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THE PRACTICE AND EVOLUTION OF VIDEO GAME TRANSLATION:
EXPANDING THE DEFINITION OF TRANSLATION

A Thesis Presented

by

ELIZABETH A. BUSHOUSE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2015

Japanese Language, Literature and Culture

THE PRACTICE AND EVOLUTION OF VIDEO GAME TRANSLATION:
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ABSTRACT

THE PRACTICE AND EVOLUTION OF VIDEO GAME TRANSLATION:

EXPANDING THE DEFINITION OF TRANSLATION

MAY 2015

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This paper looks at the practice and history of video game translation, with the goal of expanding the definition of translation. Video game translation is a complex process that incorporates a number of aspects from other types of translation, such as literary, audiovisual, and software translation, to form a dynamic whole. As a new medium, video games also present their own challenges to translation in the form of interactivity, technology, non-textual and extra-textual elements, audience involvement, and new business practices. Even though video games are a relatively new medium, the practice of translating them has undergone drastic transformations over the years. A case study of the various official translations of *Final Fantasy IV* provides a brief overview of this development to help the reader get a complete understanding of the video game translation process. The paper concludes by arguing that the different sign systems present in video games are integral to the player's understanding of the game, and should be considered as aspects that can be translated. Parallels are also drawn between the translation process and the medium of the video game, to show that different approaches to translation can provide the audience with a more holistic view of a work.

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INTRODUCTION

Like every new medium, video games have long struggled to be recognized as a legitimate art form deserving of study. Despite being overlooked by the majority of the academic world though, video games have quickly become a worldwide phenomenon enjoyed by an increasing variety of people, to the extent that game journalists have begun to question what the term “gamer” even refers to anymore.¹ Video games can be found on dedicated video game systems, computers, via internet browsers, smart phones and tablets, often only a single click away. They are so widespread that some of the few video game scholars must now first establish what a video game even is before being able to discuss anything about them. Suffice it to say that video games today come in many shapes and sizes.

Unlike other mediums, video games are not solely dominated by the Western market. In America, foreign books, films or television shows are rare, but not foreign video games. Since the beginning of the video game industry, Japan has been a major source of the video games that are popular around the world. For people of an older generation, Japanese games and game companies have become synonymous with the entire realm of video games: “Nintendo,” “Mario,” and “Game Boy” are all household terms in America that are often used to refer to any kind of game or game system. Accordingly, Japanese is a main source language in the video game industry, on the same level as English.² Although Japanese anime and manga have currently become worldwide

¹ Matt Helgeson, “The Changing Definition of ‘Gamer,’” *Game Informer*, February 20, 2014, accessed February 19, 2015, <http://www.gameinformer.com/b/features/archive/2014/02/20/the-changing-definition-of-39-gamer-39.aspx>

² Minako O’Hagan, “Transcreating Japanese Video Games: Exploring a Future Direction for Translation Studies in Japan,” in *Translation and Translation Studies in the Japanese Context*, ed. Nana Sato-Rossberg and Judy Wakabayashi (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 186.

commodities as well, video games are arguably more widespread and predate anime and manga in terms of popularity. One scholar writes: “Only a handful of Americans knew about manga in 1980. Meanwhile, the rest of the country had *Pac-Man* Fever.”³ As proven cultural products,⁴ this makes video games a primary way that the world is introduced to Japanese culture.

Video game translation, then, is not an insignificant activity. Nonetheless, while there has been a slowly increasing amount of research into video games in general, video game translation has remained largely unrecognized by the translation studies community. Within recent years scholars such as Minako O’Hagan, Carmen Mangiron, and Miguel Bernal-Merino have finally begun to establish video games as an area for research within translation studies, but much work remains to be done. Video game translation is a complicated process that combines other fields of translation to create a dynamic whole, encompassing literary and theater translation, audiovisual translation, software translation, and so on. Furthermore, not only does it incorporate aspects from each field, but as a completely new medium, video games present their own unique challenges to translation in the form of interactivity, technology, non-textual and extra-textual elements, audience involvement, and new business practices.

Because video game translation is such a complex and new process, I will devote the first section of this paper to describing the various aspects involved in it, with the aim of introducing the subject to readers and demonstrating the ways video game translation sets itself apart from other types of translation. Like any form of translation, however,

³ Chris Kohler, *Power Up: How Japanese Video Games Gave the World an Extra Life* (Indianapolis, IN: BradyGames, 2005), 2.

⁴ Carmen Mangiron and Minako O’Hagan, *Game Localization: Translating for the global digital entertainment industry* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 2013), 203.

video game translation does not occur within a vacuum, nor is it a static process, but instead is influenced by cultural norms which are always in flux.⁵ With this in mind, I believe it would also prove beneficial to briefly explore the history of video game translation, including the shifting cultural framework in which it has taken place, using a series of translations that has been made over the years of a game called *Final Fantasy IV*.

The *Final Fantasy* series is the most famous and popular series of Japanese role-playing games in the world, and the fifteenth entry is one of the most highly anticipated games currently under development. Role-playing games are well suited for translation research because they tend to have a heavier focus on narrative and character development than other genres, and thus offer more to work with. Square Enix, the developer of the *Final Fantasy* series, is well known for its high quality translations and internationally successful titles, and unlike other major game companies, it “has been generous in sharing information [on its translation practices] through game industry events as well as published interviews by staff members,” which has made it a frequent object of study by translation scholars such as Minako O’Hagan.⁶

Final Fantasy IV was first released in America in 1991 for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System under the title *Final Fantasy II*.⁷ Because only the first entry in the series had been released in America, the number was changed in order not to confuse

⁵ Alexandra Lianeri, “Translation and the Establishment of Liberal Democracy in Nineteenth-Century England: Constructing the Political as an Interpretive Act,” in *Translation and Power*, ed. Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 4.

⁶ Mangiron and O’Hagan, *Game Localization*, 179.

⁷ Although I introduce here the various titles that *Final Fantasy IV* has gone by, to avoid confusion I will refer to each version simply as *Final Fantasy IV* for the rest of the paper, clarifying which version is being discussed by indicating the system on which it was released and its release date instead.

American consumers. As the *Final Fantasy* series became more popular worldwide, Square Enix started rereleasing its older games on current game systems, so that new fans would be able to experience the series' beginning.⁸ Consequently, *Final Fantasy IV* was released again in America on Sony's PlayStation in 2001, as part of a collection of games named *Final Fantasy Chronicles*. This release featured a completely new translation because the original translation was not deemed adequate by Square Enix's new standards.

The game saw another release in 2005 on Nintendo's Game Boy Advance, under the title *Final Fantasy IV Advance*, which presented a heavily updated translation based on the 2001 PlayStation one. In 2008, the game came out yet again on the Nintendo DS as *Final Fantasy IV*, with a completely new translation this time because of the new 3D graphics and voice-acting included in the game. Finally, *Final Fantasy IV: The Complete Collection* was released in 2011 on Sony's PlayStation Portable, incorporating a slightly updated version of the 2005 Game Boy Advance translation, but using some new terminology from the 2008 Nintendo DS translation. Since then, it has also been made available on smart phones and tablets through the iTunes and Google Play stores, as well as on PC, though these versions will not be discussed because they have the exact same English translation as the 2008 Nintendo DS version.

Square Enix is one of the only companies that rereleases its games so consistently like this, and it is also unique in its policy of retranslating older games. As such, *Final Fantasy IV* is most likely the only game in existence to have so many different official translations made of it. By showcasing a game that has received multiple translations, the

⁸ Kohler, *Power Up*, 122.

evolution of video game translation can be clearly demonstrated. Because these translations took place fairly consistently over a wide range of time from 1991 to 2011, they are able to reveal the changing translation policies held by Square Enix, as well as the effects of shifting cultural norms on the translation process. Additionally, each version of the game was released on a different video game system, exhibiting the effects of technological developments as well as the publisher's influence, as the game switched between both Nintendo and Sony platforms.

Having introduced the practice of video game translation and its history, I would like to conclude by suggesting ways that game translation can expand the definition of translation and offer new ways to think about the process. The translation studies community has previously been chiefly focused on the dominant Western conception of translation, but some translation studies scholars have recently begun to call for a broader view of translation that incorporates the various translation practices and norms that can be found all over the world.⁹ As a new form of translation that has Japanese as one of its primary source languages, research of video game translation can help further this goal.

To this end, I will continue to refer to the entire process of releasing video games in other countries as “translation” throughout this paper, despite the fact that it includes many aspects that are not generally considered as being strictly translation, such as changes made to gameplay, visuals, and sounds, as well as the incorporation of extra-textual materials. In common thought these would fall under the realm of “localization,” so that the whole process would be referred to as “video game localization,” while “translation” would only specifically indicate the part of the process in which the

⁹ Maria Tymoczko, *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* (Kinderhook, NY: St. Jerome, 2007).

linguistic text is changed. However, I would argue that a wider definition of translation can be used to describe all of the changes that are made during the video game translation process, while “localization” can be conceived as just one kind of strategy a translator may take when dealing with these issues. In my conclusion I will more fully address these terminological difficulties, showing how a broader view of translation as it is presented in video games can provide a more holistic understanding of both translated and original works, as well as elevate the status of the translator.

CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO VIDEO GAME TRANSLATION

As a hybrid form of translation, video game translation combines elements of software, literary, theater, audiovisual translation, and more. Because of this, while the individual aspects included in the process may not be unique to video games, such as subtitling or use of programming code, it is the specific combination of all of these into one product that sets video games apart from other types of translation.¹⁰ In this chapter I will introduce the process of video game translation by addressing the interactivity found in games, the technological difficulties encountered, the non-textual and extra-textual elements involved, the level of audience involvement, and the general business practices that game companies have in relation to translation.

1.1 Interactivity

The fundamental factor that sets video games apart from other types of media is the fact that video games are interactive. Instead of passively reading a story or watching a play or movie unfold, video game players can directly impact the outcome or order of the narrative. Players take control of the game's main character or characters, and actively guide them through the story. This sort of active participation causes players to form a different kind of attachment to the main characters than they might if they were just passively reading or viewing a story. The player is meant to identify with the character(s) that he or she controls, to become them as they progress through the story. While in practice this may or may not result in a deeper level of immersion than that

¹⁰ Bernal-Merino, *Translation and Localisation in Video Games*, 2.

which can be found in other types of media, the concept of immersion is still crucial in video games because it is part of the reason why games are so entertaining.

Unlike other forms of storytelling, however, video games' nature as a multimedia product makes creating this suspension of disbelief harder because of the increased room for error. Between the visuals, sounds, music, and gameplay, a variety of offenses can disrupt the player's suspension of disbelief, as one scholar writes: "...[immersion] may suffer because of bad translation, confusing instructions, unclear menus, poor voice acting and a long list of localization 'bugs' ..." ¹¹ Errors such as typos or grammatical mistakes can destroy the experience and make the game less enjoyable, although these are not always completely under the translator's control due to technological difficulties that will be discussed in the next section. Inconsistencies in the game world can also ruin a player's immersion, such as when a character in a medieval setting refers to a modern concept or uses modern slang. Of course, depending on the intention of the game writer or translator, such disorienting language could also be used as a technique to enhance the narrative in some way, so the goal of the translation should always be kept in mind.

Immersion also needs to be considered in regard to the cultural approach taken by the translation, whether the translation foreignizes the work by keeping in references and terminology from the source culture, or domesticates it by replacing such references and terminology with something more familiar to the target culture. Just like other translators, video game translators must balance the amount of foreign concepts introduced to the audience so as not to completely alienate them; one translation studies scholar refers to

¹¹ Ibid., 40.

this process as “balancing the communication load.”¹² For video games, extra attention may have to be given to foreign elements because players are supposed to identify with the character(s) they control and may find it hard to empathize with distinctly foreign characters or situations. This can make it hard for translators to decide how to approach the issue of culture.

In one extreme case, a game called *Lux Pain* was released even though it exhibited extremely contradicting strategies. The character dialogue that is voice acted says that the game takes place in America, while the accompanying textual subtitles insist that the game takes place in Japan. So while players hear the characters talking about Los Angeles and American cuisine, they read dialogue discussing Tokyo and tempura.¹³ This is understandably disorienting to players who then have to decide which version they believe. Although games that go through any kind of editing check will most likely not have problems as severe as this, translators do need to make sure that everyone is on the same page and that their approach is unified.

The entire game experience needs to be considered in order to create a deep feeling of immersion. One scholar of video game translation, Miguel Bernal-Merino, argues that just as translations of stage plays or movie scripts must adhere to the idea of “performability,” video game translation must keep “playability” in mind.¹⁴ Scholars of theater translation have argued that there is a great disparity between written text and an actual performance, and a translation that sounds good in one aspect may not sound good

¹² Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1964), 140.

