problematize the industry-centered, progress-oriented history described here. The existence of these counter-histories, however, does not detract from the point that there is a dominant, industry History. For example, the *XYZ Alternative Voices in Game Design* Exhibit curated by Celia Pearce and Adam Fafinski at the Museum of Design Atlanta created a non-male and non-industry centered history. Additionally, Flanagan (2009) details alternate histories of games that center on domestic spaces and board games, pushing against the attention given to technological progress. Finally, the edited volume *Before the Crash* (Wolf 2012) includes multiple essays that problematize the progress-oriented industry history.

Despite this move to represent a more global history, Donovan never once discusses the practices of translation that enable the global medium to thrive.

Further, while many historical accounts describe the video game industry crash of 1983 and how the Japanese company Nintendo restarted the video game industry by releasing its Nintendo Entertainment System in 1985, only Chris Kohler (2005) engages with the importance of translation for that cross-national and multilingual event. Kohler writes of the importance of cross-cultural relationships between Japanese and the North American game industries in the 1980s and 1990s, the amusing bits lost in translation, and even some of the ties between translation and Nintendo's 1980s marketing techniques (2005: 205-236). However, he does not discuss how translation as a practice must routinely and persistently negotiate lost detail and information (Steiner 1998: 428),⁷¹ or the powerful way that translation shaped the industry before 1980, and up to the present. The global video game industry of the 2010s, which sells games over borders and between languages as 'globally' playable products, exists through to the extensive and daily practices of translation. As game studies scholar Mia Consalvo writes, "Researchers of new media must continue to examine not only cultural products, but also the business practices that lead to the production and circulation of these products" (Consalvo 2006).

⁷¹ As Steiner (1998: 428) notes, "A 'perfect' act of translation would be one of total synonymy. It would presume an interpretation so precisely exhaustive as to leave no single unit in the source text —phonetic, grammatical, semantic, contextual — out of complete account, and yet so calibrated as to have added nothing in the way of paraphrase, explication or variant." Because of this impossibility, translation must necessarily lose something. There is, then, no perfect translation, as all translations must willfully pick certain things to reproduce and others to abandon. For prescriptive arguments on what should be picked or left out, see: Dryden 2004 [1680]; Jakobson 1966; Nida 1964; Popovič 1975.

To date, both the practice and the importance of translation have been written out of the standard game histories.⁷²

One often hears that the best translation is invisible; a translator succeeds when the reader does not realize she is reading a translation, when the translation is “fluent.”⁷³ Such a belief is canonical in the game industry. As one post to the International Game Developers Association Localization Special Interest Group message board states, “As for localization effectiveness, I think it’s similar to good film soundtracks: if you don’t notice it, it’s great.”⁷⁴ A second points out that “you either get no qualitative feedback when a job is done well or you get negative feedback.”⁷⁵ From the experience and practice of these localization specialists, good game translation is unremarked upon and invisible. Lawrence Venuti (1997, 2008) has decried the invisibility of translation as a ‘scandal’ because it erases the labor involved, thereby alienating translators from their labor in common discourse. In light of such an ethical problem, Venuti calls for rendering visible both the translator and her work. Despite Venuti’s protest and call, translation

⁷² There are interesting ties between a critique of the ‘global’ game industry and Ruth Vasey’s (1997) study of early Hollywood. Just as Vasey indicates with the extensive translation involved in making the so-called ‘universal’ medium (Dwyer 2005), there is a systematic downplaying of the importance of translation within the game industry.

⁷³ For instance, at the beginning of *The Translator’s Invisibility* Lawrence Venuti lists 14 separate reviews that focus on the invisibility, or fluency, of the translation as a ‘positive’ quality. These reviews are encapsulated in the epigram: “I see translation as the attempt to produce a text so transparent that it does not seem to be translated. A good translation is like a pane of glass. You only notice that it’s there when there are little imperfections – scratches, bubbles. Ideally, there shouldn’t be any. It should never call attention to itself” (Norman Shapiro quoted in Venuti 2008: 1).

⁷⁴ Anonymous contributor to the International Game Developers Association Localization Special Interest Group message board, September 24, 2012.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

remains largely invisible in many publishing industries, particularly within the United States, and certainly within the video game industry.

It is possible that translation does not appear in most popular and academic histories of video games because the industry itself hides the importance of translation and its workers. Sometimes the translator is an unnamed freelancer who goes uncredited. As one translator notes, “I’ve translated... at least 200 games... but only a fraction of those, maybe 10 games at most, would have my name on them in the credits in one way or another. So, I have a very thin portfolio... I can say 200, but I can’t legally list 200 games.”⁷⁶ At other times localization service providers work under contract with the understanding of strict confidentiality – their company cannot mention that they translated their client’s games.⁷⁷ Often it is simply that the publisher and developer treat translation as a ‘black box’ where the text is sent out and magically transformed without real labor, so that there is no appreciable difference between a machine translator and a human. We saw this in Chapter 1 in the examples of Woolsey and Smith where game industry translation practices involved sending contextless text to a distant translator, and then requiring that translator reduce the character count of those translations without the ability to see how the reductions would influence the game visibly or experientially. In a black box situation, the publishers and developers seem to consider translation as a fully separate practice that does not effect the game itself. As Smith again recounts, “historically, but still now in a lot of places... translation is considered this black box...

⁷⁶ Interview with anonymous translator, March 6, 2012.

⁷⁷ While this happened with two different studios that I interacted with, I cannot mention any details due to the NDA restrictions both I and they are under.

and the company says we need to put this Japanese text into English let's throw it at the black box and when it comes out we'll slap it in the game and throw it out" (Smith 2012).

The very real invisibility of translation within the game industry is a problem for translators who are trying to survive in an industry in which they are in demand yet requires their invisibility. Paradoxically, these translators want to become visible to their industry (I am here; my translations matter; I am not a machine) even when they simultaneously try to remain invisible to the players of the games they translate (my translation is fluent; I am doing 'good,' invisible translation).

These issues of discursive and practical invisibility and the paradoxical need to constantly justify one's place within a business have resulted in several recent actions within the game localization industry. First, members of the game localization community have come together virtually through message boards such as the International Game Developers Association Localization Special Interest Group, and physically through round tables and summits at various major gaming conferences (particularly the IGDA Localization Summit and Localization World round table). These meetings work to strengthen internal ties within the localization industry. They also increase game localization's visibility as an important part of the video game industry.

Accompanying the general trend toward rendering game localization visible are several recent histories of game localization (Bernal-Merino 2011; Hasegawa 2009; O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013). These histories demonstrate that video game localization, as a constantly improving practice, is important to the game industry. However, as I am proposing, this teleological history does not pay heed to situated complexity of game

translation as a practice that makes choices as to what to include, how to include it, and what to exclude.

Three Histories of Game Localization

Hasegawa Ryoichi's (2009) history of video game localization is a particularly important work as it creates a framework within which the successive histories of game localization operate. As a professional video game translator (and game producer), Hasegawa (2009) addresses the Japanese video game industry in order to encourage it to fully embrace video game localization as a crucial and important part of game production. In addition to explaining the multimodal assets that can be localized – text, voice, graphics, level design, ratings, and religious elements – Hasegawa creates a six-part history of localization from the beginning of the 1980s to the late 2000s, noting two major shifts in the industry during this period.

First, localization developed from a minor, almost inconsequential task into an extensive and important practice. In the early 1980s, Hasegawa notes, only packaging and documentation were translated. Often translation was done almost as an afterthought; not by someone hired for the purpose, but by the company employee who happened to have the most knowledge of the desired language. During this earliest phase, in-game text remained untranslated. With Nintendo's global spread during the mid-1980s game localization practices focused on translating in-game text. However, in some instances character graphics, sounds, songs, and religious motifs were also changed. These additional changes occurred particularly when game companies deemed it necessary to

satisfy console holder guidelines.⁷⁸ At the same time that publishers mandated the change of non-linguistic elements, marketers began to institute targeted marketing campaigns to aim specific titles at a broader range of audiences.

The development of optical storage devices (CD, DVD, BluRay) led to enhanced content, but it also considerably impacted the scope of localization. By the 1990s, game developers adopted the use of CDs, taking advantage of the medium's increased storage space. The subsequent introductions of the DVD in the early 2000s and BluRay technology later in the decade made it possible for game developers to further enhance the quality of music, spoken dialog, and graphics. According to Hasegawa, the increased storage and enhanced sound and image quality capabilities impacted the scope of game localization enormously, shifting the practice from the translation of printed text to audio language substitution. This shift was accompanied by a range of concerns and techniques akin to those in the film industry multiple language version practices.

Voiced dialogue of the 2000s needed to be translated, but it also needed to be re-dubbed, and finally synched properly to the high polygon count characters' highly specific lip movements. Abstract characters (called sprites) of the 1980s had no voiced dialogue, and when these sprites finally spoke in the 1990s, when CDs allowed small amounts of spoken text, their mouths did little more than open and shut. These early

⁷⁸ One particular example is *Hittora Fukkatsu: Toppu Shiikuretto* [*Hitler's Revival: Top Secret*] (1988), which was localized as *Bionic Commando*. Beyond the title, modified elements include the removal of swastikas and changing the final boss from 'Adolf Hitler' to 'Master D.' What led to this and most non-linguistic semiotic changes in the 1980s and 1990s was the requirement that third-party developers adhere to Nintendo of America's Video Game Content Guidelines, which were developed to maintain Nintendo's family image. In turn, Sega had its Seal of Quality, but the guidelines are more vague than Nintendo's. Both are reproduced in Schwartz and Schwartz (1994: 23-5), and Nintendo's guidelines can be found online at Nintendo's Era of Censorship <http://www.filibustercartoons.com/Nintendo.php>. Additionally, for a study on regulation and video games, see Wilcox 2011.

characters' visual abstraction obviated the need for translators to craft a new sound-image relationship between dialogue and image. If a segment of dialog ran for about the same length of time as the original, then the general level of illusion of a match between sound and character image remained about the same. The introduction of characters with high polygon counts made it possible for game designers to render characters with articulated mouth movement capabilities, introducing the conditions of language-specific synchronicity to the original rendering of the character, and complicating the process for translators seeking to match up a recorded translation. It became necessary for translators not only to replace the voice recording with a track of the dialogue translated and performed in the target language, but also to negotiate changing either the dialogue or the graphics so that the words would match the lip movements. Thus, lip-synching, a process formerly associated with film and animation production and of major importance to the multiple language version film production industry, took on primary importance in general game production. And it became an issue of paramount importance for game translators who were forced to choose between ignoring lip movement in favor of 'accurate' translation, changing dialogue to match the lip movement, or in rare (and more expensive) instances re programming a character's lip movement to fit with the translated dialogue.

This was further complicated by the fact that game developers and marketers during the 1990s to 2000s began to realize that translations of dialog did not always 'read' as intended to target audiences. As a result, lines were altered to be more legible to a specific audience, to make the game make sense in a given context. For instance, the

line “*shoshitara, wafuku no onna no ko ga tsuikaketeitte*” [And then a girl with Japanese clothing went after her] was translated to “Then the girl in the hippie clothes ran after her.” According to the translator, “It’s not worth explaining. I mean if I say she was wearing Japanese medium clothes you have no picture. If I say she was wearing spiritual hippie stuff, you start getting somewhere” (Smith 2012). Changing the particularly cultural element (*wafuku*, or Japanese clothing) to a more ‘readable’ local element (hippie clothing) was far easier for the North American player, and more appropriate according to marketers.

The second large change, which Hasegawa locates in the 2000s, is the shift from “post-gold” localization, where the game is translated for secondary markets after it has been released in a primary market, to a system of “simultaneous shipment” localization, where the game is translated at the same time that it is written so that it may be released simultaneously in various markets around the world (see: Chapter 1). While such a switch is certainly hectic for individual translators and necessarily alters their practices, it also repositions localization within the game industry as a production practice, not a post-production practice (Figures 1.3 and 1.4). To reiterate my claim in both this chapter and the overall project, which sets my discussion apart from Hasegawa’s account: *localization is not a derivative act*. Rather, it is an act that is actively productive of meaning, culture

and value.⁷⁹ Localization (as a form of translation) is, of course, a copy or a version of the original. But as we know from the work of Walter Benjamin (1986, 2004) forward, the reproduction is never merely a secondary, weaker, or derivative product of the original, and its value is never solely due to its success or failure in replicating the original. The point here is not simply to state that localization, like all copy practices, entails creativity and meaning production and is not merely reproductive. Rather, I have been trying throughout this project to show how it is that meaning production occurs through distributed and situated activity, and also how the text itself – the localized game in association with its original – becomes itself a situated work, yet also a work that relies on a distributed network (other versions) for its meanings, distinct and similar. The question is no longer whether the localization is reproductive or productive, but how the rendering of the localized version both repeats and changes the game at many scales of meaning and signification, always differently configuring it and in so doing making it newly marketable and newly generative of revenue for a new audience while retaining critical markers of brand and game sameness. The value and meaning of the localized game version can be understood only in the larger, situated contexts of a discussion about the meaning of both the original and the translation in a global and digital media culture

⁷⁹ That localization is productive was explained well by Robertson in his first use of the word glocalization. As he writes: “Almost needless to say, in the world of capitalistic production for increasingly global markets the adaptation to local and other particular conditions is not simply a case of business responses to existing global variety - to civilizational, regional, societal, ethnic, gender and still other types of differentiated consumers - as if such variety or heterogeneity existed simply 'in itself'. To a considerable extent micro-marketing or, in the more comprehensive phrase, glocalization - involves the construction of increasingly differentiated consumers, the ‘invention’ of ‘consumer traditions’ (Robertson 1995: 28-9).

in which the binary of original and copy no longer hold ultimate meaning and power.

These new contexts are a world of versions, adaptations, and ever-changing localizations

Of course, this argument hinges not on the status of the object per se (the final product, original or localization), but on the means of its production, which includes the practice of localization. Hasegawa moves toward recognizing the importance of the localization process when he indicates that localization, not the initial development, is crucial to creating and selling hit titles in target markets. Writing about localizing a specific game into Japan, Hasegawa states, “While an independent American developer might have created the title, the production team as a whole wanted to make their game a hit in Japan” (Hasegawa 2009: 129, author’s translation).⁸⁰

I wish to push further Hasegawa’s perspective by directly countering the idea that translation is merely a post-production, derivative act. In his linear history of translation, Hasegawa seems to regard the past practices of only translating text as inferior to the present industry practices of altering text, audio, video, and gameplay. His account echoes the perspective of video game historians Malliet and de Meyer (2005) and Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008), who imply that games have ‘progressed’ from the 1st to the (present) 8th generations along the lines of a more-faster-better logic and in so doing become ‘better’ games. In this view, ‘better’ and ‘complicated’ are conflated: the translation process becomes ‘better’ solely because it deals with a more ‘complicated’

⁸⁰ Hasegawa’s full quote is: “Again, for characteristic titles of this generation, I want to look at the Playstation series Crash Bandicoot. While an independent American developer might have created the title, the production team as a whole wanted to make their game a hit in Japan. With such strong feelings in mind, Sony Computer Entertainment’s Japanese, American and European producers met to make careful adjustments to things like character visuals and difficulty level, thanks to repeated focus testing. As a result the game was a record breaking explosive hit within Japan and the world, and it is appropriate to call the game a localization success” (Hasegawa 2009: 129, author’s translation).

original entity – when the game is ‘more-better-faster’ than its predecessors. But this logic misses the point that the localization in itself is always more complicated. It is complicated because games have become more complicated, but also because translation is a complicated, multimodal and culturally specific process in which meanings shift and change, and in which transpositions in cultural and contextual frameworks sometimes require the translator to change meaning and sense altogether. The key point is not that games have become more complex and that localization has been able to follow this increased complexity (even if this is true). Translation is both multimodal and culturally complex, ruling out the very possibility of one-for-one correspondence or mirroring between original and copy even in the most rudimentary of original games. Because of this, translation necessarily involves choosing what to present, how to present it, and what to leave out. As I am arguing throughout, it is in deciding which foreign elements to present, how to present them, and which to replace that translation acts not as a means of swapping one national language for another, but as a productive act that has political and ethical ramifications regarding difference and borders between the two locales.

The history Hasegawa presented to the game industry has been supplemented by two academic publications that highlight the strategies and increasing success of the video game localization industry. Success, according to these publications, comes from the game industry specialists hitting their target market with well-aimed products using the thirty-year-honed practice of manipulating a game so that it is legally acceptable for sale, and adopted by consumers in a given target market. In a short article on the topic, Miguel Bernal-Merino pushes the origins of game translation back to the 1970s, noting

that arcade machines were sometimes (although not usually) exported to new locales. Unlike console video games introduced in the 1980s, these 1970s arcade games were exported with few to no changes (the Japanese games were often made in English). According to Bernal-Merino, this arcade game period is the *pre-history* of game translation (Bernal-Merino 2011: 12-14). Bernal-Merino extends the periodization, but he does not debate the periodization itself. Rather than countering the received history, Bernal-Merino reinforces the idea of a linear progression of more-faster-better toward complexity. His account of localization outlines, in his own words, “the different stages in this non-stop progression that has made video games into the most lucrative entertainment industry ahead of books, music and films” (Bernal-Merino 2011: 12).

My point of conflict with Bernal-Merino is not that games have a complex history that is tangled with other forms of media. On this point I agree. What concerns me is that Bernal-Merino casts the history of game localization in the light of a unidirectional more-faster-better logic in which game localization outstrips all other forms of media translation (“books, music, and films”) in a race toward media-industry dominance. A history of video games that uncritically focuses on technological development is incredibly limited in what it can tell us about economics, politics, and culture; a history of localization that piggybacks on top of that history by mirroring a logic of technological progress is similarly myopic, missing precisely the economic, the political and the cultural.

In a much more extensive book chapter on the history of localization, Minako O’Hagan and Carmen Mangiron similarly locate the beginning of game translation in the

late 1970s with the strategic decisions to alter *Pacman*'s title from Puckman [*pakkuman*] to *Pacman* in order to avoid vandals changing the P to an F (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013, 49).⁸¹ While the marketing-led decision to change *Pacman*'s name allows O'Hagan and Mangiron to approach the practice of localization economically and practically (in a strategy that suits their backgrounds as translation studies scholars with experience professionally translating), their orientation remains wedded to a model that ties linguistic adaptation and progress. O'Hagan and Mangiron take Bernal-Merino's "stages of progression" a step further by dubbing their successive periods the "early days," the "growth phase," the "development phase," the "maturing phase," and the "advancing phase." This explicit labeling of game culture's phases of development is simply a more explicit expression of the teleological approach visible in the Hasegawa's and Bernal-Merino's Whiggish historical accounts as well as in the previously mentioned popular video game histories. This strategy is reminiscent of modern theories of economic, political and technological development that justify present (and dominant) practices by suggesting they are the climax of previous, lesser practices in earlier periods and in less central places (Hegel 1944; Marx and Engels 2002; Rostow 1960; Schramm 1964).⁸² As numerous postmodern and poststructural theorists of the late 20th century have noted, such linear and teleological accounts of development miss much of the detail, disparity, diversity and complexity of any given social situation. These accounts tend to justify the

⁸¹ O'Hagan and Mangiron draw this from Kohler (2005: 212).

⁸² For example, Mangiron and O'Hagan's phases are strikingly similar to Rostow's stages of economic growth (1960): early days = traditional society; growth phase = the preconditions for take-off; the development phase = the take-off; the maturing phase = the drive to maturity; advancing phase = age of high mass-consumption.

dominance of the subject or political power that is the subject of the history in question (Foucault 1984; Schiller 1992). One could argue that a justification of the centrality and power of the subject position of the localizer is, of course, important and politically timely, given that localizers are at this moment fighting to keep their jobs in a field in which their positions are threatened both by the demand for invisibility as a condition of the job, and by changes in the industry toward outsourcing.⁸³ However, the history that the teleological account tells us misses important details, aspects of the practice that in fact may help us to see the larger importance of game localization, and media localization generally, in the production of meanings and cultures from the scale of the global to the scale of the situated and local. In fact, this practice can tell us much about how the global product is in fact made over to become local, allowing us to understanding the specifics of the labor (otherwise subject to the demand to be invisible) entailed in that transformation.

This chapter thus far has moved toward the goal of attempting to uncover details of localization as a form of cultural production – aspects of the practice that are lost when video game translation history is arranged into a linear progression that continues to privilege the original game and defines localization as the textual manipulations required to create a derivative artifact. These views fail to capture the ways in which localization practice is embedded within the game industry as a necessary practice that determines the relationship between original and localized games, original and target locales. Finally,

⁸³ For an academic perspective, see: O'Hagan 2009; for a professional translator's perspective, see: Dellepiane 2012.

these histories, because they have focused on linguistic alteration as the core element of translation, are limited insofar as they miss the non-linguistic pre-histories of game localization. It is these which will be discussed in the next section.

Alternate Origins of Game Localization

The history of video games is updated with each rewriting, so that forgotten examples like *Naughts and Crosses* (1952)⁸⁴ and *Tennis for Two* are recovered and raised in importance through media archeology.⁸⁵ Yet the history has not changed in terms of its more-faster-better logic. A rhetoric of improvement is maintained. Such a rhetoric both rationalizes the push of the industry toward updating technology and motivates it. But it also maintains the status quo, or what the members of the feminist game studies collective Ludica⁸⁶ call the “hegemony of play” within the game production process and environment, the technological development of play, and the cultural positioning of gaming (Fron et al. 2007). Some writing about games work to trouble this hegemonic

⁸⁴ While *Naughts and Crosses* (*OXO*), Alexander Douglas’ dissertation project on human interaction, predates *Tennis for Two* by 6 years and *Spacewar!* by a decade, I do not list it in the previous section due to its limited lifespan, interactivity, and translation. It has only recently been recovered by historians and as such is not within any of the dominant histories; there is an incredibly limited amount of actions available as the game recreates the various rules of tic-tac-toe and is, therefore, impossible to win/lose if played properly; finally, it did not migrate, nor was it played by any outside of Douglas’ thesis committee, meaning that it did not survive through translation.

⁸⁵ Media archaeology is an historical methodology that attempts to better understand contemporary media history through studying cyclically recurring historical media phenomena. Huhtamo notes that media archaeology involves two goals: “the study of the cyclically recurring elements and motives underlying and guiding the development of media culture... [and] the ‘excavation’ of the ways in which these discursive traditions and formulations have been ‘imprinted’ on specific media machines and systems in different historical contexts, contributing to their identity in terms of socially and ideologically specific webs of signification” (1997: 223). Also, see: Wolf 2012.

⁸⁶ While the authors of individual papers vary, the members of Ludica are Celia Pearce, Jacquelyn Ford Morie, Tracy Fullerton, and Janine Fron.

history of video games by unearthing alternate histories. One particularly good example of this approach is the William A. Higinbotham Game Studies Collection, which features non-digital elements of game culture that serve to problematize the current ‘digital’ rhetoric: from the oscilloscope-based *Tennis for Two* (the first ‘analog’ computer game) to boxes, manuals, advertisements and other game paratexts that were crucial to the birth of the game industry.⁸⁷ Unfortunately, no such troubling has yet occurred for the history of game localization. In this chapter, I attempt such destabilizing work by interrogating the purpose and history of game localization.

The most obvious discrepancy is that while game history begins in the late 1950s to early 1960s, game localization’s history begins in the 1970s to 1980s, if we follow Hasegawa’s, Bernal-Merino’s, and O’Hagan and Mangiron’s accounts. These accounts tie game localization’s origins to linguistic alteration, or textual translation, a game industry practice that did not occur before the late 1970s. But translation predates this point, though it goes unseen. This omission may be because of the non-standardized hardware of the 1960s-1970s. The rise of consoles that were sold around the world (Nintendo, Sega, Sony and Microsoft) led the industry to embrace the practice of linguistically translating singular games between world regions – a practice which then flows into that of semiotically translating (words, graphics, sounds) singular games in the present. However, translation before the 1980s happened in more technical ways that are not incorporated into the above histories of game localization. Because of the non-traditional

⁸⁷ A second, ongoing example is the debugging game history project coordinated by Raiford Guins and Henry Lowood. By highlighting ‘alternate’ elements within game history the contributors work as counterhegemonic influence on the greater game studies history.

way that translation most often occurred during the 1960s and 1970s previous histories have missed the importance of two aspects of this practice: software *migration* practices, and the *adaptation* of physical types of play, previously coded games, and generic formulae.⁸⁸ Both of these, migration and adaptation, are crucial elements of translation, particularly because they reveal the crux of all types of translation (including game localization). My key point is that *when translation moves a text from one place to another, it necessarily alters the text in that movement*. In turn, there is a balancing between translation and adaptation, which is to say, certain things are allowed to migrate with more or less adaptation. This negotiation is a form of border negotiation that is key to understanding game localization as both a political and ethical practice. By relocating the historical origin point of game localization to earlier instances (of migration and adaptation) we can better understand the broader purpose and meaning of game localization as a practice.

Migration

The current video game origin story begins with two games: *Tennis for Two* (1958) and *Spacewar!* (1962). William Higinbotham's *Tennis for Two* was designed and

⁸⁸ My terms, migration and adaptation, are similar to the digital preservation studies terms migration and emulation, but they are different. Migration within digital preservation is the attempt to recreate, or port, the digital code of a piece of software so that it can be utilized on a secondary environment (operating system). Emulation, in contrast, involves creating an application that can emulate the software's original environment (operating system) within the more powerful secondary environment. For example, my MacBook Pro can launch the software DeSmuME, an emulator that plays Nintendo DS games. While emulation is quite different from what I discuss in this dissertation, migration is very similar, particularly in terms of propagation. See: Pinchbeck et al. 2009.

implemented⁸⁹ on an analog computer, played on an oscilloscope, and deleted after its two-year run as an amusing demonstration for visitors at Brookhaven National Labs' yearly open house. As a tennis simulation for two people, the game was much lighter entertainment than the laboratory's main focus on nuclear research, and much more engaging than the non-responsive walls of mid 20th century mainframe computers (Yudin 2013). The second game, *Spacewar!*, was programmed by the Tech Model Railroad Club, a group of young scientist/hackers at MIT.⁹⁰ Programmed digitally on an early timeshare university computer called a PDP-1, the game consisted of two spaceships (a taller needle-like ship and a squatter wedge-like ship), each controlled by a different person with a joystick, battling around a star located in the center of the monitor. These two games are cited as the origin point of most published video game histories, but they predate Hasegawa's, Bernal-Merino's, and O'Hagan and Mangiron's accounts by roughly two decades. Both *Tennis for Two* and *Spacewar!* are demonstrations of high technology created and played within secluded, government funded, academic laboratories. As recreations of the game of tennis and a space battle, they were understood as play,⁹¹ not as culturally or linguistically based texts needing translation. However, any history that relates translation solely to the linguistic misses the broader meanings of translation.

Neither *Tennis for Two* nor *Spacewar!* include 'language' in the sense of words on the

⁸⁹ Robert V. Dvorak assisted in the game's assembly.

⁹⁰ Although primarily attributed to Steve Russell, *Spacewar!* was conceived of in 1961 by Russell, Martin Graetz, and Wayne Wiitanen, and created on the PDP-1 in 1962 by Russell, Graetz, Dan Edwards, and Peter Samson (who is attributed with creating the 'Expensive Planetarium' star display), with the help of Steve Piner, Robert A. Saunders, and Alan Kotok (who retrieved necessary sine-cosine routines).

⁹¹ While Brian Sutton Smith (1997) discusses the ambiguous, multiple meanings of play, the concept is more commonly understood as a universal function that transcends the need of translation.

screen. The former took the form of a line bouncing back and forth on an oscilloscope, and the latter involved two triangles shooting each other around a star field. Yet despite this absence of text, each is a particularly good example of translation as either migration or adaptation.

The Latin roots of the word translation point to a more general sense of the concept as transportation: *translatio* can refer to the transportation of objects or people between places, the movement of holy relics, transfer of jurisdiction, the movement of ideas, and finally linguistic alteration (Serge Lusignan quoted in Berman 1988: 9).

Translation's essence, then, implies movement from one place to another. We generally think about 'places' today as regions or nations with distinctive linguistic systems, so that the movement comes along with linguistic alternation.⁹² However, language change is not the only way to understand translation. In Berman's pre-17th century sense, translation implied both 'propagation' and 'movement': duplication and/or relocation across space and time through some sort of translational practice. *Tennis for Two* was dismantled after being shown for two years, thereafter existing only in human memories, photographs of the event, and incomplete instructions (Yudin 2013). *Spacewar!*, however, was spread extensively. Like the bones of saints being translated from one European cathedral to another, *Spacewar!* was moved from one PDP-1 computer to the next. And like sacred

⁹² While literature on place/space is varied and extensive (Harvey 2006), I understand place here through Michel de Certeau's claim that "*space is a practiced place*" (1984: 117). Localization's targeting of particular local norms is part of the practicing that turns places into spaces. Whereas places are stable "configurations of positions [...] space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. On this view, in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts" (Certeau 1984: 117).

relics, it bolstered the faith of nerds in computers and spread the new religion of video games. Due to their materiality as digital texts, video games were translated through migration between different university computers in the United States and, later, around the world. The core of translation as migration, then, is movement: rendering a text mobile.

A group of students wrote the core program of *Spacewar!* on the MIT PDP-1 supercomputer over several years in the early 1960s. However, the digitally coded algorithms that made up the game were not finished, published and distributed as a game would be today. Instead, *Spacewar!* migrated to different PDP-1 supercomputers around the United States as students and scientists moved between labs, schools and states (Brand 1972; Yasanki 1963). While digital reproducibility is an essential element of new media (Manovich 2001), copying in the 1960s was not as simple as cutting and pasting,⁹³ or attaching a ROM file in an email. Reproduction accompanied human mobility: when workers moved from one department to another, or from one company or school to another, they brought a copy of the code and manually added it to the new department or company's computer system. As people moved throughout the tech/research industry of the early 1960s, they took *Spacewar!* with them, translating it from one place (the PDP-1 supercomputer at MIT) to another (the PDP-1 supercomputer at Minnesota). It was these successive acts of translation as migration that led to the propagation of games as a medium and form of culture that was literally carried, as code, and installed into the new location's supercomputer. In the 1960s translation had to do neither with altering semiotic

⁹³ Along with the undo command, cut, copy and paste were not created until the mid 1970s (Moran 2012).

elements of a game nor providing a service to a paying publisher – acts that are important in localization of the 2010s. Rather, translation back then was a matter of propagation: spreading video games to new people.⁹⁴

Translation as migration was the primary means of digital propagation throughout the 1960s. Students were trained (propagating information); unique people moved from one place to another (bringing the information in their heads, as code and/or software to be installed); software was duplicated and information was transported when those people moved from one place to another. From its inception, the history of video game translation is deeply tied to people and code moving, and despite industry crackdowns involving patents and NDAs to restrict migrant workers from taking information and particular tools between companies, such migration practices do occur and are still important informal mechanisms of cultural migration. Individual translators take techniques and knowledge with them from job to job, company to company, as they move through their careers.

Similar to how the translation of saints' bones allowed the spread of Christian faith in the early modern period, and like the process through which how evangelists and Bible translations spread Christianity (Rafael 1993; Smalley 1991), the migration element of translation was integral to the spread of the video game industry. The physical

⁹⁴ While I focus on the 1960s as the start point for translation as migration, hobbyist, hacker, and industry efforts to migrate (port) games to new platforms continue into the present. For example, *Space Invaders* migrated when hobbyists ported it into the DOS coding language BASIC in the 1990s (see: <http://www.netadelica.com/coding/>), and old games like *The Longest Journey* (2000) migrate when publishers port them onto new platforms including smartphones in the 2010s.

migration element of translation is a territorializing and reterritorializing series of acts in which borders are created and recreated, written and rewritten.

A particularity of practice critical to this kind of border writing and rewriting is the element of adaptation that accompanies the act of translation.

particularities of this border rewriting are determined by the adaptation element accompanying the act of translation.

Adaptation

The migration of *Spacewar!* between computers is one half of the game's translation; the other half is the necessary adaptation that accompanied its migration. The game was continually modified and augmented as new students arrived at MIT and changed the game's code; further, adaptation necessarily occurred whenever *Spacewar!* migrated to a different PDP-1 computer. Any text must change in some way or another when it is moved (language, word count, aura, context, etc), and games are not an exception to this rule. Games are constantly adapted: from real to digital play; from version 1.0 to version 2.0; from loose collection of features to stable genre. Adaptation as a second mode of translation is visible with *Spacewar!* in several ways: the game was created based on Doc Smith's 1950s science fiction Lensman series; it was modified by people working at each university mainframe computer to which it migrated (Brand 1972); and finally it was turned into the arcade game *Computer Space* (1971) by Nolan Bushnell. This adaptation element of translation is even more explicit within *Tennis for Two*. Because these two games serve as the fractured origin point of most historical

accounts of the history of video games it makes sense that they also serve as two loci of game localization history's fractured point of origin.

While technology was important in the 1960s, the tech industry had not yet embraced video games as economically viable. Computers were expensive and directly linked to research labs. Games existed on research computers and therefore young scientists, not the everyday person, programmed and played them. This may suggest a lack of economic prospect that may explain in part why software migration was the primary discernible form of video game translation in the 1960s. It wasn't until the 1970s that games broke out of tech/research labs to become a media industry that spread to the populace at large. By 1966, Ralph Baer was able to stuff the necessary processor power into his console-sized creation, the 'Brown Box' prototype for the first video game console. However, due to industry reluctance and cost of production, the prototype was not actually mass marketed until 1972, when it was sold by Magnavox as the Odyssey console system. Among the games included with the Brown Box was a simulation of table tennis. Both Higinbotham's *Tennis for Two* and Baer's Brown Box *Tennis* game translated the physical game of table tennis into a new, virtual form.⁹⁵

Already we can see the proclivity to re-create physical acts and modes of play as video games; another way translation aligns with adaptation is in the successive iterations of similar games. In 1972 Nolan Bushnell and Allan Alcorn, founders of the company

⁹⁵ As a minor, but historically important note, I use the term 'virtual' here as a means of linking an 'analog' game (*Tennis for Two*) with a 'digital' game (*Tennis*). Because Higinbotham's *Tennis for Two* was created on an analog oscilloscope it is often separated from the history of 'digital video games.' While such a separation is important for media specificity, it ignores the important relationship in terms of translation and broader cultural usage of games.

Atari, created the coin-operated video game *Pong* and convinced their local bar, lovingly named by most books as Andy Capp's Tavern, to host the arcade cabinet.⁹⁶ A simple game, *Pong* is a simulation of table tennis, where there are two paddles and a bouncing ball. One player controls a paddle on one side of the screen, and the computer (or a second player) controls the paddle on the other side of the screen. If the player manages to ricochet the ball behind her opponent's paddle she scores a point, if she misses and the ball goes behind her own paddle then the opponent gets a point, and 3 points wins the match. Despite being a simple game, within a few days the game's cashbox was already filled with over 1200 quarters (Burnham 2003).