¹³ Douglas Schules, “When Language Goes Bad: Localization's Effect on the Gameplay of Japanese RPGs,” in *Dungeons, Dragons, and Digital Denizens*, ed. Joshua Call et al. (New York: Continuum, 2012), 97.

¹⁴ Bernal-Merino, *Translation and Localisation in Video Games*, 40.

in the other.¹⁵ The same holds true for video games, where immersion and constructing an enjoyable interactive product is the ultimate goal. Bernal-Merino writes:

“...the translation of video games requires ‘playability’, so that game immersion can be achieved and maintained successfully by taking the suspension of disbelief a step further and creating a convincingly personal experience for players each time they enter the game world.”¹⁶

To that end, not just the text, but the whole game experience must be considered during translation in order to produce the desired effect of immersion. This includes the gameplay as well, which contributes to the meaning of the narrative and the player’s understanding of it. While gameplay and narrative are often seen as polar opposites which hinder each other, when they are successfully combined it can create a more meaningful and compelling experience.

Ultimately, it is up to game developers to decide how best to integrate story and gameplay. This can be harder than it sounds, even for linear games. For example, in a shooting game, boxes and other materials are frequently provided for cover so that the player can survive the gun fights throughout the game. However, these cover objects can show up in such frequency that it makes the game unrealistic. There will not always be perfect places to take cover when fighting in real life. Furthermore, these items tend to only be found in places where fights break out, and appear nowhere else in the game, such that it is easy for a player to predict what is going to happen upon encountering such areas. On the other hand, if places to take cover were not provided, the player would be a sitting duck and quickly killed, making the game not enjoyable to play.

¹⁵ Suh Joseph Che, “The Performability and Speakability Dimensions of Translated Drama Texts,” *inTRAlinea*, 16 (2014), accessed March 16, 2015, <http://www.intralinea.org/archive/article/1671>

¹⁶ Bernal-Merino, *Translation and Localisation in Video Games*, 40.

In another case, the gameplay may skew the characterization of the game's protagonist. For example, the hero in the game *Uncharted* is presented in the story as a regular, fun-loving guy, but during gameplay he and the player are pitted against hundreds of human enemies and kill them all, making him seem like a mass murderer.¹⁷ This kind of conflict is known as ludonarrative dissonance, and game developers have been struggling with it since games began trying to tell stories. Balance between the two may be hard to achieve, but when it is accomplished it can create a truly immersive experience that draws the player into the game. One game reporter writes:

“Integrating gameplay and narrative is an important part of what makes video games fun – you want to feel like you’re actually participating in a story. The fact that it’s so integral to the gaming experience means not only that narrative disconnect is important – it means everyone who plays games can talk about it.”¹⁸

Even if the story and gameplay do not seem to affect each other in any meaningful way, at the very least, gameplay and the player's mastery of it determines how much of the story the player is able to experience, and whether or not he or she is able to get to the end of the game, a problem that is unique to video games. In novels or movies there is no such barrier, and in fact the consumers could skip to the end at any time if they so wished. This means that the story presented in the video game has to be compelling enough to motivate players to push through the difficult gameplay sequences and make it to the end. The translators, then, are under even more pressure to create a polished translation that encourages players to keep playing the game. On the other hand, it also means that if the translator is running out of time, it might be best to concentrate

¹⁷ Scott Juster, “Nathan Drake in: The Curse of Ludonarrative Dissonance!” *Experience Points* (blog), July 10, 2009, accessed March 16, 2015, <http://www.experiencepoints.net/2009/07/nathan-drake-in-curse-of-ludonarrative.html>

¹⁸ Harry Mackin, “Why Narrative Disconnect Is Worth Talking About,” *Game Informer*, August 20, 2014, accessed January 29, 2015, <http://www.gameinformer.com/b/features/archive/2014/08/20/why-narrative-disconnect-is-worth-talking-about.aspx?PostPageIndex=2>

on the beginning of the game, which everyone is guaranteed to experience, instead of the end, which may not be reached at all.

Because playability and immersion are the main goals of video game translation, and because gameplay can affect the meaning of the story and the player's ability to reach the end of it, the translation of the gameplay is crucial. Players must be able to understand how to interact with the game and how the game mechanics work in order to successfully play it. Therefore, tutorials and help messages need to be translated as clearly as possible so that the player is not confused. This type of text is not just technical, but may be presented in the game in the form of character dialogue, meaning that it has to be diegetic, or seem as if it would make sense within the game world.

For instance, if a player is in a fight against a major enemy that requires a certain strategy to defeat, the game might give the player a hint by having one of the characters suggest a strategy. Because the line is spoken by a character in the game, it must match that character's personality and speaking style. Failing to do so could break the player's immersion in the game. On the other hand, accuracy is very important as well. If this line of dialogue is mistranslated, the player may not understand how to beat the enemy, or might misunderstand and use an attack that is actually detrimental to success.

To use a specific example, in one of the first major fights in *Final Fantasy VII*, a mistranslation causes the player to believe that they should attack the scorpion enemy when its tail is raised, when in fact that is the opposite of what they should do and attacking during that time causes the enemy to initiate a strong counterattack. The translation reads: "Attack while it's tail's up! It's gonna counterattack with its laser." This could lead the player to believe that they need to attack and defeat the enemy

quickly before it counterattacks. The original Japanese makes it clear: 「しっぽをあげている間に攻撃するとレーザーで反撃してくるぞ」 (If you attack while its tail is raised, it will counterattack with a laser). In this case, the addition of a single word in the translation could have reduced the confusion. If it had read, “Attack while it’s tail’s up and it’s gonna counterattack with its laser!” then the player may have had a better understanding of what to do, showing that even small errors can make a big difference.

Aspects outside of the text need to be considered as well. The gameplay itself, the way the player interacts with the game, may need to be adjusted when preparing a game to be released internationally. If a country is not familiar with a certain game genre, the game may need to be made easier for them and more explanations or tutorials added so that they can understand how to play it. For example, Japanese gamers are not used to shooting games that are played from a first-person perspective (Figure 1, left), and may become nauseous when they play such games. As a result, first-person shooters that are released in Japan may be slowed down or changed to a third-person perspective (Figure 1, right).



Figure 1: Left: first-person perspective in *Call of Duty: Strike Team*; Right: third-person perspective in *Resident Evil IV*

Sources: <http://canadianonlinegamers.com/review/call-of-duty-strike-team-ios-review-for-a-mobile-cod-game-its-not-too-shabby/>,

<http://www.games73.com/1/2014/01/22/resident-evil-4-ultimate-hd-edition-comes-to-steam-on-february-27/index.htm>

Japanese games in general may tend to be slower than their American counterparts, and so at times need to be sped up when being translated into English. In one game called *Dirge of Cerberus*, the game's protagonist runs 1.2 times faster in the American version than the Japanese version, and there is less slowdown during the first-person aiming mode. Other tweaks were made to the gameplay as well, although whether this was to better suit American audiences or to generally improve the game is not known.¹⁹ If the gameplay is not adjusted to suit the target cultures tastes or needs, then players are less likely to be immersed in the game or may not be able to complete the game and therefore will not see the conclusion of the story.

Another main consequence of game interactivity means that not only do players actively make the story progress, they may also have complete control over the way the story develops and its outcome. In more open-ended games the player can decide whether the main character is good or evil, male or female, what they say to the people around them, and how they deal with different situations. Games can have multiple endings depending on the player's choices throughout the game, and some series even carry these choices and consequences over to subsequent games to allow the player to create a truly unique experience. In "open world" or "sandbox" games, the player is put into a game world and given free reign over how to interact with it. Some of these games may give players an optional main storyline to follow, or leave them to construct their own stories if they want.

¹⁹ Jon Corliss, "All Your Base are Belong to Us! Videogame Localization and Thing Theory," *Columbia University*, accessed January 29, 2015. <http://www.columbia.edu/~sf2220/TT2007/web-content/Pages/jon1.html>

While this gives players an amazing amount of freedom over what kind of story they wish to experience, it also means that translators have to deal with text that is nonlinear. Even if the game itself has a linear storyline, a player may choose to bring different characters along to certain events, or meet certain requirements, such as completing a specific sidequest, which may subtly alter parts of the main story. Even this small freedom could affect the way the characters are portrayed in translation. When a game allows the player to bring different characters to the same story event, the game writing may have two characters say the same line to save space within the game script. In one example, this prevented a translator from making a robot character speak in all capitals, since some of his lines were shared with other human characters.²⁰ That translator talks about his experience:

“Time travel, free party formation, and heavy re-use of messages also caused the sort of contextual issues that make a translator want to scream. ...[T]rying to wrap your head around the flow of conversations in the files of that game—not to mention all of the messages that randomly get re-used in multiple places—was not easy.”²¹

As the quote suggests, the game files themselves may not be organized properly and present scenes out of order. The process is even more difficult for games that offer branching dialogue options or that permit the player to complete a series of missions in any order he or she chooses. Games that simulate real-life may allow players to talk to characters in their town and form relationships with them. Dialogue in this case would also be nonlinear, since the player may talk to characters in any order, making it hard for translators to determine whether a certain dialogue string is the player’s first encounter

²⁰ Michael P. Williams, *Chrono Trigger* (Los Angeles, CA: Boss Fight Books, 2014), 134.

²¹ Tom Slattery, “Inside Gaming - An Interview with Former Square Enix Translator Tom Slattery,” by Michael A. Cunningham, *RPGamer*, April 23, 2012, accessed March 8, 2015, <http://www.rpgamer.com/features/insidegaming/tslatteryint.html>

with a character or whether it belongs to a different conversation than the dialogue preceding it. One translator talks about this exact issue:

“In the script, there’s a big conversation with [a character named] Kiel. [The initial translation] looks totally fine, right? ...However, when playing the game, I once went up to Kiel and he started the conversation with ‘I asked my sister what the difference was between the two’ and I had no idea what he was talking about. Because scripts are just giant walls of text on similar topics, you can’t tell how they’re broken up until you see them in-game. Lots of lines were changed to make sure the player wasn’t walking into the middle of a conversation. ...Text isn’t displayed in order, so sometimes you have to guess when this text is said, or what comes first. In this example, the [initial translation of the dialogue] is confusing because it looks like Doug knows the main character. It was hidden between conversations in the script as well, but the truth is that this is your first real conversation with him!”²²

As previously noted, a lot of these issues occur because the game files themselves are not organized properly, making this a technical problem as well, which will be discussed more in the next section. But the fact that games are interactive means that no matter how well organized the files are, events in the game may still occur in any order, making a linear presentation impossible. One translator comments:

“...in any game where textual elements are being used in different combinations and situations, the challenge to the localizer is more procedural than conceptual. In the case of multiple story lines, all the possibilities have to be considered so that, for example, conclusion C works in a storyline that goes A-B-C as well as one that goes A-D-C. [Quality Assurance] often spends a great deal of time working through each permutation to make sure everything works.”²³

²² Jason Schreier, “Getting JRPGs Out in English is Harder Than You Think,” *Kotaku*, October 4, 2013, accessed March 19, 2015, <http://kotaku.com/getting-jrpgs-out-in-english-is-harder-than-you-think-1441094168>

²³ Matthew Alt, et al., “Generations and Game Localization: An Interview with Alexander O. Smith, Steven Anderson and Matthew Alt,” by Darshana Jayemanne, *Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture* 3, no. 2 (2009): 136, accessed March 19, 2015, <http://www.eludamos.org/index.php/eludamos/article/view/vol3no2-2/124>

Another translator likens it to “trying to translate a novel that has been torn up into shreds and thrown into the air,” saying: “Even if you are familiar with the game, you have to work out who is speaking and where/when it appears in the flow of things.”²⁴

1.2 Technology

Video games are ultimately computer software products, so translating them is a very technologically involved process. Although the source code itself is generally left alone (unless it does not support foreign language fonts, or changes to the gameplay need to be made), game translators still need to be able to work around the code to accomplish their jobs. In order for the text to be displayed properly by the program it is embedded in programming code, a process that fragments the text into short “language strings” and then scatters them across the code, “so as to accommodate interactive textual clusters.”²⁵ To be able to translate the game, the “language strings” are extracted from the code and put in a spreadsheet next to a number that identifies where the string came from so that it can be successfully re-implemented once translated. Even within this spreadsheet, though, the translator may encounter bits of code mixed in with the text.²⁶

As a result of this process, translators suffer from a lot of contextual issues. When the text is fragmented and scattered, scenes or dialogue may appear out of order, destroying the narrative context, and text files themselves may be poorly organized so that the translator does not know which files belong to which parts of the game. Putting

²⁴ Richard Honeywood, “Q&A - Square Enix's Richard Honeywood,” *Edge: Videogame Culture*, February 2006, accessed March 13, 2015, http://web.archive.org/web/20060517012317/http://www.edge-online.co.uk/archives/2006/02/qa_square_enixs_1.php

²⁵ Gianna Tarquini, “Translating the Onscreen Text Blindfolded: Possibilities and Impossibilities,” in *Fun for All: Translation and Accessibility Practices in Video Games*, ed. Carmen Mangiron et al. (Berne: Peter Lang AG, 2014), 158.