Following the success of *Pong*, similar games began to surface around the world. In the United States, Nutting Associates made *Computer Space Ball*, and Allied Leisure made both *Paddle Battle* and *Tennis Tourney* (Kent 2001). In Japan, Taito created *Elepon*, in France René Pierre created *Smatch*, and in Italy, Zaccaria created *TV Joker* (Donovan 2010: 26). Some of these were licensed, but the majority of these games were not. Bushnell called creators of these games "jackals" descending on easy money (Kent 2001: 61). But if we think about the textual manipulations involved in creating these games, we can see them less as 'ripoffs' or 'clones' and more as a form of translation. Specifically, these games exist due to the same form of translation as adaptation that led to *Pong*, Baer's *Tennis* and even Higinbotham's *Tennis for Two*. In order to migrate some

⁹⁶ Though a commercial failure, Bushnell released an adaptation of *Spacewar!* called *Computer Space* in 1971 through Nutting Associates. While *Computer Space* is interesting as both the first coin operated arcade cabinet and an example of translation as adaptation, it is overshadowed by the historical importance of Bushnell's second game, *Pong*. Because of its popularity, as well as its relationship to both *Tennis For Two* and Baer's table tennis game, *Pong* is the more important game for both the standard history of video games as well as the history of translation in gaming.

particular text from one place to another there must be some sort of adaptation: on one level there is the adaptation of a physical game into a virtual game (*Tennis for Two* and *Tennis*); on a second level there is the modification of the virtual game into a slightly different game (*Pong*); and on a third level there is a stabilization of adapted elements into a generic pattern of the ‘tennis game’ (the clones). Virtual tennis moved (officially and unofficially, legally and illegally) over national lines, and between computers and consoles, where each variant is an adaptation that allows the game to sell in a distinct place. Translation as migration led to an initial boom of tech-industry games as a subculture; translation as adaptation sparked national video game industries, and then led to the creation of generic norms, which support the global legibility of ludic forms.

The fledgling video game industry of the 1970s described above was not exactly global, but a group of companies, consoles, and practices separately based in different national industries. While there were rough multinational ties, there were no significant multinational companies until the 1980s.⁹⁷ Companies did not exist in multiple countries at that time, nor were they able to release games in multiple different languages without assistance. In order to release a game in a foreign territory, a nationally based company needed a foreign-based company to import, localize, and publish the title. Despite this seemingly Babelian element of the 1970s game industry, what actually kept the national game industries apart and prevented localization was not language diversity, but hardware diversity. Adaptation was absolutely crucial in the 1970s not because of the multiplicity

⁹⁷ One of the few companies to attempt early transnational practices was Atari, which had a Japanese side for a portion of the 1970s. However, Atari Japan failed, was bought out, and eventually turned into Namco. See: Cohen 1984; Donovan 2010.

of global languages, but because of the multiplicity of video game hardware – platforms – around the world. There was no global video game industry with accompanying standardized consoles to facilitate the more simple translation-as-migration practices visible with the non-industrial *Spacewar!* that moved from one PDP-1 super computer to another.

In the 1970s to early 1980s there was a multiplicity of very different game consoles (hardware) that were only popular in particular regional contexts. Atari, which held a 70-80% market-share in the United States during this period (Cohen 1984; Donovan 2010), is commonly understood to have been the dominant platform of the period. But it was not the only platform, and it was more popular in the United States than elsewhere. Atari failed in Japan after a brief attempt as a multinational company. Atari also had less popularity in Europe, where the Magnavox Odyssey and Odyssey² systems dominated (Donovan 2010). Within the US there were rival consoles throughout the 1970s and early 1980s including RCA's Studio II and III, the Fairchild Vision F, Mattel's Intellivision, and Coleco's ColecoVision. England had its own rival system. Devised by Clive Sinclair, it was called the Sinclair ZX80, a system that was later upgraded into the ZX81. Germany had the Interton VC-4000. And in Japan there was the MSX home computer – not a console, but a dominant gaming platform. In addition to the Japan-centered MSX, there were several home computers that were popular for games in other regions. These include the Commodore 64 and the Apple II.

This list is anything but exhaustive. Its purpose is merely to point out the variety of systems that existed in the late 1970s to early 1980s. The key issue with this

multiplicity of systems is that they were not designed for cross-compatible use or programming, and developers located in specific national regions programming on particular consoles had little impetus at the time to code for multiple platforms.

Early console video games do not show up as translated within Hasegawa's, Bernal-Merino's, and O'Hagan and Mangiron's three histories of localization for two reasons. First, because there were few linguistic elements within the games. Therefore, the process of exporting/importing the title was rarely referred to as 'translation' even if the title happened to be moved from one regional context to another. Thus, the three histories locate the beginning of game translation within the late 1970s to early 1980s with games like *Pacman*. Second, the difficulties inherent with re-writing the code so that it could work on the console of the target linguistic region tended to foreclose industry interest. The call to translate a game was thus rare indeed. Were an American/English Atari game to be translated to work in Europe, it might need to be re-written from the ground up in a different programming language in order to operate on the Magnavox Odyssey² or Sinclair ZX81. Any attempt to move a game from one locale/language to another would have required the reconsideration of all the particular coding techniques used to create the game on its original platform (Montfort et al. 2012; Montfort and

Bogost 2009), many of which would be impossible on the new platform.⁹⁸ However, if we define game translation as a practice that includes the *adaptation* of a game in order to *migrate* it from one place to another, game translation has occurred regularly from the 1960s until the present.

When understood through the concept of adaptation, translation takes one element as essential to the text and recreates that core element as a different game. The essence is maintained in the migration, but the extras are adapted. In the case of *Tennis for Two* and its ‘virtual’ table-tennis successors, it is the mechanic of hitting the ball with a paddle. In the case of early translations of the 1980s to 1990s, the mechanics and aesthetics are both maintained, but the national language is modified.⁹⁹ In the case of ‘full localizations’ in the 2000s, the experience of fun is maintained, but textual, audio, visual and ludic assets could all be adapted (Mangiron and O’Hagan 2006).

⁹⁸ A clear example of the problems of translating between platforms can be seen in the computer program 10 PRINT CHR\$(205.5+RND(1)); : GOTO 10, a Commodore 64 command that randomly prints either / or \ on a screen, running from left to right and top to bottom as the screen fills with a maze-like image. As Montfort et al. (2012) point out, adaptation is essential to translating, or porting (a term that includes the ‘port’ from import, export, and transport), the command to any new system. Porting the command to Apple II requires changing the command to 10 PRINT CHR\$(47+(INT(RND(1)*2)*45)); : GOTO 10, where “205.5+RND(1),” the command to switch between / and \, becomes “(47+(INT(RND(1)*2)*45),” as the two characters are located in a different place within the Apple II code language. Furthermore, even when adapting the program so that it does something similar is not enough as the output of the Apple II port looks significantly different. Whereas the BASIC 10 PRINT appears to be a tight maze, where slashes match up (Montfort et al. 2012: 2), the Apple II port features slashes and backslashes that are separated by space on all sides, thus failing to create a maze (Montfort et al. 2012: 54). While the 10 PRINT command is simplistic, the difficulties of porting are visible in the effort to port arcade games of the 1970s -1990s to home consoles. For example, whereas the arcade version of *Pacman* was hugely successful both economically and popularly, the Atari port was a failure that sold far fewer copies than both expected and produced. Part of the reason for this is that the crisp graphics and clean controls were both mangled in rewriting *Pacman*’s code on the Atari 2600 (Guins 2009; Montfort and Bogost 2009).

⁹⁹ For instance, when *The Legend of Zelda* (1986) was translated from Japanese to English, no extensive aesthetic, mechanic, or cultural elements were changed.

Migration + Adaptation = Border Negotiation

No translation is ever simply about migration or simply about adaptation. I have in fact tried to show how the two are interdependent. Whenever a game (or any text) is translated there are always elements of migration and elements of adaptation. A complex negotiation of difference shapes both the balance between the processes and the particulars of which elements change and which stay the same. As Masao Miyoshi (1979) has argued, any act of translation is itself an act of interpretation that necessarily adapts the original into a particular relationship with the present time and context.

I have already proposed that the particular interpretations and adaptations made in order to move a text over national or cultural borders are relevant to both politics and culture. In this I echo Naoki Sakai's (2009) discussion of translation as an act of bordering. If translation entails a negotiation of migration and adaptation, as I have argued above, then translation is also always about politics, economics and borders.

The concept of borders most often brings to mind national boundaries: historically created geographical lines that separate groups of people. I have argued thus far that game translation influences and is influenced by such national and cultural borders. In the following section I will use generic borders to help explain the nature of the border negotiations conducted by translational practices. I propose that genre is the negotiation of maintained and adapted elements over time.

While genre appears static, as a system of classification it is always in a state of active production. The 'generic,' or normal, is produced through the simultaneous fulfillment of certain expectations and creation of new expectations (Altman 1984;

Bourdieu 1984; Bowker and Star 1999). With translation, certain elements of a game are maintained, but others are changed as the game is translated between places. Developers may take a pre-existing form of real world play and attempt to keep that element stable; developers may also attempt to modify generic norms as they become stale (or overly generic). These norms can include mechanics (as with the numerous tennis games), but they can also include contextually situated linguistic and cultural particulars (such as Japanese and English languages, or Japanese and American cultures). Translation, as a particular negotiation of migration and adaptation, is a non-neutral system of classification where certain things are generically acceptable (mobile) and others are not (necessarily adapted).

Arcade Shooter

In 1978, *Space Invaders* was developed by Pacific Kougyou and distributed by Taito within Japan, where it was a massive economic success and cultural influence.¹⁰⁰ It was so popular that Midway distributed the game in the United States in 1979. In *Space Invaders*, the player controls a small space ship and faces never ending waves of pixelated alien invaders. Hiding behind the three ever deteriorating bulkheads, the player shoots as many aliens as possible in order to rack up as high a score as possible before inevitably dying. Like most games of the 1970s, *Space Invaders* had little natural language in it. Furthermore, despite being created in Japan, the words that did exist

¹⁰⁰ Almost every history of video games makes mention of the 100 yen shortage that happened in the wake of *Space Invaders*. Supposedly the game was so popular that the 100 yen piece needed to operate it was soon in short supply.

within the game – ‘Space Invaders,’ ‘score <1>,’ ‘score <2>,’ ‘hi-score,’ ‘credit,’ ‘ready player <1>’ – were all English (the title was often transliterated into katakana within Japan).¹⁰¹ Because it was an arcade game, and not a console game that would require rewriting to exist on a different region’s preferred console, *Space Invaders* was migrated almost without adaptation. The game was not rewritten, but was exported from Japan and imported into other regions as a unified motherboard. The only adaptations that were necessary were the creation of a physical cabinet in the new country within which to house the game, the integration of the target market’s standard electrical outlet style, and the linguistic translation of the Japanese instructions into English (and other regional languages). The instructions were then attached to the physical arcade cabinet.¹⁰²

While *Space Invaders* migrated between regions almost completely unchanged,¹⁰³ it also spawned dozens of similar, but slightly different games over the next few years.

These were games in which the player controlled a ship, shot lasers at waves of

¹⁰¹ Young Japanese players’ forced familiarity with English (at least enough to understand repeated and repeatable phrases like score and player 1) has much to do with the existence of English within Japanese schooling due to post WWII politics (Shibata 2005; Torikai 2005). However, the spread of Hollywood films, rock music and 20th century American politics have also set English up as a world language (see: Crystal 2003; Nunan 2003; Pennycook 1994).

¹⁰² *Space Invaders* was re-located from Japan to the United States much unchanged, as one of the first official ‘translations,’ but less popular games were often altered in their movement. Taito’s earlier game *Western Gun* (1975) was adapted and released by Bally into the United States as *Gun Fight* (1975). The game was rewritten from the ground up in order to take advantage of new microprocessor technology, and in the process the game play was altered. In response to the different versions, the designer Nishikado has stated his distaste of the translation: “Quite frankly I thought the play of *Gun Fight* was not really good and in Japan my version of *Western Gun* was better received. But I was very impressed with the use of the microprocessor technology and could’t wait to learn this skill” (Nishikado quoted in Donovan 2010: 42). As part of the adaptation, the name was changed to fit with an assumption of what young American gamers would enjoy: *Gun Fight* broke with the idea of the West — seen as unpopular in the 1970s — but kept the gun. With the alteration of *Western Gun* to *Gun Fight* we see hints at the direction the industry takes in the 1990s, where gameplay elements are adapted to fit the target region.

¹⁰³ By unchanged I refer to the game itself, not the contextual consumption of the game. Local forms of video game consumption were incredibly different. While *Space Invaders* was often located in bars and arcades in the United States, Japan is known to have had *Space Invaders* cafes called “Invader Houses,” with cocktail-table oriented *Space Invaders* machines as tables (Picard 2013).

advancing enemies, and tried to get a high score. *Space Invaders*' offspring, the arcade shooter genre – sometimes called “shoot ‘em ups” or “shmups” – was highly successful in many regions, but it was not static. The genre shifted with each iteration: while the enemies originally came toward the player from the top to the bottom of the screen, generic modifications had the player scrolling up toward the top or to the right of the screen; a second evolution led to power-ups such as different types of weapons. Yet another generic evolution resulted in large ‘boss’ enemies at the end of each level. The arcade shooter's generic boundaries were developed over time as certain elements were adapted and other elements were maintained.

The arcade shooter genre passed over national lines relatively easily, and generic iterations were created in various national contexts throughout the 1970s to the present.

In contrast, the Role Playing Game (RPG) genre is a highly nationalized genre that elaborates the border negotiation involved with any act of migration and adaptation.

Role Playing Game

A popular subcultural activity in the United States during the mid 20th century, the RPG made a relatively easy transition to video games in the 1970s.¹⁰⁴ The genre's American popularity, however, was not matched in Japan until the mid 1980s. Niche 'adult oriented' RPGs like *Dragon and Princess* (1982), and *Danchi-zuma no Yuuwaku* [Temptation of the Condominium Wife] (1982) exist, but the RPG genre's popularity spread in Japan through a practice of translation. As a means of translating the genre that was popular within the United States, Henk Rogers, an American living in Japan, developed *A Black Onyx* (1984) by simplifying the details of RPGs popular in the United States.¹⁰⁵ One key simplification was representing character health, or hit points, graphically instead of as numbers. Hugely popular, the game caused the RPG genre to spread extensively within Japan. According to Rogers:

[*A Black Onyx*] made such a huge impact and caused so many clones to be developed I fast realized we just could not keep up. *Dragon Quest* [an RPG developed by the Japanese company Enix in 1986] was a game built specifically for the Famicom and Famicom players. The graphics and the

¹⁰⁴ The RPG's roots go back to tabletop war games like *kriegspiel* of the 18th century and H. G. Wells' *Little Wars* from the beginning of the 20th century, but its more immediate roots are in Gary Gygax' *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974), which was little more than a written set of rules determining how people could create stories and play within them using dice and their imagination. The idea of adventuring as somebody else in some particular role was adapted to computers by games like *Hunt the Wumpus* (1972), *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1976), and *Zork* (1977). In these games the player embodies an adventurer by writing directives into the command line; he or she tries to get to the end of the story by inputting text commands like 'go right,' 'open door,' and 'use sword.' The more conventionally understood generic elements of RPGs like hit points, the ability to cast spells, kill monsters and level up were implemented in mainframe computer games like *Dungeon* (1975), and then personal computer games like *Rogue* (1980), *Ultima* (1981), and *Wizardry: Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord* (1981). Over the 1980s the RPG genre became more and more popular within the United States: *Rogue* has countless 'Rogue clones,' *Ultima* has eight sequels and nine offshoots (which includes one of the first popular Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games, *Ultima Online* (1997), *Wizardry* has eight sequels, and many other individual games and full franchises followed.

¹⁰⁵ A similarly featured game called *Dragon Slayer* was also released in 1984, so whether *The Black Onyx* sparked an inchoate love of the genre, or truly adapted the genre to Japan is a matter of conjecture.

story come from the manga world, which inevitably resonated with the Japanese psyche much louder than the Lord Of The Rings style I was familiar with. (Rogers quoted in Kohler 2008)

In the RPG's case, an American developer, familiar with generic conventions within the United States, made minor adaptations so that a less complex version of the genre sold in Japan; then, because the genre was popular in its new context 'clones' followed. Each of these clones moved the genre forward, just like with *Pong*.

Of course, a crucial step of this particular generic modification is how the RPG came back to the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s as the JRPG, or Japanese Role Playing Game. The first of these popular JRPGs was Square's *Final Fantasy* (1987), which was released in the United States in 1990 and followed by well over two dozen sequels and offshoots by the early 2010s. However, just like the adaptations that were involved with moving the RPG to Japan, Kohler writes of adaptations involved with localizing the *Final Fantasy* series. "The game that Square released as *Final Fantasy II* in the US was actually called *Final Fantasy IV Easytype* in Japan. It was basically FFIV for kids and casual players, with a lot of changes made to the gameplay... Battles were made to be easier. The item system was simplified" (Kohler 2005: 224). Just as how Rogers simplified certain elements to facilitate the RPG genre's migration from the United States to Japan, publisher and developer Square was able to reverse the direction of the migration later in the decade – but only through a similar simplification.

With any migration there are decisions about what can and cannot migrate, and in the case of the RPG, the main element that was decided to be untranslatable was the

difficulty.¹⁰⁶ In translating the RPG genre between United States and Japan the two nation-states are brought within an inclusive cultural border.

Stopped at the Border

The arcade shooter genre easily passed over borders, and the RPG was able to negotiate a fruitful back and forth between the United States and Japan. In contrast, certain genres have not been readily translated: Train simulations, dating simulations, pachinko, and *ero*ge [erotic games], though quite popular within Japan, have had much less success in their translation from Japan to the United States.¹⁰⁷ Unlike the arcade shooter and the RPG, these forms are marked as foreign and prevented from migrating across the border regardless of adaptation. When companies refuse to translate these games, they draw a border between Japan (where these genres are accepted) and the United States (where they are not). Not only does such a border-drawing, mark Japan as essentially different, or Oriental (Said 1995), but it hides the complex work involved in facilitating the migration of most genres.

I now bring my discussion back to translation and bordering more generally. The adaptation of generic elements in order to move a game across borders of taste and

¹⁰⁶ Assumptions that something is ‘too difficult’ for the local audience (and therefore untranslatable) has been made by localization specialists and marketers to determine that products cannot go from Japan to the United States, and vice-versa, from the United States to Japan. Such assumptions are routine for both localization and marketing, and key to understanding the important power of bordering that translation has. The assumption, which is later shown to be false (or at least reversed), is the cause for a lack of translation.

¹⁰⁷ This is both a ‘failure to try,’ possibly due to a belief that these games are somehow “too Japanese,” resulting in few attempts to translate the genres, but also a situation where the attempts made to translate them have been heavily couched in other, more dominant genres. For instance, train and dating mini-games have flourished within certain RPGs. Thus, while certain arguments of “cultural acceptability” exist (and are mobilized by theorists and industry, see: Edwards 2006), such arguments ignore the way that genre is developed slowly and reinforced over time.

consumption is the same type of adaptation that occurs when a text is translated across national/cultural borders. Localization practice determines that certain textual, audio, graphical, or ludic elements can and should be migrated, whereas others must be adapted. Localization specialists are thus active producers of national culture in that they are determining what is able to be seen by local playing audiences. Thus, game localization should be seen as a part of a larger negotiation of cultural difference at the political and ethical levels, rather than as simply a practice of linguistic alteration that starts in the 1980s with altering lines of Japanese into English.

Contextualizing Game Localization History

Debugging history by inserting alternate origin stories, people and practices is both productive and necessary because it redirects attention toward where it may otherwise never reach. So far, this chapter has attempted to debug localization history by reconsidering the act of localization as one that includes migration and adaptation in a process that negotiates political and cultural borders. In doing so I pushed the beginning of game localization back to the 1960s instead of the 1980s when formalized linguistic translation practices began. For the remainder of the chapter I wish to contextualize video game localization as a historical form of media translation.

While specificity is a necessary element of studying any particular medium, understanding the ties between different media is essential to understanding broader entanglements of history and culture around the across world regions. Linking game translation to earlier, 20th century forms of media translation can help elucidate what is

actually unique and particular about game localization as both an industry and cultural practice. Particularly relevant are two other industry practices: the ‘multiple language version’ from early cinema history, and the ‘format show’ in current television industry practice.

Early Cinema and the Multiple Language Version

When cinema was first exhibited at the turn of the 20th century there was no call for translation. There was no attached sound, dialogue, or intertitles. The Lumière Brothers’ *La Sortie des Usines Lumière* (1895), which depicts the workers leaving the Lumière factory, and their *L’Arrivée d’un train à La Ciotat* (1896), which shows a train arriving at the station and people disembarking, are good examples of what might be provisionally called a kind of general ‘universality’ of the earliest films.¹⁰⁸ In both of these examples there is a single scene with no camera movement, and a simple plot conveyed in images (people leave the factory in the first; a train arrives and people get off in the second). The absence of speech and writing in the earliest cinema could be taken as an indicator that these films were both outside of language, and universal. Although this indexicality of photography would be roundly questioned, most famously by Christian

¹⁰⁸ While represented and seen as universal at the time, Dwyer (2005: 300) has noted that the Lumière Brothers’ own practices of mixing local and international views in their films denies the ‘universality’ of their work. Furthermore, Vasey (1997) has written of the extensive and elaborate practices of linguistic translation, simultaneous translation, cutting scenes, and massive marketing regimes that were necessary to make Hollywood ‘universal.’ Despite these practices, former head of the Motion Picture Association of America notes without irony at the end of the century, “It is a fact, blessedly confirmed, that the American movie is affectionately received by audiences of all races, cultures and creeds on all continents” (Jack Valenti quoted in Miller et al. 2005: 1).

Metz (1974) in his book *Film Language*, the absence of the spoken and written words in these texts still stands (also see Doane 2007; Sekula 1986; Sturken and Cartwright 2009).

This belief in cinematic universality slowly eroded as written and spoken words were technologically inserted into films during the 20th century. Intertitles were the first technological crack in the facade that cinema was universal, first as title cards to advance the plot in *Dorothy's Dream* (1903) and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903), and then more commonly as a written form of dialogue in many films in the 1910s.¹⁰⁹ In order to show a silent film such as *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) within a non-English speaking locale, the English intertitles needed to be extracted, translated into a different language, and finally reshot and re-edited into the film. Intertitles can be seen as a disruptive, localizing element attached to most films from the 1910s and on. Yet films are still generally represented as universal within popular discourse. As the *Variety* review of *The Birth of a Nation* claims:

“A Birth of a Nation” has universal appeal to America at least, and the superbness of this production will gain recognition anywhere, with the story carrying, through perhaps to lesser human interest extent in foreign lands than at home, where the subject is more thoroughly understood.
(Variety Staff 1915)

The reviewer notes an American might get the human interest element more than a European, but the film as technology has universal appeal. This is of course not a fact about film, but a rhetoric about the form's interpretability and cultural translatability as a

¹⁰⁹ Musser (1994) notes that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the first American production to use intertitles, but it borrows the technique from G. A. Smith's English fairy-tale film *Dorothy's Dream*. Nornes elaborates that intertitles, or “leaders,” might have been used by exhibitors who could cut the film and insert whatever titles they desired, but *Dorothy's Dream* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are the first films where producers inserted intertitles into films. Also see Ivarsoon 2009.

visual form. Variety is of course in the business of evaluating products to advance an industry. What markedly upended the discourse and rhetoric of cinema's visual universality, though, was the creation of sound film, or talkies, in the late 1920s.

In popular history the shift to voiced films is accompanied by the creation of two styles of translation: subtitling and dubbing. By putting a translation at the bottom of the screen, subtitling materially places the translation on top of the text and creates visible disjuncture between the actors, their voices, and their words. In contrast, dubbing erases the voices of the visible actors and replaces those sounds with other voices in the target language. Dubbing erases certain immersive problems (by not requiring the viewer to simultaneously 'read' the dialogue), but does not address a discrepancy between the bodies on screen and the dialogue, which surfaces most often with the mismatch between lip movement and dialogue. Furthermore, while dubbing can alter the words and voice coming out of the body, it cannot change the bodies themselves. In a realm of racialized nationalism or, as Arjun Appadurai (1990) puts it, when the hyphen between the nation and state is strong, any apparent discrepancy between racially marked bodies and local language may be noticed and perceived as a problem – one we might call cultural synchronicity. The alignment or apparent misalignment of specific bodies with specific languages and voice types may be perceived as potentially troubling the film viewers's immersive pleasure. Since the beginning of sound cinema in the 1920s, film theorists and practitioners have discussed over whether dubbing or subtitling has been regarded as the 'better' way to translate films: each practice has been criticized (Betz 2001; Fong and Au 2009; Koolstra et al. 2002; Nornes 2007). While some discussions approach film

translation as a simple debate between these two methods (subtitling and dubbing), others look to remaking as an alternate approach that predates both subtitling and dubbing by two decades.

Remakes throughout the latter half of the 20th century and into the 21st century are known as a form of cinematic repetition, or as some have argued, a form of media translation (Evans 2014; Forrest and Koos 2002; Horton and McDougal 1998; Mandiberg 2008). However, remakes were initially a legal issue in that certain companies physically duplicated films, a practice that led to a series of lawsuits in the 1900s to 1910s and resulted in the legal ruling that while copying shots was legal, copying the film itself was illegal (Forrest 2002).¹¹⁰ Remaking resurfaced as an overt form of translation with the emergence of sound film and the cinematic practice of foreign and multiple language versions (Durovicova 2004; Sorlin 2004; Vincendeau 1988). *Foreign language versions* (FLV), where the film was recreated after the fact in a different studio, are most reminiscent of remakes as we know of them now. A film is licensed to a foreign company and remade so that it can be sold in the new territory. *Multiple language versions* (MLV) are when the film was recreated in the same studio on the same set with different actors, but later in the same day.¹¹¹ For example, Swedish actress Inga Tidblad recounts her experience performing alongside German and French actresses:

¹¹⁰ There are, of course, interesting similarities between the legal issues of remakes in cinema history and of clones within video games (for instance, the previously discussed *Pong*). However, the relationship will not be fully dealt with here. For a history of the remake, and particularly the legal troubles between the dupe and copy in cinema, see: Forrest 2002.

¹¹¹ A helpful way to differentiate the FLV and MLV is through a contrast of diachronic and synchronic. The FLV is a diachronic remake; the MLV is a synchronic remake. This similarity is particularly helpful when we compare film translational remakes with video game translational forms: post-gold localization is a diachronic; simultaneous shipment localization is synchronic.

In order to save film, all three [actresses] were lined up in the harbour where they were supposed to run out on the pier and shout ‘Marius’. There we were, all three of us, in exactly the same aprons and the same fishmonger hats. We could barely keep from laughing when it was commanded ‘Camera! Action!’. First off was the German [actress] shouting ‘Marius!’, and then the French one with her ‘Mari-uss’, and then the Swedish one – well, that was me. (quoted in Bolin 2011: 88)

Both the FLV and MLV remake practices help mitigate difference inscribed on the visible bodies of the actors and actresses by replacing the ‘foreign’ body with a ‘local’ one in the same way that dubbing replaces the ‘foreign’ voice with a ‘local’ one.

Remaking as a practice highlights that language is not the only cultural/nationally specific element within a film in need of translation: bodies, clothing, and even story can be ‘translated.’ With the MLV, it was believed that replacing the body, remaking the film into both the ‘local’ language and body, the film would be less foreign (Garncarz 2004). Unfortunately, the MLV is generally considered a failed practice for two reasons: cost and depth. Then as now there is a high priority given to business and the bottom line, and the cost of making multiple movies simultaneously was not economically justifiable especially when the movie could flop. As most writers of the MLV remark, few MLVs have remained in the history books because they were cinematic and aesthetic failures (Bolin 2011; Ford 1961; Garncarz 2004; Vincendeau 1988). The necessary expenditure of simultaneously producing ‘multiple’ language versions of a film that might very well fail to reap even the cost of one language version is not the best business practice. The second reason they failed was that while the FLV and MLV forms incorporated linguistic and human alteration, they did not consider other cinematic content as culturally specific: the

stories were not altered. Film scholar Ginette Vincendeau explains the central contradiction of both the MLV (and capitalist industry) as:

the constant tension between the necessity for standardization to increase profitability on the one hand, and on the other the need for differentiation to ensure the renewal of demand. MLVs were, on the whole, too standardized to satisfy the cultural diversity of their target audience, but too expensively differentiated to be profitable. (Vincendeau 1988: 29)¹¹²

This double failure – too expensive and yet not specific/deep enough – led to the rise of both subtitling and dubbing as ‘better’ alternatives for translating films: while they were even less particular than either the FLV or the MLV, subtitled and dubbed films were far less expensive to make.

While the FLV (remaking in a different time or place) has resurfaced repeatedly over the past 100 years in one form or another when the cost/benefit evaluation seems positive, the cinematic MLV has remained buried within cinema history, apart from the accounts offered by Durovicova and others.¹¹³ However, the practice of creating multiple language versions resurfaces with video game localization of the mid-2010s. What I am proposing is that the cinematic MLV bears striking theoretical similarities to the simultaneous shipment form of localizing video games. One of these points of commonality is the effort to replace semiotic layers of the text beyond the linguistic text alone. This would be bodies in the MLV, gameplay and re-characterization in games. The two forms also bear practical similarities in their extreme cost as compared to less

¹¹² This same contradiction is elaborated in the Czech context by Petr Szczepanczik (2004).

¹¹³ Film remakes, particularly as a form of ‘adaptation,’ has been a booming topic since the 1990s. On film remakes, see: Durham 1998; Forrest and Koos 2002; Horton and McDougal 1998; Martinez 2009; Mazdon 2000; Verevis 2006. On adaptation studies, see: Hutcheon and O’Flynn 2013; Leitch 2007; McFarlane 1996; Moran 2009; Raw 2012; Smith 2009, 2014; Stam 2000; Stam and Raengo 2005.

multimodally extensive forms of translation (partial localization for games and simple subtitles for films).

In the following section, the similarities and differences between the MLV and game localization are brought into sharper relief through comparison to a third form of media translation, the television format.

Television Format Shows

As with cinema, creating new television shows is both expensive and risky. While importing television shows is the cheapest available option, and a common option for television broadcasting of the 20th century (Sinclair et al. 1996; Straubhaar 2007), imported shows are ‘foreign’ in terms of the translated language (subtitled or dubbed), the foreign actors, and culturally distanced content. This foreign quality has been extensively researched from the standpoint of the cultural imperialism model about which it has been argued that such shows influence the target locale and audience (Schiller 1992; Tomlinson 1992). It has also been studied from the reception studies model that seeks to know more nuanced reactions of the audience, particularly how watchers do not necessarily take the foreign media at face value (Ang 1982, 1990; Morley and Robins 1995; Naficy 1993). Like the MLV within cinema, the “television format show” is a 20th century media practice that can sidestep the problems of cultural distance described above. I have in mind game shows like *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, idol contests like *Pop Idol*, reality TV like *Big Brother*, and even narrative heavy telenovelas like *Yo soy Betty, la fea* (*Ugly Betty*) in which the format provides an economically mid-range

alternative that seems safe because it has been successful in other regions, and it facilitates textual mobility while avoiding both the limitations of linguistic translation and the body disjunction problems inherent with both subtitling and dubbing.

The format show is not a pre-recorded show ready for broadcast, but a collection of components¹¹⁴ that help a local media creator make a version of the format show in their particular locale (Moran and Malbon 2006: 23-25). These components include both technical specifications to help create a similarly branded show (computer software and graphics solutions; collections of titles, sounds, scripts and insertable footage, and set blueprints), detailed research information to help market the show including demographics and scheduling information of global versions of the show, and finally a consultant to help advise with the show's local production.¹¹⁵ To see the format show as a collection of components with scaffolding for re-creation brings this form into alignment with the concept of game localization. Both forms eschew fidelity to a source and push adaptability. The text can be changed as much as required in order to make it mobile.

Australian screen studies scholar Albert Moran defines the television format show as a “formal, organized system of content adaptation... [where an] unspecific, universal or de-nationalized program template or recipe... can be customized and domesticated for reception and consumption by specific audiences in local or national contexts” (Moran

¹¹⁴ While Moran classifies some format shows as ‘closed’ in that adaptation is limited in order to protect the format as a brand, the format is designed to be ‘open’ to adaptation. Closed formats are closer to an ‘instructions’ metaphor, but the majority of open formats are closer to the ‘recipe’ or ‘components’ metaphors where the local producer can pick and choose what to include (Moran and Maldon 2006).

¹¹⁵ Moran and Malbon’s full list includes: the paper format; the format Bible; production consultancy services; blueprint and set specifications; computer software and graphics; titles; sound; scripts; a dossier of demographic and ratings data; scheduling slots and related information; off-air videotapes of programmes; and insertable footage (2006: 23-25)

2009b: 115-6). Moran takes the ‘recipe’ metaphor from the industry that he studies. For instance, game show deviser and consultant David Bodycombe states, “A format... is a recipe for re-producing a successful television programme, in another territory, as a local programme. The recipe comes with all the necessary ingredients and is offered as a product along with a consultant who can be thought of as an expert chef” (quoted in Moran and Malbon 2006: 19). To extend and explain the culinary metaphor, a format is not a singular dish (like an imported television show or a particular film), but a dynamic recipe with marginal notes by previous cooks and the ability to change ingredients according to local availability and taste, to alter cooking steps according to regional styles, and to vary plating styles. By understanding the core of a TV format to be a basic recipe, and not something more unified, or ‘textual,’ adaptation is not only possible, but necessary: adding chocolate is an important first step in modifying a cookie recipe, but not when baking for somebody who has an allergy.

The television format show has been a highly visible part of modern television culture since the rise of the so-called “super format shows” like *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, *Survivor*, and *Pop Idol* during the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, the format’s history dates back to legally (and illegally) licensed adaptations of both radio and television shows in the 1950s (Chalaby 2011: 296). For instance, *What’s My Line?*, an early quiz show, was adapted from the 1950 CBS television show in 1951 by BBC Radio and then by BBC Television in 1954 (Moran 1998, 2009a, 2009b; Moran and Malbon 2002). *What’s My Line?* is certainly a type of format show in that the American and British versions were different. But the recipe metaphor does not hold in the same

way. Moran argues that a better candidate for the first format show is *Romper Room*, a children's show televised locally in Baltimore starting in 1953 (Moran 2009: 118; Moran and Malbon 2006: 22). According to Moran and co-writer Justin Malbon, what made *Romper Room* unique as the first 'format show' was that the creators did not sell the show to the CBS network – a standard practice that would have led to the show being nationally televised. Instead, the creators “systematically facilitat[ed its] adaptation” (Moran and Malbon 2006: 22) by licensing out or franchising the format, a decision that led to over a hundred different versions of the show being televised in the United States, Australia and Japan within a decade. Those who purchased the format from its creators received a number of materials used to recreate the show such as books, activities, and games devised by the creators, Bert and Nancy Claster, as well as objects such as “a grinning jack-in-the-box holding a stake with the series title and Mr. Do Be, a smiling yellow jacket” (Moran and Malbon 2006: 22). Here we see the concept of 'migration' at work. Like the code for early computer games that travelled from lab to lab, the instructions and key objects of *Romper Room* were made to migrate as a means of making the show localizably global. There was even 'migration' of people: the local hosts of the show were able to receive formal in-person training from Nancy Claster who served as *Romper Room*'s original host. Instead of simply rebroadcasting the same show, different stations were able to create their own local version of the show using the same format, but varying the format and using local host-bodies whenever desired. Just like commodity franchises, which emerged in the mid 20th century (Dicke 1982), the television format's owners distributed a particular good or service. Unlike the typical fast

food franchise of the era, the television format's franchise object was not a physical object or brand, but a collection of services, training, and physical objects.

The format show dates to the 1950s, but its popularization in the late 1990s, four decades after both *What's My Line?* and *Romper Room*, reflects a more extensive shift from industry and cultural strategies of globalization as homogenization to more nuanced practices of localization as domestication. Like video game localization, then, the TV format show narrows focus from the globe or region back down to the local, and brings discussions of consumption and identity back to the nation. The import of popular US and other international shows has been a part of television content flows around the world since the 1950s and continues to exist in the 2010s. However, regional flows and local productions dominate the various national markets (Iwabuchi 2004; Straubhaar 2007). As Straubhaar notes, in the 2000s to 2010s "locally produced versions of imported, licensed [format] shows... tended to replace imported programs in networks that had previously relied on imports" (2007: 178). Creating a local version of a format show adapts the show to foster a more nationalized, local identity (Moran 1998); it also enhances local industry by employing local workers, contrasting with the general advanced capitalist strategy of outsourcing to use cheaper labor (Castells 2000; Miller et al. 2005).

The cinematic MLV described above was an economic and critical failure. In contrast, the television format became a phenomenally successful practice of media translation both in terms of economics and how it specializes content to a local audience. As Michel Rodrigue, an industry leader and CEO of Format People, notes:

A format is not a product, it is a vehicle, and thus the only *raison d'être* of formats is the international market... the format is a vehicle which enables an idea to cross boundaries, cultures, and so on, and to be localized in every place where it stops. (Rodrigue quoted in Chalaby 2011: 295)

The television format is successful because it abandons a textual ontology and the traditional practice of translation that maintains an idea of fidelity to the original or origin; in contrast, the television format aligns with a general shift within late 20th and early 21st century media from texts to intellectual properties (Allison 2006; Hediger 2005; Jenkins 2006a, 2006b) by focusing on adaptation, mobility and economic gain.

Certain MLV, such as Gustav Machaty's 1933 film *Ekstase*, also attempted the television format's level of adaptability. Not just re-created with different actors and actresses, *Ekstase* was extensively altered – added to, subtracted from, censored, and modified – for each language version with the approval of the director. In light of the many versions, trying to identify an original is counterproductive. Instead, Vinzenz Hediger argues that “it seems useful to think of the original as a set of practices... employed in the production and circulation of films” (Hediger 2005: 147). Hediger argues *Ekstase*, its varied language versions, and remakes in general, show a general destabilization of the original, and a reconceptualization of film translation as productive. In making this argument, he shows the historical process within the cinematic medium wherein the singular work became a more distributed text. That television had no such struggle emphasizes a difference between the two media. There is no question that television is unstable in the singular unit. Do we think of the singular unit as a series, season/year, or episode? This instability of the unit is merely emphasized with the

adaptable format show, and does not become a hindrance to its success. Rather, it is a feature of it.

The cinematic MLV and the TV format show are both important and related antecedents of game localization. However, they are not the same. By interrogating their differing adaptability and textuality (or materiality) we can better understand what makes video game localization unique as a form of media practice. According to Sinclair, Jacka and Cunningham, even with the rise of satellite, multichannel, and global broadcasting, “[t]elevision has always been more of a local than a global medium, and remains so” (1996: 10). This locality is due not only to local audience interpretations and reimaginings of shows, but also to the predominantly ‘live’ nature of television. Unlike cinematic films, which are created through extensive processes of formal mise-en-scene, cinematography, and editing (Bordwell and Thompson 2010), most television production tends toward somewhat faster production speeds and limited post-production time. It is this live or fast and local nature that enables the television format show’s adaptability, a quality which directly contrasts with the relatively more orchestrated and extended duration of film production. Thus, even though the Czech film *Ekstase* was extensively altered in its transformation into the North American *Ecstasy*, Machaty’s film (regardless of title) is analyzed and understood by most academic and popular scholars as a unified text.

In the following section I show how video games reside between these two practices and media both textually/materially and in terms of adaptability.

The Contradiction of Localization

As described in the beginning of this chapter, the video game industry makes historical sense of localization as an ever expanding/improving practice of alteration that maintains a game's entertaining experience over all else. The goal of video game localization – according to localization industry specialists – is to adapt a game so that it will sell well in a target market, consumed by players as if it were made for that market. According to Hasegawa, Bernal-Merino, and O'Hagan and Mangiron these practices of alteration have improved over the past 30 to 40 years in a non-stop progression, with 'improvement' measured in terms of amount of the game that is changed (this has increased) and accuracy of the changes (there has been greater appeal to the target market). This 'progress' implies a continuation to the point where game localization alters all semiotic modes within a game so that it can best sell in any given target market. Such an idealized, full adaptability is identical to the component or recipe metaphor used for the television format show, s in the discussion of *Romper Room* above. However, it is important to note that such an equality is precluded by both the materiality of video games (as a medium too expensive to fully change) and actual practices of video game localization (see: Chapter 1), where current 'globalizing' impulses actually limit the adaptability of games. Such a specific targeting is opposed by the necessity felt by game companies to spend as little money in the alteration as possible, driven by the high cost of developing games.

As digital artifacts, I propose, video games *should be* fully mutable, and like television format shows, they *can be* adapted through localization practices so as to best

fit any given target audience. Unfortunately, this full adaptability is rarely utilized because of the time consuming and costly nature of manipulating the multimodal digital assets. The MLV failed because it was too expensive and yet not adaptable enough given the medium's materiality (filmed and edited) and practices (repeat the same practices without divergence using the different actors).¹¹⁶ Video game localization is likewise doomed to failure when it is built upon a requirement to elaborately adapt a game's multimodal assets while working within a simultaneous shipment environment. Not only is it expensive to fully localize a title, but the time-crunch associated with simultaneous shipment – an unfortunate necessity within the early 21st century game industry according to most industry accounts – makes full adaptation nearly impossible except for the largest and most monetarily sound language-locales such as English (when the title is moving from Japanese to English). Thus, despite their digital mutability, games are localized neither as extensively as they could be, nor as extensively as the television format show.

Furthermore, the very 'globality' of games stymies full adaptability. Both films and television shows can exist as identifiable and translatable texts that, once translated, have little to do with their other versions. In contrast, contemporary games are increasingly linked with their other versions due to always-online networks that the game connects to in order to play, and online multiplayer modes of play where players utilizing

¹¹⁶ It is important to note that the lack of adaptability visible in the MLV is not a lack of adaptability within cinema: later remake and adaptation practices of the 20th century facilitate much greater adaptability (at a comparable economic price). However, remakes are distanced from their originals in much of the academic and popular writings on the subject, which is different from the discussed translation practices here (Durham 1998; Forrest and Koos 2002; Horton and McDougal 1998; Mazdon 2000; Verevis 2006). This distance is what disappears in the move from localization-focused GILT to globalization-focused GILT described in Chapter 1.

different versions play with/against each other. With games that utilize this ‘global’ connectivity, full localization is impossible.¹¹⁷

Located between a desire to fully alter games as recipes (like the TV format), and the more cohesive textuality of games (simultaneous shipment strategies; multiplayer across versions), video game localization is a contradictory enterprise. At the same time that localization as a practice argues it is for the ‘locale,’ a smaller and more nuanced group than the language, region, or nation-state, it cannot maintain economic viability with such a small locale while moving along a history that focuses on technological improvement. As such, the aim/goal of localization is impossible in practice.

Given the failure of localization when it is located historically as a progressively improving act (it can never achieve its intent), what then is the purpose of localization? What is the benefit? Despite its inherent failure (as a capitalist industry), game localization bears consideration as both an actual practice that negotiates failure, and a theoretical model that could lead to new possibilities. In the following chapter, I argue that video game translators work ethically by taking on a form of authorial responsibility. This proposal, in turn, allows me to argue in the final two chapters that localization can operate on two extremes: either traces of the source culture can be maintained, providing a layered experience (like relatively inexpensive cinematic subtitles), or localization can

¹¹⁷ *World of Warcraft* (2004) is a good example of this tension between global connectivity and local adaptation. As a massively multiplayer online roleplaying game, *World of Warcraft* tries to connect all of its players together. North American and European players are, in fact, connected – consumers who buy either version can choose to play on either NA or EU servers, and transferring between servers is available for a price. In contrast, China is relegated to separate national servers, as culturalization changes to make the game legally salable within China (where it is operated by a local company) resulted in the game being separated from the other games sold around the world (Andrews 2014). The global connectivity of *World of Warcraft* was directly limited by efforts to localize the title, which resulted in *World of Warcraft* in China being a walled-off or walled-in world.

respond with the original text, creating a ventriloquizing and differentiated localization (like expensive cinematic remakes).

Chapter 2, in part, is being prepared for submission for publication.

Chapter 3 - Translation and Responsibility in *Shadows of the Damned*

Narrowing my focus from the distributed occupational groups that create and localize games (Chapter 1) and the various histories of localization (Chapter 2), this chapter analyzes the specific practices of game translators as a key point within the production and distribution of video games around the globe. Closely analyzing the creation of the game *Shadows of the Damned* (2011) by US-based publisher Electronic Arts, Tokyo-based developer Grasshopper Manufacture, Tokyo-based localization agency 8-4 Ltd, and Tokyo-based boutique translator/writer Brian Gray. This chapter proposes that game translators – the game localization specialists who translate text and dialogue, and recommend a host of other transformations – have and enact a form of authorial responsibility.

In pointing to the translator as a point of authorship this chapter reflexively and critically engages with the postmodern legacy of authorship theory. As a broad concept, authorship has variously been theorized to encompass textual meaning, authorial intention, power of authorization, legal rights over the work, legal and/or ethical accountability, and ethical responsibility. Building from but also breaking with post-structural literary critique (Burke 1998; Derrida 1976), I will show how the work of some Japanese to English game translators constitutes authorship through responsible translation: they do not have any legal hold over they text, but they take responsibility over its meaning and reception. While some translators may avoid, deny, or be forbidden from taking such responsibility, this chapter focuses on the translators (or studios) that

actively engage with what I refer to as *responsible localization*.¹¹⁸ Adapting Donna Haraway's (2008) theorization of "response-ability," where humans and non-humans alike are co-created through responding with each other, I propose that some game translators engage in ethical game translation by responding with the source and target texts and cultures to help change the game industry.

Authorship, as I theorize it in this chapter and throughout this work, is not a romantic ideal of singular genius, but a distributed activity that ensues from shared responsibility.¹¹⁹ The interpretation of the author as individual is, of course, derived from modern literary studies in which the object of consideration is the novel, a textual form in which the writer is typically regarded as the locus of creative expression. While this form of authorship has been popularized over the 19th and 20th centuries with the rise of novels, single author written works, and cinematic auteur theory, other media works from popular music to studio films have encouraged a more distributed understanding of creative responsibility. The understanding of authorship as distributed is particularly explicit in theorization of the cinematic multiple language version (MLV), in which it is understood that multiple versions of films are the creative product of an array of individuals working in and for studios and production companies. With such studio-based

¹¹⁸ In terms of Figure 1.4 the translators denied authority are generally located on the non-overlapping area of the localization occupational group. In contrast, those I am focusing on here are located in the central region where cooperation occurs between groups.

¹¹⁹ In software and media studies the term 'authoring' is often used to describe the more distributed and technical nature of creating software and virtual worlds (Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin 2009). As Losh (in press) writes, "[w]ith the rise of 'authoring tools,' 'authoring systems,' and 'authoring languages,' traditional modes of 'authorship' by autonomous individuals have taken a profoundly computational turn toward adapting to new communities of practice." While the distributed processes I describe in Chapter 1 are aligned with 'authoring,' I use the term authorship in this chapter to unpack how game translators engage with more traditional theorizations of authorship as both authoritative and responsible.

cinematic production creative expression is widely accepted to be not solely attributable to an individual director or screenwriter. In this regard the film studies discussion of MLVs made an important incursion into auteur theory, the body of work in film studies in which films were understood through interpretation of the creative output of individual directors producing bodies of work reflecting their unique intellectual or creative trajectory. The film studies literature on the MLV as well as literary theory of the translation post-*Of Grammatology* provides a rich groundwork of concepts from which I draw to demonstrate the distributed ways in which games are created and translated. Authorship as distributed responsibility also fits with conceptualizations of globalization that argue broad social changes occur through the intersection of smaller conflicting forces, or “frictions” (Tsing 2005); in this, the responsibility of game translators is limited, but critical. To make this multifaceted argument about the multimodal and distributed nature of authorship in video game localization, I draw from several bodies of theory: theorizations of authorship in literature, cinema and video games (Aarseth 2005; Barthes 1977; Foucault 2003; Gaut 2010; Huber 2013; Jenkins 2006; Sarris 1999; Wollen 1972), literature in translation studies that engages with literary translation as a form of authorship (Buffagni et al. 2011; Pym 2009; Zeller 2000), critical studies that link authorship with ethical responsibility (Derrida 1991; Haraway 2008), interviews with key people who created and localized the game *Shadows of the Damned* (2011), and close textual analysis of the same game. A distinctive feature of this chapter, as compared to other works on translation, is its use of observational ethnography in localization studios,

from which I derive evidence of the actual processes through which localization is conducted as a distributed practice to transform the text in substantive ways.

In this chapter I will first consider how SotD is branded and marketed as a ‘star’ driven product by analyzing how its packaging and websites present the executive director, creative producer, and sound director as key authors. However, I will then use interviews with the translator and project manager at 8-4 Ltd to show how the particular process that went into localizing the title is at odds with its marketing. While the marketing indicates that the stars are responsible for the game, the localization process reveals a much more distributed authorship. By considering the particular practices of the translator I am approaching how the translator, as a specialist, can respond to and influence the localization. Next, I will review the pertinent literature on authorship as ownership, intention, and authority as it has been theorized in literary analysis, film and media studies, and translation studies. Literary studies scholars fight over the existence of the author and the author’s relationship to intentionality, or textual meaning. A key point of friction in this literature is the opposition between claims of a post-structuralist death of the author and more political and ethically oriented studies that want to understand the relationship between authorship and accountability. With the death of the author, the author’s intentions are sacrificed to argue the importance of readers’ contextual interpretations and discourses between authors and readers, consumers and producers. On the other hand, later studies seek to understand a more complex authorial position where authors can also be accountable for the words they print on the page regardless of their intentions. In the middle of these conflicting sides, theorists within translation studies

complicate the argument by questioning whether the translator, as a secondary author, is similarly important in terms of intention and accountability. As a means out of this conflict, I draw on the work of Haroldo De Campos, Jacques Derrida, and Donna Haraway to show how the game translator works from a position of responsibility as an ethical agent able to influence the game within a distributed authorship system. Finally I will conclude by showing how Gray's work as a game translator is exemplary of the form of responsible translation within game localization.

Game localization as a practice is necessarily distributed due to the multimodality of video games – the point I argued in Chapter 1. Here, however, I am specifically approaching the work of the North American English translator located at the central meeting point between the different occupational groups (located within the central, most overlapping position within the venn diagram in Figure 1.4) and at the moment of the pivot between Japanese and the rest of the world languages. This chapter argues that these translators have a particular sort of authority, a kind of authorship that must be analyzed in order to understand the implications and possibilities of game localization.

I am not arguing that translators have the legal rights and creative powers of authors – an argument familiar to translation studies works refuting the derivative nature of translation. Rather, I am approaching both translation and authorship from the concept of responsibility. Whether game translators are 'creators,' or are just 'creative,' is of less interest to me than the question of responsibility given the centrality of the translator within a distributed network and pivot system.

By linking game translation and responsibility my purpose is not to rob programmers and directors of their authority or standing, or to otherwise inflate the importance of the role of translators alone. Rather, fitting within the scope of this dissertation as a whole, I see the choices made by game translators as equally important points of friction (Tsing 2005) within the flows of globalization. Recognizing translational responsibility is not about figuring out who is the genius behind the game, but about understanding how globalization – as a complex and distributed process – operates. By setting up the game translator as an authorial/responsible figure, this chapter marks the translator as a figure worthy of attention. Such an argument also lays down the groundwork for the final two chapters that focus on how game localization uses its authority in modern practice (Chapter 4), and how it might use its authority in the future (Chapter 5).

The Authorial Process of *Shadows of the Damned*

A relatively typical action horror game, *Shadows of the Damned* (SotD) wears its authorship prominently on its cover. As is visible on the bottom right of the game's North American and Japanese boxes (Figure 3.1), the game was developed by the Japanese company Grasshopper Manufacture and published by American publisher Electronic Arts (EA). Specifically, it is published by the EA Partners Program, a branch of the massive company that helps co-publish and co-produce third-party titles with external development companies like Grasshopper.



Figure 3.1: Front covers of the North American and Japanese Playstation 3 localizations both show Grasshopper and EA company logos in the lower-right-hand corner. The North American cover (left) refers to the game as “A Suda51 Trip.” The Japanese cover (right) includes a damsel being rescued.

Thus, the overt ‘creator’ status is marked on the box as a split between the developer group, which conducts the practical planning and coding, and the publisher group, which more informally oversees production and handles distribution. Developer and publisher interactions are, of course, highly complex, involving legal agreements dividing up the terms and conditions of authorship. Official ownership and power to authorize a sequel, both elements of authorship in theory, and particularly important for understanding authorship within the game industry, are determined somewhere in the legal documents signed by Grasshopper when the company agreed to work with EA as a publisher. However, the question of authorship goes far deeper than on-paper legal agreements between the developer and publisher as corporate entities.

On the back of each box both the Grasshopper and EA logos are again visible, but they are subsumed by other information detailing the game and three individuals' names: Suda51 (須田剛一), Mikami Shinji (三上真司), and Yamaoka Akira (山岡晃). Referencing the game's horror genre, the North American box (Figure 3.2A) refers to the trio as a "nightmare team."

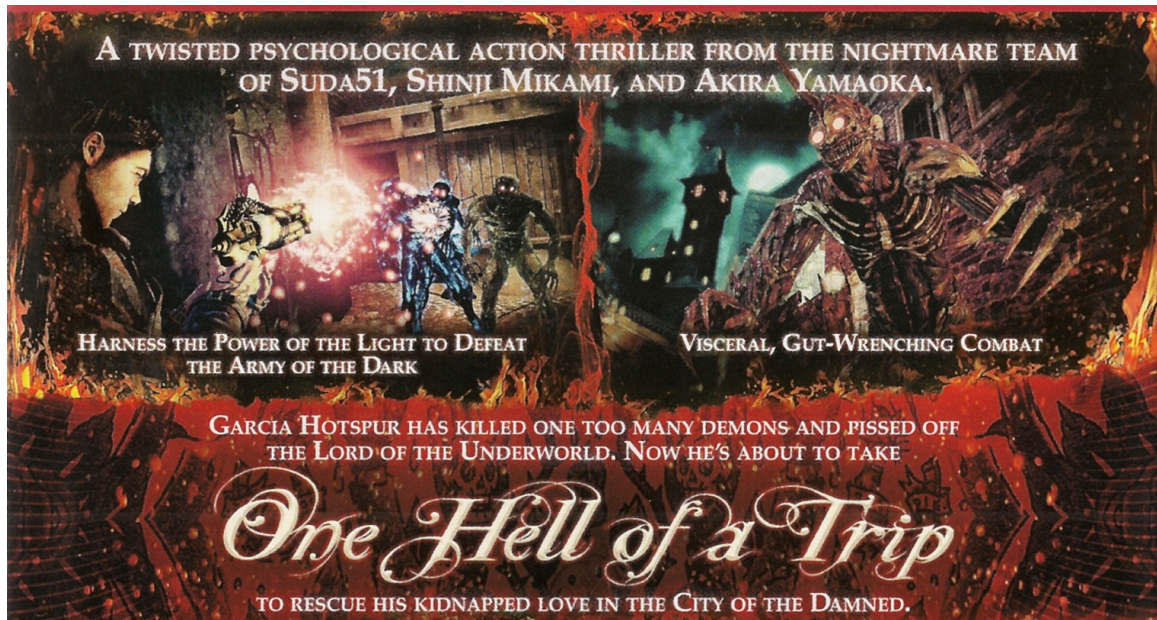


Figure 3.2A: Close-up of the back cover of the North American Playstation 3 localization. 'Star' names are embedded in the introductory sentence at the top of the image. Photo by author

The nightmare tag is also, however, an indication of the popularity and status of the three individuals game creators. Just as the listing of a star on a movie poster would not need to include the word "starring," so did Suda, Mikami and Yamaoka not need descriptive job titles to help sell the product to players, according to the North American marketers. The North American localization's box highlights Suda's star position by calling SotD "A Suda 51 Trip" on the front cover, and EA's English website elaborates that SotD

“combin[es] the punk rock style of Suda 51 with the legendary horror design of Shinji Mikami.”¹²⁰ Moving away from action/horror genre humor, but building on the strategy of branding by allusion, the Japanese box (Figure 3.2B) extends the individuals’ importance by more prominently displaying their names using a large font and calling the game “a gem drawn by the strongest three” [*saikyo no sannin ga egaku shugyoku*].



Figure 3.2B: Close-up of back cover of the Japanese Playstation 3 localization. ‘Star’ names and jobs are in the largest font near the bottom of the image. Photo by author.

As a marked difference from the North American back cover, the Japanese version lists each individual’s romanized title on the project in a small font above the name: Suda is executive director, Mikami is creative producer, and Yamaoka is sound director. This writing is reminiscent of *furigana*, a form of reading aid used to provide phonetic readings of *kanji* (Chinese characters). Not only are prospective players expected to know

¹²⁰ The North American localization’s website does not mention Yamaoka, presumably because the website writers assumed that game players would not recognize a music designer’s name.

what the romanized job titles mean, but they should be able to recognize the trio by name. Like the English website, the Japanese marketing team pushed the generic credibility of Mikami and Yamaoka, both of whom are known for their contributions to the horror game genre, but unlike the English variation, the Japanese website describes all three individuals: Suda is responsible for the “scenario and world,” Mikami spearheads his “shooting action specialty,” and Yamaoka “adds the music.”¹²¹ Unlike in the North American market, video game music is often sold as a stand-alone soundtracks in Japan, with some famous composers even performing live, thus justifying the inclusion of Yamaoka as one of the “strongest three.”¹²²

The game player is supposed to both recognize the names and view them as authorial thanks to marketing, visual rhetoric coming from the placement of the names on the box, and previous encounters with the individuals’ creative endeavors. These figures are, in effect, the “stars” of the game even as they are its creatives. As the head of Grasshopper Manufacture and SotD’s creative director, Suda Goichi (commonly referred to as Suda 51 due to his given name being a homonym for the number fifty-one) garnered significant fame – the EA website refers to him as a “creative genius” – including both supporters and detractors. He is particularly known as an oddball or rebel auteur within

¹²¹ Specifically, the Japanese website states: “A Road Movie Style Action Adventure fusion with Suda Goichi’s scenario and world, Mr. Mikami Shinji’s specialized shooting action elements, and sound director Mr. Yamaoka Akira’s music” (Translation by author). See: <http://www.ea.com/shadows-of-the-damned> and <http://www.ea.com/jp/shadows-of-the-damned>.

¹²² Silent Hill soundtracks are available in Japan, but must be imported by North American fans. Mobilizing Yamaoka as one of the stars of SotD in Japan is justified by the availability of Yamaoka’s work in CD form. In contrast, putting Yamaoka as a distant third star within the United States makes sense because Silent Hill soundtracks were unavailable for purchase in the North American market. As an addendum, a recent compilation CD now exists for purchase in the United States, but at the time of SotD nothing was available for domestic purchase.

the game industry from releasing titles like *Killer7* (2005) and *No More Heroes* (2007), both of which play with game form and content in much the way that French new wave directors played with film form in the mid 20th century. The second person, game designer Mikami Shinji, is most famous as the creator of the cult favorite *Biohazard/Resident Evil* (1996), a game that has been turned into a massive intellectual property through the creation of twenty-four offshoots or sequels, seven successful movies, and numerous books, comics and other franchise tie-ins. Wrapping up the trio of well-known twenty-year industry veterans is the music designer, Yamaoka Akira, who is known for designing the music of one specific game series, *Silent Hill* (1999), another multi-game horror franchise with two Hollywood movie tie-ins.

Mobilizing “star” names like Suda, Mikami and Yamaoka is a familiar marketing technique in mass media with a significant history in cinema. For example, “A Steven Spielberg Film” is emblazoned above almost all of the director’s films. Similarly, we can find “From Academy Award-Winning Director Hayao Miyazaki” or “A production by the director Miyazaki Hayao” [Miyazaki Hayao kantoku sakuhin] prominently displayed on film posters and boxes in order to use the animator’s star power to sell his films. Specifically, the marketing technique at play with these films and SotD is an attempt to push a profitable, individual-based understanding of authorship, which has been popularized in 20th century media first through a star system (Dyer 1998; McDonald 2000; Schatz 2010) and later through an idealized type of *auteur* directors (Buscombe 1973; Gerstner and Staiger 2003; Grodal et al. 2005; Wollen 1972). Such authorship

helps generically direct SotD (all three are known for their ‘horror’ tendencies¹²³); it is also a safety mechanism that ensures fans will buy their favorite creators’ games.

While the auteur figure is familiar within other media, particularly film, it is less common within the context of video games (Aarseth 2005; Demirbas 2008; Huber 2013). In addition to game development being a distributed practice (see Chapter 1), the less visible star-system is due to the way that early game publishing companies subsumed developer names underneath the company title in the 1970s, a practice that still remains prevalent despite the rise of certain star figures. Atari is well known for hiding individual creators’ names in part due to game creator Warren Robinett, who included the phrase “created by Warren Robinett” within a hidden room in his game *Adventure* (1979).¹²⁴

Protesting Atari’s practice of hiding authorship under the corporate-publisher identity, several developers quit their jobs at the massive platform holder and publisher and formed the development and publishing company Activision in 1979. Activision not only credited authors, but often highlighted them on the game boxes. The early developer-authors that formed Activision are the first of a longer line of popular authorial figures from the 1980s to 1990s – for example, Shigeru Miyamoto, Nintendo’s star designer and the developer behind *Super Mario Bros* and *Legend of Zelda*, and Roberta Williams, the co-founder of Sierra Entertainment and pioneer of the graphic adventure genre. While few game creators have become household names in the way that movie

¹²³ While the North American localization’s box highlights Suda by calling SotD “A Suda 51 Trip” on the front cover, the Japanese marketing also pushes the generic credibility of Mikami and Yamaoka, both of whom are more well known for their contributions to the horror game genre.

¹²⁴ Many Japanese companies had similar practices; the most obvious example being Iwatani Toru, the creator of *Pac-Man*, who stated in a 2007 interview, “There was no change in my salary, no bonus, no official citation of any kind” (Pfeffer 2007).

stars and directors are well-known beyond the ken of gossip columnists and film aficionados, the marketers of SotD are clearly attempting to leverage a similar star status for Suda, Mikami and Yamaoka in order to sell the title.

The box and credits focus on the publisher, developer, and star trio, but there are two less prominent names that I argue are equally responsible for the creation of SotD: 8-4 Ltd and Brian Gray. Neither name is visible on the box, but both are listed in the credits. 8-4 Ltd, the localization service provider hired to localize/translate the game, is listed 3 minutes into the credit roll. Brian Gray, the translator employed by 8-4 Ltd, appears 4th on the credit roll just after Suda, Mikami and Yamaoka.¹²⁵ Interestingly, however, Gray is not listed as a translator. Rather, he is credited for “Additional Writing.”

Despite being hired as a translator by a localization service provider, Gray is utilized and credited as a writer. According to Gray, while “the plot and the overall framework of the script is [Suda-san’s]... I wrote all of the English sentences in the script, or most of them, maybe like 90% of them” (Gray 2013). To clarify, while translators always write lines in a separate language, what Gray did ranged from completely re-writing character lines all the way up to writing in-game short stories and fully creating character backstories that are embedded within the character dialogue. Such extensive writing is not usually associated with literary translation, and by most translation studies accounts Gray’s practices overstep the limitations put on the average literary translator: to remain faithful to the source text (Dryden 2004 [1680]; Zeller 2000).

¹²⁵ Gray’s is the 4th or 5th name to appear depending on which localization of the game you play. He is 5th in the North American version, right after Massimo Guarini. However, having left Grasshopper between the publication of the North American and Japanese versions, Guarini does not appear in the Japanese localization’s credits, and Gray’s is the 4th name.

The reader might ask why I refer to Gray's work as that of localization when Gray acts as, and is credited as, a writer. While he was listed for "additional writing," Gray was officially hired by the localization company 8-4 Ltd to translate dialogue. The specific 'writing' credit was due to the intervention of John Ricciardi of 8-4 Ltd, who told me, "We don't actually always tell [the client] how to credit us. Sometimes they ask, sometimes they just do it. I did want Brian to get credit so I asked [Grasshopper and EA] to make sure [Gray got] credit" (Ricciardi 2012). It is likely that without Ricciardi's intervention Gray would have been credited as translator, not writer, and his name placed with 8-4 Ltd, which is listed as "localization support."

Additionally, while Gray informed me that he divides his work between "translation" and "writing" jobs, this distinction is not necessarily relevant. Gray sees himself as having greater freedom with what he refers to as "writing" jobs, where "you're usually involved way, way, way earlier in the process... You're talking... with development staff to work on the script. They'll contract you to write original content, or give you a Japanese script, but say we don't really care what you do with it. Change it liberally" (Gray 2012). There are certainly large differences between the freedom of "writing" jobs and the more restricted process involved with what he calls "translating" jobs. However, it is important to note that Gray began his career as an English localization specialist within Square Enix, a company that tests prospective game translators' creative writing skills before it tests their translation skills, allows them to "tweak cultural differences for the target audience," and gives them the "final say" (Fox 2013; also see: Honeywood 2007). Thus, Gray's translation skills and training are

critically tied to his ability to freely re-write things, even if his feelings about the two practices might be different. Equally important, French, Italian, German and Spanish translators do not so easily differentiate Gray the translator from Gray the writer. As Gray quite candidly told me:

In situations where it's J to E to FIGS [Japanese translated to English, which is then translated French/Italian/German/Spanish], the English translator has way more power, and I've experienced that power... I'm the authority on it. [They ask:] 'can you explain what's happening in this scene?... We just want to understand what you're trying to do.' And I'm like, this is what I was trying to do. And that's an awkward place to be. You see yourself as just being a mouthpiece, right? You don't really see yourself as being an author. (Gray 2013)

Whether the translator is the author or not (and Gray specifically informed me that he does not see himself as the author), he or she is in a position of *authority* – regardless of whether the job is ‘writing’ or ‘translation’ focused. What interests me in this chapter, then, is the position and practices of game translators, which must be considered in order to understand how game localization functions. Specifically, how translators like Gray act given such positions of authorial power.

Initial Process

While the story told above about SotD’s authorship, distribution, and marketing is complicated, the full story is even more complicated. Released first to the North American, European and Australian markets in June of 2011 for both the Playstation 3 and Xbox 360 platforms, SotD was then back-translated into Japanese and released three months later in September of 2011. Thus, while SotD is a “Japanese” game in that it was

created by a Japanese company, and by a man (Suda) who works in Japanese, it is also an English game in that it was first released in English to North American audiences through the efforts of 8-4 Ltd and Gray. The following section attempts to untangle this interlingual and distributed knot by explaining the process of ‘translation.’

SotD existed in the minds of Suda and Mikami long before it ever came to the attention of either 8-4 Ltd or Gray. Furthermore, as a EA/Grasshopper co-production that had been through several years of production it was in an advanced state when 8-4 Ltd was brought onto the project. To be clear, I am not claiming that 8-4 Ltd and Gray are the creators of the game. Rather, I am arguing that they are important to understanding the game’s authors as partially responsible agents for the title. As such, I am not writing about the full development process that spans from the late 2000s to the game’s release in 2011. Instead, I focus on the localization process.

Thanks to a previous working relationship between Yamaoka and members of 8-4 Ltd, Grasshopper contracted 8-4 Ltd in 2010 to do two things. First, they were contracted to re-translate the computer generated (CG) scenes in order to backpedal out of a heavy-handed, poor translation job done by a different company. Second, they were hired to overhaul the in-game script between the two main characters, the demon hunter, Garcia Hotspur, and his talking gun, Johnson (both visible on the boxes in Figure 3.1).¹²⁶ In turn, 8-4 Ltd employed Brian Gray to do the translation/writing work, which he completed within an incredibly short two-week deadline.

¹²⁶ Johnson was originally named Dokuro, the Japanese word for skull, but the name was changed through suggestions by Ricciardi and Gray.

As the bones of the story, the CG scenes were originally penned by Suda in Japanese, and were (according to Gray) interesting. For the CG re-translation, Gray "backpedal[ed] out of some of the heavy adaptation that had been done to the Japanese script. [The original translation] veered wildly away from... what Suda-san had wanted to do with it, and so [Grasshopper] wanted it re-translated to get back towards the... original vision" (Gray 2013). Interestingly, a second translator (Gray through 8-4 Ltd) was called to salvage the over-creativity exercised by an initial translator, demonstrating both the power of translators to direct the game through translation, but also the layers of trust between developers and translators. While the previous translator – an outsider in the Tokyo game production scene – had proven to be untrustworthy, Yamaoka trusted 8-4 Ltd, and by extension, Gray. Because of this mutual trust, Gray was able to make large alterations that were not rejected.

During CG scenes the player loses control over the avatar and instead watches graphically detailed, cinematic cutscenes. While the player's attention is focused on the characters, and not on the action, synchronizing lip movements to spoken dialogue is critical. In contrast, during standard gameplay, when the player merrily runs around shooting demons, Garcia and Johnson 'talk,' but no effort is made to synchronize lip movement and speech. This constant chatting is a crucial narrative device that transforms the game from being an exercise of shooting virtual monsters into an entertaining narrative. Unfortunately, according to Ricciardi (2012) and Gray (2013), when they first got their hands on the in-game dialogue it was "crap," an "unmitigated disaster," and "barely English." Because of both the lack of tie between lip movement and dialogue and

the initial state of the dialogue, Gray was able to make extensive alterations while overhauling the in-game dialogue. While he specifically notes that he “didn't just throw everything out and start over,” he also claims that “it was pretty much free-reign,” and that by the end he had written 90% of the script (Gray 2013).

Following the initial two-part/two-week whirlwind task that included Gray picking up and dropping off documents by hand, EA and Grasshopper proceeded to revise and restructure the game to make it more interesting and more marketable. Included in this restructuring was an effort to expand the narrative elements of the game.