²⁶ Tarquini, “Translating the Onscreen Text,” 158.

the text into spreadsheets may also hurt the linearity of the narrative, and if translators are only given a spreadsheet of text to work with, then the visual and aural context is lost. Finally, the translator may have to deal with bits of programming code that are mixed in with the text that may be used in place of certain item or character names, so that the translator is unable to know what these codes are referring to.

As previously discussed, context is particularly an issue because the linearity of the text is destroyed due to its fragmentation between different computer files or even within the same file. While this is not as much of a problem for regular software translation which is more functionally oriented, it does disrupt the storytelling of video games. However, there is no way to avoid this kind of fragmentation, since it goes hand in hand with the interactivity that is central to video games. One translator says:

“The text to be translated is generally organized in a logical way, with dialog and various [user interface]-related text grouped together. That said, there are times when the dialog jumps backwards and forwards on the timeline as you proceed through a file, due to the branching nature of the script. This makes it necessary to use other cues such as message codes to determine the context. Most files also contain developer notes listing information such as where the dialog will jump to when a certain action is taken, and these can also be of help.”²⁷

Another translator comments:

“As a game translator you have to be prepared to deal with materials in a non-linear fashion. Sometimes this is due to certain parts of the game being completed faster than others. Other times, it is due to the grouping of text strings by type (such as all dialog in one place in the file, all in-game text in another, etc.) Or the way the file is arranged. Or because certain text needs to be finished quicker because of development concerns. In our experience this just comes with the territory and is one of the reasons we prefer to submit all text at once, in a finished/checked state, rather than in chunks – quite often we come across something later that changes the way we translated something earlier.”²⁸

²⁷ Alt, “An Interview with Matthew Alt et al.,” by Jayemanne, 137.

²⁸ Ibid.

Creating consistent and understandable naming conventions, as well as adding explanatory notes, is therefore important to allow translators to be able to locate the correct files and sections. However, as Bernal-Merino writes, “[e]ven when all the possible precautions have been taken and files have been organised following an intuitive naming convention, translating games from spreadsheets can be confusing and time-consuming.”²⁹

Because the text is often given to translators in the form of tables or spreadsheets without any accompanying visual or aural information, video game translation can easily turn “into an error-prone guesswork exercise.”³⁰ Bernal-Merino writes:

“Having to translate text without taking into consideration the semiotic context of the product risks affecting the act of communication adversely because isolated linguistic items tend to have multiple possible meanings and, hence, give rise to an unnecessary ambiguity which slows down the translation process.”³¹

Consequently, translations may have to be heavily edited during the quality assurance testing period, when the context finally becomes apparent. One translator quickly discovered the importance of this issue, writing:

“...little things like ‘Hats’ versus ‘Headgear’ taught me the importance of context. ‘Hats’ is a perfectly understandable raw translation, but once I saw the things UNDER the Hats category – ribbons, glasses, etc. – ‘Headgear’ was a much more appropriate localization.”³²

Even though spreadsheets are not the most ideal solution, Bernal-Merino says:

“...this procedure is considerably better than the method used in the last two decades of the twentieth century, where the text requiring translation was directly written into the game code, creating a complicated situation for both translators

²⁹ Bernal-Merino, *Translation and Localisation in Video Games*, 145.

³⁰ Ibid., 111.

³¹ Ibid., 141.

³² Schreier, “Getting JRPGs Out.”

and engineers who were forced to puzzle over thousands of game source code lines.”³³

Context issues may also arise due to programming code that is left in the middle of text that needs to be translated, even within the spreadsheets that are given to translators. Scholar Gianna Tarquini writes: “[Game text] is made up of language strings extracted from a formal language, containing tags, metadata and variables.”³⁴ Variables are certain codes used to refer to character, item, or event names that will then display the correct name when the game is played. That way a variety of words can be inputted into the same message, standardizing it. However, translators may not know what each code refers to, leading to possible grammatical errors and other translation mistakes. For example, the code “@カレンダー 0 @” gave one translator some problems: “Since all the Japanese says is ‘Calendar’ in the script instead of listing an actual holiday, we have no idea what the holiday is until we see it in the game. This created multiple instances of ‘The Beach Day is tomorrow!’ ‘The Christmas is tomorrow!’ ...etc.”³⁵

Video game translators have to be able to recognize these kinds of codes and understand their function. Bernal-Merino writes: “It is not impossible for the untrained eye to understand programming languages, but it is certainly very different from reading a novel, a screenplay or a set of subtitles.”³⁶ If the translator knows what the code is used for, then an educated guess can be made about how to translate around it. For instance, the translator quoted above was able to understand that the code stood in for some sort of holiday, but if he or she had guessed that the game used real holidays, such as Christmas,

³³ Bernal-Merino, *Translation and Localisation in Video Games*, 145.

³⁴ Tarquini, “Translating the Onscreen Text,” 160.

³⁵ Schreier, “Getting JRPGs Out.”

³⁶ Bernal-Merino, *Translation and Localisation in Video Games*, 143-144.

then it would have been obvious to leave out the ‘The’ at the beginning, saving editing time. This kind of educated guessing is known as risk management.³⁷ Scholars Minako

O’Hagan and Carmen Mangiron comment on this process saying:

“Blind localization requires translators to assess the risks associated with the different possible translations and to manage them accordingly... Under these circumstances translators have to rely on their own intuition drawing on their game literacy and general understanding of game culture; they must make an educated guess of what the context could be and provide the most flexible translation which is likely to work in different contexts.”³⁸

However, grammatical issues may still arise even if the translator knows exactly what the code refers to. It may be impossible to make a standardized sentence that agrees with every possible word a variable might stand for. Bernal-Merino writes:

“In games, variables may be used when dealing with substantives which, when they function as the subject of the sentence, influence the conjugation of the verb as well as any other words that need to agree with them. If the game code does not take into account the grammar of the languages covered by the project, many mistakes will occur.”³⁹

Programming codes are not easily able to deal with the complexities of natural languages, and programmers have a hard enough time trying “to take into account the various syntactical and morphological rules of their mother tongue, let alone those of the many different languages into which the game will be translated.”⁴⁰ This remains one of the more prominent challenges of video game translation.

Translators also have to be familiar with programming code so that they do not accidentally change any of it during translating, causing new glitches or bugs to appear in the game. This means translators are responsible for the functionality of the game as well

³⁷ Mangiron and O’Hagan, *Game Localization*, 119.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Bernal-Merino, *Translation and Localisation in Video Games*, 147.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

as its translation. Continuing with the previous example, if the translator had translated the Japanese word inside the code to “Calendar,” then an error would have been produced in the game, possibly causing it to crash. Extreme care has to be taken in this regard, because errors can occur if even a single space is changed. Translators also have to avoid using certain fonts, characters or types of punctuation so as not to cause problems. For example, plain quotes (" ") are preferred over smart quotes (“ ”), since smart quotes may affect the game code.⁴¹ This is a primary concern for game translators, since it directly affects the functionality of the game. No matter how good a translation is, it will not make a difference if the game is rendered unplayable.

Technology also restricts translation in that the user interface only allows a certain amount of space for words. Tarquini writes:

“In practical terms, the main space restriction is an Excel cell in the translation environment, and the corresponding hypothetical margins of the containing dialog box, menu or screen in the end-user display. Quite often then, the translator is required to adhere to more binding constraints, such as the maximum number of lines per cell and the maximum number of characters per line.”⁴²

In this way, game translation is similar to software translation, since both suffer from such limitations, with the goal of making the interface as understandable and user-friendly as possible.

Translators have to accurately convey each term so that the user can easily and successfully navigate the game or program, but they also have to do so succinctly so that the translation fits within the space allotted. Tarquini continues: “It follows that a major translation priority throughout the [onscreen text] is condensation, resulting in ellipses,

⁴¹ Tarquini, “Translating Onscreen Text Blindfolded,” 160.

⁴² Ibid., 159.

abbreviations and reductions.”⁴³ Meeting both of these requirements calls for a bit of creativity on the part of the translator. Translating from Japanese makes this process especially tricky, since Chinese characters can be used to describe complex concepts in a smaller amount of space than can be achieved in English. One translator writes:

“In Japanese, each character is enough for a pretty lengthy description of an item – an example being, an item may use three characters that literally mean ‘Dragon Claw Thunder,’ and in English you only have 12 letters to convey that same idea. Sometimes it doesn’t really work out, and in [games like the *Etrian* series] you have to do that with hundreds and hundreds of different items. It’s difficult.”⁴⁴

The amount of space given for each section of text may also change within the same game, as one game translator writes:

“Character limits changed with every menu in *Rune Factory 4* ... and lots of different status names had to be cut down dramatically to keep within the space while still retaining some of their original meaning. This was one of the most difficult limitations to work with, and took several builds to adjust properly.”⁴⁵

As with context errors, the translator will not know if a line violates the given space restrictions until the game reaches the testing period, when all such errors must then be fixed. As the previous quote suggests, it may even take multiple attempts before the text is able to fit properly.

At times, however, the translator may be confronted with an excess amount of space, requiring some additional text to fill it up and make it look like a polished translation. Allowing for this may require some slight modification to the programming code, but it results in a more professional looking product. One game translator says:

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Alexa Ray Corriea, “Blood, sweat and kanji: the hurdles and rewards of localizing niche Japanese games,” (includes an interview with Mike Meeker) *Polygon*, August 3, 2013, accessed February 20, 2015, <http://www.polygon.com/2013/8/3/4560250/blood-sweat-and-kanji-the-hurdles-and-rewards-of-localizing-niche>

⁴⁵ Schreier, “Getting JRPGs Out.”

“I also pushed for text to be extended as well. Sometimes they just weren’t using the space they should have, so I went through every line of item descriptor text and changed them to use the whole box instead of part of the box. Not only did the final result look better, but it allowed for more flavor text every once in a while, too.”⁴⁶

The way the text is displayed is important to make sure the final product looks professional and aesthetically pleasing, so the formatting and orthotypography have to be consistent, and attention must also be paid to fonts and font sizes. If different fonts are used, they should complement each other, and the style of font may be chosen depending on the setting and tone of the game. As demonstrated above, an effort should also be made to verify that the text is formatted such that it uses all of the provided space.

1.3 Non-textual and Extra-textual Elements

This attention to formatting shows that besides the textual language itself, many other things may be changed during the video game translation process. Visuals, sound effects, music, and even gameplay (as was previously discussed) may be altered to be more appropriate for new international audiences. As one translator says, “There are many titles where we change graphics, animations and sounds to better suite English.”⁴⁷ Video game translators may be involved in making these adjustments themselves, or may have to simply advise the developers on what revisions should be made, depending on their role and the company. Most of these modifications end up being a form of censorship as translators try to conform to each country’s sensitivities and video game rating boards, but some changes are made for purely aesthetic or business reasons. Translators must also deal with elements that are outside the game itself, such as

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Honeywood, “Q&A - Square Enix's Richard Honeywood,” *Edge*.

instruction manuals that are packaged with the game, the game's box art, and the game's logo. All of these may be altered for new audiences in order to better appeal to them and make more profits. There is no limit to the things which may be adjusted during video game translation; as one scholar remarks: "...images, animations, and overall design aesthetics, game mechanics and interface, narrative, even button mapping might be modified to accommodate the perceived differences between regional markets."⁴⁸

As previously mentioned, censorship is one of the main reasons these types of aspects are changed. For example, *Bravely Default*, a game which came out in America in 2014, featured less revealing costumes for the 3D models of some of its female characters in the Western release.⁴⁹ Character gestures may also be modified in order to avoid offending foreign audiences. One translator says:

"You should have seen some of the things we had them change. For example, the blitzball poses and religious gestures from [*Final Fantasy X*] originally had characters putting their fist up over their other arm as if giving someone 'the finger'! We had to request retakes at motion capture studios. Fullmetal Alchemist also had the main character counting to two on his fingers, but the way he held his fingers up looked very much like an 'up yours' (reversed V-sign) in British culture. But we changed it at the storyboard stage well before it was animated."⁵⁰

Graphics may be revised to remove cultural references that would not make sense to a foreign audience. The same translator gives another account:

"Another example could be *Chocobo Racing*, where we replaced the graphics of Momotaro & Kiji (Japanese folk heroes of peach-boy and his faithful bird) with Hansel & Gretel in one scene. As the game was for children, it would make no sense to keep in a cultural reference to something kids would never know. You'd lose the joke and maybe the audience."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Rebecca Carlson and Jonathan Corliss, "Imagined Commodities: Video Game Localization and Mythologies of Cultural Difference," *Games and Culture* 6, no.1 (2011): 64.