According to Gray:

Some of the new writing included scenes to explain the game mechanics, and a lot of backstory. Who was Paula? Why was she there? Who were the bosses was a big thing, which... turned out to be the storybooks. Christopher we wanted to flesh out more. I shouldn't say we. They. Because it was their idea. All of these directions were directly from Grasshopper. (Gray 2013)

With these new directives, 8-4 Ltd and Gray began a second 2-week phase that included fleshing out characters and writing new game elements. Of particular note are Paula, Christopher, and the storybooks. These three elements bring out the tangles between authorship and localization in SotD, and spell out the idea of ‘responsibility’ as more important to the practice of distributed authorship than ‘creation.’ While the first round involved Gray dipping his hand into the dialogue of only 2 characters, by the end of the second period he had extensively manipulated every character’s dialogue and backstory.

Secondary Process

During the second 2-week phase of work Gray touched numerous elements of the game's story and text, but two elements are key: the secondary character Paula and the diegetic storybooks. Important to remember here is that while EA and Grasshopper decided to expand the secondary character backstories, it was Gray who did the expanding.



Figure 3.3: The Japanese release of *SotD* included a faux magazine titled *Playbox*. In addition to articles about each of the game's three auteur figures, the parody features an illustrated 'interview' with Paula in lingerie.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Image from <http://electronictheatre.co.uk/industry-news/8804/shadows-of-the-damned-marketing-mocks-playboy>

Paula began as a simple throwback to the damsels in distress of 1980s gaming fame.¹²⁸ Scantly clad depictions of Paula as a “lingerie model” are visible on the Japanese box (Figure 3.1), on the Japanese disc (Figure 3.6), and throughout the *Playbox* paratext (Figures 3.3 and 3.4) available to Japanese pre-orderers of the game. These paratextual elements reveal that Paula never quite escaped her roots as an objectified damsel.



Figure 3.4: A centerfold of Paula in lingerie within the faux magazine *Playbox*.¹²⁹

What depth she does have was added during the second two-week phase. According to Gray: “all we knew about Paula was that Garcia loved her very much and that he found her in a dumpster... That was it... it's really kind of interesting and funny, and I instantly

¹²⁸ For an astute summary and reaction to the damsel in distress game cliché see Anita Sarkeesian's Kickstarter funded video essay “Tropes vs. Women in Video Games: Damsel in Distress.” See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6p5AZp7r_Q. Additionally, Sarkeesian's response to male gamer culture is discussed in more depth in Chapter 5.

¹²⁹ Image from http://www.gamekyo.com/group_article23162.html

liked it when I heard it, but that was the only detail that we had.” Gray began with nothing other than finding the damsel in the dumpster and “just kind of pictured her clawing her way into the dumpster and traced that back.”

The backstory Gray created during the second two-week session re-characterized Paula as a demon huntress. Her discovery within the dumpster by the game’s protagonist, Garcia, follows both her own assault on, and harrowing escape from Hell. The player uncovers this history through in-game dialogue between Garcia and Johnson (penned by Gray). While the pair discuss Paula throughout the game, the player finally understands Paula’s full backstory near the middle of the game upon finding three paintings in a library (Figure 3.5). Upon seeing the first painting Johnson informs Garcia (and the player) that it is an artist’s rendering of his favorite demon fairy tale hero, the Unbreakable Huntress. Johnson begins to recount the story, which continues in chunks as the player finds two additional paintings. According to the story, the Unbreakable Huntress is a demon huntress who unsuccessfully attacked the Lord of the Dead only to be enslaved as the Lord’s unwilling queen. Johnson’s story ends by noting that “they say she’s never stopped trying to claw her way back to the world of the living where she knows she truly belongs.” During the rest of the game, the player slowly realizes that Paula is the Unbreakable Huntress; she rescued herself by clawing her way up to the world of the living where she was found by the protagonist in a dumpster.



Figure 3.5: A screenshot of the third Unbreakable Huntress ‘painting.’ The Huntress is depicted killing demons while trying to climb up stairs, presumably out of Hell. Screen capture by author.

There is an interesting discrepancy between Gray’s heroic strengthening of Paula as the Unbreakable Huntress (Figure 3.5) and her representation as a consumable object (Figures 3.3, 3.4, and 3.6). While the backstory depicts her courageous assault on Hell, it also reduces her to a body that is repeatedly torn apart for pleasure by the Lord of the Dead. In order to fit within the game as it existed, Gray had to end her backstory with Paula in the dumpster where she would be found by Garcia so that the game itself could happen. Beyond Paula’s mistreatment by the story, the player is repeatedly put into a position of objectifying Paula: she is a body on the *Playbox* cover, its full-page spread, and even on the Japanese disk that the player must manually insert into the Playstation 3

console (Figure 3.6). Paula's objectification is even more problematic in that the player is forced to kill her during the final action sequence. In a perversion of the damsel in distress trope, the Player/Garcia must kill Paula in order to rescue her.



Figure 3.6: North American (left) and Japanese (right) Playstation 3 discs for *Shadows of the Damned*. Interestingly, the same image used within the *Playbox* paratext is reproduced on the Japanese disc. Photo by author.

Paula's gendered representation is not unusual, as Suda's other games have been criticized for their negative portrayals of women.¹³⁰ *Killer is Dead* (2013) provoked a particularly impressive response. While it pushed boundaries, much as Suda 51 and Grasshopper Manufacture's previous work has done, *Killer is Dead* was panned for its objectification of women. Particularly sexist are the Gigolo mini-games where the player character seduces women for power-ups by putting on a pair of x-ray glasses, staring at her body, working up courage to give her a present, and then sleeping with her. According

¹³⁰ For game reviews that note Suda's sexism see: Edge Staff 2011; Gies 2013; O'Mara 2013. For an interview with Suda 51 that includes a discussion of sexism, particularly in the game *Killer is Dead*, see: Edge Staff 2013; Sinclair 2013.

to one review, “*Killer Is Dead* is deeply misogynistic — even stepping outside of the overwhelming ick-factor of the gigolo aspects, every female character in the game exists to be rescued, killed, gawked at or f**ked for an in-game item” (Gies 2013). Suda 51 himself protests such criticism, claiming a form of everybody else is doing it mentality backed by cultural difference when he states “I think Western publishers do similar things... going out to a strip club and other things... But I do understand that if a Western developer was to create something like [Gigolo mode] it could backfire” (Haske 2013, brackets in original). Further, it is not quite clear whether Suda and Grasshopper are to blame for SotD’s shortfalls given EA’s involvement with the title. Regardless of whether Suda 51 and his characterizations are sexist or not, there is a certain perception that they are unacceptable for a North American audience.

Dealing with sexism, homophobia, and gender stereotypes by cutting, altering, or strengthening the characters, their words, or their representations are quite normal for game localization between Japan and the United States. In an interview discussing other work, Gray informed me that:

Gender issues... in terms of how women are viewed... portrayed as ultimately being secondary to the man and the male hero... and where women will play along to that role. They won't be laughed at or made fun of... everyone is on the same page here. In Japanese [these characters] come across as endearing, whereas in the West they come across as very sexist. And these are things that tend to universally get cut [when localizing from Japan to the United States]... because certainly the writer's intention was not to offend anybody and that would be offensive. And so the idea is that this isn't really what's important in this scene. I mean, if it is important then it will be left in, but if it's not important then let's just find another gag or joke or riff here. And [this cutting] happens fairly often. (Gray 2012)

While SotD's Paula was not necessarily offensive, by giving her a background as a strong woman Gray tempered sexism – even if it failed to completely erase the game's problems involving objectification. Importantly, both Grasshopper and EA were okay with the strong backstory that Gray created:

There wasn't a lot of pushback. They seemed to be okay with [Paula's story]. I don't really get a sense of whether that jived with the vision or not, I just know that they took it, they liked it, it's in the game, and they even drew the paintings [Figure 3.5]. So obviously if they drew the paintings they couldn't have had any large objections with how it was going. (Gray 2013)

While Gray might be the translator, his divergent efforts to give Paula a full backstory and a stronger characterization were both integrated and supported by the developer and publisher.

In addition to Paula's backstory that is told through posters and accompanying dialogue, Gray wrote four storybooks that show how the game's boss demons were damned (Figure 3.7). The player finds these books during the course of the game and is rewarded with Garcia and Johnson reading the book. Garcia starts and stops; he gets some words wrong and fails to understand others; Johnson provides pronunciation corrections and witty backtalk; and the player amusedly listens to the five minute performances. Gray explained that, "I did the stories, yeah. And also the illustrations that showed up in the game, originally there were not going to be any illustrations."

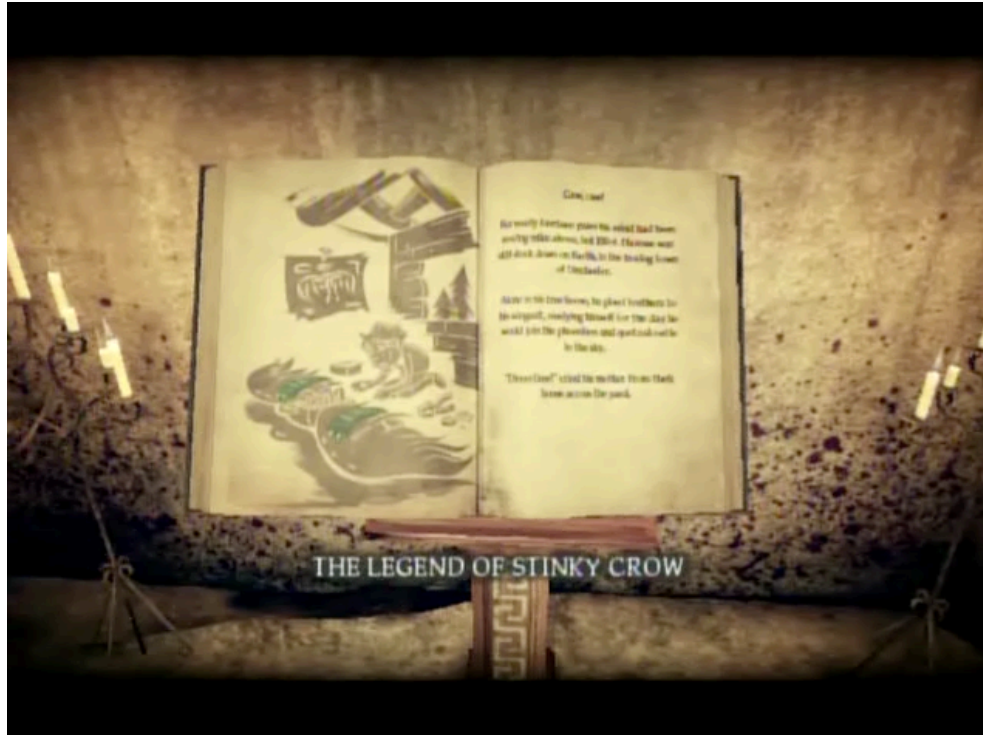


Figure 3.7: A screenshot of the second boss' storybook, The Legend of Stinky Crow. The story and accompanying pictures, both created by Brian Gray, elaborate how and why "Eliot jumps off a building." Screen capture by author.

Truth be told, I played SotD specifically due to its richness as an example of game localization, but I did not enjoy it as a player; happy to be away from the frenetic, gory world of demon killing Gray's story breaks were the delight of my experience with the game. For me, then, the game was largely made consumable by Gray's contributions.¹³¹

While Gray claims credit for writing the stories he quickly adds that he did not 'create' the characters or the plots. He states, "The gist of [the storybooks] was already in place. Eliot jumps off of a building; Justine cuts her own throat... The plot was like 3

¹³¹ And I am not alone in appreciating the story books. Responding to a forum post entitled "Anyone else hate the Story Books?" on June 25, 2011, Jonvandamm exclaims, "Heck no!! Those are the best. Especially since Garcia and Johnson read them aloud. xD." In fact, nobody nobody responding to the post indicates anything but positive feelings toward the books. The GameFAQs forum post is online at <http://www.gamefaqs.com/boards/952594-shadows-of-the-damned/59551051>.

sentences and those were fleshed out into full stories” (Gray 2013). It is this ‘creative’ fleshing out that Gray claims to have done.

It is important for me to reiterate and emphasize Gray’s comment that, “it was their idea. All of these directions were directly from Grasshopper” (Gray 2013). While he sees himself as ‘creative,’ he does not consider himself an authorial ‘creator,’ an author.

As Gray explains:

You have to remember that authorship isn't just projected out toward the public. It's also projected inward to the people that are producing the product. Certainly when I was working on [SotD] I knew what I was working on. I knew it was a Suda-san game. A Suda 51 game. Like a Spike Lee joint kind of thing. You understand this is the rough boundaries of what he's done before and this is what he's talked about, and this is the information he's given us, and you work within those elements. You don't just go off and do your own thing. Whereas if it hadn't been projected, if I hadn't been told that THIS IS, in all caps, I might have been a little more crazy in some ways. There are definitely places that I stopped myself and said, no, he wouldn't do this, so I didn't do it. So it's not just an external thing... which is why I think that the whole auteur thing is not just a marketing thing. It's an active ingredient in the development itself. (Gray 2013)

The back and forth between Gray as creative and Gray as working within what he sees as Suda’s vision is crucial to understanding localization as a distributed practice, but it does not take away from my argument that game translators enact authorial responsibility. I am not arguing that Gray is the sole author of SotD, or even that he is more authorial than others. As Gray says, he “knew it was a Suda-san game,” and he *responded* to the inward projection of Suda as an author. What Gray does not mention is that it is his *response* to Suda that then goes outward as the projection of Suda’s authorial presence.

While Gray may not see himself as a creator, or as an author, and instead sees Suda as the auteur, it is important to understand that Gray is still in a position of authority. Gray uses this authority in his creative filling-in of the story books, and in his particular strengthening of Paula. In contrast to Gray's practices, other translators do not creatively soften problematic elements. In reference to their work localizing games, two localization specialists working at the same company – a translator and a project manager – informed me about a long standing disagreement between staff members as to whether they should manipulate sexist tendencies in games or not. The translator noted that he tries his best to maintain fidelity to the original game as much as possible, going so far as to say:

screw cultural sensitivity. I'm going to go with whatever the creator intended. So if the creator intended for them to be sort of a somewhat offensive character, then I'm going to translate them appropriately. It's not a personal view on my part, it's more that I want to be as accurate to the original source material as possible while still sounding natural in English.¹³²

The project manager seconded the company's belief in fidelity, stating “we don't change story elements or plot points. Ever. Even if they may not be as palatable as other ones.”¹³³

Such fidelity is important to her because:

We want to do right by our Japanese team as well. This is their dream. Their vision brought to another country. They're still sort of the... We don't try to claim authorship. Exactly. Obviously we make tweaks and we make decisions that we think are important for our area, but it is still more of a hand-in-hand service and power. I mean we *could* make hardline decisions and change stuff. [...] But we think it's kind of important to keep it the same.

¹³² Anonymous interview with translator, September 5, 2013.

¹³³ Anonymous interview with project manager/editor, September 5, 2013

However, she also indicates a certain hesitance when the Japanese original objectifies women or sexualizes younger girls, stating “It's not my preference, these kind of games... but I don't deny that there's an audience for it. And it's not up to me to make that decision. But I would prefer to push games that aren't so toned.” Suda 51's portfolio demonstrates this back-and-forth between re-toning and fidelity. While Gray took authorial responsibility in creatively altered sexist elements, the company Xseed worked toward an idea of fidelity in maintaining the sexist Gigolo mode in its localized version of Suda 51's *Killer is Dead*.

As a final rejoinder, Ricciardi of 8-4 Ltd summarized both the process and situation of SotD well when he said, “It was a complicated set up. Suda had all of these original ideas and what [Gray] does agreed with him. I think [Gray] did a better job of bringing those ideas to life” (Ricciardi 2012). I am not claiming that one or the other is more of an author, but that localization is a process of multiple authorship where the translator shares responsibility in that role.

On Authorship

In order to unpack the complex authorial process of SotD's, I now turn to the literature on authorship in literature, media studies, and critical theory. While Gray identifies Suda as the *auteur*, not himself, the literature on authorship is complex and allows for multiple meanings and layers of authorship. In this section I summarize several theories of literary and media authorship in order to make room not only for a theory that allows for both Gray and Suda to be authors, but to switch the discussion from

intentionality and power, to accountability, responsibility and ethics, which I will discuss in the following section.

Authors, Intentions, and Meanings

Roland Barthes announced the death of the author in 1967. As a modern creation that allows the cementation of textual meaning to a singular authorial subject, the author is no longer relevant to the reader focused mode of interpretation born with poststructuralism. As Barthes declares, “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” (Barthes 1977: 148). In order to switch the locus of meaning from writing to reading, the author must ‘die.’ Two years later in 1969, Michel Foucault struck another blow against authorial meaning by analyzing and critiquing the author function, claiming:

[The author] is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction... The author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning. (Foucault 2003: 119)

According to Foucault, while we see the author as an origination point of creative meaning, or the “indefinite source of significations that fill a work” (Foucault 2003: 118), the author’s ideological purpose is to limit meaning. Thus, we are safely able to understand and delimit the frightening possibilities of meaning within the author’s subject. In terms of SotD we can see this in reviews that place the game within Suda’s

oeuvre, as well as with Gray's own comment that he worked within the general realm of what he considered to be Suda's boundaries.

Death of the author discourse has been crucial to the rise of audience studies/reception studies research (Ang 1982; Morley 1986; Morley and Brunsden 1999), and a greater focus on the distributed creation of meaning (Hills 2002; Jenkins 1992, 2006a). Reception studies originated as a means of escaping linear communication theories where an empowered sender dominates peripheral receivers. In particular, reception studies moves away from the cultural imperialism thesis, where stronger, centralized cultural powers brainwash and wipe out weaker national cultures (Dorfman and Mattelart 1984; Tomlinson 1991). Thus, Ang (1982) argues that European watchers of *Dallas* are not reading the text in a universal manner, and they are not necessarily reading America positively. The focus on readers has also led to both fan studies research that seeks to understand how meaning is created by fans (Jenkins 1992), and a reconceptualization of the authorial production cycle as one of convergence between producers and consumers (Jenkins 2006a, 2006b).

Reception studies and ideas of producer-consumer convergence both border on an understanding of authorial intention as distributed. While distributed authorship has been a relevant concept within film and television studies during the 20th century due to the large number of people involved in the industrial creation of any film or television show (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson 1985; Miller et al. 2005; Schatz 1998), it is particularly relevant for video games due to the way applications build off of and draw code from other applications, and because of the increasingly large teams necessary to create AAA

games for modern consoles. With dozens to hundreds of programmers listed in video game credits, and hundreds to thousands more when artists, quality assurance, marketing and localization are included, games now rival films in terms of how long the full credits take to roll.

Ironically, the author found new life within film studies in the form of the *auteur* at nearly the same time that Barthes killed it in literary studies. Originally a concept coined within the French film journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* and used to highlight certain directors as creators of art (*auteurs*) as opposed to mere scene-setters (*metteurs en scène*), *auteur* theory gained traction through Andrew Sarris' 1962 appropriation (Buscombe 1973; Gerstner 2003). Along with taking the French theory into an American context, Sarris worked to structurally formalize *auteur* theory claiming that any film necessarily has outer, middle and inner circles that coincide with the director's technique, the director's personal style, and the director's interior meaning (Sarris 1999, 518). Skillful technique is the least important circle, and the most important is "interior meaning, the ultimate glory of the cinema as an art" (Sarris 1999, 516), which Sarris unabashedly calls the "soul" of the film. For Sarris' *auteur* theory, like with romantic art, the director bares his soul on the celluloid, but it is the collection of the director's works that truly allows one to understand the director as *auteur*/artist.

One way to understand SotD, then, is through the *auteur* power of Suda, Mikami or Yamaoka. A guiding intentionality within and across games could be read for each: Suda's story and quirkiness (from *Killer7* through to SotD and onto *Killer is Dead*), Mikami's engine programming (from *Biohazard/Resident Evil* to SotD), or Yamaoka's

music (from *Silent Hill* to *SotD*).¹³⁴ The marketing, box design (Figures 3.2A and 3.2B) and Gray's comment that he "knew it was a Suda-san game" all support reading *SotD* as *autuer* driven. However, traditional *autuer* theory does not help me understand how Gray can influence the FIGS translators and FIGS localizations, nor does *autuer* theory help me come to terms with Paula.

In a critical redirection of *auteur* theory within his larger book *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, Peter Wollen argues that *auteur* theory need not fetishize the director as authorial figure. Rather, like Barthes' focus on reading, Wollen highlights the audience's "decipherment" of the cinematic text (Wollen 1972: 77). This later reading, which takes place after the film's creation, is what constructs the *auteur* (Wollen 1972: 168-9) and interestingly, "can [reveal] authors where none had been seen before" (Wollen 1972: 77). As Wollen notes, it is not the author and his [sic]¹³⁵ "meaning" that the audience finds through *auteur* theory, but the "structure" that is made possible through the *auteur* figure who is often, but not always, the director as an "unconscious catalyst" (Wollen 1972: 168). Wollen's move is a first step along the same lines of authorial destabilization outlined above in that singular authorial control moves to what Patrick Colm Hogan calls "minimal auteurship" (Hogan 2005: 71). With minimal auteurship it is possible to look at direct, nested or even conflicting "guiding intentionalities" (Hogan 2005: 72) that could

¹³⁴ Both Aarseth (2005) and Demirbas (2008) have written about the specifics of how *autuer* theory figures within video game creation. In contrast, Huber (2013) traces several shifts in the authorial organization of video games between the 1970s and 2010s – these include *auteur* and collective. Regardless of organizational structure, however, he concludes that the Peircean "semiotic conditions of authorship have been stable" (Huber 2013: 230)

¹³⁵ I use the masculine pronoun here specifically to reproduce how Wollen's term, *auteur*, is gendered in a way to reproduce heteronormative gender roles where men are active creators.

come from “any person – director, producer, cinematographer, editor, star, set designer” (Hogan 2005: 84), and I would add: translator. Finally, in his critique of cinematic auteurship, Berys Gaut (2010) proposes that cinematic control and interpretation are better understood through a multiple-authorship view of cinema that allows films to be “multiply classified: by actors, cameramen, editors, composers and so on” (Gaut 2010: 129). While Gaut’s multiple authorship is similar to minimal auteurship on the surface, he makes a crucial extension: that disagreement between authors is artistically fruitful. For example, when two authorial figures have a different intention during the creation process *auteur* theory would necessarily hold that the stronger auteur’s intention is correct, but a multiple authorship view allows for both to be important and the contrast to be crucial. Similarly, Gaut points out that when an actress disagrees with the intentions of a director the result is a combination of the two intentions.

Through Wollen (1972) and Gaut (2010) I can claim that Gray, the translator, is also a part of the multiple authorship and the game could be read through him and linked into his other translation work that spans from *Final Fantasy X-2* in 2003 to the present and how this ‘translation’ work has lead to ‘writing’ work. I can also read SotD by opposing Gray’s inferred intentions with those of Suda, Mikami, or Yamaoka. This is a tempting reading where intention and power reside in the hands of the English translator. However, Gray’s statement that “There are definitely places that I stopped myself and said, no, [Suda] wouldn't do this, so I didn't do it” precludes such an easy answer. Gray’s authorial position is not of intention then, but what I want to argue is responsibility.

From Intention to Responsibility

A crucial part of the death of the author discourse is the separation of the text from the author. In his essay “Signature, Event, Context,” Derrida concludes that “Writing is read, and in the last analysis does not give rise to a hermeneutic deciphering, to the decoding of a meaning or truth” (Derrida 1982: 329). Analyzing a text does not reveal the author’s intended sense through communication. Rather, meaning is dependent upon context, discourse, or the very absence of the author (or reader) in any given mediated communication. Derrida’s Deconstructive intention is to “practice an *overturning* of the classical opposition [between speech/writing, or absence/presence] and a general *displacement* of the system” (Derrida 1982: 329) through a constant doubling (often in the form of homonyms). While Deconstruction is important for opening up philosophy to discourse, or as Derrida writes, “displacing the system,” and is a compelling method for ethical localization – specifically, in Chapter 4, I propose that one form of responsible localization is embracing translational remainders, or traces of the source text that exist in localizations – the separation of authorship and ethics is problematic. As literary theorist Seán Burke points out, the death of the author has run in tandem with an emptying out of ethics, of authorial responsibility:

As Derrida's commenters are fond of saying, [encrypting his own true name and writing through Hegel and Genet] is a tactic which prevents any one authorial voice from gaining control, as indeed it is. But does it not also, simultaneously, indicate a reticence about taking control, about risking the proper name? (Burke 1998: 170)

Authorial control, which I have discussed above in terms of intention/meaning, is certainly displaced within post-structural discourses of the death of the author, including

deconstruction, but also displaced are accountability, responsibility, and ethics. Thus, while multiple authorship may allow me to argue Gray's importance in the artistic text, it does not grant me the ability to understand the politics and ethics of the situation.

While Deconstruction as a postmodern theory has been critiqued regularly since the 1980s, it was particularly scrutinized following the uncovering of Paul De Man's history as a Nazi sympathizer (Burke 1998). A key figure within deconstruction and literary theory, De Man argued for the divorce of the author from the text. Burke follows others in noting that De Man's support of a separation of author and text can be read as a means for De Man to shirk his own wartime responsibility. If the text cannot be read for the author, then the author cannot be judged by his texts, and De Man cannot be held accountable for his Nazi writings.¹³⁶ To Burke, De Man's life and works spell out the six "cardinal intersections of author and text" that include Intention, Authority, Biography, Accountability, Oeuvre, and Autobiography (Burke 1998: 4-5). What I take from Burke is that authorship is not merely about intention (meaning), but about authority and accountability. On the one hand the author is trusted and respected as the authority, can claim such authority, and can authorize the text; on the other hand the author must be held accountable for his or her own history and choices. With *SotD*, Gray does not have any legal authority, but he (as a Japanese to English translator) does have practical authority in the sense that the FIGS translators look to his vision of the Japanese original

¹³⁶ Of course, De Man is not the only figure to have his or her name entangled with an ethically problematic political movement posthumously or otherwise. Nietzsche and Heidegger were both equally mobilized within Nazi Germany, and Burke has used both authors to discuss authorial responsibility and the ethics of writing (Burke 1998, 2010).

when pivoting to their respective European languages. My argument, then, is that Gray, as a game translator, takes a certain responsibility or accountability over the text.

Translating in the Shadows

For me to argue that Gray, the translator, is accountable (or responsible), I must move now to engage with the field of translation studies, where the question (and sometimes problem) of authorship is a particularly sticky issue. While popular understandings might posit translation as a sieve through which the translator effortlessly pushes pure information through in order to transform the source text into an identical target text,¹³⁷ most 20th century translation theory has rigorously protested this reductive conceptualization. While the conceptualizations of translation range from faithful vs. free (Dryden 2004 [1680]) to domestication vs. foreignization (Schleiermacher 2004 [1823]), and from correspondence theory (Nida 1964) to *skopos* theory (Vermeer 2004 [1989]), translation theorist Anthony Pym synthesizes these various conceptualizations by claiming that the central requirement is for the translator to decide upon a particular translational methodology (2010: 182).¹³⁸ And yet, despite Pym's requirement that translators decide on how they will actively shape the translated text using one of the

¹³⁷ This is traditionally seen in the mythical Biblical Septuagint translation where 72 individually cloistered translators made 72 simultaneous translations of the Torah from old Hebrew to Greek over 72 days. As the story goes, their translations were exactly the same indicating divine intervention. 20th century versions include *Star Trek's* universal translator technology, and the Babel Fish within Douglas Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. All of these currently culminate in the dream that machine translation can function perfectly – for instance, Google Translate.

¹³⁸ This moment of decision, where Pym claims a translator must choose, is similar to Suchman's (1987) work on situated actions. While planning influences design choices, workplace choices come from contextually situated actions.

aforementioned methods, he is clear that they are non-authors (2009). Despite clearly having a role in the manipulation of the text from source to target, this non-authorship is important for certain translators.

While the concepts of intertextuality and distributed authorship reinforce the theory that translators are, in fact, the “other author” of a text (Zeller 2000), some theorists note the existence of issues that can necessitate distancing translation from visible authorship. Exemplifying the need for translation to be separate from authorship is when the translator is called to mediate between frictional zones and can be in physical danger (Apter 2006; Seidman 2006). However, it is crucial to separate ‘on the ground’ experiences of interpreters in frictional zones from translation ‘in theory.’ While certain on the ground experiences might necessitate the non-authorship of interpreters and translators, the actual responsibility, or authorial role, that translators plays in practice is increasingly the focus of critical investigation (Torikai 2009). Thus, it is for the theorist to recognize the shadowy role of the translator even if the translator must remain in the shadows to protect her life.

In *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*, Lawrence Venuti shows how translation has been historically rendered invisible within English language discourse, and how this invisibility adversely effects both cultural relations and practicing translators. Drawing from reviews of translations that use the word “fluent” as a positive quality, Venuti attacks the fluent translations as a key element of invisibility. He writes:

Fluency can be seen as a discursive strategy ideally suited to domesticating translation, capable not only of executing the ethnocentric violence of domestication, but also of concealing this violence by

producing the effect of transparency, the illusion that this is not a translation, but the foreign text, in fact, the living thoughts of the foreign author... Transparency results in a concealment of the cultural and social conditions of the translation – the aesthetic, class, and nationalist ideologies (Venuti 2008: 51).¹³⁹

Not only does fluent translation side with Schleiermacher's domestication (reworking the source cultural contexts into local contexts for easy reading) over the opposing strategy of foreignization (making the reader work to understand the source culture), but as Venuti argues, translational fluency goes so far as to hide the fact of translation by "conceal[ing] the translator's interpretation of the foreign text" (Venuti 2008: 66). Venuti's genealogical aim within *The Translator's Invisibility* is to "force translators and their readers to reflect on the ethnocentric violence of translation and hence to write and read translated texts in ways that recognize the linguistic and cultural differences of foreign texts" (Venuti 2008: 34). It is this socio-political element of Venuti's work that is most often taken up in translation studies scholarship, and which I will take up in Chapter 4. However, his protest of "the translator's shadowy existence in British and American cultures" (Venuti 2008: 8), which he argues is a historical practice that needs to be altered for political and ethical reasons, is the more relevant element of his work in terms of this chapter.

¹³⁹ As I have written elsewhere (Mandiberg 2012), there is an interesting similarity here between transparency in translation studies, and the friction between transparency and obfuscation of source code and interface in digital media studies. While Bolter and Gromala (2003) note that transparency in interface design is often understood as 'best,' they argue that reflective interfaces can help the user understand her own self in important ways. Similarly, against the obsession with seeing and understanding code, Wendy Chun (2011) argues that "code is a 'dirty window pane,' rather than a window that leads us to the 'source'" (54). For Chun, desires for transparent interfaces and the obsession with seeing the source code, instead of the material layers between users and code, are related to "a desire to control, to 'govern,' based on a promise of transparent technologically mediated contact. [...] This spectral interface has come to stand in for the machine itself, erasing the medium as it proliferates its specters, making our machines transparent producers of unreal visions—sometimes terrifying but usually banal imitations or hallucinations of elsewhere, in which the uneasy relationship between human agency and dependency is negotiated" (87). With transparent interfaces, like with transparent translation, we do not need to think about the material, social, political, and ethical practices that enable and disable our mediated subjectivities. Also, see: Bolter and Grusin 1999; Galloway 2012).

While Venuti declaims the translator's invisibility as a scandal, others note the practical benefits and even necessity of translational invisibility. Naomi Seidman (2006) notes that the translator is a double agent with a dual and semi-conflicting role that encompasses both 'faithful translator' who must translate accurately, and 'productive mediator' who must alter meanings in order to safely interface between two communities. Seidman explains how her father translated between a group of French *gendarmes* and Yiddish-speaking Jewish refugees after World War II's conclusion. Instead of 'accurately' reproducing the words of each group he performed a dual role to assure each group in their own language that he belonged with them. He did this by selectively mistranslating specific statements in order to help the refugees with whom he was a part. To Seidman, "Fidelity, in the sort of translation conducted under the watchful eye but uncomprehending ear of the Egyptian king, an SS guard, or even a benign *gendarme*, means faithfulness to one's embattled community rather than to any abstract ideal of linguistic equivalence" (Seidman 2006: 13). Seidman's claims are applicable beyond her examples of embattled Jews, Yiddish and Hebrew within a Christian world. Her overarching argument is that translators work within particular contexts and must negotiate their role and the reception of their words/works. For Seidman's father, accuracy might have meant being refused entry to Paris after World War II; it was the invisibility of Yiddish that protected his double agent status, allowing him and his fellow refugees to reach safety. Invisibility is thus a protective element in that it allows necessary changes within some contexts.

The translator's invisibility can even be a matter of life and death as in the much cited case of Igarashi Hitoshi, the Japanese translator of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. Following the publication of Rushdie's controversial novel, Ayatollah Khomeini proclaimed, "I inform the proud Muslim people of the world that the author of *The Satanic Verses*... and all those involved in its publication who were aware of its content, are hereby sentenced to death" (Khomeini quoted in Wallace and Fisher 1989). While Rushdie himself escaped the fatwa, Igarashi was murdered by an unknown assailant presumably because he translated *The Satanic Verses* into Japanese (Helm 1991). To many writing about translation studies, Igarashi is a clarion call about the need for a separation between writer and translator as Igarashi should not be held responsible for the words and ideas of Rushdie. However, while the phrase might say not to shoot the messenger, a serious question is whether the translator is a messenger, bringing the inevitable news to new ears, or an active agent shaping the future through their choices and writing. Did not Igarashi choose to translate the work?

In her examination of prominent Japanese diplomatic interpreters, Torikai Kumiko begins with the unwritten rule that "interpreters are invisible" (Torikai 2009: 1), but concludes by arguing "an interpreter is not simply an invisible linguistic conduit, but is an intercultural communication expert and coordinator, facilitating and mediating intercultural encounters" (Torikai 2009: 180). The diplomatic interpreters that Torikai interviews claim to transparency, to remaining invisible like *kurogo*, the black clad non-actors within Kabuki theater who assist onstage by bringing and removing props.

Contrast their drive toward invisibility, Torikai elaborates how interpreters actively make choices:

Interpreters unintentionally testified in their narratives that notwithstanding their perceived norms, in practice, they made their own creative strategic choices, sometimes foreignizing, at times domesticating, changing their footing in their role as animator, author, and even principal, depending on the nature of the communicative event they were involved in. (Torikai 2009: 176).

Interpreters might claim to be transparent and idealize invisibility but, as Torikai argues, they are an “invisible presence” (Torikai 2009: 25) that actively influences any translational event. Certainly, game localizers can never be present like simultaneous interpreters, as they are not visibly interpreting on stage. However, certain game localizers – particularly Japanese to English translators within the pivot translation model – have a similar “invisible presence” within the production cycle.

In this discourse of translational visibility there is a separation between sides: on the one hand are those arguing that earning a living wage, being able to matter in terms of production, and ownership of work are crucial; on the other hand are those who state that matters of life, health, and effectiveness of translation are more important. What I find important, particularly in terms of game localization, is that neither side denies the creative nature of translation as a practice. As translation theorist Anthony Pym summarizes the postmodern move from Bakhtin to Kristeva to current translation theory:

The idea that all creativity is translational is now a keystone of postmodern thought. From this perspective, to say that the translator has authorship is also to say that all authors work translationally. And if that means that translators, like all authors, transform texts, bring newness into the world, have complex productive cognition processes churning within them as they work, and are all different, then I have no qualms about the

proposition at all: translators are indeed subjective in their minds and creative in their writing. (Pym 2009)

Because translation is creative, then, there is no question that translation is *linked* to authorship (Buffagni et al. 2011). The move away from authorial genius/creation and toward ‘intertextuality’ within postmodern literary theory parallels the link between translation and authorship as both are ‘creative.’ The larger question becomes just what elements of authorship are tied to translation: whether the translator is granted, or should be granted, the rights, privileges, status, accountability and/or responsibility of the author. For me, the question comes down to whether the translator is responsible for the text or not.

Despite clearly stating that translators are authorial, Pym actually argues that translators are non-authors in that they are not ethically responsible for the texts they create. Drawing on the work of Irving Goffman, Pym argues that an author is a “principal” who is responsible for the text, but a translator is an “animator” whose position is not established by the words being written on the page. As a result, the translator is not ethically responsible for the words, nor should the translator be held accountable. This implies, when we think about the case of Igarashi, that the translator should not be held accountable for the inflammatory novel because it is not Igarashi’s claims and beliefs on the page; Igarashi was merely animating the principal’s words in a secondary language. Pym summarizes his argument by writing, “with respect to discursive positioning, beliefs and commitment, translators are not authors. Such, at least, is the conclusion invited by the translation form in our immediate cultures” (Pym 2009).

And it is in this summary that Pym opens up both the key to his argument and the way out, as he points that there are other translational cultures and other translational processes.

When Pym suggests looking at “process studies” – how translators actually go about their work, not simply at the text and its derivative translation – he inadvertently points out a crucial difference between translating in the typical sense, and game localization. According to Pym the translational culture where the translator is an animator and not responsible as a principal is “based on products, on texts that have been authored and translated” (Pym 2009). Igarashi as the translator of *Satanic Verses* is merely animating Rushdie’s already written words and ideas. However, unlike novels, games are never principally created into a single language, but animated into multiple localizations through the same distributed and collaborative processes of authorship. SotD was not written in Japanese and then translated into English (like the translational culture Pym discusses with a principal author and animating translator). Rather, SotD was conceived of and roughed-out in Japanese; translated, re-translated, adapted, filled-out in English, and then published as a North American English localization; translated from English to FIGS for the simultaneously shipped European localizations; and then back-translated into Japanese for the Japanese localization published six months later. While Gray may or may not have been “animating” Suda’s creation in his own mind, he shows that with pivot translations FIGS translators in turn feel that Gray is the person who knows/holds meaning as “principal” of the text, and Gray’s active tempering of

characters and sexuality described above actually indicates that he is taking responsibility.

Translating “Well”

I have used the term “responsibility” rather loosely until this point, matching the different conversations and quotes within which it has appeared. Here I wish to specifically theorize responsibility as I see it being ethically used within certain game localization practices. To do this I will draw from Haroldo De Campos’ theorization of translation as cannibalism (Vieira 1999), Jacques Derrida’s (1991) exclamation that one must “eat well,” and finally Donna Haraway’s (2008) understanding of responsibility (response-ability) as having significant intra-action with significant others. My argument through these theoretical twists and turns is that game localization (as a form of translation) necessarily involves a form of violent incorporation, but that its violence can be ethically, or responsibly, aligned. My argument, then, will allow me to conclude this chapter by pointing out where responsibility exists within video game localization (particularly within the figure of Gray), but also where responsibility does not exist within other, perhaps more standard game localization practices, and finally where it may exist in future practices.

Transcreation and Patronage

In theorizing translator agency within game localization, Minako O’Hagan and Carmen Mangiron (2013) combine the concepts of “transcreation” and “patronage” to

explain how games are adapted through localization to fit into the target cultural contexts. Drawing on Haroldo De Campos' theorization of translation as cannibalistic incorporation (Vieira 1999), O'Hagan and Mangiron argue that transcreation moves "beyond the dichotomy of source/target and cites original and translation in a third sense, where each is both a donor and receiver" (Vieira 1999: 97 cited in O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013: 197).¹⁴⁰ Unlike traditional notions of fidelity, transcreation operates as a "two-way transaction in which, rather than the translator being totally subservient to the ST [source text], his or her agency is privileged, enriching the original text in the process of translation" (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013: 197).

While O'Hagan and Mangiron reveal the transcreative agency of game localization specialists, they are also clear to argue that for them the practice is best understood through André Lefevere's concept of patronage (1992) due to the tense intersections of publisher (client) and translator (service provider), which serve to limit the translator's agency. Within Lefevere's system it is the patron who attempts to exert control over discursive culture through the ideological, economic and status components of manipulating texts within society. For translators, "[a]cceptance of patronage implies that [they] work within the parameters set by their patrons and that they should be willing and able to legitimize both the status and the power of those patrons" (Lefevere 1992: 18) even by going so far as "allow[ing] their patron to claim authorship of their work" (Helmut von Glasenapp quoted in Lefevere 1992: 18). For Lefevere translators do

¹⁴⁰ In going back to De Campos' 1960s theorization of transcreation as cannibalism, O'Hagan and Mangiron are clear to distance themselves from the recent advertising and marketing use of transcreation that focuses on adaptation for the sake of economic gain (Humphrey et al. 2011).

not have creative agency; rather, they work, willingly or not, under the overarching authority of their patron. O'Hagan and Mangiron's combination of transcreation and patronage covers how translators must creatively adapt games, but only to the extent that they are providing a "service" to their patron/client/publisher. My critique, however, is that the patronage system breaks down when the translator's responsibility to some other entity, or ethical system, supersedes the importance of the service they are providing to the patron. If Gray offsets Paula's objectification with the Unbreakable Huntress, but the Xseed translators reproduce Suda's sexist Gigolo mode, to whom (or what) are they each holding themselves responsible?

Eating Well (bien manger)

To separate the translational ethics of Gray and the translators of *Killer is Dead* I turn to Derrida's theorization of being as the violent, but necessary eating of others. In "Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida" (1991), Jean-Luc Nancy leads Jacques Derrida through a discussion of "questions of ethical, juridical, and political responsibility around which the metaphysics of subjectivity is constituted" (Derrida 1991: 101). While most of the discussion revolves around Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, or being in context, an aside in the middle taken from Levinas' understanding of the subject as a hostage allows Derrida to interrogate the command "Thou shall not kill." By reformulating the Biblical command as "Thou shalt not put to death the living in general," Derrida is able to argue:

The moral question is thus not, nor has it ever been: should one eat or not eat, eat this and not that, the living or the nonliving, man or animal, but since *one must* eat in any case and since it is and tastes good to eat, and since there's no other definition of the good (*du bien*), *how* for goodness sake should one *eat well* (*bien manger*)? (Derrida 1991: 115)

In a situation where one must eat to survive, Derrida ponders how can one both 'eat lots of good food' and 'eat ethically?' While eating is the physical act of painfully killing and eating an animal (an other), it also involves consumption, incorporation, or the process of progress on a more systemic level. For Derrida, then, eating involves "respect for the other at the very moment when... one must begin to identify with the other, who is to be assimilated, interiorized, understood ideally" (Derrida 1991: 115). One thus "[does] well to eat [the other]" (Derrida 1991: 115), and this eating is not simply physical, entropic incorporation, but an idealized, cultural procession.¹⁴¹ Eating is modernity/modernization, but there are ethical ways to do it 'well' – less like teleological progress and more like a self-reflexive process.

Derrida's question, of how to kill and eat ethically (*bien manger*), resonates with de Campos' anthropophagic transcreative translation as both confront how one can incorporate an other ethically. To combine Derrida's "eating well" and de Campos,

¹⁴¹ There are similarities between what Derrida argues in "Eating Well" and what he argues in *Monolingualism of the Other* (1998). Primarily, as a subject we *must* incorporate others just as "we never speak only one language – or rather there is no pure idiom" (1998: 8). We are never monolingual in that our language is always in the process of change and incorporation. However, we are always monolingual in that we identify one language, or one subjectivity as ours. As Derrida indicates at the end of *Monolingualism of the Other*, his oeuvre – including the relationship between writing and speech (Derrida 1976), living-on and the trace (Derrida 1979), lifting/relevant translations (Derrida 2001), being as incorporating others (Derrida 1991), and the monolingualism of the other (Derrida 1998) – is about different metaphors approaching the same relationship between being in a system, where he argues it is necessary to live with a building-up, or layering of being. As he indicates in *Specters of Marx*, being (ontology) happens through being haunted (hauntology) (Derrida 1994). While exorcism is one way to react to being haunted by ghosts from the past, a different, and, as Derrida argues throughout his oeuvre, a better response, is to incorporate the disparate voices of the haunting ghosts and move forward (Derrida 1994: 174-6). Of all the varied theorizations, I choose to engage primarily with the "trace" and "eating well" as they best match the specific objects I am analyzing and discourses into which I am inserting myself.

Vieira, and O'Hagan and Mangiron's "transcreation," then, just as one must eat, one must also translate; and just as Derrida calls for "eating well," not just "eating," we must also ask how can we "translate well?" What is an ethical form of translation? Again, given translation's inherent violence, if the translator must do well, must be ethical, must be responsible (and not just to the patron), then what is the translator's responsibility? What are the practices that would ensure ethical translating given that a reliance on patronage does not alleviate ethical problematics?

Unfortunately, at the moment when Derrida points toward an ethics of being/assimilation/incorporation, he fails to indicate an actual path. While Derrida argues that we must 'eat well,' he never prescribes how we might do so.¹⁴² Once again, Derrida fears authorizing something and thereby risking his own authority (Burke 1998: 170). Thankfully, Haraway is willing to risk author(iz)ing an answer despite fears of getting the consequential issue emotionally, intellectually and morally wrong (Haraway 2008: 79).

Response-ability

It is Donna Haraway's (2008) concepts of "response-ability" and "becoming with" that finally help me move from Derrida's search for ethical incorporation, or 'how

¹⁴² For those readers jumping out with answers like veganism and paleo-diets, Haraway responds fully when she writes, "I do not disagree that vegetarianism, veganism, and opposition to sentient animal experimentation can be powerful feminist positions; I do disagree that they are Feminist Doxa. Further, I think feminism outside the logic of sacrifice has to figure out how to honor the entangled labor of humans and animals together in science and in many other domains, including animal husbandry right up to the table. It is not killing that gets us into exterminism, but making beings killable. Baba Joseph understood that the guinea pigs were not killable; he had the obligation to respond" (Haraway 1998: 80). Killing animals is a necessary problem within scientific experimentation. What is important, according to Haraway, is to not take such killing for granted. Similarly, avoiding the consumption of eggs is not a final answer when the vegan wants to go to a hospital. Taken back to translation, answering 'veganism' is the same as answering 'play/read it in the original.'

we can eat [ethically] well,’ to understand how game translators work in an ethical/responsible way. With this theoretical movement I will be able to separate the translations of SotD and *Killer is Dead*, and identify how Gray’s work is ethically responsible.

In her chapter, “Sharing Suffering: Instrumental Relations between Laboratory Animals and Their People,” Haraway argues that laboratory scientists must share lab animals’ suffering by responding to the animals’ pain and thereby being “response-able.” In this chapter and elsewhere, she is writing about ethically “becoming with” significant others, both animal and human, in practices of “intra-action.” Far from *being* perfect humans/beings, *we become with* through intra-acting, or *responding with* others.

For Haraway, responsibility is crucially related to the ability to respond. Defining responsibility within the context of a laboratory with human scientists and animal workers, she writes:

Response, of course, grows with the capacity to respond, that is, responsibility. Such a capacity can be shaped only in and for multidirectional relationships, in which always more than one responsive entity is in the process of becoming. That means that human beings are not uniquely obligated to and gifted with responsibility; animals as workers in labs, animals in all their worlds, are response-able in the same sense as people are; that is, responsibility is a relationship crafted in intra-action through which entities, subjects and objects, come into being. People and animals in labs are both subjects and objects to each other in ongoing intra-action. If this structure of material-semiotic relating breaks down or is not permitted to be born, then nothing but objectification and oppression remains. (Haraway 2008: 71)

Responding with others is a critical part of becoming an ethical being, and not the sole domain of humans within positions of power.

To Haraway, sharing and responding to animal suffering is necessary for ethical science and a part of realizing that we are all equal (and that *we* includes everybody, human and animal included). As she writes, “To share the dogs’ suffering, or that of participants in today’s experiments, would be not to mimic what the canines go through in a kind of heroic masochistic fantasy but to do the *work* of paying attention and making sure that the suffering is minimal, necessary, and consequential” (Haraway 2008: 82). Response-ability within the lab is not about stopping pain, suffering and death (of lab animals or other significant others); it is about caring for, being affected by, and otherwise responding to these necessary practices that cause pain, suffering, death, but also growth and progress.

Just as we must eat, we must also kill, whether it is for eating or for science, regardless of intentions. What is crucial, according to Haraway, is not *not killing*, but not *making killable*. We *must* kill, so the response-able way to go about this killing is not merely saying we can/should/must kill animals and therefore understand it is allowed, but by understanding that “human beings do not get a pass on the necessity of killing significant others, who are themselves responding, not just reacting” (Haraway 2008: 80). One must kill, but one must respond with the thing being killed. To bring this ethical answer back to Derrida's question, then, ‘eating well’ involves pain and responding to the thing consumed by limiting the suffering of the animals consumed and not eating too much. But to shift that answer back a second step to translators by redirecting Haraway’s words: [translators] do not get a pass on the necessity of [translating] significant others, who are themselves responding, not just reacting. Faithfulness might explain reproducing

Suda's sexism in the localization of *Killer is Dead*, but it does not justify it; falling back to the patron's wishes without responding with others might be industry approved, but it is not responsible translation, it is not "translating well." Responsible translation is thus not simply fitting within a patronage system, letting the patron authorize the text, and ultimately holding the patron accountable, but responding with the producers, developers, players, and the cultural system within which the game industries operate. It is in pushing back, by responding with Suda in the creation of a more nuanced Paula that Gray acts ethically.¹⁴³

Haraway's aims and object are well beyond my own in some ways – she studies object and animal agency, while I am still focusing on national/cultural locales and the human. However, her basic posthumanist point, that "heterogenous beings are in this web together for all time, and no one gets to be Man" (Haraway 2008: 82), resonates with game localization well. Nobody gets the Biblical free pass of dominion over the animals, whether it be for killing others, eating animals, or translating. We all must be responsible since we are all entangled, humans, animals and of course other humans in other locales. If animals must be understood as significant others, then certainly all humans must also be significant others.

Just as scientists must respond with lab animals, singular authors are not the only ones who are responsible. Haraway shows that responsibility (response-ability) is

¹⁴³ I must add that I am not trying to demonize Xseed or its translators. They worked within the system and authority allotted to them. While I am referring to the Xseed localization of *Killer is Dead* as not responsible, it is entirely possible that such responsibility could never have happened. Gray was given the ability to act responsibly due to the particular processes that were involved in creating SotD. In contrast, the *Killer is Dead* translators might not have been given the ability respond with the game in the first place. Responsible translation, then, might come from the actions of translators, but it is enabled through the distributed processes of game localization.

absolutely required for ethical, multidirectional relationships, and I extend her argument to point out that game localization practices, as a similarly multidirectional relationship, must be responsible.

Responsible Localization

Most game localization specialists shy away from the concept of translation ethics. As one translator memorably quipped during an interview, “I don’t have time to worry about ethics! I’m not paid to worry about ethics!” Nondisclosure agreements result in game translators being unable to comment on the exact nature of remuneration, but as translators like this one explained to me, the low pay-scale results in a tendency toward “barfing out this translation as fast as [possible] to put food on the table” instead of “negotiat[ing] good ethics, practices and rates.”¹⁴⁴ This is particularly true for translators working within a draft environment, where their work will be heavily edited after their translation is finished. Summarizing the issue in many ways, Alexander O. Smith stated, “ethically I think you have to do the best you can with what you’ve got. And you have to please the people that have the most to lose.” Importantly, however, the people with the most to lose is not the same as the company paying the money, or O’Hagan and Mangiron’s “patron.”

While translators like Smith and Gray must worry about, and satisfy their patron’s desires particularly by making sure the game they translate is well adjusted into the local

¹⁴⁴ Questions of labor and ethics are a common theme within recent digital labor studies scholarship, which uses Marxist approaches to look at conflation of work and play that is particularly visible on the Internet. See: Scholz 2013.

culture and sells well in the local market, they also worry about the future of game production, localization's place within the industry, and if pushed enough, the ethics of game translation. Smith emphatically notes that translating solely to satisfy the client's desire for a better return on investment can be a negative practice:

you're robbing the creator of his voice at that point, and that is removing the possibility of this future vision that I see of Japanese creators and American creators on equal terms sharing their visions and making games together. Where localization is just an enabling process to let this cross seeding continue... I feel like there is the ethical call to give those creators a voice... And what I really want to see is Japanese game creators... sharing their vision with the US. With creators in the West. And I want to keep that going... I want to get those creators' voices heard in a way that people will listen, and I think that if you put too many barriers again in the localization process you're running the risk of losing that voice. (Smith 2012)

The ethical localization described by Smith involves enabling a process of mutual becoming. He does not merely provide a service for his publisher patron, but enables a multidirectional cultural cross seeding between Japan and the United States.

Through his actions Gray presents a variation on Smith's ethical localization ideals. Gray does not completely remove the character, Paula, instead transfiguring her into a stronger archetype. In strengthening the Paula character – from pin-up to demon hunter – Gray takes what would otherwise be an offensive element and makes it palatable to a North American audience. Certainly problems still exist – SotD is still objectionable to many North American players due to the game's objectification of women and juvenile humor. However, by softening the blow Gray enables the Japanese creators' voices to be heard and responded to instead of being ignored. Such response (to reiterate Haraway), “grows with the capacity to respond, that is, responsibility. Such a capacity can be shaped

only in and for multidirectional relationships, in which always more than one responsive entity is in the process of becoming” (Haraway 2008: 71). The result of Gray’s mediating response – which itself came out of his own interpretation of the text and subsequent discussions with the localization project manager, Ricciardi – was a second round of edits with the other team members at Grasshopper. The multidirectional responsibility in turn led to Grasshopper Manufacture’s next game featuring a female heroine. Becoming happens in unpredictable ways, but responsible translator ethics are certainly a part of the process.

While game localizers are certainly professionals working under a concept of “patronage,” they can also be ethical people with responsibilities beyond bottom line economics. I agree with O’Hagan and Mangiron in that translators have a form of creative agency that they utilize when localizing video games, something that I have described as authorial responsibility throughout this chapter. However, while O’Hagan and Mangiron argue that this agency is limited through translators’ professional actions while working for patrons, I have demonstrated that certain translators do, in fact, work beyond the strict mandates of the job. In so doing they both take particular ethical stands and conduct responsible localization practices. Both Gray and Smith are such translators working within multidirectional relationships of responsibility.

In this chapter I have argued that Japanese to English game translators, as individuals working within the distributed practice of game localization, have a particular form of authorial responsibility to effect change on the game during the localization process. I have called this responsible translation, a type of translational practice where

translators worry less about economics and their publisher/patron's ROI economics, and more about the interactions between different nationally located creators and players of games.

In the two remaining chapters of this dissertation I will discuss particular forms of game localization responsibility. First, in Chapter 4, I will show how traces of the foreign culture remaining in a localized game are inevitable despite efforts to wipe the foreign residue clean. However, in contrast to many localization specialists, I will argue that these traces can be a good thing. Then, in Chapter 5, I will show where a gendered localization responsibility might be exercised on a larger scale given early 21st century debates on games as a male gendered space, the exclusion of women, and discursive and practical efforts to make room for women players. While this final chapter will focus on localization to respond to gendered exclusion, the implications are broadly scalable to any bordered zone of inclusion/exclusion.

Chapter 4 - Playing (with) the Trace in *Phoenix Wright*

In the opening scene of *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney: Trials and Tribulations* (2007),¹⁴⁵ the main character Phoenix Wright (Naruhodo Ryuichi in Japanese) is depicted wearing a white surgical mask (Figure 4.1). While white surgical masks are a common sight in Japan where it is customary to wear one if you are sick, it might seem odd in the North American context where such masks are worn by doctors in formal medical settings.



Figure 4.1: Phoenix Wright with surgical face mask from *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney: Trials and Tribulations*. Screen capture by author.

When asked by fans in a 2007 English-language interview, “What’s up with the... face mask that Phoenix sports?” *Phoenix Wright*’s producer, Matsukawa Minae responded:

¹⁴⁵ The Japanese title is *Gyakuten Saiban 3* (2004).

There's also a prosecutor with a mask – he's a very interesting character who likes to drink coffee in the courtroom. He'll go through cup after cup and they'll pile up, maybe ten or twenty cups in the course of a case. I think he's very interesting. The mask, he's hiding something from his past that comes to light during the course of the game – I think fans will really enjoy seeing why he's wearing a mask! (tiny dancer 2007)

It is most interesting that Matsukawa misses the point of the question, and goes off on a tangent discussing a completely different character.¹⁴⁶ To the Japanese producer, the question could not be something as banal as why does Phoenix Wright wear a mask. He wears a mask because he is sick. To the Japanese producer it is obvious, but to the American fan asking the question it is not obvious. The mask is a culturally specific trace of Japan that has slipped through the cracks of localization practice.

According to most translators working within the game localization industry, confusing the player is a failure of translation. Thus, while the confusing cultural particularity of the mask might have gone unnoticed by the game's Japanese producer, it was noticed by the localization team. The Japanese Naruhodo Ryuichi says nothing about the mask as it is an everyday item, but the American Phoenix Wright must explain that his doctor prescribed the mask so that he does not infect other people (Table 4.1). As current Localization Director at Capcom and translator for *Phoenix Wright: Trials and Tribulations* explained:

Those were all hand drawn 2D sprites, so to go through and remove the mask from all of those you'd have to redraw everything. You'd have to re-

¹⁴⁶ As was helpfully pointed out to me by veteran game translator Brian Gray in conversation, it is possible that the question was translated incorrectly so that 'face mask' became *kamen* instead of *masuku*, which might have confused Matsukawa. *Kamen* is the native Japanese word for mask; *masuku*, in contrast, is a foreign loanword within Japanese used for surgical masks like the one in the image. That Matsukawa states there is "also a prosecutor with a mask" indicates she was able to link the mask to Phoenix Wright, but found it implausible as the point of the question.

design the character's animations completely. Cause once you take away the mask is he going to sneeze? Will he have droplets coming out of his face? There's all these considerations to be taken... it was so daunting that we couldn't take it on. It was too much. (Hsu 2013)

Unable to change the hand-drawn animations of Phoenix Wright sneezing into a mask and hoping that the SARS outbreak several years prior to the release of this game would have made surgical masks a more common sight (Hsu 2013), the localization team did its best to make the mask seem natural by adding an additional line of dialogue into the English version in order to explain the awkward visual (Table 4.1). However, the situation still caught in players' minds as a trace of Japan and resulted in players like the one quoted above who questioned producer Matsukawa during an interview.

Primarily, traces like the mask are understood as *failures of translation*. This negative view is supported by many game localization specialists and idealized game localization practice, which argues for the complete erasure of games' culturally specific contexts and iconography (Chandler and Deming 2012; Esselink 2000; Honeywood and Fung 2012). To veteran Japanese to English game localizer Alexander O. Smith (2012), traces like the mask are failures of translation because they cause the player to experience what Smith calls *iwakan*, or a moment of incongruity. When the American player encounters such a rupture she is robbed of an immersive experience and forced to think outside of the box provided to the original Japanese audience. Unlike Matsukawa and the average Japanese audience, the American fans had to ask what was up with the mask, indicating that they experienced an *iwakan*.

Table 4.1: Transcript of mask scene from *Gyakuten Saiban 3* (Japanese) on the left; author's direct translation in the middle; transcript of mask scene from *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney: Trials and Tribulations* (English) on the right. Added English lines are highlighted.

	Japanese		Direct Translation		English Localization
ナル ホド	う。お。おはよーご ざいますセンセ イッ！	Naruhodo	Ugh. Oh. Good morning, sir!	Phoenix	*cough* *sniffle* Good morning there everybody!
チ ヒロ	おはようございま す。(とりあえずエ ガオよ、千尋)	Chihiro	Good morning. (In any case, smile, Chihiro)	Mia	Good morning... (Try to keep smiling, Mia!)
ナル ホド	きよ、今日 は。。。ボク、が んばりますからッ！	Naruhodo	To, today... I'm really gonna try hard!	Phoenix	I, err, I just want to say... I'll give it all I've got!
ナル ホド	ええもお、やります とも！げほ。げほげ ほ。	Naruhodo	Eh, well, I'm gonna try! Cough, coughcough.	Phoenix	Yup, it'll be fine! No prob! *cough* *achoo* *achoo*
チ ヒロ	あ。。。そんあに リキまないで。ええ と。。。なるほどさ ん！	Chihiro	Ah...please, not so strongly. Uh... Mr. Naruhodo!	Mia	Oh, what's wrong? Do you have a cold or something... Mr. Wry?
ナル ホド	はは、は いッ！。。。あ。い え、あの。	Naruhodo	Ye, yes!... Um, er, well...	Phoenix	Actually, it's Wright... Like the flying brothers... People screw it up all the time.
ナル ホド	セイカクには”なる ほど”なんですけ ど。。。	Naruhodo	Actually, it's really Naruhodou, but...	Phoenix	And yes I have a cold. That's what this mask is for.
				Phoenix	My doc says this way, I won't give it to anyone else... Be kind to others, he says...
チ ヒロ	いいですか、なるほ どさん！シンパイは いりません。	Chihiro	Okay, Mr. Naruhodo! There's no need to worry.	Mia	Right, Mr. Wright! You have nothing to fear in court today!
チ ヒロ	あなたが無実な ら。。。かならず、 助けてみせます！	Chihiro	If you're innocent... I will definitely save you!	Mia	If you are truly innocent... I promise I will save you!
ナル ホド	うぐぐぐ。む、胸 ぐらをつかまないと ください。。。げ ほ。	Naruhodo	Ugggghh. M, my shirt, please don't grab it... cough.	Phoenix	Nnnnggghh... P-Please I- let go of my shirt... *cough*

In contrast, this chapter proposes that traces created through video game localization can be and should be seen as *successes of localization*, and the limited practices that produces these traces should be seen one particular type of responsible localization. Approaching traces through the Derridian notions of writing ~~under erasure~~ (Derrida 1976) and relevant translation (Derrida 1979) allows me to argue that traces of Japan are a signifier of the border between locales and a residue of the border-work being done by localization practices to evacuate difference from the localized text. *Iwakan* – caused by experiencing a trace, or ~~remainder~~, of the original Japanese cultural context – provoke the player into recognizing the original Japanese game within the localized version. These moments remind the player not only of the smoothness of global flow, but the stoppages, rupture and friction within globalization. Far from signifying failure, then, *iwakan* are what make the localization culturally relevant by educating the player.

One important thing games do is educate, and one of the ways players learn from games is through what James Paul Gee calls cultural models, which he defines as “images, story lines, principles, or metaphors that capture what a particular group finds ‘normal’ or ‘typical’ in regard to a given phenomenon” (Gee 2007b: 149). To Matsukawa the mask is a standard cultural model, and as such it is unremarkable and unremarked upon, even when it is subject to question. To the American audience, however, the mask is evidence of Gee’s point that players learn about alternate cultural models through games. Upon witnessing the non-normative act of wearing a face mask American players demonstrate their interest in the game’s distant origins by seeking out answers from somebody they thought might know (tiny dancer 2007).

Traces like the mask are not just a matter of education. They are sites where an anxiety about difference is contained and globalization is enacted. As argued by globalization scholars, global flow is not homogenization or cultural imperialism (Tomlinson 1991), nor is it the unfettered flow of money and information under neoliberalism (Ong 2006). Rather, globalization is a nuanced, frictional (Tsing 2005) process that takes place at particular disjunctive moments, sites or ‘scapes (Appadurai 1996) such as game localizers’ daily practices of translational border-work, and players’ attempts to uncover the borders that are hidden through localization practice. Borders are the site of difference between distinct national locales; translation is the interface (Mandiberg 2012) that negotiates difference across those borders by allowing certain cultural elements to cross and stopping others (Bermann and Wood 2005). Playing traces, then, transforms games into an inadvertent arena for “border pedagogy” where the player educationally and productively encounters those on the other side of the border (Giroux 2005). It is particularly appropriate that the face mask, a device used to prevent physical contagion, is itself the trace that reveals the work of localizers as the industrial site trying to prevent cultural contagion by erasing traces of Japan. Not only is it impossible for localizers to fully prevent cultural contagion by erasing the border, but it is traces like the mask that lead *Phoenix Wright* fans to approach Japan and enable a form of cross-cultural hybridity (Consalvo 2006; García Canclini 2005).

Building on Chapter 3, which argues that certain game translators should take and do take authorial responsibility to ethically bridge the foreign and domestic versions of the game, this chapter argues that one form of this responsibility is a layering approach,

where, similar to film subtitling, the process of incorporation is witness-able by the player. First, the chapter introduces the game *Phoenix Wright*, focusing on the complex processes through which the Japanese *Gyakuten Saiban* was localized into *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* in the United States. Second, the chapter draws from, but also moves beyond Mia Consalvo's (2009) study of player engagement with *Phoenix Wright*, the only other scholarly critique of the series. By engaging with the specific practices and limitations circumscribing game localization in general, and the localization of *Gyakuten Saiban* into *Phoenix Wright* in particular, I show that the key to game localization, at least within industry practice, is preventing traces of the foreign from being visible for domestic users. Despite the goal of erasing traces and preventing *iwakan*, or moments of incongruity, this chapter then draws from personally conducted interviews with *Phoenix Wright*'s former translator Alexander O. Smith, Capcom's former Head of Globalization Ben Judd, and Capcom Localization Director and *Phoenix Wright*'s present translator Janet Hsu to show that economic and practical reality necessitate the inclusion of traces and *iwakan* within most, if not all, localized games. In order to make sense of the traces that necessarily exist in localized games, this chapter proposes a Derridian conceptualization of the trace in order to reconsider *iwakan* as an element of relevant (Derrida 1979), responsible (Haraway 2008), or ethically appropriate translation (Nornes 2007; Venuti 1998). All gamers play traces, but this chapter suggests that we (gamers, translators, and academics alike) follow Derrida's lead and play *with* those traces in order to understand how game localization practice manages the construction and negotiation

of cultural and national differences as they are experienced within all games, Japanese, North American, European or otherwise.

Playing (*with*) traces enables both an engagement with/incorporation of cultural difference and an alternate form of mobility. This sort of active playing with borders is particularly important within the early 21st century where neoliberal assumptions of the free flow of information, people and culture is opposed by reality where less privileged information, people and culture suffer restrictions on mobility (Govil 2007; Nevins 2002; Ong 2006). Thus, like previous studies of television and cinema (Cronin 2003; Moran 1998; Moran 2009; Nornes 2007), this argument holds the implication that studying game localization practice can lead to a better understanding of globalization and media flow between nations and cultures. A second implication, which is particularly relevant to game localization specialists, is that the idealized International Game Developer Association (IGDA) ‘best practices’ (Honeywood and Fung 2012) are not necessarily ‘best’ for all locales and all times, which is an important industrial argument in that it shows there are as many different best practices as there are video game industries (Zackariasson and Wilson 2012).

Particulars of *Gyakuten Saiban* (*Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*)

Originally created for the Gameboy Advance, *Gyakuten Saiban*, which means, roughly, Reversal Trial, was released in Japan in 2001.¹⁴⁷ Classified on the box as a

¹⁴⁷ Research was conducted using personal recorded playthroughs of *Gyakuten Saiban: Yomigaeru Gyakuten* and *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* on the Nintendo DS. For better image quality certain images were captured using the iOS version, *Ace Attorney: Phoenix Wright Trilogy HD*.

Courtroom Battle [*houtei batoru*], the game stars Naruhodo Ryuichi (Phoenix Wright in English), a rookie defense attorney tasked in each episode with defending somebody charged with murder. As Naruhodo, the player begins each episode believing that there is a set up of some sort, but unable to prove it. In order to find the truth of the episode and defend Naruhodo's client, the player must collect and use evidence in the right way during conversations outside and inside of the courtroom. The game progresses through 'presenting' individual pieces of evidence to witnesses and other non-player characters at the right time and place in order to make the conversation proceed along a new path. Outside of the courtroom this happens by simply showing the proper item to the proper character; inside of the courtroom this happens through objecting to something a witness says, and then presenting a piece of evidence that proves the witness has created a contradiction in their witness statement. By repeatedly pointing out contradictions Naruhodo eventually arrives at the truth and proves his client is innocent of the murder. While reminiscent of graphic adventure games like *King's Quest* (1983) or *Myst* (1993), where the player must progress through a story by pointing-and-clicking to discover and use a variety of items scattered throughout the environment, *Gyakuten Saiban* is driven less by finding and using items than by writer Takumi Shu's over-the-top, amusing characters and tightly written dialogue.

Capcom's Head of Localization, Ben Judd, encouraged his company to localize the game in the early 2000s, but the original Gameboy Advance title, *Gyakuten Saiban*, was not localized even after successfully spawning two sequels in Japan (2002 and 2004). The game was finally localized for the North American and European markets after the

Japanese game was revised and re-released on the Nintendo DS in 2005. The re-released game, *Gyakuten Saiban: Yomigaeru Gyakuten* [Reversal Trial: Revived Reversal] utilized the Nintendo DS's dual screen and touch screen functionality, and it featured an additional 5th episode. More important for the present discussion, however, is that the re-release's producer, Matsukawa Minae, was able to convince Capcom's decision makers to localize the title. *Gyakuten Saiban* was localized into English as *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*, and the English translation was used to pivot the game into French, Italian, German and Spanish.



Figure 4.2: Box art for *Gyakuten Saiban: Yomigaeru Gyakuten* (left) and *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* (right).

While the practices involved in localizing the title were complicated due to the large number of people involved,¹⁴⁸ Ben Judd explained the core process of how linguistic elements like names and accents were changed as follows:

Alex[ander O.] Smith [the translator] would come up with a list of names, and then as a second pass we [the internal localization team] would say oh, like it, like it, oh, that's not going to work, a bit too much, and get through one more filter. And then send it over to R&D, and a lot of the times they would come back and say this, this, and this. And then we would have to sit down and talk. (Judd 2013)

Each name, and even many accents, went through the extended process of being changed by the translator, then approved by the localization team, the producer, the original writer, and even members of the development team. These extensive processes helped work out the best possible choice that could ensure good English reception as well as fidelity to the original. For example, the name Naruhodo Ryuichi went through approximately 20 permutations before the team finally settled on Phoenix Wright (Smith 2012).¹⁴⁹

Beyond changing the linguistic text, game localization experts are able to alter graphics. With *Phoenix Wright* a similar interaction occurred between numerous people

¹⁴⁸ The team responsible for localizing *Phoenix Wright* is quite large and distributed across both Capcom and Bowne Global Solutions. At Capcom are Matsukawa Minae (producer), Takumi Shu (original writer and director), Ben Judd (head of localization), Brandon Gay (internal editor), and Funakoshi Kaori (internal project manager). At Bowne Global Solutions are J. Patrick Riley, Yuuko Muto, Yuli Kim, Steve Anderson (external editor), Alexander O. Smith (translator of episode 1-4) and Philip Soldini (translator of episode 5). While this list is already large, it does not include the artists and programmers required to implement changes.