⁴⁹ Luke Karmali, "Bravely Default Censored for Western Release," *IGN*, January 3, 2014, accessed January 29, 2015, <http://www.ign.com/articles/2014/01/03/bravely-default-censored-for-western-release>

⁵⁰ Richard Honeywood, interview by Daniel Orner, *Final Fantasy Compendium*, accessed January 29, 2015, <http://www.ffcompendium.com/h/interview.shtml>

⁵¹ Honeywood, "Q&A - Square Enix's Richard Honeywood," *Edge*.

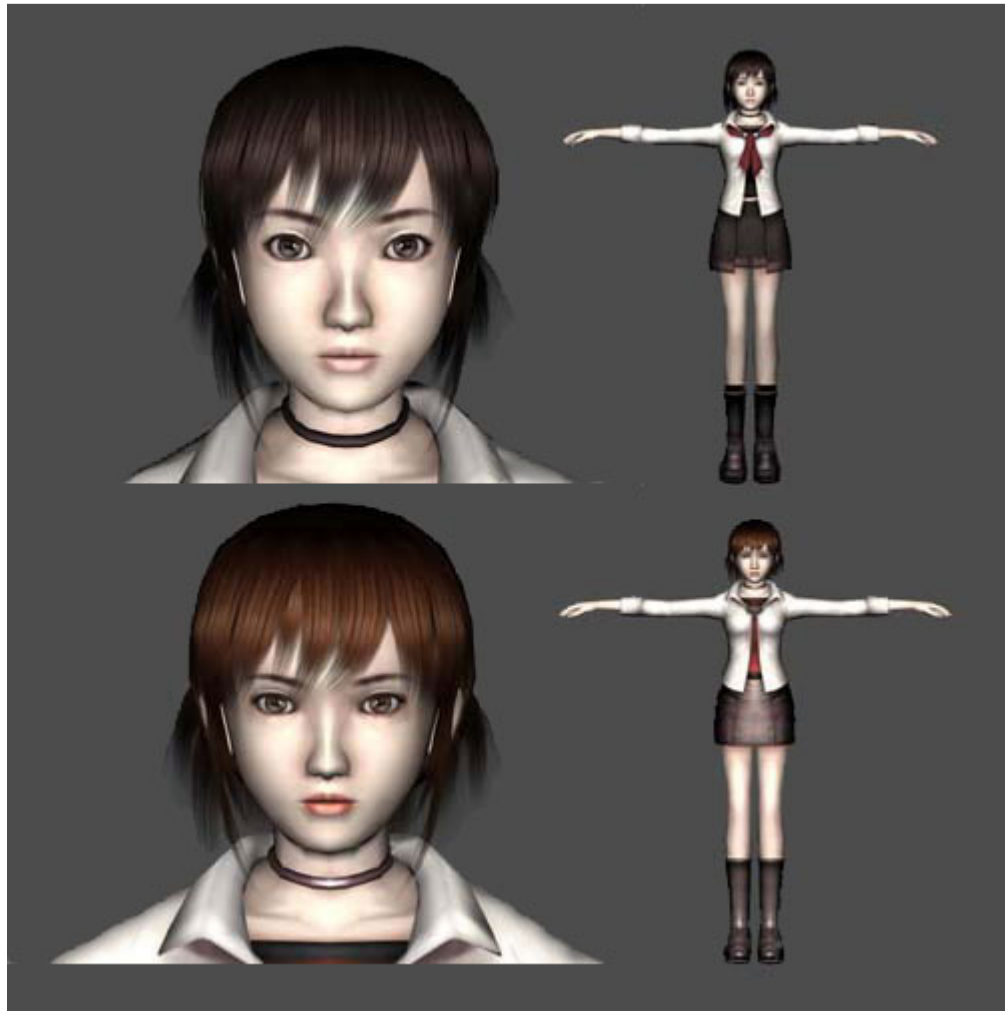


Figure 2: *Fatal Frame* protagonist – Top: Japanese version; Bottom: American version

Source: <http://www.fti.uab.cat/tradumatica/revista/num5/articles/06/06.pdf>

In other cases, entire character designs may be remodeled to attract more foreign consumers. In one game called *Fatal Frame*, the main character, who was a young high school girl in the Japanese version, was turned into a mature young adult for its international debut (Figure 2). Her face and hair color were altered to make her appear more Western, and her clothing was changed from a Japanese high school uniform to business attire. This was done because it is thought that Western gamers prefer mature

protagonists, while Japanese gamers favor younger-looking characters.⁵² Even more recently in 2014, the creators of the game *Azure Striker Gunvolt*, were considering redesigning the main character for the game's American release, editing out his ponytail and cropped shirt, although it was later decided that the ponytail at least would be kept.⁵³

In a more extreme case, one company decided to split its game up into two separate versions known as *Nier Replicant* and *Nier Gestalt*, each featuring a different version of the main character. In *Nier Replicant*, which was released only in Japan, the main character is a young boy on a quest to save his sister; whereas in *Nier Gestalt*, which was released in the rest of the world, the main character is an older and bigger man on a quest to save his daughter. The two games are essentially the same, except for this one difference between the main characters. Just like *Fatal Frame*, this change was made because it is thought that Japanese gamers prefer younger characters while Western gamers prefer mature ones.⁵⁴

Modifications may also be made to the game's sound effects or music. Once again, these changes usually appear in the form of censorship. In one game called *EarthBound*, the American release altered a sound effect that previously suggested a parent was beating his child off-screen, to a sound effect that made it seem like the parent was only yelling at the child.⁵⁵ Other games have had to edit out chanting from the Qu'ran from

⁵² Francesca Di Marco, "Cultural Localization: Orientation and Disorientation in Japanese Video Games," *Revista Tradumàtica* 5 (2007): accessed November 23rd, 2014, <http://www.fti.uab.cat/tradumatica/revista/num5/articles/06/06.pdf>

⁵³ Kyle Hilliard, "Azure Striker Gunvolt Character Design Changes For West, Changes Back," *Game Informer*, April 16, 2014, accessed January 29, 2015, <http://www.gameinformer.com/b/news/archive/2014/04/16/azure-striker-gunvolt-character-design-changes-for-west-changes-back.aspx>

⁵⁴ "Q&A: Square Enix's Nier Combines Fighting, Farming," by John Mix Meyer, *Wired*, March 3, 2010, accessed January 29, 2015, <http://www.wired.com/2010/03/nier-interview/>

⁵⁵ Clyde Mandelin, "Localization Comparisons: Earthbound/Mother 2," *Legends of Localization*, accessed November 23rd, 2014, <http://legendsoflocalization.com/earthbound/onett/#abusive-parents>

their music files to avoid upsetting Muslims. Failure to pay attention to these kinds of details can be disastrous for a game. The developers of *Kakuto Chojin* discovered too late that parts of the soundtrack contained chanting from the Qu'ran, but decided to sell it in the United States anyway because they could no longer change that part of the game. However, there was so much uproar about it that they had to recall the game and discontinue it.⁵⁶

Besides any possible sound changes that have to be made, the majority of blockbuster games today feature voice acting, so that game translators have to decide whether to record new voices in the target language or just offer subtitles. While this change may seem like it has to do with the text of the game, voice acting deals more with translating oral language than it does textual language, something which is also understudied within translation studies.⁵⁷ As stated before when discussing “playability,” there is a difference between spoken and written words that is recognized by theater translators. Even beautiful prose may sound awkward when read aloud, or with the wrong kind of feeling. Therefore, translators not only have to pay attention to the way they translate spoken text, but they also have to find talented voice actors that can bring the script to life. Because many games feature some parts that are voice acted and others that are not, video game translators also have to provide voice actors with the context of their lines and details about the personality of the character to ensure the lines are said with the right feeling. The decision to add target language voices is not a trivial one. One translator talks about all of the work involved:

⁵⁶ Heather Chandler and Stephanie Deming, eds., *The Game Localization Handbook* 2nd edition (Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Learning, 2012), 19.

⁵⁷ Michael Cronin, “The Empire Talks Back: Orality, Heteronomy, and the Cultural Turn in Interpretation Studies,” in *Translation and Power*, ed. Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 46.

“During the recording preparation, we compose detailed descriptions of the characters, including their personalities, relationships, background stories and any important information beforehand. We also go through the entire voice script and add direction notes to every single line, so when a [voice actor] sees a line, he/she can quickly get an idea of what kind of emotions and inflections to put into their read. ...During the sessions, alongside an experienced voice director, we help the [voice actors] understand the context, and in order to do this effectively and efficiently, we have to know exactly how each line should be read and be prepared to give feedback quickly. Preparing for a recording project is a lot of work, but we take it very seriously and never take shortcuts.”⁵⁸

Putting this much effort in helps guarantee that games are not plagued by stilted dialogue, which can easily break immersion and ruin an otherwise incredible game.

Even if the translators decide to keep the original voice actors and only add subtitles, the very existence of those voices in the game can change the way a translator approaches translation. For example, the recently released *Tales of Hearts R* decided to retain the original Japanese voices, but also implemented a very domesticating translation strategy that changed some character names and rewrote lines to include English idioms. If there had been no voice acting, or if they had decided to hire English voice actors, this approach would have been fine, but when juxtaposed with the Japanese voice acting, the changes became very obvious to fans. Even for those who do not understand Japanese, it can be disorienting when they hear a character call out someone’s name, and then read a subtitle that presents a completely different sounding name. Similarly, if they hear a character saying one word, but the text translation presents an entire sentence, the liberties taken during translation become very pronounced. When dealing with foreign languages that the target audience is more likely to understand or recognize, this problem is only compounded. When preserving the original voices then, it may be advisable for

⁵⁸ Monica Marume, et al., “10 Questions with Danganronpa 2: Goodbye Despair’s Killer Localization Team,” by Bob Mackey, *USGamer.net*, October 16, 2014, accessed March 19, 2015, <http://www.usgamer.net/articles/10-questions-with-danganronpa-2-goodbye-despairs-killer-localization-team>

translators to cut back on some domesticating strategies that would otherwise be acceptable.

Materials outside the game itself need to be considered as well, such as the box art, logo, and instruction manual. The translation of these types of materials could be likened to the translation of advertisements, another under-researched area in translation studies, because they are generally aspects that consumers encounter before buying and experiencing the game (with the exception of the instruction manual), and so their main purpose is to attract more customers. For instance, Kirby, a Nintendo character who is essentially a pink ball with eyes, feet, and stubby arms, always appears cute on Japanese box art, but gets additional angry eyebrows on American box art. The developers explain:

“For the Japanese versions we are, at [Kirby developer] HAL, involved in everything throughout development, including the package design. The most powerful image of Kirby is that cute image, we think that’s the one that appeals to the widest audience. ... While it does start cute, we know there is a serious side to Kirby as well. What we have heard is that strong, tough Kirby that’s really battling hard is a more appealing sign of Kirby [in North America], so that’s what we feature in the US.”⁵⁹

Game box art may be completely different depending on the country, or have more subtle edits. The art for *Gravity Rush* is basically the same in both America and Japan, although Japan’s version is zoomed out to let the viewer see more of the picture (Figure 3). *Rage* also looks exactly the same in both countries, but the American version includes the blurb “from the creators of Doom and Quake” to attempt to draw in players who liked those games.⁶⁰ While these changes may or may not be made by translators,

⁵⁹ Martin Gaston, “Why is Kirby always angry in the US? Nintendo explains,” (includes an interview with Shinya Kumazaki), *GameSpot*, April 28, 2014, accessed January 29, 2015, <http://www.gamespot.com/articles/why-is-kirby-always-angry-in-the-us-nintendo-explains/1100-6419263/>

⁶⁰ Lucas M. Thomas, “How Game Art Changes Around the World,” *IGN*, March 13, 2012, accessed January 29, 2015, <http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/03/13/how-game-art-changes-around-the-world?page=1>

translators do need to be able to advise companies on the preferences of foreign countries, especially to avoid images that might be offensive or inappropriate in the foreign country for the target audience. This holds true for logos as well. For example, the Japanese logo for *Dead Island* featured a man hanging from a tree in place of the “I” in Island, whereas that image was deemed inappropriate in America and changed to a zombie standing by a tree.⁶¹



Figure 3: *Gravity Rush* box art changes

Source: <http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/03/13/how-game-art-changes-around-the-world?page=3>

The instruction manual that is usually included with the game is important to how players understand the gameplay and narrative presented in the game. In earlier games, sometimes the entire story was included solely in the instruction manual, because it could not be fit within the game itself. Instruction manuals could also provide extra background information on the setting or characters, to help players better understand the story. The

⁶¹ Thomas, “How Game Art Changes.”

instruction manual is mainly responsible for including details on how to play the game, making it an invaluable resource for players who are struggling to complete the game. To aid in this goal, translated manuals may add, subtract, or rearrange the information included in the instruction manual, especially when the target culture is unfamiliar with a specific genre of games.