¹⁴⁹ Naruhodo Ryuichi is difficult to translate due to his last name. Because ‘naruhodo’ means, roughly, ‘of course,’ there are numerous jokes involving his name throughout the game. Translating the name to Wright enables similar name-based jokes like that play with right/Wright. For a longer discussion of how translated names are determined, see: Janet Hsu’s blog post “Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney - Dual Destinies Localization: TRIVIA TIME!” at <http://www.capcom-unity.com/zeroobjections/blog/2013/10/02/phoenix-wright-ace-attorney---dual-destinies-localization-trivia-time>.

spanning from Capcom's development team to the external translation agency. According to Judd:

Everyone [at Bowne Global and in Capcom's internal localization team] had played the original game and made suggestions like 'hey, this needs to be changed,' and 'this looks a little bit weird'... And then [the producer] went over to the [development] team and talked about what graphically *could* be changed. For every change it's going to cost a certain amount of money. And then [the producer] came back with a list. (Judd 2013)

While the team began with a larger list of ideal changes, cost restrictions meant the team changed only what was deemed both necessary and within budget. Thus, the in-game *tokusatsu* samurai drama's title screen changed from *Oedo Senshi Tonosaman [Edo Fighter Lord-man]* to *Steel Samurai* (see Figure 1.6), but the *tokusatsu* samurai drama itself was not changed despite the story's relocation from Japan to Los Angeles. Changing the splash screen was within budget, but changing the entire scenario – rewriting, redrawing, and reprogramming – would have been too costly. While Matsukawa was successful in getting the approval and funding to localize the Nintendo DS re-release into English, French, Italian, German and Spanish, it was with significant limitations. Despite the elaborate interactions and impressive effort made to best localize the title into English, it is important to understand that *Phoenix Wright* was not expected to sell well in the North American market, so the localization team was not given enough funding to change everything. Limited funding resulted in many unchanged graphical elements that read as Japanese. These unchanged graphics include, but are not limited to, the *tokusatsu* drama, a character who sells typical Japanese *bento* (boxed lunches) while wearing a hat decorated with *onigiri* (rice balls), a guard in who wears an armband (typical of authority

figures in Japan) emblazoned with *kanji* (Chinese characters), a character wearing a *magatama* (a traditional Japanese bead or jewel), and a small room with *tatami* (woven straw matting), a *kotatsu* (floor table with attached heater), and *senbei* (rice crackers wrapped with seaweed) on a plate (Figures 1.6 and 4.3).



Figure 4.3: Assorted Traces from *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*. Woman in *onigiri* hat selling *bento* (upper left); guard's armband with *kanji* (upper right); character with *magatama* (lower left); *tatami*, *kotatsu*, and *senbei* (lower right). Screen captures by author.

In addition, narrative and ludic elements went completely unchanged due to lack of economic support: for instance altering the legal system, which is vaguely similar to Japanese law, but holds no similarity to American law, would have necessitated

completely rewriting the story and core mechanics, a process that was far above the economic support granted *Phoenix Wright*'s localization team.

Neither Capcom nor Matsukawa expected *Phoenix Wright* to sell well in the English market (Riley 2006; Sheffield 2007; tiny dancer 2007). Smith elaborates on just how little Capcom expected the title to sell by saying, “they didn’t think it was going to sell at all. And how many copies did they make of the first one? It was like 2000 or something? They made like nothing and it sold out instantly and then they had to do a big reprint” (Smith 2012). Most interesting, however, is Ben Judd's reaction:

We nailed it, and it was good. And unfortunately, it was good enough that it sold well, so when [*Gyakuten Saiban 2*] came out [on the Nintendo DS] ... we had about 60% [time and money] to do the second one. And the second one is like 1.3 times as big a game as the first. So then there were mistakes, which is a shame. (Judd 2013)

While Judd primarily means grammatical and consistency mistakes that increased due to the rush the team had when localizing *Gyakuten Saiban 2* and *Gyakuten Saiban 3* into English, also included are what this chapter is calling traces. Minor textual, audio, graphical or even ludic ‘mistakes,’ like the existence of the room with *tatami*, a *kotatsu* and *senbei*, the guard with *kanji* on his armband, the *magatama*, the various *bento*, and of course the white, surgical face mask, which slip through the cracks of localization practice and reveal *Phoenix Wright*'s Japanese origins to the North American audience.

Localization and *Iwakan*

Idealized and actual practices of localization are quite divergent. The Localization Industry Standards Association defines localization as “taking a product and making it

linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale (country, region and language) where it will be used and sold” (quoted in Esselink 2000: 3). What this means *ideally*, and described in Chapter 1, is that in addition to translating the written text within games, which includes names and dialogue, modern video game localizations translate and re-dub voices, modify background noise, soundtracks and graphics to ‘local tastes,’ recreate paratextual elements like manuals and websites, make larger gameplay changes like changing the speed and difficulty or deleting mini-games, and even sometimes rebrand the game in a marketing campaign aimed at the target locale (Chandler and Deming 2012; Honeywood and Fung 2012; O’Hagan and Mangiron 2013).



Figure 4.4: Title screen from *Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan* (left) and title screen from *Elite Beat Agents* (right). Screen captures by author.

Game localization *can* make all of these changes. For instance, the localization of *Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan* (2005) into *Elite Beat Agents* (2006) manipulated visual, audio and ludic semiotic registers so that a rhythm game with Japanese songs about a Japanese ouendan (cheer squad) could be transformed into a rhythm game with US top 40 hits about a secret agent group (Figure 4.4). While ideally localized games like *Elite Beat Agents* exist, such examples are rare. Much more common are localizations that do not fully manipulate the game.

In a close reading of *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*, game and media studies scholar Mia Consalvo ruminates on how certain Japanese elements, which could be seen as inappropriate within a strict definition of idealized localization, remain within the localized game. She writes:

the game does keep many fictitious Japanese references, possibly because it would have been extremely difficult to expunge all evidence of ‘foreign’ content... Yet perhaps references to Japanese media and popular foods need no longer be erased, or even heavily modified. Recent interest in Japanese pop culture, such as manga, anime, and of course videogames, has been well documented. Furthermore, while most Japanese companies attempt through localization to erase the ‘cultural odor’ of their products, more recent hardcore fans seem intent on preserving as much of the local Japanese ‘flavor’ as possible. Thus leaving some of the ‘Japanese-ness’ in the game might be as much of a draw as the game’s skillful use of language. (Consalvo 2009: 160)

Consalvo brings up a crucial point in that there is conflict as to what is ‘good’ or ‘optimal’ localization practice. Consalvo, analyzing her own playthrough of the game and focusing on the pleasures of reception, is absolutely correct that foreign fragrances (Iwabuchi 2002) are often desired by consumers (Norris 2014). Through translation theory we may extend this claim to say that such odor is even appropriate given certain

socio-political situations (Venuti 1998). However, it is equally important to understand that the practices and explanations of game localization specialists identify these parts of *Phoenix Wright* as failures. To the industries responsible for localizing games, localization practice is about making a game culturally appropriate with the emphasis in practice being that replacing foreign with local is the appropriate process in terms of money and immersion. This conservative belief is elaborated in Anne Allison's (2006) interviews with marketing experts tasked with localizing Japanese cultural products into the United States, it is supported by the IGDA best practices (Honeywood and Fung 2012), and finally it is visible in the attempts of *Phoenix Wright*'s localization team to make the localized text seem natural (Hsu 2013; Judd 2013; Smith 2012).

For the localization of *Gyakuten Saiban* into *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* names, accents, speech patterns, jokes, sounds, and graphics are changed and even the general setting moves from an unnamed place in Japan to Los Angeles. All of these alterations are important for the game industry for two related reasons: markets and money. A localization enables the sale of a game within a new market, or locale, and this in turn allows an increased return on investment. As a business, video games are meant to make money, and as a particular service meant to expand the reach of a game, the sole reason to localize a game is to increase the return on investment for the parties involved. After a large sigh, Judd responded to a question about how he toed the line between his own interests in Japan and the industry's bottom line mentality noting quite explicitly that:

It's a business. If it doesn't sell, it's done. So, that being said, I put myself in the shoes of the end user. The person who is buying the game. What do they want? Giving them a taste of Japanese, of that culture, is it going to make them enjoy it more? Most of the time the answer is no... I'm not trying to change peoples' view on life, to try and culturalize them. (Judd 2013)¹⁵⁰

It is important to remember that the budget for localizing *Gyakuten Saiban* was limited, and as Judd said, it was even more limited for the sequels. Unlike idealized localization, key to most game localization is staying safely within the restrictive forces of taste and budget: the localization of *Phoenix Wright* was driven on the one hand by the belief that keeping Japanese elements within the North American localization would not satisfy consumer desires, and on the other hand by the restrictive budget that prevented overly extensive changes.

Carmen Mangiron and Minako O'Hagan (2006) note that one way to look at video game localization is as translation with particular restrictions. These restrictions can be structural (the way localization companies are organized separately from development teams and publishing companies, and the way money is a limiting factor in what localization can and cannot do), and the restrictions can be formal (the way translators must work around character limitations when translating *kanji* compounds to much longer English or German words, and the way translations have to match character

¹⁵⁰ As Jennifer Prough (2011) shows in her discussion of manga production and affective labor in Japan, when readers of *shojo* manga become editors they must negotiate their own pleasure and the bottom line. Similarly, while localization specialists like Judd are professionals doing their job and minding the bottom line, they must also negotiate personal gaming preferences, and the personal belief that they are performing an ambassadorial role for Japan. One anonymous translator noted the importance of contextually understanding certain Japanese concepts like *ninja* and *yokai*, but then separated his own authorial work where he paid extreme note of such details and his professional translation work where he acquiesced to the company's desires, because "it's a business." Thus, while there are possibilities of actively negotiating personal preferences, money and industry discipline seem to push translators into toeing the line. Also see: O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013), who further discuss this liminality in terms a patron/translator power relationship that dictates game localization practice.

lip movements). According to Mangiron and O'Hagan, what is unique about game localization as a form of translation, is that game translators work within these restrictions using what the authors call “transcreation,” a form of quasi absolute freedom to change certain semiotic elements in order to create a “similar experience” for players in the target locale. Thus, the formal and structural restrictions necessitate greater freedom to alter the games, which would not be given to translators of other media.

In facing the economic restrictions inherent to localizing *Gyakuten Saiban* into *Phoenix Wright*, Smith used this quasi absolute freedom to completely rewrite elements of the game. Smith explained, “when there were things that couldn't be translated well I would ignore them and write something else that fit with the characters in the situation” (Smith 2012). Specifically discussing why he changed one character's love of miso ramen (in *Gyakuten Saiban*) into a love of hamburgers (in *Phoenix Wright*), Smith elaborated:

At the time I didn't feel it [ramen] was that insinuated into the fourteen year old crowd, that they would know it immediately... One of the rules I go by... is that if a translation is creating an *iwakan* [sense of incongruity], that doesn't exist in the original, [if] there's a disjoint, if it's breaking immersion, if it's creating confusion that the original doesn't create with its original audience then you are doing a disservice to the goal of the scene or the line. So if I say, oh, it's my bento, and somebody has to say “what's a bento... I guess it must be this lunch thing and I see it and they're eating it,” that's a whole thought process that didn't exist at all for the original player. (Smith 2012)

Thus, Smith translates the experience, or overall feeling, of the scene, and creatively alters Japanese elements that do not fit within an American mentality.¹⁵¹ A character's

¹⁵¹ Elsewhere, Smith calls a localized game character that exudes *iwakan* a “Frankenstein character that is neither Japanese nor English – such as a squeaky-voiced anime girl in a serious setting” (Jayemanne 2009).

love of *ramen* became a love of hamburger; *bento* were called lunch boxes; a character's traditional medium garb became weird hippy clothing; and the wiretapped Hantou Hotel became the Gatewater to allude to the Watergate scandal. If, as O'Hagan and Mangiron argue, the goal of game localization is to create a similar experience for the target player in the target locale, then Smith demonstrates that the key to creating a similar experience is preventing *iwakan*.

To many within the video game localization industry, the key element of translating games is preventing *iwakan*, the incongruous feelings and moments that occur when encountering traces of cultural difference like Phoenix Wright's mask. When suitably funded, localization does in fact attempt to completely prevent *iwakan* by changing everything. Similar to the previously mentioned transformation of *Osu! Tatakae! Oendan* into *Elite Beat Agents*, *StarCraft II*'s localization teams were given "carte blanche" budget and freedom to change anything and everything related to audio and graphics in addition to text localization (Barnes 2012). In addition to using tools like FaceFX to facilitate lip-synching during the dialogue — allowing translators to worry about what is being said, not matching up dialogue to character lip flaps — localization teams even changed labels on beer bottles that existed within the game's bar scene, but were never visible to the player during normal play (Barnes 2012). A particularly interesting example is how the game's cinematics were altered. During one of the game's numerous cut-scenes the player sees a computer screen quickly display information about a prisoner being scheduled for release; while changing this text was not originally intended, first one locale and then all for the rest changed the language displayed on the

computer to their own. A second changed scene is when one character throws a grenade down a hallway toward a group of approaching soldiers. When the grenade stops rolling at the end of hallway the player sees that attached to the grenade is a small note that says ‘Have a Nice Day’ with a little heart symbol (Figure 4.5). Like with the computer display, each locale decided to change this hand-drawn element to a note in its own language, and the Russian localizers even changed the heart symbol to a little yellow smiley face. For Blizzard's well-funded localization, traces of any sort, even little hearts, are prevented to make sure that the player never encounters an *iwakan*.

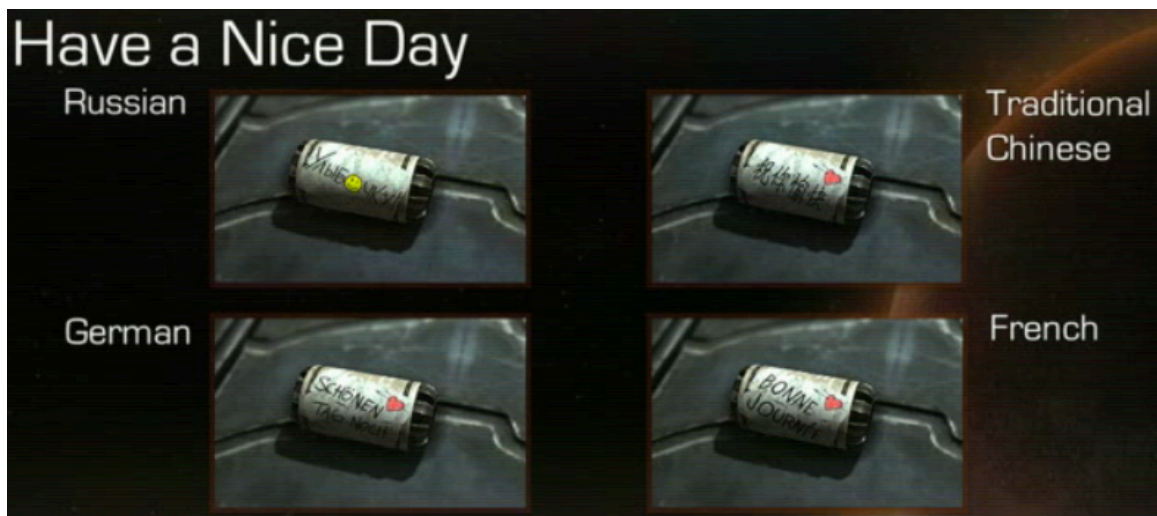


Figure 4.5: Localized grenades from Barnes' (2012) GDC presentation on Blizzard Entertainment's *carte blanche* localization strategy for *StarCraft II*.

While players might desire Japanese traces, as Consalvo points out, localizers rarely intend to leave traces of the original locale's culture in the localized version except when forced due to a lack of funding. While localization specialists I have interviewed note that certain niche products leave a whiff of cultural odor (Iwabuchi 2002) within localized products, preserving cultural odor is *not* the case with most mainstream console

video games translated from Japanese to English, and it was not the case with *Phoenix Wright* according to both the head of localization and the translator.¹⁵² Because of the increasing cost of producing video games, and the corresponding increase in cost to localize games (more text, audio and graphics with current generation games), most console games that are localized are aimed to hit as large of an audience as possible. Such was the case with *Phoenix Wright*'s localization according to Capcom's head of localization who stated the importance of making money on the title (Judd 2013), and the game's lead translator, who stated his goal was to avoid perturbing the target 14 year old crowd that would not know particular Japanese elements (Smith 2012). However, despite the stated goal of aiming *Phoenix Wright* at a mainstream American audience that, according to Judd, does not want a Japanese odor within their entertainment, there were still textual and graphical traces within the localized version that cause *iwakan* for American players and in so doing reveal *Phoenix Wright*'s origins within Japan.

There are two ways of thinking about this issue of *iwakan* within *Phoenix Wright*. Following from Ben Judd's comment that "it's a shame" his team did not get more time and money, one line of thinking is that a more complete localization that fully prevents *iwakan* is a better localization. This line of thinking leads directly to the current IGDA 'best practices' and Blizzard's carte blanche localization of *StarCraft II* where much more

¹⁵² Specifically, one translator noted that when translating manga, a much more niche medium aimed at reaching hundreds to thousands of people and not video games targeting millions of people, he would maintain the Japanese flavor because most players of that niche medium specifically want to experience Japan. Regarding games, Judd mentioned that were he localizing a product directly into French he would try to leave anime elements within the localized version due to anime's stronger, more mainstream popularity in France. However, it must be understood that game localization typically manipulates Japanese to English, and then uses the English version to pivot into French, Italian, German and Spanish. Thus, English localizers act as gatekeepers (Lewin 1947) of cultural flow to Europe as well as to North America.

money was spent in order to further the goal that the game “feel like it was designed for any player that sits down in front of it, regardless of their locale” (Monehaim quoted in Barnes 2012). With this line of thinking, the lack of full funding caused player confusion in the form of a white surgical mask.

The other line of thinking, which I am proposing in this chapter, is that *iwakan* can be good. Far from signifying failure, *iwakan* are helpful because they reveal to the player a trace of the game’s cultural origin. Players experienced *iwakan* when they saw Phoenix Wright in a strange face mask, and the feeling of incongruity led them to ask about the mask. Traces of cultural difference are successful elements of ethical translation precisely because they encourage players to try to understand the construction of borders and difference.

From *Iwakan* to Trace

While the localization of *Gyakuten Saiban* into *Phoenix Wright* altered many cultural elements including turning ramen into hamburgers, an Osaka accent into a Southern American accent, and Japan into Los Angeles, Smith notes that his alterations are dependent upon the general cultural awareness of those very elements. “Not to compare either my work or this game to Dante, but it's an example of a translation for every time. There's been like 40 different translations in English [of Dante’s *Inferno*] and all of them... are valid in their own way, and valid for their own time” (Smith 2012). Thus, if Smith were to translate *Gyakuten Saiban* again now, he might not change *ramen* to hamburgers, as *ramen* has become relatively popular within the United States with

restaurants popping up along the east and west coasts in a similar way that sushi spread to the United States in the 1980s and 1990s (Bestor 2001; Corson 2008; Issenberg 2007; Solt 2009). In fact, *Gyakuten Saiban 4* (2007), localized as *Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney* (2008), introduces a character who owns a noodle stand, and the English localization maintains the stand, depicting Phoenix, his new understudy Apollo, and their other friends discussing going to eat noodles instead of hamburgers (Figure 4.6). Times changed and what was dubbed *iwakan* in 2005 was considered appropriate just three years later in 2008.

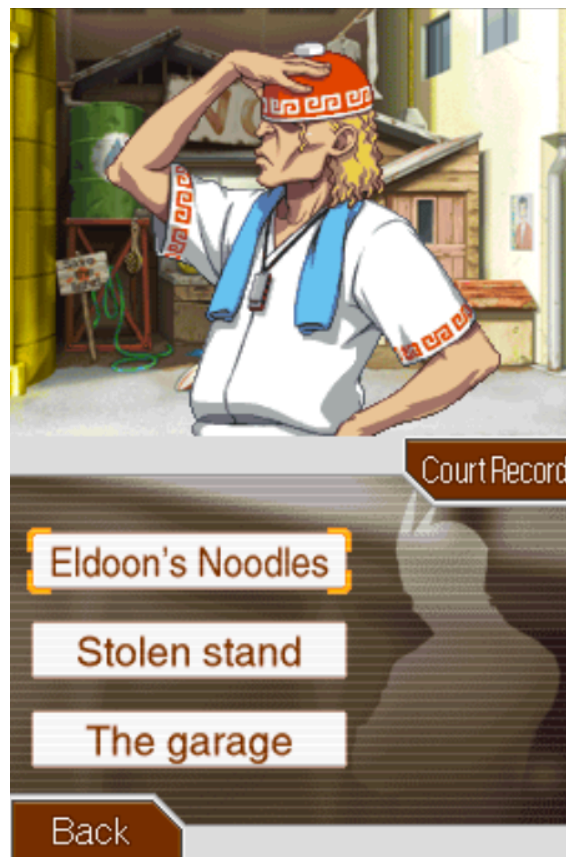


Figure 4.6: Noodle stand owner with typical ramen bowl as a hat in *Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney*. Rewriting the entire script and character was impossible, so noodles were included despite their alteration to hamburgers in the localization of *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*. Screen capture by author.

While there might be a translation that is better for every time and place, and Smith's argument leaves room for 'better' to be a fluid concept, 'better' for the game industry (as a business) is tied to perceptions of current taste cultures and what marketing experts claim will sell. Within this logic, *Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney* featured noodles because ramen had become popular in major cities in the United States by the late 2000s, meaning that localizing the food was no longer necessary to prevent *iwakan* and sell the title. The problem with such an economically-based justification is that it holds translation/localization to be a completely 'reactive' practice: the industry believes it simply makes money based on audience preferences, but little thought is given to how video games are a cultural vehicle (Chen 2013) where particular game localization practices lead to long term alterations of taste preferences. In comparing the import/localization practices involved with *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* and *Pokémon*, Allison (2006) indicates a similar lack of consideration by marketing experts of how taste changes over time and through consumption practices. The *Power Rangers* television series was rejected by American producers for eight years because it seemed too different from American tastes, and was only localized once all traces of Japan could be removed. *Pokémon*, in contrast, was popular in part *because* of the Japanese traces. It was the unintentional remainder of these traces that then produces what Allison concludes is "a global imagination no longer dominated... by the United States" (Allison 2006: 279). It is, of course, this changing realm of taste that Consalvo references when she indicates that "perhaps references to Japanese media and popular foods [in Phoenix Wright] need no longer be erased, or even heavily modified" (Consalvo 2009, 160).

Naoki Sakai's (1997) theory that translation is a "subjective technology" that constitutes bodies and cultures is helpful for understanding the contradiction between marketing strategies on one hand, and both Allison's production of a global imagination and Consalvo's claim that localization no longer needs to erase or heavily alter Japanese culture from games on the other hand. Following Sakai, we must see industry practices of localization as 'productive': localizations do not merely capitalize off of current tastes. They also determine and reinforce cultural tastes and borders. In a later essay theorizing translation through language counting and differentiation, Sakai argues that translation is a type of bordering:

translation pertains to two dimensions of difference that must not be confused: radical difference of discontinuity that does not render itself to spatialized representation, and measured difference in continuity that is imagined in terms of a border, gap or crevice between two spatially enclosed territories or entities, figuratively projected as a distance between two figures accompanying one another. And the transition from the first to the second we often call 'translation.' (Sakai 2009: 86)

For Sakai, translation is an act that produces language (and cultural) borders by representing difference as a measured, bridgeable gap. Thus, whenever translation is exclaimed to be impossible, and whenever a producer argues some element must be changed as it is 'too Japanese' to be understood by a North American audience, there is a marking of both incommensurable and commensurable difference, as well as the creation and cementation of a border. What this means, and how Sakai concludes his essay, is that translation is political: it is "an act performed at the locale of social transformation where new power relations are produced" (Sakai 2009: 87). Far from being merely reactive,

game localization as a practice produces the very cultural tastes, relations and communities it claims to merely satisfy (Carlson and Corliss 2011).

Visible within this example of *Gyakuten Saiban / Phoenix Wright*, but at stake with all game localization, is the active production of politically significant cultural borders between people and places. If Sakai argues that translation is important as a labor practice that hides/reveals borders, then this chapter extends Sakai's claim to argue that *iwakan* are important because they reveal to players the political border-work being done by localization practice.

Iwakan are moments when the player senses or even sees that there is something below and before, in this there are helpful similarities with the Derridian ~~trace~~.¹⁵³ Just as the word written ~~sous-rature~~, or ~~under-erasure~~, (Derrida 1976: 62) haunts the reader despite its erasure, the localized element that has left a trace creates an *iwakan* for the player. It is in these moments of haunting/*iwakan* that the player recognizes there is something underneath the localization, that the game she plays is 'living-on' ('sur-vivre') its original language version (Derrida 1979) through a 'relevant' ('relever' and 'relève') translation (Derrida 2004). Through such a recognition of the trace the text is able to survive in a manner that is relevant to both the world and the player: in moments of *iwakan*, the player of *Phoenix Wright* sees below the otherwise clean surface of the

¹⁵³ A traditional Derridian sense of the trace argues that writing '~~under-erasure~~' emphasizes the *différance* within language. Just as there is a constant sliding of signifieds on signifiers as meaning changes and builds up, there is never simply the word, or the concept, but its embodied history that is necessarily both painful and traumatic. Finally, while this chapter has similarities to, and partially draws from, Lippit's (2005) use of Derrida to understand atomic traces as trauma within Japanese film, it is immediately indebted to Lewis (1985), Nornes (2007) and Roy (2010), who take Derridian theory and layering as both ethical starting point and method.

localized game to the haunting traces of Japan, and it is these haunted traces that can reveal to the player what Sakai (2009) calls the production of power relations.

Abé Markus Nornes (2006) has similarly argued that ethical film translation now requires an ‘abusive’ turn where translation forces the viewer to actively engage with the film and its translation. Nornes argues that standardized, market driven subtitling and dubbing modes of translation are “corrupt” because they “[smooth] the rough edges of foreignness, [and convert] everything into easily consumable meaning” (Nornes 2006: 185). In opposition to this “corrupt” translation practice that only “pretends to bring the audience to an experience of the foreign” (Nornes 2006: 155), Nornes advocates for an abusive translation that is “ready and willing to experiment, to tamper with tradition, language, and expectations in order to inventively put spectators into contact with the foreign” (Nornes 2006: 230). To Nornes, this type of abusive translation is important because it moves beyond the national chauvinistic view of “translation as global battleground, where border crossings involve altercation and contamination, prophylaxis and destruction” (Nornes 2006: 233). Traces and *iwakan* within video games are like abusive subtitling as they push players to actively engage with games not simply as entertainment, but as a part of global capitalism and cultural flow. It is with such abuse, which can be felt by the player, that Haraway’s response-ability (discussed at length in Chapter 3) can be felt with translation. Like Haraway’s call to respond with an other (even and particularly a suffering other), feeling *iwakan*, by responding to the abusive trace, is one form of ethical game translation.

Playing (with) Traces

Traces, when the other is visible despite the best effort of game localizers, are inevitable with localized games due to a lack of time and money to completely rewrite the game from the ground up. In alignment with localization industry professionals, one can think about these traces as translational failures because they create an *iwakan* that can confuse the player. However, this chapter has argued that it is possible and helpful to think of these slippages as a trace of the game's culture of origin that, when played, force the player to acknowledge globalization's material stoppages, rather than its flows around the world. While many gamers may not wish their escapist play ruptured, games are always-already frictionally entangled with politics, economics, and entertainment (Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter 2009; Huntemann and Payne 2010; Nakamura 2009), and the presence of an increasingly large number of independent, serious, news, art, and persuasive games (Bogost 2007; Frasca 2007) points to the futility of wishing for something as impossible as frictionless entertainment.

Despite the increasing prevalence of humanists and social scientists arguing that games are never merely, or only entertainment, most within the game industries fall back on the 'only entertainment' rationale. One prominent members of the game industry to counter this belief is Kate Edwards, executive director of the International Game Developers Association and cultural geographer. Arguing that we need to think beyond localization, Edwards works as a consultant to game projects by helping "culturalize" games. According to Edwards:

Culturalization is going a step further beyond localization as it takes a deeper look into a game's fundamental assumptions and content choices, and then gauges their viability in both the broad, multicultural marketplace as well as in specific geographic locales. (Edwards 2011: 20)

Key to Edwards' culturalization concept is the move from reactive to proactive. Unlike localization, which "helps gamers simply comprehend the game's content" by reacting to determined content (Edwards 2011: 20), culturalization is a "proactive approach to content design and development" (Edwards 2011: 21). For Edwards, culturalization proactively works during the development cycle to avoid possible cultural friction – and loss of revenue – that might be caused by contextually different understandings of "history, religion, intercultural conflict, and geopolitical friction" (Edwards 2011, 27).

The switch Edwards discusses here is quite similar to the switch from Localization centered GILT practices to Globalization centered GILT practices that I discussed in Chapter 1. However, while Edwards is right to point out the interesting switch from reactive to proactive, she does not engage with how games are also *productive*.

Localization and culturalization, regardless of whether they proactively or reactively respond to the cultural friction, are productive of the very norms and contextual understandings of history, religion and conflict that Edwards describes. As discussed in Chapter 2, norms are created by the adaptations and migrations of particular games and genres of games as they are translated between cultures and markets. Traces are one of local frictions of globalization, and playing traces is a productive form of culturalization.

In explaining how the localization of the Phoenix Wright series has changed over the past 10 years, Capcom Localization Director and Translator Janet Hsu told me of the

series' increasingly Japanese flavor and accompanying increase in traces of Japan within the localizations. She notes:

As the series went on it got progressively more and more Japanese. You can tell from the backgrounds, you can tell from the characters. In the latest game there's a *yokai* village! I understand [trying to change Japanese elements like ramen to hamburgers], but trying to force the story to always make sense [as locally American] or make the world make sense [as Los Angeles] is progressively harder. (Hsu 2013)

While Hsu points out that she really “can't just re-write whole swaths of the scenario” (Hsu 2013), which would be necessary to take out the Japanese quality of the game, she also points out that such a re-writing to make it fully American is not desired by players who have gotten to the point where they appreciate and lampoon the way the Phoenix Wright series flips between Japan and America (also, see: Hsu 2014).¹⁵⁴ While the original localization in 2005 might have been reactive in altering Japanese elements to prevent *iwakan*, the impossibility of fully erasing such traces has produced an audience that looks for, and appreciates, the very Japanese traces that the localization originally intended to erase. Localization here is not just reactive/proactive (to use Edwards' terms), but productive of a fan-base that plays with the traces of Japan found in the game.

However, while the niche American fan base of Phoenix Wright might push for the maintenance of a Japanese odor within localized games (Iwabuchi 2002; Norris 2014), the localization industry generally assumes that North American players cannot or do not wish to deal with Japan, cultural differences, or the frictional entanglements of politics, economics and culture at play within modern commodities (Allison 2006; Judd

¹⁵⁴ In particular, Hsu described *Awkward Zombie*'s comic, “Culture Schlock,” where a thoroughly confused *yukata* dressed Phoenix Wright eats ‘hamburgers’ in the form of a bento box while sitting at a *kotatsu*. <http://www.awkwardzombie.com/index.php?page=0&comic=120913>

2013; Tsing 2005). As a result, localizers still do their best to prevent *iwakan*, or traces of the Japanese origin, thereby re-inscribing a hard cultural border between Japan and North America and encouraging a belief that games and localization go hand-in-hand with the frictionless flow of commodities. In delimiting the player experience localizers work to manage the translational interface (Mandiberg 2012) that determines what type of border-work is being done within each game and between each locale. If the game localization industry's theoretical and idealized "full localization" (Chandler and Deming 2012) is a hard border where nothing of the foreign seeps through to the target player in her locale, then this chapter is ultimately arguing two things: first, that porous translational borders are inevitable due to the limitations of localization in practice; second, that porous translation's visible and playable traces are a particularly playful approach to difference and global flow.

For players in certain socio-political locales, traces are a means of trespassing (Miyoshi 2010) over otherwise impassable borders. Such trespassing is particularly important during the present moment where a fear of marked others leads to racialized surveillance, patrol checks, and militarized borders near certain marked borders but not other (Gates 2011; Nevins 2002). As an uncontrollable slippage, traces are a means of trampling national, cultural and disciplinary borders, but in a way that does not allow

Western elite to simply go out and sample the other (hooks 1992; Roy 2010).¹⁵⁵ Traces allow a type of uncontrollable trespassing: they allow gamers to cross borders, but not simply tour in a way that reinforces the here and there, the foreign and the local through a type of translational tourism that reinforces center/periphery power relations. As invasive and abusive, encountering *iwakan* is not meant to be pleasant and comfortable. Players cannot control *iwakan*; they simply feel it while playing, and in that instance both trespass there and are invaded here. When encountering traces like Phoenix Wright with his face mask North American players approach the reality of borders and difference in a productive manner; playing traces reveals disallowed pathways over borders and between locales, but such play can also open up new pathways in the future just as previously unacceptable translations like *ramen* can become acceptable and understandable over time. It is through traces and *iwakan* that players learn alternate cultural models (Gee 2007b) and become global, or hybrid citizens by incorporating difference (Garcia Canclini 2005). As such, traces must be understood not as a failure of translation, but as both inevitable element of game localization practice and as essential part of globalization.

¹⁵⁵ As bell hooks (1992) writes, “With commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture” (21). It might be argued that Japaneseness within video games is a similar spice. The problem, as hooks points out, is that “White racism, imperialism, and sexist domination prevail by courageous consumption. It is by eating the Other... that one asserts power and privilege” (1992: 37). Contrast the problematic link between consuming Otherness and pleasure, my argument in this chapter is to focus on the feeling of awkwardness, incongruity, or displeasure. When controlled, trespassing is pleasurable as it is an exertion and reinforcing of power (I can cross this boundary); however, when uncontrolled, trespassing is not pleasurable (my boundary has been crossed and I am uncomfortable with that). While localization cannot necessitate the “engagement in a revolutionary ethos that dares to challenge and disrupt the status quo” (hooks 1992: 37), it can at least bring to the player’s attention that such a status quo exists by maintaining *iwakan*.