1.4 Audience Involvement

As is clear from all the visual and other changes that translated games may incorporate, fans have a major impact on the way video games are made and translated. This is not to say other media do not consider their audience at all; the audience is always an important part of any kind of creative work. However, it seems that video game fans tend to be much more vocal about the games they love, and developers may decide to change certain features of a game if they think the fans' reaction to it will be bad. With the internet, developers and translators can easily be in contact with fans and take their concerns into consideration, whether this is by email, Facebook, forums, or blogs. Translators must pay attention to fan desires when translating certain names or terminology, or risk protest from fans and thus potentially lower profits. Fans may also be able to influence which games get translated in the first place, and when games do not get translated, they take matters into their own hands and create fan translations that they post on the internet. Recently companies are beginning to take more notice of such projects, and some have even used them as stepping stones to help initiate official translations.

Game companies do not always cater to their fans' every whim, as the head of Nintendo of America says: "We certainly look at it, and we're certainly aware of it, but it

doesn't necessarily affect what we do."⁶² However, it is clear that they consider their fans during the development process and make decisions based on how fans will react. After all, that is why so many adjustments are made to the visuals, sounds, and box art during translation, so as to make fans like the product more. Modern video games can cost a lot of money to create, and if developers fail to address fan concerns then they could easily end up losing money when the game does not sell well.

Like developers, translators also pay attention to fan reactions and keep in contact with them. Even in the early days of the game industry, translators would receive all sorts of feedback from fans via mail or even phone calls. One translator recalled:

"The fans have been the most unexpected part. I really appreciated the supportive responses. I used to receive all kinds of mail, illustrations, scripts, photos and random stuff. ...I even unlisted my phone because folks started calling me, wondering about who married whom."⁶³

Translators may decide to change or not change parts of their translation depending on feedback from fans. One translator says: "Sometimes you can't make certain changes because the fans have expectations that you need to consider."⁶⁴ While another translator talks about how this impacted the translation of the game *La Pucelle*:

"There were a couple of scenes where there were these cross-like structures, and the whole thing was the most incredible temptress in a teapot, in that we were accused of censoring it. We even ran the screenshots side-by-side. But some random fan got hold of it and it turned into a firestorm. That to me served as a reminder of how sensitive the hardcore market is. I read a lot of the postings, and people really spent time, and there'd be one guy with some Japanese trying to rate

⁶² Reggie Fils-Aime, "Nintendo's Reggie Talks Wii U, Western Development and Operation Rainfall," by Robert Ward, *Siliconera*, December 4, 2014, accessed January 8, 2015, <http://www.siliconera.com/2013/12/04/nintendos-reggie-talks-wii-u-western-development-operation-rainfall/>

⁶³ John Szczepaniak, "Localization: Confessions by Industry Legends," (includes an interview with Ted Woolsey and Victor Ireland) *Hardcore Gaming 101*, August 31, 2009, accessed March 18, 2015, <http://www.hardcoregaming101.net/localization/localization1.htm>

⁶⁴ Szczepaniak, "Confessions by Industry Legends."

our translation. It was amusing and gratifying. Mostly gratifying, because we spent a ton of time on that.”⁶⁵

A game translation company known as “XSeed” recently took over the translation of the popular farming game series previously known as *Harvest Moon*, and decided against changing certain terms and names after fans reacted badly. They write on their blog:

“We’ve also heard your requests and listened, making editorial changes such as nixing ‘cents’ as the currency and returning to the game-standard ‘G’, as well as returning a few of the names we’d changed back to their originals. ...In charting a new future for the [*Harvest Moon*] series as *Story of Seasons*, we know we need to live up to fans’ expectations, but we’re glad to have you fans on board. We want this game to do right by you, and if there’s something we can do to make the game more enjoyable for you (within our realm of control anyway), just let us know.”⁶⁶

Fans may even directly influence which games are translated in the first place. If a company is unsure whether to bother translating a game, fan outcry can help sway their decision, convincing them that the game does in fact have an audience. The fan movement known as “Operation Rainfall” is a clear example. In this case fans banded together to convince Nintendo to release three Japanese role-playing games in the United States by sending them letters, posting en masse on Nintendo’s Facebook page, and by preordering a placeholder version of one of the games that Amazon had initially created when it was first announced in Japan. The game became the “#1 Bestseller” in the entire video games category on Amazon within hours.⁶⁷ And sure enough, over the next two years, all three games were eventually brought to America.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Nick Colucci, “Story of Seasons – Localization Blog #1, Go!,” *XSeed Games Tumblr* (blog), October 2, 2014, accessed February 5, 2015, <http://xseedgames.tumblr.com/post/99008986430/story-of-seasons-localization-blog-1-go>

⁶⁷ Lucas M. Thomas, “United Nintendo Fans Push ‘Monado’ to Amazon’s #1 Bestseller,” *IGN*, June 26, 2011, accessed February 5, 2015, <http://www.ign.com/articles/2011/06/26/united-nintendo-fans-push-monado-to-amazons-1-best-seller>

Of course, not all such fan movements are successful. Companies have to think about the financial side of things first and foremost so that the company does not end up losing money, as the head of Nintendo of America says: “I’m paid to make sure that we’re driving the business forward – so we’re aware of what’s happening, but in the end we’ve got to do what’s best for the company. The thing we know [about petitions] is that 100,000 signatures doesn’t mean 100,000 sales.”⁶⁸ If Operation Rainfall had not been able to pledge money by preordering on Amazon, and if the games had done poorly in Europe before they were announced for America, they might never have made it to America at all.

Still, there is another option available to fans whose favorite games never receive official translations; if they can get enough talented people together, fans can create their own translations for games and release them on the internet for fellow fans to enjoy. However, this practice can be problematic because it could reduce the game’s chances of ever receiving an official translation. Even if a company has no current plans to translate a certain game, should they decide later in the future that they want to go ahead and take that risk, the existence of a fan translation could hurt sales and thus prevent an official translation from happening. One professional translator says: “You don’t want those sales cannibalized. A lot of guys who go on to fan sub the game would absolutely buy the game again anyway if they have the chance to support it officially. But at the same time, not everyone would necessarily do that.”⁶⁹ Another translator says:

⁶⁸ Fils-Aime, “Nintendo’s Reggie Talks Operation Rainfall,” by Ward.

⁶⁹ Alexa Ray Corriea, “A peek into the underground world of fan-translated games,” (includes an interview with Mark MacDonald) *Polygon*, May 14, 2014, accessed December 9, 2014, <http://www.polygon.com/2014/5/14/5335288/fan-translations-japanese-western-localization-translation-games>

“Other fan sites do unofficial translations – whether inside [Read Only Memory, a file containing the binary data of a game]⁷⁰ or just as text – but don’t realize that their work may be seen as ‘weakening our brand’ or ‘ruining our characters.’ Besides pirating taking away sales of official translations (thus causing our localization efforts to not pay off), if their unofficial translations are weak, people may conclude that the original games were rubbish, affecting sales of the final game. So, best intentions aside, the distribution of fan translations cannot be viewed lightly.”⁷¹

There are still positive sides to fan translation, however. Recently, some companies have even entered into negotiations with fan translators to use their work to help create an official translation. Game translation company XSeed Games bought a fan translation of the game *Ys: Oath in Felghana* and used it as a base for their official translation. One of their localization specialists says:

“With a rather well-done translation of the game already in existence, it seemed almost silly to retread ground by translating it again. Instead, we got a hold of the translator who worked on the fan patch for the PC version, and bought the script from him. After all, we’ve dealt with third-party freelance translators in the past. ...Of course, we’re not about to buy someone else’s translation, dump it in the game as-is, and call it a day. Instead, we used the time that otherwise would’ve gone to translation and editing for just editing. We polished it to a real shine, making sure every line sounds natural and appropriately dramatic.”⁷²

Other companies have followed in their footsteps. Japanese developer Minori initially sent a cease-and-desist letter to a fan translation project that was handling one of their games, but later licensed their translation for an official release.⁷³ The publishing company JAST USA has also used fan translations to create official releases of several

⁷⁰ Pablo Muñoz Sánchez, “Video Game Localisation for Fans by Fans: The Case of Romhacking,” *The Journal of Internationalisation and Localisation* 1 (2009): 169, accessed March 13, 2015, http://raptor1.bizlab.mtsu.edu/S-Drive/DMORRELL/Mgmt%204990/Crowdsourcing/JIAL_2009_1_2009_APA.pdf

⁷¹ Honeywood, interview by Daniel Orner, *Final Fantasy Compendium*.

⁷² Tom Lipschultz, “Ys: Oath in Felghana Q&A with XSEED Games Localization Specialist Tom Lipschultz,” by John McCarroll, *RPGFan*, October 12, 2010, accessed December 9, 2014, http://www.rpgfan.com/features/Ys_Oath_in_Felghana_QA/index.html

⁷³ Corriea, “A peek.”

visual novel games.⁷⁴ This practice can greatly reduce the amount of work that official translators have to deal with, while also letting unprofessional translators form business relationships that could help them learn more about the process of video game translation and eventually get a job as a professional translator.

1.5 Business Practices

Buying fan translations is only one of the new kinds of translation business practices that can be found within the video game industry. Unlike the standard conception of translation which matches one translator with one work, in video game translation teams of translators are assigned to the same project, which is completely decided by the game company, and lately translators have been able to collaborate heavily with the creators of the original game. As an entertainment product, the *skopos* or aim of video game translation is to retain the “look and feel of the original” while providing a fun experience.⁷⁵ This makes game translation more functionally oriented than the translation of novels or poems, so that video game translators are allowed a lot of freedom in editing or adding to a script in order to create an entertaining product. As opposed to translation scholar Venuti’s idea of fluency,⁷⁶ video game translations may use archaic or colloquial language, including puns, pop culture references, or even accents that did not exist in the original to heighten the game’s entertainment value. Because game companies are focused on making a profit, budget and time constraints also heavily affect game translation.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Mangiron and O’Hagan, “Unleashing Imagination with ‘Restricted’ Translation.”

⁷⁶ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 4-5.

This is part of the reason why multiple translators are assigned to a single game. Game scripts can reach extremely large levels, so that it would be impossible for a single translator to finish translating a game within the time limit given by the company. One game reporter writes: “The text in *Animal Crossing: A New Leaf*, for example, is 2.4 million Japanese characters, Nintendo says. That’s over a million English words. For one game.”⁷⁷ And that is from a game that is not story-driven; other games can easily feature stories that require more than a hundred hours of play to complete.

Multiple translators may lighten the work load, but this approach also produces new problems. Consistency can easily be compromised if the translators do not communicate well with each other. Game world terminology needs to be spelled the same, character personalities need to match, and formatting and punctuation are important as well. In an effort to make sure all their translators are on the same page, some companies such as Square Enix have created glossaries containing all of these kinds of information. These glossaries also help translators keep track of terms and concepts that have been used in previous games, if the game is part of a series. Because of this need for consistency, the translators may have to compromise on what kind of style or approach to use, so that they are not free to pursue the kind of translation they may desire, limiting creativity.

On the other hand, translators could serve as sources of inspiration for each other, resulting in a more artistic product. With group translation, translators can discuss their ideas with each other to discover more imaginative solutions or make sure their translation is acceptable. One translator writes:

⁷⁷ Schreier, “Getting JRPGs Out.”

“What I find helps the most is a good co-translator or editor, and usually both. Ideally, you want to create a dynamic where one person gets to play fast-and-loose with the text, pushing it to the borderline and frequently beyond. On *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*, I would often write several versions of each joke, each version increasingly bizarre, and Steve Anderson, the editor, would choose where to draw the line, or sometimes grab two jokes and weave them together, in addition to the usual tweaking an editor performs.”⁷⁸

Having multiple opinions and finding compromises between them can help formulate a more polished translation that appeals to wider audiences, generating more profits.

Collaboration with the creators of the game helps translators know what was originally intended by them, also forming a more polished translation. This is a significant concept within translation studies, where scholars and translators have even argued that the translator needs to identify with or become the author in order to properly translate.⁷⁹ Being able to be in such close proximity with the creators of the game then is a great opportunity for translators. By talking with the creators, ambiguities and context issues can be resolved, and translators can request that tweaks be made to the game in order to make it easier to translate, such as reprogramming space limitations. This way, game developers are able to better understand the process of translation and design games that allow for easier translation in the first place, instead of having to go back and make changes to accommodate other languages.