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Chapter 5 - Feminist Localization as Resistance and Response

In May of 2012 Anita Sarkeesian launched a Kickstarter campaign to design and produce five web-based essays on female stereotypes within video games.¹⁵⁶ Within 24 hours her Tropes vs. Women in Video Games campaign achieved its goal of \$6000. When the 30-day funding period ended on June 16, Sarkeesian had received \$158,922, or 2649% of what she had hoped for, and had expanded her project to include 12 essays and a classroom curriculum. A feminist popular culture activist (often disparaged by detractors as a social justice warrior), Sarkeesian was previously known for developing short video essays and reviews applying feminist critique to popular culture, which she then posted to her website and YouTube channel, Feminist Frequency.¹⁵⁷ Similar to her other Feminist Frequency videos, Tropes vs. Women in Video Games was designed to point out, and help users identify, troubling gender elements within popular entertainment. Sarkeesian's work, then, responds to and resists typical, big-budget AAA games that are derivative due to a reliance on commonplace sexist tropes, and the hegemonic game industry that releases these games.

¹⁵⁶ Sarkeesian's Kickstarter funding website is available online. See: https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/566429325/tropes-vs-women-in-video-games?ref=nav_search

¹⁵⁷ A typical example of her work introduces the Bechdel test to Oscar nominated films from 2012 with dreary results (Sarkeesian 2012). Coined by comic creator and 2014 MacArthur Genius grant recipient Allison Bechdel in her 1985 comic *Dykes to Watch Out For*, a movie satisfies the test when: "One, it has to have at least two women in it... who, two, talk to each other about, three, something besides a man." Sarkeesian's (2012) video essay indicates that only 2 of 9 films nominated for best picture in 2012 pass the Bechdel test. The Bechdel test does not seriously analyze the film, nor does it deal with racial or ethical issues that might otherwise be involved. Rather, it is simply a tell as to the systemic problems with Hollywood as an industry. For a blog that includes a link to the original comic, see: <http://alisonbechdel.blogspot.com/2005/08/rule.html>. For a user generated, comprehensive database of films and whether they pass or fail the test, see: <http://bechdeltest.com/>.

After her successful Kickstarter campaign, Sarkeesian proceeded to create and upload videos to her website and YouTube channel, spending significantly more time per issue than originally intended and releasing multiple videos for each original essay topic (Sarkeesian 2013). Her 72-minute *Damsel in Distress* essay was published over three parts between March and August of 2013 with the first part reaching 2 million views. Subsequent videos have received fewer views, though even the lowest is at 700,000 and growing. Sarkeesian's *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games* campaign is momentous and timely, but the arguments that the video essay series makes are not unique, as Sarkeesian protests on a popular level the same issues of gender representation that academics and game makers have been writing against for two decades (Cassell and Jenkins 1998; de Castell and Jenson 2011; Fron et al 2007; Jenson and de Castell 2007; Kafai et al. 2008; Kennedy 2002). Importantly, however, unlike the academic critique of gender representation within video games, which has made little meaningful headway between the 1990s and 2010s (de Castell and Jenson 2011), Sarkeesian's efforts have been key for bringing the discourse to the broader gamer and media consuming community. After the popular reception of her Kickstarter campaign, Sarkeesian herself has given interviews and lectures to mass media and scholarly audiences, and gender in games and in game culture blossomed as a hugely important topic among academic and popular readers.¹⁵⁸ Sadly, Sarkeesian's efforts to publicize the issues related to gender representation in video games have not gone without controversy: reception ranges from the utterly supportive to

¹⁵⁸ For example, Sarkeesian was interviewed for *Rolling Stone*, *IGN*, and the *Colbert Report*, and gave lectures at numerous venues including the NYU Game Center, Brandeis University, and the Game Developers Conference, where she was presented the Ambassador Award in 2014.

the rabidly oppositional.¹⁵⁹ The result has been anti-social justice harassment campaigns, battered civil liberties, injured gamer pride, and GamerGate.

The continued exclamations of outspoken feminist game creators, critics and players like Sarkeesian hit against backlash from equally vociferous and territorial ‘gamers’ in the summer of 2014 in a phenomenon colloquially called GamerGate. Named for the hashtag phrase #GamerGate, commonly used on social media platforms, GamerGate began as backlash against game industry and game press corruption, when game designer Zoe Quinn’s ex-boyfriend Eron Gjoni wrote an inflammatory blog post complaining about Quinn’s alleged promiscuity, which quickly escalated into others claiming Quinn traded sexual favors for positive reviews for her recently published game, *Depression Quest*.¹⁶⁰ Named after the 1972 Watergate scandal, where lying, illegal acts, and a general lack of integrity led to the impeachment of United States President Richard Nixon, GamerGate began as a reaction to improper interaction between game journalists and creators.¹⁶¹ However, social media posts using the #GamerGate hashtag quickly

¹⁵⁹ Soon after initiating the Tropes vs. Women campaign Sarkeesian began to receive aggressively oppositional responses in the form of YouTube comments and response videos, and these escalated to personal attacks and death threats resulting in her seeking refuge away from her apartment (McDonald 2014). The threats even include a bomb scare at the Game Developers Conference where she received a Ambassador Award for her work on the Tropes vs. Women campaign and subsequent activist work (Totilo 2014b). Her response was to shut down the ability to comment on her videos, foreclosing the possibility of communicative dialogue within those platforms and leading to her opponents calling foul regarding her desire to work through these issues (Baker-Whitelaw 2013).

¹⁶⁰ Gjoni’s original blog post “TL;DR:” is available online at the blog thezoepost, <http://thezoepost.wordpress.com/2014/08/16/tldr/>. Stephen Totilo posted a reaction to claims that a Gawker/Kotaku staff writer was corrupt at <http://kotaku.com/in-recent-days-ive-been-asked-several-times-about-a-pos-1624707346>.

¹⁶¹ As seen in Chapter 4, where Alexander O. Smith translated the Hantou Hotel into the Gateway Hotel, alluding to the Watergate scandal is quite common. Particularly common is attaching the suffix -gate to some form of online activism. For example, beyond GamerGate there is #shirtgate the online reaction to Rosetta Mission scientists Dr. Matt Taylor’s sexist shirt (Turk 2014)

included Sarkeesian and Brianna Wu with Quinn as female figures generally trespassing on male-gamer culture (Totilo 2014a).¹⁶² With the floodgates opened, GamerGate transformed from a protestation of reportage integrity into a general border dispute with (mostly male) ‘gamers’ defending their identity and territory (social and physical media space) against what they saw as invading feminist reformers and their supporters. ‘Gate’ transformed from a suffix to a defended portal bordering a protected space of play. As writer Erik Kain summarizes:

In the end, it’s about gamers upset with the status quo and demanding something better. It’s about a group of consumers and enthusiasts not simply feeling that their identity is threatened, but believing that they’re being poorly represented by an industry and press that grow more and more cliquish and remote every year. And it’s about the ad hoc, messy series of uncoordinated events that got us here. (2014)

Unfortunately, as with many border disputes “both sides of the debate [are unwilling] to simply accept that the other side might have valid, or at least sincere, points” (Kain 2014).

As argued throughout this dissertation, localization is an industry practice of mediation across borders, and responsible localization can be relevant toward multiple types of borders: while game localization is usually about linguistic borders between different national languages, it can also be about responding with others across cultural, racial, or gendered borders. Game translators have agency and responsibility: some go

¹⁶² Race, sexuality, and non heteronormative gender identities are equal parts of the greater issue of diversity in games and game production, but largely absent from popular reportage. While Brianna Wu was targeted as a trans woman, and Aisha Tyler was smeared as woman of color (Nakamura 2014), this intersectionality of individuals being attacked by GamerGate has been simplified in popular media reportage, where the issue is reduced to gender and sexism: that sexist representation and the lack of women characters are both problematic.

well beyond mechanically reproducing the same text in a new language by responsibly mediating within the general distributed practices of game authorship. In the previous chapter I discussed this responsibility and agency within the specific example of national and cultural borders between Japan and the United States. In this chapter I redefine the idea of a locale by showing how localization can and does operate within the gendered borders of gamer culture. As a border dispute surrounding accessibility of popular media and who gets to count as a gamer, GamerGate has large differences from national and religious arguments where militarized borders, economic sanctions, social restrictions, and life and death situations are regular happenings. However, all border disputes exist where certain things and people count, and others do not count, and localization, as a part of game production, functions to (re)produce the standard borders of gamer culture.

In addition to arguing that localization can look at other forms of locales/borders – cultural, racial and gendered – I argue in this chapter that localization can be responsible when working within a substitutional mode of translation, where localization specialists try to maximally adapt a text to its target locale. I noted in Chapter 4 that when localization practices wash over the source culture, replacing it with local equivalents, response (and responsibility) between people in the new and old locales is limited. In this chapter, I show how localization can responsibly work within such a substitutional framework. Localization can produce/resist through *actively responding* and *producing a response*.

First, I will argue that 2009 action role-playing game *NieR*, which exemplifies from a certain perspective what can be done through the substitutional form of

responsible localization, is also a failure of responsibility from a different perspective. Second, I will provide an overview of women in games, elaborating the work done within game studies and how women have been excluded from game culture despite being a strong part of it since the beginning. Third, in contrast to *NieR*, which responds within a culture of male gamers, I will describe several independent and fan productions that show what can be called responsible feminist localization. In particular, *Zelda as Zelda* and *Donkey Kong Pauline Edition*, two ROM hacks that manipulate the original game and enable the player to switch female damsel in distress with male hero. The player thus plays a female hero rescuing a male victim. While these examples are not official localizations in that they are both independently conducted and referred to online as hacks, my point is to propose that they are feminist localizations: a form of responsible localization that “responds with” (Haraway 2008) game culture in a positive manner. These feminist localizations are not typical game industry practice, however, I will show that they are neither alien to industry practices of localization practice nor prescriptively utopian.

***NieR* as Success and Failure**

In a boardroom in Los Angeles in 2009, executives, marketers and developers from publisher Square-Enix and developer Cavia gathered to discuss the future of their in-progress title *Nier*.¹⁶³ Specifically, they debated who the protagonist should be,

¹⁶³ For interviews with the staff members, including the executive producer, the director, and several sound and video programmers, see: Tsuchimoto 2010; Yamamura 2010.

ultimately deciding to move away from the original vision of a teenage boy who would save his little sister, a typical trope in Japanese popular media (Figure 5.1). The new, revised protagonist was a middle-aged father seeking to save his young daughter.



Figure 5.1: Adolescent protagonist from Japanese *Nier Replicant* (left) and adult protagonists from North American *Neir* (right). While the adolescent protagonist ages over the 5 year course of the game's narrative, eventually becoming a taller, but still lithe late teenager, the adult protagonist changes only sartorially. Screen captures by author.)

According to original writer and director, Yoko Taro, people within Square Enix's Los Angeles office felt that a skinny boy was unbelievable as a hero character, particularly when he swung a huge sword around, so Cavia prepared a macho protagonist aligned with the American sensibilities that needed heroes to be big, tough, football-playing figures.¹⁶⁴ Importantly, the North American realignment to macho father protagonist not

¹⁶⁴ Specifically, in an interview Yoko states, "First it was just the adolescent version (the one that eventually was called Replicant) that was going to be made, but there was talk from Saito-san about thinking about the foreign markets. Discussion within the Square Enix Los Angeles office was that a weak, skinny adolescent character wasn't believable. At that point we made a macho protagonist aligned with the West. We got the American and European staff to gather and had a really natural discussion. We resisted. But their opinion was that "A delicate, skinny protagonist swinging a huge sword around is just ridiculous. If you look at the popular games in America, yeah, the protagonists brawny heroes that look like they play American football really stand out" (Tsuchimoto 2010, author's translation).

only matched a general trope of heroes being burly figures, but it also matched the new average gamer demographic that had recently been rediscovered as a thirty-year-old, and increasingly considered either parental or with the possibility of becoming parental. As a for-profit capitalist industry, video games must make money, and the safest way to profit is to target the majority audience.

While the popularly imagined average gamer is typically a young, anti-social male, recent statistics indicate this imagined average is not the case (Warr 2013).¹⁶⁵ In their yearly published industry sales, demographic and usage statistics, the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) has shown that the average gamer's age has been over 30 since 2004 (Table 5.1). Along with this older average, many game players are also parents and, as a separate demographic, parents are not being represented within games as protagonists. Adapting *Nier*'s protagonist to be a burly father figure matched with Square Enix's Los Angeles' local sensibilities of what a hero should look like, but it also fit the new average age of gamers in the late 2000s, which was about 35. However, while *Nier*'s protagonist in the North American and European markets became a burly father, he remained a lithe brother for the version released on Japan's Playstation 3 console,

¹⁶⁵ Certainly there are significant links between children and video games, as the under 18 male group has been a highly sought after and targeted demographic by video game publishing companies. Additionally, the late 20th century fears of a link between violence and video game effects, particularly with impressionably children, reinforced the general imagined link between children and video games. Despite these, this chapter will largely hold to the older average, considering children as just one group that play games.

officially titled *Nier Replicant*.¹⁶⁶ Thus, the protagonist was localized depending on cultural expectations and its target audience.

Table 5.1: Compilation of age and gender statistics from the Entertainment Software Association's yearly Essential Fact publications from 2004 to 2014.¹⁶⁷

Year	Average Age	(under 18)	(18-49)	(50+)	Male	Female
2004	29	34%	46%	17%	59%	39%
2005	30	35%	43%	19%	55%	43%
2006	33	31%	44%	25%	62%	38%
2007	33	28.20%	47.60%	24.20%	62%	38%
2008	35	25%	49%	26%	60%	40%
2009	35	25%	49%	26%	60%	40%
2010	34	25%	49%	26%	60%	40%
2011	37	18%	53%	29%	58%	42%
		(under 18)	(18-35)	(36+)		
2012	30	32%	31%	37%	53%	47%
2013	30	32%	32%	36%	55%	45%
2014	31	29%	32%	39%	52%	48%

In their book *Game Localization: Translating for the Global Digital*

Entertainment Industry Minako O'Hagan and Carmen Mangiron refer to *Nier* as a unique case of localization with "changed character relationships and designs in the localized

¹⁶⁶ The Xbox 360 version of *Nier* published in Japan was titled *Nier Gestalt* and featured the father protagonist. Outside of Japan all versions dropped the Replicant and Gestalt differentiation and featured the father protagonist. The Replicant/Gestalt division seems to have been mainly a production period means of differentiating the two localizations with their different protagonist figures.

¹⁶⁷ The most recent Essential Facts are available on ESA's website. See: http://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/ESA_EF_2014.pdf

version” (O’Hagan and Mangiron 2013: 186). Importantly, they elaborate how the decision to re-design the main character is not limited to changing the polygonal image of the character, but extends to “changes in parts of the scripts, voice, and the camera positions due to different heights between the adolescent and the adult [protagonists]” (O’Hagan and Mangiron 2013: 187). According to O’Hagan and Mangiron, then, *Nier* is an advanced, extensive, and thoroughly impressive example of successful game localization.

I agree with O’Hagan and Mangiron that *Nier* is an extensive example of localization, however, internal and external members of the localization team shift responsibility away from themselves when they explain how the alteration from child to adult hero happened before the localization teams began work on the project. According to John Ricciardi, the external project manager at 8-4 Ltd, the change:

happened before [8-4 Ltd was brought onto the project], but the way I understood it from the team was they were making a game that was going to be this action RPG and they wanted it to succeed in the West as well... I don't think it was a response; it wasn't a result of anybody pressuring them to do it. The director wanted to do [the adult protagonist] version cause he thought it would be better for the West. (Ricciardi 2013)

Ricciardi is clear to distance himself (as a localization specialist) from the decision-making process that led to the father protagonist. He is also clear to indicate that the game director was fully behind the decision, even if it was suggested by the Los Angeles office’s marketing specialists. For Ricciardi it is important that the switch to father protagonist is an above-board, production decision that comes from the director without

coercion. Square Enix's Internal Localization Director for the project, Chris M. Kennedy, offers an explanation that similarly allows himself to avoid authority and responsibility:

Ah that's right, the little boy, or teenage boy was only for Japanese PS3 version, right? I mean, as I recall that was something... it wasn't even a translation or a localization issue. It was a marketing decision made before things really got rolling... It was right at that time, that was sort of right when Square Enix... the localization department and other people in the company were really kind of pushing for this global awareness. That if you're going to make your English version, and if you're going to make your EFIGS [English, French, Italian, German, Spanish] versions and you want these to represent a sizable portion of your global sales, then you really need to keep these markets in mind from the beginning and not just spend 3 years making a game for Japan and then translate it and ship it, because that's not going to work (Kennedy 2013)

Like Ricciardi, Kennedy says the switch was not a matter of localization, but of production and marketing. However, as explained in Chapter 1, the cornerstone of my argument throughout this dissertation is that game localization is a distributed, collaborative practice. It is not limited to the localization group, but includes processes by and within other occupational groups, and the cooperation between occupational groups that is necessary to carry out many of those processes. Even though Kennedy states it was a “marketing decision,” by noting that the child to adult alteration happened right when Square Enix was pushing for “global awareness” during game production, he helps support my claim that localization is distributed between group processes, and that these processes can include the early marketing decisions. The combination of marketer assumptions that EFIGS markets are a significant portion of global sales with Cavia's desire to successful target markets outside of Japan were the first acts of the extensive

localization process that began with the decision to change the protagonist to an adult, and ended with two very different versions of the game *Nier*.

While Kennedy implies that localization had little to do with the creation of the burly, father protagonist, significant alterations were still conducted throughout the whole endeavor. Ricciardi's nuanced explanation of how the dialogue came about reveals a significant amount of response, and active creation coming about through both 8-4 Ltd's internal collaboration as well as freedom provided through a good relationship with Yoko Taro, the original writer and director.

As with many of 8-4 Ltd's localizations, the work was split between a translator (Kevin Gifford), a rewriter (Alan Averill), a checker (D. Scott Miller), and a coordinating project manager (John Ricciardi). According to Ricciardi, "*Nier* actually got a lot of praise for its writing and a lot of that is Alan [Averill]. He's a really amazing writer. He's the guy that just won the Amazon [Breakthrough Novel Award] contest last year" (Ricciardi 2013). It was Averill interacting with Ricciardi, Yoko and others that penned the adult protagonist's characterization. Again, according to Ricciardi:

what we [Ricciardi and Averill] were talking about when we first decided to take the direction was like, if your daughter is all you have in the world and someone takes that away from you you're not going to be rational. You're going to get, and this guy is a brute, he's not just your average everyday salary man, he was a warrior already. He's gonna kinda lose it. We patterned it after a good friend of ours. So Alan, the writer, was basically thinking of what this friend of ours, what would he do if his child, cause he's really good friends with the guy and his kids, if this happened to his child, how would he react. And that was kind of a pattern. The basis for the direction that the English version of *Nier* went. Also, you also kinda have to justify the fact that he's out mashing heads and he does make some bad decisions throughout the course of the project where you're like, yeah, this guy's kind of an asshole, but he did do that, so it

wouldn't make sense for him to be like, a calm loving kind of character up to that point and then suddenly do these things. (Ricciardi 2013)

While the decision to turn *Nier*'s protagonist into a father might not have been made by the localization department or the external localization studio, Averill and Ricciardi were the individuals responsible for turning the basic lines into believable dialogue voiced by particular characters. They did this by imagining what their friend would do if his daughter had been kidnapped, and spicing up this friend/character hybrid by adding aggressive dialogue to correspond with a more macho character. Critically, then, while the decision to replace the young protagonist with a macho father figure was made during early stages of production through discussions between the director/writer and producer from the Japan-based development company Cavia and staff from publisher Square Enix's American and European offices (Tsuchimoto 2010), the localization specialists were indeed responsible for creating the thirty-year-old father protagonist experienced by the player.

Ricciardi and Averill did not, however, write the dialogue in a vacuum. Rather, they were acting within a long processes that included trust and collaboration. Ricciardi notes that *Nier*'s liberal translation occurred because 8-4 Ltd:

had a good relationship [with Yoko, the director and writer] and in fact we're still friends now. We hang, he's a great guy, he's a really great writer. And he was in the voice studio with us watching how we were doing the voices and he actually changed the direction of some of the Japanese voices after he saw what we did with the English voices, because he liked what we did... He was telling me after that he made certain characters sound a little less like this, a little more like that. Cause he heard it in English and he thought, oh, that actually fits that character, I hadn't seen that. So we worked really closely together. (Ricciardi 2013)

Not only did trust allow Averill and Ricciardi to liberally adapt the dialogue, but the collaboration circled back around to the Japanese version. The dialogue was penned for an adolescent in Japanese by Yoko and others, Gifford translated the original lines into English, Averill (who, according to his blog, does not understand Japanese¹⁶⁸) adapted and rewrote the English lines, Miller checked to make sure important meaning had not been lost during the process, Ricciardi oversaw the voicing of those lines, changing them when necessary, and then the Japanese writer and director Yoko changed particular characterizations of the Japanese version when he liked them better than his own.¹⁶⁹

Nier is an excellent example of the game industry successfully homing in on an audience, or locale, and adapting a game to fit that target locale. *Nier* is successful precisely because the publisher, developer and localization groups collaboratively worked to change the protagonist into a father figure that would match the 2009 average 35-year-old gamer who was already, or would soon become a parent. Graphics, characterization, dialogue, camera angles, and voice acting all work to convince the player of this switch. Said another way, *Nier*'s localization both responds to changing demographics of game culture and satisfies industry demands for a high return on investment. Unfortunately, when one considers that the average gamer is (and was) not merely increasing in age and becoming parental, but balancing out in terms of gender, *Nier*'s focus on a father can also

¹⁶⁸ See: <http://www.alanaverill.com/2012/05/on-videogames-and-localization.html>

¹⁶⁹ An important secondary point here is that Yoko did not change all of the Japanese characterizations, which emphasizes that the English and Japanese versions of the characters do not always match. While the process of localization is one of response between collaborators, it does not always result in the same response being published.

be considered a failure. *Nier*'s protagonist could just as easily have become a mother, but it experienced no such gender alteration.

Alongside the ESA's figure that described the average game player as a mid-thirty-year-old, the average game player is rapidly approaching gender equality (see: Table 5.1). Male game players outnumbered female game players approximately 6 to 4 for most of the 2000s. However, the number has drifted closer toward 50/50 since 2011. In 2014, the year of GamerGate, the ratio is quite close at 52% male and 48% female. Thus, while *Nier* helps to fill in the gap of father protagonists and in so doing successfully targets the older male audience, it does nothing toward making up for the lack of maternal protagonist representation.

In addition to reporting the average gamer age and gender percentages, the ESA Essential Facts has declared that since 2004 game-playing women over 18 years old outnumber game-playing boys under 18.¹⁷⁰ With older gamers and women gamers as growing demographics, the claim that young boys are the ones playing games is proven false year after year. In 2004 the ESA used the phrase "represent a greater portion" to describe the 28% to 21% relationship.

¹⁷⁰ It should be noted that the ESA, reformed in 2003 from the Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA), does not have statistics available before 2004. In 1998 the IDSA noted that 31% of console game players and 38% of computer game players were women (IDSA 1998). Interestingly, the yearly report also notes that 49% of computer game buyers and 51% of console game buyers were women (IDSA 1998). However, whether these buyers also played the game, or simply purchased for children is unmentioned. I cannot find earlier demographics data for the industry, but Flanagan (2009) notes that women were actually the majority of players for other game forms (cards and board games), and Fron et al. (2007) note that mid 19th to early 20th century board games were a more gender-balanced leisure activity with women designing, play-testing and playing the games.

Women age 18 or older represent a significantly greater portion of the game-playing population (36%) than boys age 18 or younger (17%)

Figure 5.2: Highlighted statistic within the 2014 ESA Essential Facts, that states there are over twice as many women over 18 playing games than young boys. Image from ESA 2014.

However, since 2005 the language has been switched to “represent a significantly greater portion,” which more closely matches the increasingly large gap between the percentages as women over 18 become a larger and larger portion of the game-playing population. By 2014, the number of women game players over 18 is more than double the number of male gamers under 18. Despite the ESA’s repeated declaration that women players are here, have been here and are not going anywhere – a claim that is reinforced by rigorous academic study (Pearce and Artemesia 2009; Shaw 2012; Taylor 2006) – popular imagination, pundits, and GamerGate keep maintaining that games are not for women. As game localization is not merely the linguistic translation of a game from one national language to another, but the responsible adaptation from one locale to another and the responsible interface between audiences, the decision to age *Nier*’s protagonist, but not switch its gender becomes ethically critique-able. The localization of *Nier* simultaneously responds with a particular culture (middle-aged gamers) and (re)produces the exclusion of another demographic (women).

Women in Games

Since the mid 20th century, men have increasingly outnumbered women within science and technology fields, including computing and gaming. According to the National Center for Women and Information Technology, the percentage of women to receive undergraduate computer science degrees has dropped by 20 percent over the past three decades. While 37% of the computer science degree recipients were women in 1985, that percentage has dropped to 18% (at all universities) or 12% (at major research universities) in 2010.¹⁷¹ Somewhere between the mid 20th century, when women *were* computers – computing ballistic computations and programming the first electronic computer, the ENIAC – and outnumbered the men in computing significantly (Light 1999), and the late 20th century, when governments began initiatives to push women back into STEM jobs, women were pushed out of computing culture (Abbate 2003; Butler 2010; Ensmenger 2010).¹⁷² While wikistorming and recent scholarship intervene in the situation by uncovering and highlighting the work of female scientists, programmers, and technicians, repairs are ongoing not only for the intersections of women in technology, but women in gaming more specifically. In addition to the ESA's data that indicates a growing percentage of female players, IGDA Game Developer Satisfaction Surveys from 2005 and 2014 indicate that the percentage of women in the game industry has doubled in the past 10 years. Unfortunately, the doubling is from

¹⁷¹ These statistics come from the National Center for Women and Information Technology's "By the Numbers" report. See: http://www.ncwit.org/sites/default/files/resources/btn_02282014web.pdf

¹⁷² Light (1999) argues that post-war efforts to return to 'normal' by putting men back into the workforce and women back into the home were a primary reason why women left the computer world. Also see: Ensmenger 2010.

11.5% to 22%. Women still make up under 25% of the total individuals working in the game industry. Despite the paucity in terms of absolute numbers of women game developers, the surveys are clear that individuals within the game production process view diversity – in terms of gender and race – as an important value for creating games. Diversity in production is important for creating representational diversity, which is important to construct a diverse culture of gaming.

Despite the embattled position described by industry statistics, women are not new to the game industry. Designers, writers, programmers and producers like Carol Shaw, Roberta Williams, Jane Jensen, Kodama Rieko, Brenda Laurel, and Brenda Romero (previously Brenda Brathwaite) have all been critical for the development of video games as medium. However, while certain efforts highlight these women, like Pearce and Fafinski's XYZ Alternative Voices in Game Design exhibit in 2014, these female game industry pioneers go unmentioned in most popular accounts, where men like Ralph Baer, Richard Garriott, Shigeru Miyamoto, and John Romero are labeled fathers and stars.¹⁷³ As with the masculinization of computer culture (Ensmenger 2010), the industry and culture of video games was not always dominated by men, but has *become* that way through several decades of marketing and audience construction (Lien 2013; Shaw 2012). The result, now, is that when a developer comes to a publisher with a game idea that features a female protagonist, they are told “well, we don't want to publish it

¹⁷³ For example, women game developers like Shaw, Williams, Jensen, Rieko, Laurel, and Romero appear rarely in the popular histories used in Chapter 2 (Burnham 2003; Donovan 2010; Herz 1997; Kent 2001; Kohler 2005; Malliet and de Meyer 2005; Poole 2000; Ryan 2011; and Sheff 2004). While many recent texts (Donovan 2010; Ryan 2011) mention women game creators, most earlier books focus only on men.

because it's not going to succeed. You can't have a female character in games. It has to be a male character, simple as that" (Jean-Max Morris quoted in Prell 2013).

As a means of intervening in the problematically male dominated industry and culture, the contributors of *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games* point out the general lack of women in the game industry, the various attempts to tailor games to girls, and the problems of creating a pink and blue game movement ghettos (Cassell and Jenkins 1998).¹⁷⁴ While Cassell and Jenkins' volume initiated a respectable amount of scholarly discourse on gender in games, progress toward gender equality in gaming since the 1990s has been slow in part due to the lack of progress within the game industry itself. Thus, Kafai et al.'s (2008) follow up volume, *Beyond Barbie & Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives on Gender and Gaming*, brings together industry and scholar voices that raise some new issues, but much of the progress noted is within non-industry environments. Most pointed is the feminist game studies collective Ludica's contribution, which argues industry conditions are the viciously cyclical reason why women are not involved in the game industry (Fullerton et al. 2008). Poor conditions (long hours, sexist conditions, lower pay, and a general feeling that gender did not matter) do not encourage women to join the industry, and the lack of women in the industry mean

¹⁷⁴ While the separation consumable boy and girl texts ('blue' and 'pink' respectively) is a part of the way games are marketed (Lien 2013), responding to a a market (and game culture) saturated with blue boy games with the creation of pink girl games – an intervention taken by Brenda Laurel's Purple Moon software in the 1990s with the "girl game movement" – only hardens a gender binary and border between women and men. Far from solving the problem of the industry, this 'pinkification' justifies the problems of industry games by legitimizing the sexist tendencies of 'boy' industry games. While some women prefer casual games, others like to frag in first-person shooters (Kennedy 2006). Important is not to rigidly identify a genre as gendered, but to program for diversity within games by including an ecology of representational forms: races, body types, gendered enemies, gendered players, and sexualized and unsexualized characters (Sarkeesian 2015). While diversity itself will not solve any industry problems, as Shaw (2010) argues, it is a "nice" compromise that might foster broader changes in the gaming industry and culture.

that changes do not occur. In opposition, Ludica argues for a “virtuous circle,” where “making games that appeal to women and girls attracts more women to work on games, resulting in the creation of more games that appeal to women and girls” (Fullerton et al 2008). This virtuous circle is a necessary step and yet it is still in progress.

Beyond their contribution to *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat*, the members of Ludica protest this male dominance in their collaborative scholarly work on games. They critique male game culture as a “hegemony of play” within the production process and environment, the technological development of play, and the cultural positioning of gaming. Specifically, Ludica contends that, “the power structures that surround game technologies, game production and game consumption... perpetuate a particular set of values and norms concerning games and game play, which tend to subordinate and ghettoize minority players and play styles” (Fron et al. 2007: 2). Of primary importance for Ludica is showing that there has been a masculinization and juvenilization of games that has both limited the industry and ghettoized female players in particular. This is troubling for Ludica due to the strong ties between women and games from the mid 19th to early 20th century when women were strongly engaged in the production, testing, and playing of board games. The ghettoization of women is also quite troubling in that it works in direct opposition to their ideal “virtuous circle” (Fullerton et al. 2008). Ludica’s vision where women are important for gaming culture is actually quite close to the ESA statistics that indicate the average gamer is over 30 years old, and around 50% of gamers are female (Entertainment Software Association 2014); their vision is quite different, however, from the early 21st century game industry’s idealized “average” game player:

the 14 year old boy. For Ludica the industry's courting of the male gamer is a damning fact that has reduced the size of the industry and its current revenues. The average game player has not always been a young male, but has been constructed as such. This construction of the average game player is important for understanding both games and how alternate localization practices can work in resistance and response to the standard hegemony of play.

The masculinization shown by Ludica is a general trend within the game industry, but it also happens at specific moments. For example, games that were originally designed with strong female characters have been published featuring male characters. In her "Damsels in Distress Part 1" video essay, Sarkeesian explains how *Dinosaur Planet*, which was designed with male and female co-protagonists, was scrapped and reconfigured as *Star Fox Adventures* (2002), a game within Nintendo's popular Star Fox franchise. While *Dinosaur Planet* was a cancelled project, and the deletion of the female protagonist somewhat justified in making the title align with the franchise's logics that include a male protagonist, other examples are more flagrant. The arcade game *Ninja Princess* (1985), which was designed by Japanese game designer and producer Kodama Rieko and released by Sega in Japan, featured a running jumping female ninja protagonist. However, in porting the game from the arcade to the Sega Master System, and from Japan to the United States, the protagonist was changed from a woman to a man, and the game was re-titled *The Ninja* (1986).¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ For *Ninja Princess*, see: <http://www.giantbomb.com/ninja-princess/3030-34969/>. For informatino about *The Ninja*, see: <http://www.giantbomb.com/the-ninja/3030-32/> and http://segaretro.org/The_Ninja



Figures 5.3: Cover art for the Japanese *Ninja Princess* (left), the Japanese *Ninja* (middle), and the North American *The Ninja* (right)

Women were, are, and will be a part of game culture, but as the members of Ludica clearly argue, women are fighting an unwelcoming system (Fron et al. 2007). Beyond Ludica's proposal of the virtuous cycle (Fullerton et al. 2008) there have been several other important scholarly and design interventions aimed at making games more welcoming to women and bringing women into the game industry.

Beyond Gender

Before moving onto the gendered interventions that will lead me to ROM hacking and feminist localizations, I feel it is important to stop and acknowledge that I am bracketing off other forms of diversity – particularly racial and sexual – in order to simplify the issue so that I can make an argument about localization.

Some scholars note the problematically reductive representation of race in games, with Black characters limited to visual variety and stale racial tropes (Leonard 2006). In contrast, other scholars focus on the disappearance of race in games. As Higgin (2009)

notes, “blackness in MMORPGs not only is scattered and diffused through a lens of fantasy but is intentionally obscured to erase any troubling political connotations” (12). Race in games is hidden under the untroubled fantasy tropes like human, orc, and elf, where race becomes a player choice that is nearly meaningless in terms of gameplay and separated from racial politics of the real world. This colorblindness within games is ruptured when real world difference invades the space of play in the form of economic disparity. As Nakamura (2009) shows, while some MMORPG players can play freely, others farm gold to earn a real world income and are thereby marked as both Chinese and Other. The disappearance of race is particularly troubling when considered in parallel to readily available statistics regarding age and gender. The ESA makes note of the gendered profile of buyers and players, however, no statistics are given for racial diversity. Race, for the ESA, is either an unimportant, or unmentionable statistic. The IGDA, which I noted above highlights the value of diversity, also indicates that only about 12 percent of the game industry workers are people of color (including Asian, black and Hispanic/Latino) (Edwards et al. 2014: 9). These low numbers are startling given that studies have shown people of color play video games the same amount or more than white players (Campbell 2012; Packwood 2011). There is, then, a troubling lack of balance between representations of race in games, racial demographics of players, and lack of racial diversity in the game industry.

Even more than race in games, sexuality is pushed toward invisibility. Not only are same-gender relationships rare in game narratives (Shaw 2009), but some companies forbid the mention of homosexuality within forums, claiming to be preventing the

discussion of “sensitive real-world subjects” for users’ own good (Pulos 2013: 78). And even when non-heterosexual relationships are included, they often reproduce heteronormative understandings of gender binaries as they come out of a “rhetoric of equality rendered through sameness and likeness” (Greer 2013), not difference. If, as Galloway (2006) argues, interpreting a game’s allegory is a matter of understanding the way it is coded, its “allegorithm,” then sexual difference is made reductively understandable in many games largely through the limitations of code (or at least the laziness of its coders). While particular companies like BioWare push beyond reductive coding to actively program in additional/unique characters that complicate the ludic representation of sexuality with, for example, transgender characters and non-standard romances (Gaider 2013; Heir 2014; Weekes 2014), other games tease the user with gender trouble, but then facilitate the reaffirmation of gender binaries through the narrative (Youngblood 2013).