However, if the creators are too heavily involved in the translation process and do not trust their translators or understand the translation process, problems can arise, as one translator says:

“What people probably don’t realize is that, although we gained a lot more insight into the original by working closer with the dev teams, there was a flip side. The more involved they are in the translation approval, the more they would push their

⁷⁸ Alt, “An Interview with Matthew Alt et al.,” by Jayemanne, 140.

⁷⁹ Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility*, 7-8.

will on a language they don't fully understand. So we now had to make new compromises, like when you take localized names back to the original creator and he would veto ideas you'd want to put in, taking you back to the drawing board over and over."⁸⁰

Game creators may insist on a particular translation even if it is not culturally appropriate, and may not be very receptive to any changes the translator proposes. This can stand in the way of the translator's creativity and lead to a subpar translation. It may take a while, but once trust has been established between the translators and the game developers, the results can be very beneficial. One translator recounts how the game creator rejected their magic spell name changes many times before coming to an agreement:

"Some new [development] teams are more insistent that we don't make changes, but usually after we do a title with them and they have read the feedback and seen how high our localisation quality is, they become more willing to go above and beyond the call of duty on their titles. Take Horii-san in the North American version of *Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King* for instance. All naming choices and changes had to be painstakingly approved by him. Gradually we built up trust with each other, and by the end, not only had he allowed us to make a lot of naming changes to make the game more natural and funnier in English, but he worked with us to practically reinvent the game with voiceovers, orchestral sound, new menu systems and added animations and graphics that were not in the original Japanese release. ...I believe our latest DQ is one of our greatest localization masterpieces ever, and shows what happens when you work closely with the original creators."⁸¹

This example also shows what an additive process video game translation can be.

Whereas the original Japanese *Dragon Quest VIII* was completely text based with synthetic music, the English release added voice acting, menu images, and live orchestral recordings performed by the Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra. Other games have added completely new content when released in other countries. For example, the

⁸⁰ Richard Honeywood, "GameSpite Quarterly Interview: Richard Honeywood on The Rise of Square Localization," by Wesley Fenlon, *Wesley Fenlon* (blog), April 15, 2012, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.wesleyfenlon.com/2012/04/15/gamespite-quarterly-interview-richard-honeywood-on-the-rise-of-square-localization/#more-967>

⁸¹ Honeywood, "Q&A - Square Enix's Richard Honeywood," *Edge*.

American release of *Final Fantasy VII* included some extended cutscenes and additional bosses; *Kingdom Hearts* also added bonus boss fights in its American release. Translated games also tend to have less bugs and glitches than the original, since there is more time for these to be fixed after the original release. Of course, this assumes that the translators have not accidentally generated new bugs by changing the programming code, as discussed previously. The developers may even decide to change bits of the story in the international release in order to make it clearer. One translator writes:

“...sometimes the English versions are better than the Japanese versions, as we can remove bugs that were found after the mastering of the Japanese (such as those reported by Japanese players). Also, some staff members like to add or change things for the foreign versions. In *Chrono Cross*, for example, the scriptwriter Kato-san agreed that some of his explanations of background events and people’s connections weren’t very clear, so we added extra text for the English version. ...So, Kato-san and I rewrote parts for the North American version.”⁸²

Besides added content and other various improvements made to translated games, game translators also add jokes, cultural references and accents to make up for anything that might have been “lost” in translation. As one translator says in an interview, the goal is to be creative, making the translation fun to read, because after all, if the translator does not enjoy his or her translation, then the audience will not enjoy reading it.⁸³ This is especially the case with humor, which may not translate very easily, causing translators to add jokes elsewhere to make up for the lost humor. One translator writes:

“...what makes something funny in one culture does not always translate to others. Whenever possible we try to adapt humor to suit the target language, but in some cases, such as when we are not given the creative license to deviate from the source text, the humor is inevitably lost. On the other hand, we are often able to

⁸² Honeywood, interview by Daniel Orner, *Final Fantasy Compendium*.

⁸³ Mark MacDonald, “CANDY has a CRUSH on SAGAt,” (includes an interview with Alexander O. Smith), *8-4 Play*, podcast audio, January 24, 2014, accessed March 17, 2015, <http://8-4.jp/blog/?p=1876>

add context-appropriate humor to dialog that was not necessarily intended to be funny in the original.”⁸⁴

However, it may no longer be possible to make translated games different from their originals by adding content or other such things. As the video game industry has grown, there has been a stronger push to release titles concurrently worldwide in a process known as simultaneous shipment in order to increase profits, since even the best of games tend to have short shelf lives.⁸⁵ Due to this new practice of simultaneous shipment, developers no longer have time to update international releases of games because they come out on the same day, or shortly after, their release in the developer’s home country.

Because the release times are so close together, the translators have to work very closely with the developers, translating the game while it is still being created.

Translators and developers become co-authors, influencing and helping each other to produce the best possible product in each language. One translator talks about his work on *Final Fantasy XIII*:

“...we were asked to help with the naming of the roles—Medic, Synergist, Ravager, and so on. We were intending to use different names in Japan and the US/EU from the start, and we (the English translators) brainstormed and proposed both sets. For the Japanese version, they needed English words that [met certain criteria], so we worked with the writers to come up with a set of consistent-sounding terms that met those criteria. ... Retroactive integration of the English translation into the Japanese version happens on projects quite often as well. For example, we were asked to come up with a translation for the names of the transporters in the Nautilus theme park. The Japanese name at the time was not something that really worked for us, so we went with “Nautilift.” A few weeks later, that started popping up in the Japanese script. That kind of thing is always a huge compliment. It’s a collaborative process.”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Alt, “An Interview with Matthew Alt et al.,” by Jayemanne, 144.

⁸⁵ Bernal-Merino, *Translation and Localisation in Video Games*, 167.

⁸⁶ Slattery, “An Interview with Translator Tom Slattery,” by Cunningham.

While simultaneous shipment may help increase sales, it spawns new difficulties as well. Because the game is being translated before it is completely finished, translators may have little to no access to the context of what they are translating, as the visuals or other information may not even have been constructed yet. Translators end up having to translate twice the amount of text or more, as the developers rewrite or change scenes.

These problems cropped up during the translation of *Final Fantasy XIII*:

“We probably translated the entire voice script about four or five times. We would translate blindly from the text, and then see an early render and say, ‘Oh, no, that doesn’t work. Better rewrite that scene.’ Then some placeholder audio would show up and we’d realize our lines probably wouldn’t match the timing or the emotion that would be on the characters’ faces. Rewrite again, and then rinse, repeat with final audio, motion capture, and endless fine-tuning. We had scripts from the writers, videos of events, transcripts of the actual Japanese voice data, and the latest game build, but all four would be different and none of them final. Simply trying to figure out what it was that we needed to translate was headache-inducing for much of the project...”⁸⁷

Because this approach is still relatively new, game companies have yet to fully adapt to it and establish practices that would streamline the translation process. Some tools have been created, such as Square Enix’s “Moomle” which tracks changes made to the script and its matching audio, but much progress still needs to be made in this area.⁸⁸

Another thing that sets video game translation apart is the heavy restraints imposed by time and budget limitations. Other mediums may have these constraints, but they do not appear to be as restrictive as they are for video game translation. This may be because games have a shorter shelf life than other products, so that time is of the essence in order for companies to make a profit. Smaller game companies may not have enough money to devote to a quality translation, or companies may not acknowledge the

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Mangiron and O’Hagan, *Game Localization*, 146.

importance of translation and so calculate a smaller budget for it. Whatever the case may be, game translators seem to agree that time and budget are some of the hardest constraints in game translation, and most likely the main reason why so many game translations are poor. One translator says: “First off, we are always on both a budget and a schedule, so we often have to let go of ‘our baby’ while wishing we only had a little more time to perfect one part or another.”⁸⁹ While another translator says one of the main factors that decides whether a translation turns out successful or not, besides having a skilled translator, is the schedule, proclaiming: “show me a three month project that was translated in one, and I’ll show you a poor localization.”⁹⁰

1.6 Conclusion

Clearly the practice of video game translation is distinct from other types of translation in its engagement with branching storylines, contextual issues, technological difficulties, non-textual elements, an active audience, and unique business practices such as simultaneous shipment and the close relationship between translators and developers. However, video game translation was not always carried out in the way it is today. Early game translators often faced great barriers and challenges in bringing games to other countries in a time when video games were new and not well understood. The practice of video game translation and the way it is viewed by both industry insiders and outsiders has changed drastically over the years, as will be demonstrated by my case study of *Final Fantasy IV*.

⁸⁹ Honeywood, interview by Daniel Orner, *Final Fantasy Compendium*.

⁹⁰ Alexander O. Smith, “Localization Tactics: A Conversation with Alexander O. Smith,” by Jeriaska, *Square Haven*, April 27, 2007, accessed March 16, 2015, <http://squarehaven.com/news/2007/04/27/Localization-Tactics-A-Conversation-with-Alexander-O-Smith/>

CHAPTER 2

A CASE STUDY OF *FINAL FANTASY IV*

In my analysis of the translations of *Final Fantasy IV*, I will look at some of the overall differences between each translation, focusing on the certain aspects of the game that produce those changes, and the outside forces that caused each one to develop. The first section will examine the difficulty adjustments made to the first translation of the game, in terms of gameplay, narrative, visuals, and the instruction manual included with the game. The next section will concentrate on the amount of censorship that can be found in each translation, highlighting modifications made to the visuals and the text, as well as discussing Nintendo's role in censoring the first translation and the establishment of the Entertainment Software Rating Board. The next section will cover the stylistic choices made by each translator, along with the role played by nostalgia. Finally, the presentation of the story has evolved over the years, with the introduction of voice acting and 3D graphics in the more recent Nintendo DS version, and the technological developments that have been made over the years.

Table 1: *Final Fantasy IV* version summary

1991 Super Nintendo	2001 PlayStation	2005 Game Boy Advance	2008 Nintendo DS	2011 PlayStation Portable
Grammatical errors and weird English	Scenes slightly rewritten, accents added	Accents toned down, pop culture references added	Literary/archaic flavor (3D models and voice acting)	Edited version of the Game Boy Advance script
Heavy censorship, difficulty reduction	Extra swearing, no censorship	Less swearing, some censorship	Almost no swearing, only alcohol censored	Less swearing, some censorship
Spatial limitations	Spatial limitations	Almost no spatial limitations	No spatial limitations	No spatial limitations

For easy reference, I have provided a table to help familiarize readers with the differences between each translation of *Final Fantasy IV*.

1.1 Difficulty

In the early period of the video game industry, when fewer people were familiar with game mechanics, the difficulty of a game was a primary concern when releasing it in a foreign country. As such, when *Final Fantasy IV* was initially brought to America under the title *Final Fantasy II*, the gameplay was significantly altered to make the game easier. Role-playing games were still a very niche market at the time, having previously been only available on computers and attracting an older and smaller audience. However, a Japanese developer who was fond of these types of games decided to simplify the experience to appeal to a younger audience, and released the first console role-playing game in Japan, known as *Dragon Quest*.⁹¹ It was a phenomenal success, and many sequels followed, as well as other role-playing game series such as *Final Fantasy*. By the time *Final Fantasy IV* came out in Japan, gamers there were well-accustomed to role-playing games, and the developers were able to play around with the game mechanics and make it a little harder. However, role-playing games were still uncommon in America, and since Americans had only received one *Final Fantasy* game up until that point, it was determined that *Final Fantasy IV* would be too hard for them as it was, so they reduced the difficulty.

The variety of items included in the game was severely reduced in order to make the game simpler and easier to understand. In the Japanese version, there were unique items to cure the various status effects that the characters might be inflicted with during

⁹¹ Kohler, *Power Up*, 86.

battle; for example, eye drops would cure blindness, or a “maiden’s kiss” item would cure the “frog” status effect. In the American version however, these items were removed and replaced with a single item called “Heal” which would cure any status effect. While this item did exist in the Japanese version, it was much rarer and could not be purchased from the item stores within the game.

The American version also allowed players to purchase an item called “Ether” which restored a character’s magic points, enabling them to cast more magic. Although it cost a lot of in-game currency to buy this item, it was still more easily obtainable than it was in the Japanese version. The prices of items in general were also decreased when compared to the Japanese version, and some other items which acted as magic attacks when used in battle were completely removed. The names of the basic healing items in the game, previously known as “potion” and “hi-potion” in Japanese, were changed to match the names of the healing magic spells, “Cure1” and “Cure2.” The items found in treasure chests throughout the game were changed to make the game easier as well.

A special area known as the “training room,” which was full of characters that told the player how to play the game, was made available in almost every town instead of just the first one. Since a special character called “Namingway” was found in this room, he could no longer be found in various areas of each of these towns as part of a sidequest, because he could not be in two places at once within the town. Some of the characters’ special abilities that made them unique in battle were removed. For example, an old man character could use the ability “Recall” in the Japanese version, to remember and cast a random magic spell that was otherwise unavailable to him. These abilities were either deemed useless or confusing, and therefore removed to make battles simpler. A few

magic spells, such as “protect” which boosted the characters’ defense, were also removed to streamline the game. Fights against major enemies were sometimes made easier. One enemy that usually released a counterattack when hit with a fire spell no longer did in the American version.⁹²

A couple changes to the script were made, particularly in the opening sequence of the game which featured a flashback scene. In Japanese there was absolutely no dialogue during this scene, but some was added to the American version to make it clearer to children what was going on. Some characters got extended lines of dialogue that broke the fourth wall, and directly told players how to control the game and how to progress.

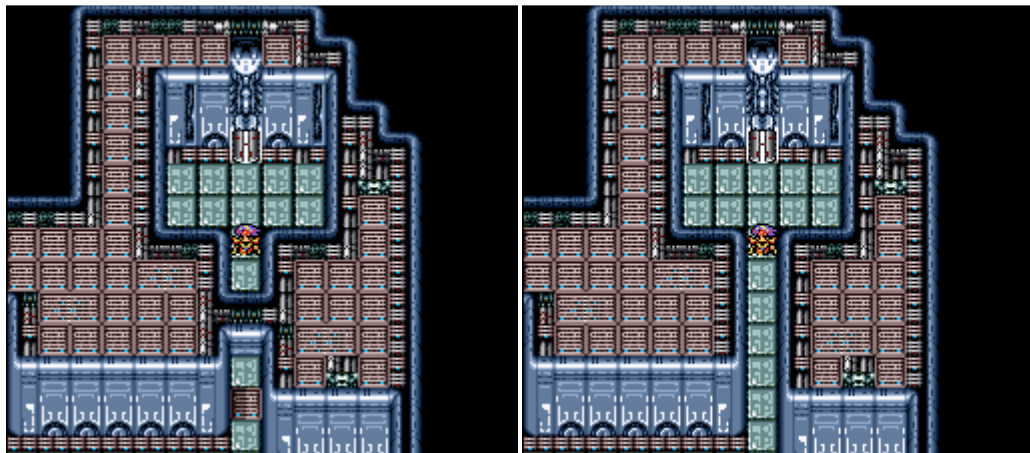


Figure 4: Floor tile changes in initial release of *Final Fantasy IV*

Source: <http://legendsoflocalization.com/final-fantasy-iv/tower-of-zot/#tower-of-reconstruction>

Some visual changes were made to make the game easier to play, showing that visuals can also determine the difficulty of a game. As mentioned previously, an area known as the “training room” was added to each town, in some cases requiring the entire layout of the town to be changed. Some floor tiles in a certain area were changed to make

⁹² Clyde Mandelin, “Localization Comparisons: Final Fantasy IV,” *Legends of Localization*, accessed March 11, 2015. <http://legendsoflocalization.com/final-fantasy-iv/mt-ordeals/#a-gassy-fiend>

it clearer where the player needed to go (Figure 4) and the appearance of the treasure boxes in that area was also completely changed in order to make them more obvious. There were also hidden passages throughout the game which would lead to special areas containing treasure. These were completely invisible in the Japanese version, but made very obvious in the American version so that players would not miss them. The visual appearance of the game's "save point" (a small area which allows the player to save his or her progress) was changed from what appeared to be a special Japanese magic circle, common in Japanese anime and games, to a very obvious circle with an "S" in the middle (Figure 5). Finally more icons were added to the beginning of item names to help separate different types of items, since the space restrictions did not allow their entire names to be written out.

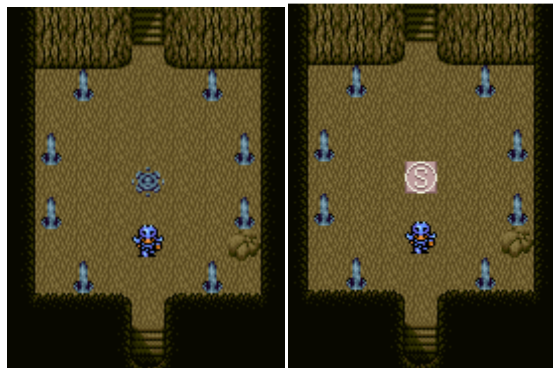


Figure 5: Save point changes in initial release of *Final Fantasy IV*

The instruction manual included with *Final Fantasy IV* was heavily edited in an effort to reduce the difficulty of the game. The English manual is much larger than the Japanese one, and features a complete walkthrough through the entire first half of the game, summarizing the story and telling players exactly what to do to defeat enemies and where to go next. Because American gamers were unfamiliar with role-playing games, this sort of walkthrough was provided to help introduce them to the game. However,

some parts of the manual had to be removed to support this addition, such as safety warnings, illustrations, a prologue and map page, a section on the game's characters, and so on.

For the sections that are included in both the American and Japanese manuals, the trend seems to be that the English version really focuses on the basics of the gameplay, while the Japanese version goes into more detail. For example, both manuals contain sections that explain the new battle system in the game, but the English version only talks about the three most basic steps (the player selects a command, the character executes the command, enemies are defeated), while the Japanese version has ten steps explaining the process and exactly how everything works. On the other hand, the English version does go into more detail about every item and magic spell in the game, even including every single weapon and piece of armor, their properties, who can equip them and how much they cost, which is not included at all in the Japanese version, opting instead for brief descriptions of just the items and magic spells accompanied by illustrations of some of the items. This is most likely because it was assumed most Japanese players would already be familiar with the standard items and magic spells used in the *Final Fantasy* series, while Americans would not be.

Besides the addition or removal of sections, the order of the information itself was changed. The English version prioritizes an explanation of how to start the game and an explanation of towns, how to progress through the game by talking to people and which objects the player can interact with. The Japanese version on the other hand does not cover how to start the game until several pages in and leaves the explanation about towns until closer to the end. In exchange, it describes the menus found in the game much

earlier as the second section of the manual, in contrast to the American version which puts it around the fourth section. This also shows how the American manual focuses on the basics, while the Japanese prefer much more detailed information.

Such a variety of changes, in terms of gameplay, visuals, and more, shows that many different aspects have to be considered when altering a game for a foreign audience. Making a game easier may sound like a simple process at first, but in reality it is much more complicated. As demonstrated, it may not be enough to simply make the enemies easier to kill; items, abilities, visuals, and even the way the story itself is told all affect the difficulty of the game. Gameplay difficulty is important to game translation because if it is not adapted it can hinder the player's experience of the game and its narrative.

Video game translators are currently expected to be able to advise developers on these kinds of modifications, and may or may not be directly involved in the actual process. During the time the first translation of *Final Fantasy IV* was taking place, however, the translators would most likely have made these adjustments completely on their own, because after a game was completed programmers often moved on immediately to start working on another game.⁹³ One translator who joined Square Enix around 1997 says: "The original idea back then was that we took all the code off of the dev teams' hands and did everything for them so they could move on to their next title,"⁹⁴ suggesting that this was also common practice during the time that *Final Fantasy IV* was first translated. Although due to the fact that so many visual and mechanical changes

⁹³ Chris Johnston, "Lost in Translation," (includes an interview with Ted Woolsey), *Player One Podcast*, podcast audio, Episode 16, February 12, 2007, accessed March 16, 2015, <http://www.playeronepodcast.com/2007/02/11/episode-16-021207-lost-in-translation/>

⁹⁴ Honeywood, "The Rise of Square Enix Localization," by Fenlon.

were made, it is possible that one of the translators actually worked as a programmer on the original game, something that was also common at the time.⁹⁵

None of these changes were retained for subsequent translations of *Final Fantasy IV*, because by the time the re-translations started being released in America ten years later, American gamers were finally accustomed to role-playing games and their mechanics. The developers even increased the difficulty of the 2008 Nintendo DS version for both the Japanese and American releases, since the game had received multiple remakes by then and it was assumed that most people would already be familiar with it. This may reflect a declining need for adjustments to a game's difficulty. Because video games are becoming more mainstream, more people are familiar with the mechanics of different game genres, so that the difficulty of a game is now less of a concern. Many games are now designed with both newcomers and experts in mind, and feature various difficulty levels built into the game itself that the player can choose from, or are able to automatically adjust the difficulty based on the player's performance. However, slight modifications may still need to be made in terms of the speed or perspective of the game (whether first-person or third-person), because some countries prefer different styles of gameplay. Translators therefore need to be aware of their target culture's preferences, as well as any changes that occur over the years in their target culture, and adjust their translation strategies accordingly.

1.2 Censorship

When *Final Fantasy IV* was first released in America in 1991, the video game industry was still being established, and like all new forms of entertainment, video games

⁹⁵ Corliss, "All Your Base are Belong to Us!"

were accused of corrupting the nation's youth. Even Nintendo's family-friendly games were under attack, as evidenced by the 1991 publication of *Video Kids: Making Sense of Nintendo* which decries the violence found in many Nintendo games.⁹⁶ In an effort to stave off controversy, Nintendo created a set of guidelines restricting the kinds of content that were allowed in games published on their system, which included: sexually suggestive material, violence, death, religious references, profanity, and political messages.⁹⁷ The first translation of *Final Fantasy IV* was no exception to these rules, and so included its fair share of censorship, showing the kind of power a publisher can have over game translation.



Figure 6: Dancing girl sprite, from left to right: Japanese sprite before removing dress, Japanese sprite after removing dress, censored American sprite

A number of visual changes were made to the game in order to comply with Nintendo's strict standards. At one point in the game, a giant blade was set to fall on a captured female character, but in the American version this was changed to a giant metal ball because it was deemed less violent. A dancing girl character that is found in the beginning of the game was also changed. In the Japanese version, she threw off her dress and danced in a bikini (Figure 6). However, this was deemed too suggestive for the American version, and her sprite was edited so that she no longer threw off her dress, and

⁹⁶ Eugene F. Provenzo, *Video Kids: Making Sense of Nintendo* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 134.

⁹⁷ J.J. McCullough, "Nintendo's Era of Censorship," accessed November 24th, 2014, <http://www.jjmccullough.com/Nintendo.php>

instead danced in a new dress designed specifically for the American version. In terms of the text, references to death were removed, as well as references to hell and Hades. All instances of the words “pray” or “praying” were changed to “wish” or “wishing,” and a spell known as “Holy” in Japanese was changed to “White” in English. All bars were changed to cafés, with alcohol references removed, and there was no swearing at all.

A few years after the release of *Final Fantasy IV* in America, the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) was established to counter the campaign against violent games started in 1993 by U.S. Senators Joseph Lieberman and Herb Kohl in response to infamously violent games such as *Mortal Kombat* and *Night Trap*.⁹⁸ The ESRB is a non-profit, self-regulatory organization that is not enforced by the government, and advises parents about the content and age appropriateness of each game through their rating categories and content descriptors posted on the game box. Although game ratings are not enforced by the law, companies such as Nintendo and Sony will not allow unrated games on their systems, and many game retail stores do not let children buy mature-rated games without a parent’s consent. Each country now has its own unique game rating system that translations must conform to, which is another aspect that sets game translation apart, according to scholar Minako O’Hagan.⁹⁹

The establishment of the ESRB did not necessarily allow translators to get rid of all kinds of censorship, but it did give them a more standard set of rules to follow if they were specifically aiming for a certain demographic. This way, translators did not have to censor everything on the off chance that it might upset someone, and could instead fall back on the game’s rating if anyone complained. As a result, the next translation of *Final*

⁹⁸ Rusel DeMaria and Johnny L. Wilson, *High Score!: the illustrated history of electronic games* (Berkeley, CA: McGraw-Hill, 2001), 279.

⁹⁹ O’Hagan, “Transcreating Japanese Video Games,” 187.

Fantasy IV on Sony's PlayStation was able to get rid of all of the censorship that plagued the original, although subsequent translations have again included varying degrees of censorship. Because the 2005 Game Boy Advance translation was released on a Nintendo system, it once again censors the dancing girl, though by this time Nintendo's standards had relaxed enough to allow references to death and praying, among other things. In a surprising reversal, the 2008 Nintendo DS translation does not censor the dancing girl, while the 2011 translation released on Sony's Playstation Portable does. This outcome could be a reflection of a change in ESRB standards.

The ESRB itself has evolved over the years, adding more content descriptors and adjusting their ratings to the times. For example, the 2001 PlayStation translation of *Final Fantasy IV* was rated Teen with only two content descriptors: "Mild violence," and "suggestive themes." Whereas the most recent 2011 PlayStation Portable translation has more content descriptors than any other translation of *Final Fantasy IV*, and yet is rated Everyone ages 10+, with tags for: "Fantasy violence," "suggestive themes," "language," "alcohol reference," and "animated blood." Because this translation received so many tags from the ESRB, the translators may have had to censor the dancing girl in order not to push the game over into the Teen rating, which would reduce their audience. Translators must therefore pay attention to the developing standards of each country's rating system to make sure their game gets a rating that allows them to market to their desired audience.