The problem is not that there are a lot of straight white male gamers (Shaw 2009; Nakamura 2012; Williams et al. 2009), but that straight white males attempt to overwhelm the possibility of change by exerting their economic buying power to prevent representations of difference. Calls for a “no homosexuality” option within games that include non-heteronormative characters (Condis 2014), and GamerGate’s protestation of trespassers into the “white spatial imaginary” of gaming space (George Lipsitz quoted in Nakamura 2012) are tactics that straight white male gamers employ to protect their (imagined) culture’s borders. Difference is feared both for its own sake and for the sake of these gamers’ ideals of pleasure. In her analysis of BioWare’s incorporation of queer

relationships within their games' narratives, Condis (2014) argues that BioWare as a company courts the queer gamer as a profitable market. Same-gender romances are available not for the sake of diversity, but because the profit margins for inclusion outweigh the loss of profits that might come from alienating straight white male gamers. Ultimately, this chapter mobilizes the same point: that profit margins can be maintained through the incorporation of gendered difference in video games. While incorporation of difference is important, which I argue particularly in Chapters 3 and 4, here I am pushing toward the practical. Capital can be made.

Gendered Interventions

Most video game protagonists are men, but an important corrective at the production level is the inclusion of the differently gendered protagonists, particularly since the 1990s. Lara Croft, the star of the Tomb Raider franchise, is a well known example, but others like April Ryan in *The Longest Journey* (2000), Jade in *Beyond Good and Evil* (2003), and Faith Connors in *Mirror's Edge* (2008) also exist. In a way these women protagonists are created so that presumably well-meaning industry defenders can make very small "binders full of women,"¹⁷⁶ thereby satisfying the game industry that

¹⁷⁶ The phrase (and Internet meme) "binders full of women" comes from the October 16, 2012 United States presidential debate where Mitt Romney responded to a question of how he would rectify gender inequality in the workplace with the claim that he sought out women for his cabinet. Romney stated, "I went to a number of women's groups and said: 'Can you help us find folks,' and they brought us whole binders full of women." Commentators (Cardona 2012; Cohen 2012) were quick to point out not only the problem that Romney had to actively seek out women candidate members, meaning that he lacked female colleagues in his own mind, but that he has fewer women in his cabinet than others politicians, meaning that his claim was doubly false.

women protagonists actually exist.¹⁷⁷ This type of rebuttal is particularly visible in online critiques of Sarkeesian's Tropes vs. Women videos that claim female protagonists exist, therefore gender is not an issue within gaming. However, while some women protagonists are deeply three-dimensional characters with meaningful narrative progression that both flows from and responds to developers' understanding of the character's gender, indicating a maturation of the game industry as well as a courting of gender equality, other female protagonists are little more than objectified moveable dolls. One particularly pernicious example of this "fighting fuck toy" exists in the Dead or Alive franchise of fighting and volleyball games, which advertises its physics engine by highlighting the movement of female breasts.¹⁷⁸ Such characters are certainly women, but only so far as they are sexualized objects for play; they are hardly meant to be identified with or even considered as complex beings.

A second method of providing diversity at the production level is through creating an option, or toggle, to play either a male or female character. The gender toggle as a method comes not from an intervention, but a role-playing choice. Most tabletop role playing games require the player to choose his or her gender and race when creating a character, and digital role playing games often maintain this choice. Older games like *Might and Magic* (1986), newer ones like *Mass Effect 3* (2012), and most massively

¹⁷⁷ While women protagonists exist, they are quite limited. As Geoffrey Zotkin from EEDAR (Electronic Entertainment Design and Research) indicates, out of a sample of 669 action, shooter, and RPG games there were 24 exclusively female protagonists. Incredibly problematic, however, is that those "Games with a female only protagonist, got [...] only 40 percent of the marketing budget of male-led games. Less than that, actually" (Kuchera 2012). Thus, women protagonists are rare, and doomed by the game industry due to a lack of marketing funds.

¹⁷⁸ The popular, weekly Japanese game magazine Famitsu ran several articles and interviews about the in-development *Dead or Alive 5: Last Round* during 2014 (Famitsu Staff 2014a, 2014b, 2014c).

multiplayer online role playing games like *EverQuest* (1999) and *World of Warcraft* (2004) all include the option to choose gender, and many include the option to choose a ‘race’ – although this is as often a choice between human, elf, and orc as it is between skin color.

The gender toggle results in equally deep characters regardless of gender, but women protagonists can suffer from being little more than a re-skinned male protagonist. In their analysis of the *Mass Effect* series, Layne and Blackmon (2013) argue that the female version of the protagonist, Commander Shepard [FemShep], is problematic because she is exactly the same as the male protagonist [BroShep]. They have the same model/movement, the same player actions are available, and diegetic character reactions are the same regardless of whether you play as a man or a woman.¹⁷⁹ Commander Shepard is only made female through active player re-reading of the game, “in the modding of the narrative that the player does during and after gameplay. For most players of the *Mass Effect* series, it is the interpretation of the actions of FemShep and the conscious choices that they make for FemShep that make her female” (Layne and Blackmon 2013). While they argue that the game, story, and paratexts normalize a male protagonist, players can interject a feminist re-reading of the game through “post-play narrative modding.”; Layne and Blackmon are clear to note that player oriented post-play

¹⁷⁹ While I agree with their interpretation of an overarching sameness between the male and female versions of the protagonist, Layne and Blackmon (2013) are not fully correct. The male and female protagonists are differentiated in who they are able to ‘romance.’ While some characters are taken to be bisexual, and therefore the interactions are identical between male and female protagonists, other characters are monosexual, and will only romance either the male or female protagonists. For example, my experience playing through *Mass Effect 3* (2012) as a female Commander Shepard who was unable to romance the male character Steve Cortez is different from another’s experience as a male Commander Shepard able to romance the homosexual Cortez. This critique of Layne and Blackmon is important only because it is important to recognize that while gender is collapsed, as they note, sexuality is differentiated.

narrative modding does not solve the overarching problems, but “it holds potential for both players and scholars to shape their and others’ experience of gaming without need[ing] to be programmers” (Layne and Blackmon 2013). Post-play narrative modding is powerful specifically as it bypasses the production side.

A critical problem in bypassing the production side, however, is that post-play narrative modding is essentially a humanist form of interventionist rereading.¹⁸⁰ Unfortunately, re-reading is a limited form of intervention due to its subjectivity. In analyzing the character Lara Croft, Kennedy (2002) points to the limits of a textual analysis by arguing that interpretations of Croft range from object of the male player’s gaze to embodiment of female gamer empowerment. Because the reading depends on so much of the player’s contexts that go beyond the text, textual analysis and interventionist rereading are limited. While re-reading “fighting fuck toy” protagonists in a positive light can work for the individual player, it does little to offset the legion of players who reinforce the industry’s status quo by following the dominant reading.

Physical or digital modifications of the game text or the game experience are an accessible intervention that extends into the social play of games and the general production of video games. Mods can be case-mods, complex alterations of the game hardware (Simon 2007), raid tools that augment the out-of-box MMORPG raiding experience for games like *World of Warcraft* (Taylor 2009), or in-game items created for

¹⁸⁰ Kennedy (2002) does not explicitly cite Stuart Hall’s work on encoding and decoding representations. However, the negotiation of Lara Croft as woman is understandable through Hall’s negotiated position, where the reader “acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, ' situational (situated) level, [the reader] makes [her] own ground rules - [she] operates with exceptions to the rule. [She] accords the privileged position to the dominant definitions of events while reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to [her] "local conditions," to [her] own more *corporate* positions” (Hall 2007: 172).

social games like *The Sims* (Gee and Hayne 2010). Player motivations for creating game mods (Sotamaa 2010) include enabling cheating (Consalvo 2007), facilitating group cooperation (Taylor 2009), and even artistically modifying the game playing experience (Galloway 2006). In their work on games, learning and women, Gee and Hayne (2010) point out not only how women playing *The Sims* push beyond the game as a text by creating customized rule sets, modifications, salable items, fan stories and other practices, but they do so in a way that reverberates back up to the production level. While oppositional re-reading is conducted by players on their own time, these material forms of modding push the industry to change through what Jenkins calls convergence (Jenkins 2006a), or participatory (Jenkins 2006b), culture – where industry and fan interactions lead to new texts instead of a one way process of production and consumption.

Game modding is important, then, because it exists between production-centered changes like gender toggles, and reception-centered oppositional readings. As part of the assemblage of play (Taylor 2009), mods of all types push the boundaries of what counts as a game. In the following section I will discuss a type of game modification where the (man) protagonist is changed into a woman protagonist. My proposal is that these gendered ROM hacks are both feminist intervention and localization.

Gendered ROM Hacks / Feminist Localizations

In addition to feminist scholarship and activism like Sarkeesian's Tropes vs. Women campaign, several ROM hacks were created and discussed in 2013. I propose that these ROM hacks can be interestingly linked to *Nier*'s more technically impressive

localization. In calling these gendered ROM hacks feminist localizations, my intention here is to show what could happen to game production by combining gender hacks and localization; my hope is that this combination will result in the creation of more responsive and accessible games.

Most of the hacks modify older, well-known games. These games are preferable because they are accessible through PC emulation and because they are small in comparison to most games created for consoles of the 2010s. Examples include Mike Mika's *Donkey Kong: Pauline Edition*, Mike Hoyer's gender pronoun swap of *Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*, Kenna W's "Zelda Starring Zelda" modifications for *Legend of Zelda* and *Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, and Scott and Casey Goodrow's *Sorry Mario Bros*. These hacks modify well known protagonists who have appeared in long running series. Between the five hacks only two protagonists are changed: Mario is turned into either Princess Peach or Pauline, and Link is either turned into a woman or swapped with Princess Zelda.

Picked up by mainstream press media like MSNBC, ABC and NPR (Curry 2013; Ruiz 2013; Mullis 2013) *Donkey Kong: Pauline Edition* was the most visible ROM hack of 2013. With *Donkey Kong: Pauline Edition*, game industry veteran Mike Mika hacked *Donkey Kong* in order to change the character sprites and roles so that Pauline is doing the rescuing and Mario awaits rescue (Figure 5.4).¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Of note is that Mika's version is originally titled "Donkey Kong (Ellis Edition)" assumedly after his daughter. This can be seen in the various screenshots available including Figure 5.5. The game was renamed Pauline Edition after the game's new heroine. It is unclear whether Mika or the mass media made the change.



Figure 5.4: Mike Mika's ROM hack, *Donkey Kong: Pauline Edition*, where the protagonist and victim are switched. Here, Pauline climbs ladders and jumps barrels to rescue Mario from the clutches of Donkey Kong. Image from Mika 2013.

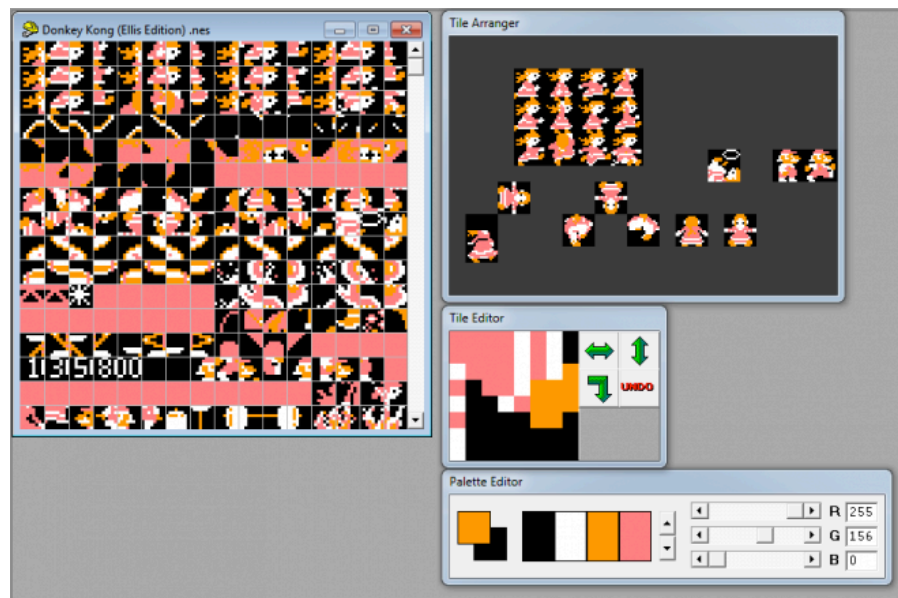


Figure 5.5: Mike Mika's Pauline created within Tile Editor Pro. Each character sprite (upper right hand corner) is made up of four 8x8 pixel tiles (upper left hand corner). From Wired.com.

In his postmortem article on *Wired*, Mika explains that *Donkey Kong: Pauline Edition* came about after his young daughter asked him how she could play as the girl. Having recently played *Super Mario Bros 2*, where Princess Toadstool is one of four playable characters, Mika's daughter knew that other games gave you the option to choose your avatar, and she wanted to save Mario. Haunted by his daughter's question, Mika was pointed in the direction of Tile Layer Pro, which he used to replace each of Mario's animated sprites (Figure 5.5). According to Mika, replacing the sprites was a multi-night and multi-step process including redrawing Pauline to fit within Mario's 16x16 pixel character size and altering the game's color palette to work with Pauline's black, white, orange and pink.

Mika worked on the sprite alterations late in the night, finishing the hack by fixing a few bugs that popped up due to the color palette switch. He then waited for his daughter to wake up and ask to play:

My daughter. Just like clockwork, she woke up and sat on my lap asking to play *Donkey Kong*. Only this time, she could play as Pauline. She was excited! But for all she knew, I just figured out how to get Pauline to work. And that was fine. I wasn't expecting it to change her life. We played for a bit. And some more. And again later. You know what? She really did seem to enjoy the game more. For whatever reason, she was more motivated to play as Pauline than as Mario. I can't read into that too much, because it does feel a bit like a new game to her still. So we'll see how she does after a week with it. (Mika 2013)

Mika claims that he has no "feminist agenda," noting that he "didn't follow the whole Tropes vs. Women thing" before he modified *Donkey Kong* (Mika 2013). Importantly, however, when questioned in a later interview about being a father and a video game designer within an industry that targets males Mika responded sympathetically:

It's eye-opening for me. I have always felt that there should be fairness in games, and a lot of the games I've worked on have never really been violent games or intentionally male focused, but now when I reflect on it, especially after this whole experience, it's impossible to go forward without thinking about it now. And now having a daughter, she's only three—but even with what we did here, I see the world through her eyes. When she's upset about something, or when she disagrees with something I naturally do not think about those things, but now I am. It's definitely changed the way I approach game making. (Ruiz 2013)

By creating a version of *Donkey Kong* that allows his daughter to play as Pauline, Mika helps her to better identify with the character on the screen, keeping her more interested in video games. However, the process is important for Mika himself as it helped open his eyes to the systemic issues of sexism within the game industry. While Mika started the project simply hoping to please his daughter, he ended it thinking about gender representation in games and how to better create games that avoid targeting only male gamers.

Many of the popular blogs dub Mike 'father of the year,' 'best father ever' or something similar. However, while Mika does something extra ordinary, he is not alone in his gendered hacking actions. Several of the blog posts and articles about Pauline Edition link Mika to 2012's 'father of the year,' Mike Hoye, who hacked *Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* so that his own daughter could play as a female protagonist (Hoye 2012; Johnston 2012). Like Mika, Hoye used his experience with code to go into the game and change it; unlike Mika who altered graphics, Hoye swapped pronouns throughout the script so that every instance that referred to the protagonist Link became feminine: he turns into she, boy becomes girl, swordsman gets adapted to swordmain, and various

other pronouns turn into the multipurpose milady (Figure 5.6).¹⁸² Also unlike Mika, Hoye is not shy in his agenda. On the blog post where he posts the binary patch that will alter a *Wind Waker* Gamecube disk image for the Dolphin emulator, thereby enabling the gender swap, he quite explicitly gives his reasoning for the project. Yes, it begins with the complaint that “It’s annoying and awkward, to put it mildly, having to do gender-translation on the fly,” but Hoye reveals his agenda when he exclaims “I’m not having my daughter growing up thinking girls don’t get to be the hero and rescue their little brothers” (Hoye 2012). As he says elsewhere, he is trying to be “a proactive feminist and a decent ally” (comment on Weil 2013).



Figure 5.6: Mike Hoye’s gender swap for *Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*. The young boy protagonist became a young girl, through altering the game’s gendered pronouns. Image from Hoye 2012.

¹⁸² While he does not discuss it, Hoye’s intervention works for both gender and sexuality, because he changes Link’s gender but maintains Princess Zelda’s.

Mika and Hoye have received a significant amount of media attention for modifying games for their daughters. While the more neutral discourse applauds them as good fathers, more pernicious responses argue that they are doing what women cannot be bothered to do. In her critique of the gendered anxiety surrounding these ROM hacks, Rachel Simone Weil (2013) points out one such comment made on the Slashdot write up about Mika's hack. The commenter writes: "This dad did what feminists can't be arsed [sic] to do, he worked long hours past midnight... instead of bitching about it for years without doing anything. It would have been a better story if her daughter made the hack herself instead of having to manipulate a man to get her wish."¹⁸³ Within this inflammatory response, men are the only ones acting to solve society's problems, as feminists simply complain. Weil shows the problems with this claim and the dehistoricization of Mika and Hoye's hacks when she quickly gives a short history of gender hacks going back to the late 1990s (Weil 2013). Included in Weil's short history are Mr. Dude's hacks that turned the Megaman games into the Mega Girl series, *Peach and Daisy: The Ultimate Quest*, a hack of *Super Mario Bros 3* from 1999 that replaced the Mario Brothers with the franchise's damsels, and her own hack that turned *Super Mario Bros* into *Hello Kitty Land* (Figure 5.7) "featur[ing] revised graphics, palettes,

¹⁸³ See: <http://beta.slashdot.org/story/183189>

game physics, and levels to situate the Mushroom Kingdom within the Sanrio universe” (Weil 2013).¹⁸⁴

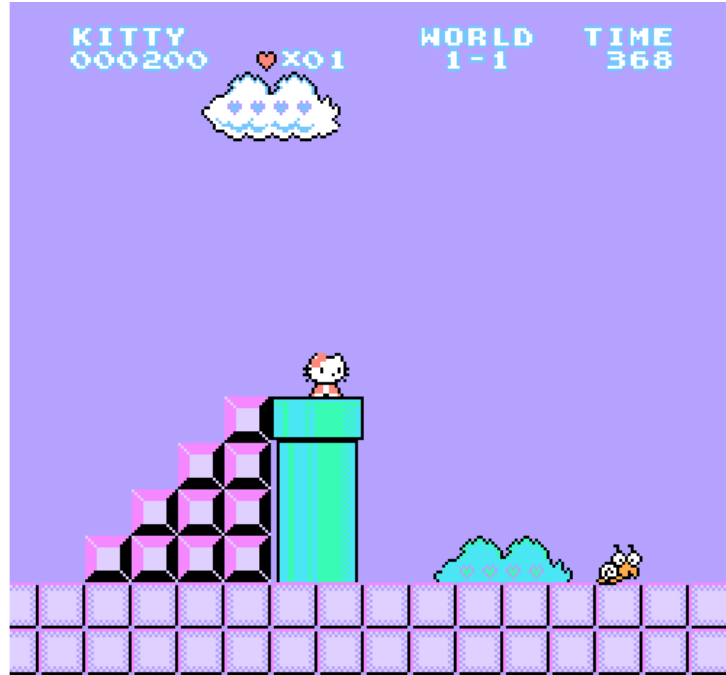


Figure 5.7: Rachel Simone Weil’s 2002 *Hello Kitty Land*, a ROM hack of *Super Mario Bros*, features changed levels, graphics, colors, and physics. Image from Weil 2013

For Weil, what is important in the media responses to Mika is a type of denial of culpability. Instead of the industry admitting general responsibility for the poor representation of women in games, a few good men and good fathers can be elevated as examples, but the “hegemony of play” (Fron et al. 2007) in industry and discourse goes unchallenged and unchanged.

¹⁸⁴ Weil could also have mentioned that the first popular female game protagonist was also the first gender hack. *Ms. Pac-Man*, which started as a conversion of *Pac-Man* by General Computer Corporation, was essentially a gender swap that added a hair bow and lipstick. According to Midway spokesman Stan Jarocki, *Ms. Pac-Man* was their “way of thanking all those lady arcaders who have played and enjoyed *Pac-Man*. (Worley 1982).

Weil's critique is astute; it is a problem that popular media blogs and newspapers jumped to report on Mika's and Hoye's hacks, but ignored the various predecessors, contemporary hacks, and follow-ups conducted by women. One such ignored example is Kenna W's 2013 "Zelda As Zelda" modifications for the Legend of Zelda series where she switches Zelda, the princess, from a damsel-in-distress into the protagonist heroine.¹⁸⁵ Her second effort, the 2014 "Zelda as Zelda 2" modification for the Super Nintendo game *Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, is particularly impressive because it changes narrative, dialogue, and graphics, thereby combining the work of Mika and Hoye.¹⁸⁶ While not advertised as such, Kenna W's effort is a fully multimodal localization from a male gamer culture locale into a female gamer culture locale. Kenna W's work is technically impressive. However, her work has not been remarked upon beyond the same close-knit ROM hacking community. Mass media reporting has done nothing beyond showing that men are making a difference as individuals.

Beyond Weil's critique, however, is the issue that post-production modding forgives the problems that are central to game production. The mass media reportage ignores the general issue by showing that individual male heroes are rescuing young female players. Similarly, the separation of game production from post-production game

¹⁸⁵ Kenna W details much of the process of switching the protagonist and damsel of *Legend of Zelda* in her blog, Kenna Stuff. A March 15, 2013 post called "Zelda Starring Zelda: The Story" discusses the overall process for her first effort. See: <http://kennastuff.blogspot.com.au/2013/03/zelda-starring-zelda-story.html>. An additional note is that, like industry practices of localization detailed in Chapter 1, Kenna W collaborated with her boyfriend, who works as a professional programmer. For his write-up on her work, see: <http://dev.ionous.net/2013/03/playing-zelda-as-zelda-do-we-make-what.html>.

¹⁸⁶ Kenna W's second effort, where she turned the damsel into the heroine and altered the narrative to match, is discussed in the April 2, 2014 post entitled "Zelda Starring Zelda 2: Dev Blog 3." see: <http://kennastuff.blogspot.com.au/2014/04/zelda-starring-zelda-2-dev-blog-3.html>

modification allows industry producers of games to say, ‘hey, others can modify games to be gender inclusive, so we don’t have to code for inclusivity.’ How, then, can the feminist interventions within gendered ROM hacking be brought into the fold of the video game industry? As gendered ROM hacking mirrors the actions of localization specialists (on a smaller scale), my answer is that they be understood as a form of localization specifically targeting not language, but gender.

Response and Resistance

Above, I elaborated how the extensive localization of *Nier* responded to documented changes in game player demographics. In this way, *Nier* is a “responsible localization,” as described in Chapter 3. Unfortunately, full localization like what occurred with *Nier* – where text, graphics, sound, gameplay and paratexts are all changed through collaborative practices distributed in various industry groups – is rare. It costs too much time and money, and there are too many language locales into which to localize any given title. The result is that only games being localized into large markets receive extensive localization. English within North America is one such language locale; Catalan is not (Mangiron 2014). While localizing to only the largest markets satisfies publishers seeking a high return on investment, it does little to change the game industry through active resistance. *Nier*’s alteration of youthful to mature protagonist mirrors the already changed demographics, but does not respond to the change in player gender.

In contrast to localizations like *Nier*, which *respond to* the game industry, feminist localizations like the gendered ROM hacks try to *respond with* the game industry through

a resistant process of mutual becoming (Haraway 2008). As an active resistance to male-dominated gamer culture, ROM hackers that localize for gender work against the borders created through the “hegemony of play” and fought for by GamerGate defenders. These ROM hack creators do not merely change the game to match the target culture, but attempt to change the(ir own) culture at the same time.

ROM hack creators do important work, but it is the same work described in Chapter 3. Ricciardi, the localization project manager at 8-4 Ltd who facilitated the localizations of both *Shadows of the Damned* and *Nier*, is well aware of the importance of *responding with* the game industry. He notes:

There's a lot of tropes, there's a lot of Japanese stereotypical characterizations that just don't work in the West. Or that don't even make any sense necessarily. You know, the [stereotype of] females acting scared and helpless... the kind of over-sexualized [character]. A lot of it is related to females, I guess, but you know, there's just a lot of Japanese stereotypes that don't really fit in English and, yeah, changing those or improving them are usually, I would agree, that's something that we tend to do, and I think that's a good thing. I think that's something you have to do. Making characters, making the women maybe a little strong or independent, or less whiny. (Ricciardi 2013)

It was just this type of responding with that led to the creation of *Shadow of the Damned*'s Paula as not simply an objectified Playboy pin-up, but the Unbreakable Huntress. By combining Ricciardi's comments on gender with Smith's description of localization as a multidirectional cultural cross seeding that brings together game creators from Japan and the United States, it is possible to see localization as a practice that can actively target non-linguistic elements such as gender. In this, localization does not merely target a particular market by fitting a game to its desires, but acts upon game

culture by mediating between different players and creators in different locations (Mandiberg 2012).

As a final note, it is important to remember that full localization only happens when targeting large markets. While the argument is still made by major game publishers that women are not the primary targeted demographic, women players make up 48% of the total player base. This is a large market that needs to be targeted not only so that it can play for fun, but in order to respond with game culture so as to move beyond the current fracturing debates between gendered players. However, as Shaw (2012) notes:

it is not enough to make the game industry recognize that their consumer base is broader than they tend to assume. Such an approach promotes targeting groups on the basis of essentialized notions of identity. In turn, this targeting marks those groups as peripheral gaming markets; it does not create a more diverse video game market more broadly. (13)

If localization is to be responsible, it is important not to simply create secondary, or niche markets, but to respond with, to bring together. Feminist localizations are a form of resistance against toxic gamer culture, but they are also ethical and economical: as responsible localization they are ethical; and as an attempt to incorporate a massive 48% of all players, they are anything but utopian.

Conclusion

This dissertation is described by two separate arcs. Chapters 1 and 2 defined video game localization and predicted its ultimate failure. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 then elaborated that video game localization, doomed as an *idealized* practice, can still be fully functional as a form of ethical media translation, which I call *responsible localization*.

The first arc began by defining video game localization as a multimodal and distributed form of translation, where specialists at distributed occupational groups in the game industry collaborate to change the multimodal assets that make up video games. In historicizing video game localization, industry specialists highlight their progressively evolving ability to fulfill the promise of localization as multimodal translation. The industry history of game localization thus mirrors the industry history of video games as one of technological progression. However, the costs in terms of both collaboration and money are steep, and ultimately, as I argued in Chapter 2, untenable. Like the cinematic MLV, video game localization as a global practice cannot simply aim at fully adapting each and every video game. While dominant markets may be able to fully adapt (as with Hollywood's tendency to remake foreign films), smaller markets and cultures simply cannot follow suit. As a result, localization's promise must lie elsewhere.

The second arc began in Chapter 3, where I identified the 'elsewhere' as *responsible localization*, a translation practice that responds with the source text and creators in order to ethically create a localized version. Applying the theoretical work of Jacques Derrida, Haroldo De Campos and Donna Haraway, I argued that game translators are 'good' when they exert their shadowy authorial presence to help source and target

cultures *respond with* each other in a process of mutual becoming. In Chapter 3, I identified how Brian Gray works responsibly to mediate between the Japan and North America by rewriting characters. However, I did not write about how others might follow in Gray's footsteps doing responsible localization. I make no direct prescriptions because being responsible means responding to the particularities of the situation.

While there are no specific steps, I elaborated two examples of responsible localization in the final two chapters. Demonstrating the breadth of ways game localization can be responsible, these two examples paralleled the layering of film subtitles and the ventriloquism of film dubbing. On the one hand, playing layered traces of another culture is a less expensive form of responsible localization that is available to smaller markets. It celebrates a type of productive difference where encountering foreign traces in jarring moments of incongruity can eventually lead to better understanding cultural interactions not through an elitist cultural consumption of others, but by frictionally (and uncomfortably) encountering them. On the other hand, while fully adaptive localization can hit a target market, its target is often not the local market that might need special considerations. This is particularly true with the large amounts of time and money put into localizing games into English for a straight, white, male, American audience (and correspondingly fewer hours and dollars put into localizing games for Catalan, Arabic, women, disabled gamers, and the host of other minority audiences that play games). As a result, the final chapter goes beyond Gray's delicate mediation of sexism described in Chapter 3 to elaborate a form of resistant localization that responds to the problems of dominant culture – such as straight, white, male gamer culture – by

utilizing the ventriloquist ability of localization to write over the original culture and instead target the game at an other, local culture – such as female gamers. While more expensive and more difficult, this later form of localization has the possibility of being used for necessary social justice. If localization is meant to bring games to new and different audiences, then it should not be limited to dominant linguistic communities.

Limitations and Future Paths

As I complete this work, scholarly research on video game localization is becoming more commonplace. O'Hagan and Mangiron published the first book-length manuscript on game localization practices in 2013; Bernal-Merino published the second in 2015; Mia Consalvo is in the process of publishing a third; and several dissertations on localization are in the process of being finished and will no doubt be published in the near future. Taking this blossoming of work into consideration, I want to bring this dissertation to a close by discussing what I see as future paths – for scholarly research on localization, and for video game localization as an industry practice.

My conclusions open new ground for fruitful research, proposing that video game localization can responsibly go in two directions: traces for most games, and targeted full adaptations for specific, appropriate games so as to encourage diversity. Treading down either of these future paths requires overcoming some of the methodological limitations of my own work, as well as others' research on video game localization.

First, my claim that traces are theoretically positive necessitates quantitative and qualitative research to test how players actually experience traces. Do they notice them?

Do they learn from them? Does encountering traces leave positive or negative emotional residues? Is there a difference between short term and long term playing of traces? While this dissertation focused on localization through the lenses of critical theories of globalization and workplace studies, one limitation is that I did not approach how players (other than myself) engage with the games and localizations that I analyzed (c.f. O'Hagan 2009), and while I recorded the screen of play, I did not record myself (or my physiological response) while playing.¹⁸⁷ Studies of video game effects and reception studies are both important areas that need consideration to fully understand how localization is meaningful. First, one of the reasons video game localization as a practice remains invisible within the game industry is because there is simply no data related to the effectivity of localization. As several localization specialists informed me, while marketers have advertising and sales data to back up their practices, there is no data proving that how (or whether) localization helps sales. As long as video game effects research focuses only on sexy (and economically fundable) topics like aggression, obesity or addiction, it is unlikely that we will understand how video games function as cultural texts in other respects. The result is that the game industry will remain unconvinced of the effectiveness of localization as a practice. Second, while reception studies within game studies has helpfully brought out the diversity of game players and nuances of how individuals and communities play games (El-Nasr et al. 2008; Pearce and Artemesia 2009; Taylor 2006; Shaw 2012), they tend to focus on player engagement within a

¹⁸⁷ I wrote field notes while (and after) playing the games I analyzed, but I did not use technological methods to measure eye movement, galvanic skin response, or heart rate.

singular language-locale, or conflating all language-locales into a singular game. My hope, therefore, is to see reception studies that not only take the players as full of difference, but take into consideration the game versions themselves as multiple.

Second, while I claim that gendered ROM hacks are an important form of feminist localization that both resists the “hegemony of play” (Fron et al. 2007) and responds to the limitations of video game localization industry’s standard practices, I do not fully explain how feminist localization can be brought into standard practice to help change the game industry itself. Gendered ROM hacks are resistant, but they do not *respond with* (Haraway 2008) and in so doing help change the industry. For that, work could be done to show that such practices are economically feasible through studies of business, marketing and economics. As a capitalist industry, however, video game production is highly dependent upon bottom line economics, and economically feasible likely will never prove to be the largest return on investment. The result is that work in other areas will likely be more effective at changing the industry. One alternative method is training new students to embrace the sort of resistant hacking done by Kenna W, Mike Hoye, and Mike Mika. While this teaching would likely happen in social science and humanities based courses in Sociology, Anthropology, Communication, Literature, and Media Studies departments, where game studies courses are often taught, it would also need to happen in Computer Science departments and Game Design programs, where computer programming instruction is located. The critical reconceptualization here, as stated in the previous section, is that game production is not only coding from scratch, but modding, re-making, and localization. A second method to bring feminist localization

into the industry is figuring out how to integrate different forms of game design that can enable both hegemonic visions and resistant layers. While some game localization specialists informed me of their companies' attempts to control, and thereby protect, their intellectual properties, previous industry fan interactions were both more linked and more open to collaborative production (Jenkins 2006). Games like *Quake*, *World of Warcraft*, and *Minecraft* thrive thanks to fan created modifications. Peace might be reachable between intellectual property protection and resistant layers. Critical here is the fluidity between control and creativity: risk prevention and adaptation (Pang 2012).

Friction, Flows, and the Globalization of Video Games

While the primary thesis of this dissertation has argued that responsible localization between Japan and the United States is an ethical form of game translation, I have also shown how localization is critical for the production of games themselves and for the production of games as a global medium. Games do not simply flow around the world as global commodities, but shuffle along through the ambiguous, changing, and frictional practices of game localization.

In arguing that game localization is both multimodal and distributed, I am reconceptualizing the boundaries of both game localization and game production. The localization practices that I describe in Chapter 1 are not just linguistic: they range from linguistic translation and altering graphics to tweaking characterizations and facilitating a targeted marketing campaign through paratextual manipulation. Game localization is not derivative, an afterthought in a new, minor market, but a vital part of game production

itself. In the same way that Montfort and Bogost's (2009) platform studies model pushed code from a central position of importance in game production to argue that the console, or platform, is the base on which any game operates, my claim pushes on the protected realm of coding and programmers. Certainly the platform enables the game code, which enables the rules/narrative, which enables the interface, which enables a player's reception and operation of the game. However, if we consider games as being important not for their play, but for their political economy, which is to say the fact that they are important in the world as 'global' commodities – as so much of the rhetoric claims from *Wired* (Figure 0.3) to the *International Game Developers Association* – then it is through localization practices that games are made meaningful.

While localization makes games global, it does not do so evenly, smoothly or unambiguously. Rather, like all processes of globalization – from the production of films (Miller et al. 2005) to the cross-border movement of individuals (Nevins 2002) – game localization is full of friction (Tsing 2005), and in this dissertation I have tried to attend to the nuances of these frictions. Some of the friction involves systemic unevenness of nation-states within 21st century global Capitalism. I chose to study the localization of games between Japan and the United States because of my own familiarity with the language, but also because of the step from Japanese to English historically precedes the pivot into French, Italian, German, Spanish and the host of other languages into which games are translated. Game localization into North-American English is more equal than game localization into other language-locales. Other frictions emerge in the specific interactions between situated individuals: as workers within the five occupational groups

interact with each other, as translators exert authorial responsibility (or not), as players encounter traces, and as responsible localization responds with game culture in processes of mutual becoming.

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