1.3 Style

Despite the establishment of the ESRB, the controversy surrounding the depiction of violence and sexually suggestive material has continued throughout the years, and may

be part of the reason why video games have remained largely unstudied by academics. There have been multiple efforts to create laws enforcing the distribution of violent games, but in 2011 it was decided by the U.S. Supreme Court “that video games are a constitutionally-protected form of entertainment.”¹⁰⁰ Since this ruling, video game violence has slowly become less of a concern, and the bigger debate within the video game community now is whether or not video games can be thought of as a form of art. Game developers have recently begun experimenting with constructing new experiences and forms of storytelling within games, playing with different visual styles and gameplay mechanics, and pushing the boundaries of what it means to be a “video game.” In 2012, the Smithsonian American Art Museum even held an exhibition titled *The Art of Video Games*, which strove to “explore the forty-year evolution of video games as an artistic medium, with a focus on striking visual effects and the creative use of new technologies.”¹⁰¹ In any case, whether or not games can be counted as art, the fact is that they have come a long way from the days of *Pac-Man* when games were just about high scores and pure entertainment.

This development has given both game writers and translators much more leeway in terms of testing out different styles of writing. For example, the 2008 release of *Final Fantasy IV* on the Nintendo DS had a much heavier focus on making the story emotional. In an interview, the Japanese game developers talk about how they updated the script to conform to today’s standards, trying to flesh out parts that were previously cut, while removing others to keep up the pacing. They generally concentrated on making the story

¹⁰⁰ Entertainment Software Rating Board, “Frequently Asked Questions,” *ESRB*, accessed November 24, 2014, <http://www.esrb.org/ratings/faq.jsp>

¹⁰¹ “Exhibitions: The Art of Video Games,” *Smithsonian American Art Museum*, accessed November 24, 2014, <http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/archive/2012/games/>

more dramatic, putting the most effort into story scenes and trying to create them artistically.¹⁰² Likewise, the English translation of this version takes on an almost literary flair, adding a slightly archaic touch to the character dialogue to suit the medieval setting of the game. A line towards the beginning of the game that reads “Captain, what is it?” in other translations, is now rendered as “Our king has granted you your leave, and yet you would trouble him further?” The translation also adds new fantastical terms such as “eidolons” and “feymarch” for words which were previously translated simply as “summoned monsters” and “land of the summoned monsters.” Finally, a recurring legend within the game is given a poetic style to make it sound like a real prophecy.

Although the subsequent 2011 PlayStation Portable translation is based more on the 2005 Game Boy Advance translation, it continues to use the new terms introduced in the 2008 Nintendo DS translation, and even borrows a line or two directly from that translation, showing that there is a continued interest in presenting a moving story. This also means that game translators now have to be familiar with literary language and poetics, to help achieve the dramatic effect game developers may desire.

This new literary style stands in direct contrast with the original translation of *Final Fantasy IV* in 1991. The original translation suffered from grammatically incorrect English (“His thoughts were still awaken.”), article misuse (“Do the Meteo!” and “I am the hatred!”), and weird instances of British English (“defence” and “Who’s this chap?”). There are also inconsistencies in terminology, such as a spell being referred to both as “Cure2” and “Cure two,” as well as a place being called both the “Watery Pass,” and the “Underground Waterway.” Although it appears that an editor did look over the script

¹⁰² “FF intabyū 3 fainaru fantajī IV.” 「FF インタビュー 3 『ファイナルファンタジーIV』」 (FF interview 3 Final Fantasy IV), *Famitsu.com* ファミ通.com, May 25, 2007, accessed March 7, 2015, <http://www.famitsu.com/interview/article/2007/05/21/668,1179719120,71989,0,0.html>

(one screenshot in the instruction manual shows a character using the outdated word “quay,” while the in-game line uses “harbor”¹⁰³), clearly not enough time was given to produce a quality product.

Because role-playing games were almost unheard of in America in 1991, it was a big risk to try to translate a game such as *Final Fantasy IV*, so Square Enix, the developer, probably did not dare devote much money or time to translating the game. Game developers also did not really understand yet what it meant to translate a game, and the amount of work involved. One of the translators of the 1991 release of *Final Fantasy IV* says: “Our boss had no understanding in putting in extra work for the English version at that time.”¹⁰⁴ Translation was often an afterthought, done more in a quick attempt to make more profits, rather than carefully planned out.¹⁰⁵ This meant the game code generally needed to be modified to support foreign language text, and that translators were expected to produce translations quickly with little to no context and unorganized text files. Ted Woolsey, a famous video game translator who worked during this time period, says in an interview: “I didn’t have a team to do this work, but had to keep all the disparate files and content in my head, remembering snippets of conversation from one file to add to messages from another file. It was easy to make a boo boo, especially under the time crunch.”¹⁰⁶ The translators themselves were regularly native Japanese speakers, likely programmers of the original game, who happened to know some English, which

¹⁰³ Mandelin, “Comparisons: Final Fantasy IV,” <http://legendsoflocalization.com/final-fantasy-iv/fabul/#east>

¹⁰⁴ Chris Collette, “Spotlight: Final Fantasy II,” (includes an interview with Ted Woolsey and Kaoru Moriyama), *Lost Levels*, December 2003, accessed March 11, 2015, <http://www.lostlevels.org/200312/200312-ffan2.shtml>

¹⁰⁵ Mangiron and O’Hagan, *Game Localization*, 51.

¹⁰⁶ Collette, “Spotlight: Final Fantasy II.”

explains the grammatical errors found in *Final Fantasy IV*.¹⁰⁷ Ted Woolsey talks about the first translation of *Final Fantasy IV* in another interview:

“They really didn’t have [a translation process]. They had one person who spoke some English and she did her best with *Final Fantasy [IV]*, which was her game. ...When I talked to the guys that hired me, the senior VP and then the finance guy, they basically spent some 24 hour blocks of time late into the evenings, trying to rewrite the text as best they could without ever having played the game. They found so many issues with the screen text when they started reading it, they figured they should take a shot at it. So it was a mess.”¹⁰⁸

As it became clearer that international sales were needed to support the growing budget dedicated to producing blockbuster games, developers started designing their games with foreign audiences in mind and began to give translators more resources.¹⁰⁹ For Square Enix in particular, the unprecedented success of *Final Fantasy VII* in 1997 (which sold more copies in America than it did in Japan) made them realize what a lucrative endeavor translation could be, encouraging them to allocate more money and time to the translation process.¹¹⁰ Since then, Square Enix has created glossaries to help maintain consistency among a team of translators and across different entries within the same series, as well as an entire translation department, using teams of Japanese and English translators, along with editors and managers, to produce the international versions of their games. This development can be seen in the credits of the English versions of *Final Fantasy IV* as well. The 1991 translation just lists three Japanese names under the heading “Translation,” whereas all subsequent translations list a combination of Japanese and English names under the heading “Localization staff,” or “Localization

¹⁰⁷ Corliss, “All Your Base are Belong to Us!”

¹⁰⁸ Johnston, “Lost in Translation.”

¹⁰⁹ Frank Dietz, “‘How Difficult Can That Be?’ – The Work of Computer and Video Game Localization,” *Revista Tradumàtica* 5 (2007): accessed, March 20, 2015, <http://www.fti.uab.cat/tradumatica/revista/num5/articles/04/04art.htm>

¹¹⁰ Kohler, *Power Up*, 119.

division,” including job titles such as “Localization Assistant,” “Editor,” “General Manager,” “Coordinator” and “Localization Specialist.”

Not all game translations are performed by teams of translators, however.

Depending on the size of the project, the number of people on the translation team can vary. For example, the 2008 Nintendo DS translation of *Final Fantasy IV* was completed by a solitary translator who was a major fan of the game since he played it as a child. In an interview he says:

“I had actually asked not to be put on the project because they had merely wanted someone to brush up the existing text and format it to fit; I knew I could not work on my favorite game of all time without giving it a full retranslation. In retrospect, that may have been why I was assigned to it. Naturally, I ended up putting forth a case for doing a new localization from scratch –offering to do it in the span of the original schedule—and obtained approval. Fortunately, they decided to expand the project schedule to allow me enough time to do a retranslation without having to sleep under my desk.”¹¹¹

In this case, instead of having a team of translators, he collaborated heavily with the Japanese development team, saying: “The team was amazingly kind and supportive. They put translation credits in the opening movie, which is almost unheard of.”¹¹² Since this translator was already so familiar with the game and had a close relationship with the original script writer and development team, this translation ended up being one of the best translations of *Final Fantasy IV*, despite not being done by a team of people.

The 2005 *Final Fantasy IV* Game Boy Advance translation team may have had the benefit of being in contact with the Japanese development team as well, since an editor from that team spoke about the differences between how translation was done in the early days of the game industry versus recently, saying “Nowadays we’re now

¹¹¹ Slattery, “An Interview with Translator Tom Slattery,” by Cunningham.

¹¹² Ibid.

working with the [development] team, and we can just roll over and just say, ‘Hey, when is this text used? I can’t figure this out. What are the conditions I need to meet to make this text bubble pop up?’”¹¹³ This is especially likely since the Game Boy Advance version was the only version of *Final Fantasy IV* to be released in America before it came to Japan, although only by a couple of days, meaning that it underwent the process of simultaneous shipment. The Game Boy Advance translation team would have had to work with the development team while the game was still being made because it managed to release in America before Japan while featuring a new translation. Although in this case, context may have been less of a problem than it usually is for simultaneous shipment translations, because previous translations of the game already existed and many of the translators were already familiar with the game, having played it as children.¹¹⁴

Whether or not a game is translated during development and undergoes this simultaneous shipment process depends heavily on the developer and the game itself. The Nintendo DS translator says:

“...every project was somewhat different in terms of schedule. *Final Fantasy VI Advance* was localized concurrently with development of the Japanese version. With *Final Fantasy IV DS*, we didn’t get started until the Japanese version was more or less in its final form. [*Final Fantasy*] *Tactics* fell somewhere between the two.”¹¹⁵

Games have actually been translated during development even in the early days of the game industry, suggesting that this is a much more common practice than previously thought. An interview with the translator of *EarthBound*, which came out around the

¹¹³ Colin Williamson, “Colin Williamson on Codifying Final Fantasy,” by Arman Aghbali, *Built to Play*, audio recording, May 28, 2014, accessed March 8, 2015, <http://builttoplay.ca/interviews/2014/5/28/colin-williamson-on-codifying-final-fantasy>

¹¹⁴ Williamson, “Colin Williamson on Codifying Final Fantasy,” by Aghbali.

¹¹⁵ Slattery, “An Interview with Translator Tom Slattery,” by Cunningham.

same time as the first translation of *Final Fantasy IV*, reveals that he translated the game without any visual context at all because, as he says: "...a lot of the areas of the game weren't playable when we were doing the writing."¹¹⁶ This is despite the fact that the game did not come to America until months after its Japanese release, so it is possible that the original 1991 translation of *Final Fantasy IV* also dealt with this issue.

With a larger budget, more time, a team of people, and access to the developers, translators were able to not only produce grammatically correct translations, but begin adding in their own style to the translations as well. The 2001 PlayStation translation of *Final Fantasy IV* gave accents to some minor characters to make them stand out more, and added in extra swearing, most likely as a response to the fans' negative reaction to the heavily censored original translation. One character in particular is given a much darker characterization, saying in the beginning of the game that he is only joining the main character because he cannot kill him, whereas other translations make it seem like he was always planning on joining the main character. This sort of "darker and edgier" translation may also be because the game was released for the first time on a Sony system, which is generally associated with an older and more mature audience, once again showing the effect of the publisher on game translation.

It also switches between more medieval sounding dialogue ("You insolent cur! How dare you barge in here!?"), and casual, slangy dialogue ("Dude, look at you! High five!"), and there are times when the translation playfully breaks the fourth wall, as when the player selects "No" instead of "Yes" to a request to help save a country and the next

¹¹⁶ Marcus Lindblom, "Marcus Lindblom on EarthBound's Localization and History," by Arman Aghbali, *Built To Play*, audio file, June 15, 2014, accessed March 12, 2015, <http://builttoplay.ca/interviews/2014/6/14/marcus-lindblom-on-editing-a-classic>

line reads: “FF Director: CUT! Cut! Cut!”¹¹⁷ Some scenes are slightly rewritten, changing the order in which characters speak, and what they say.

The 2005 Game Boy Advance translation on the other hand tones down the accents and excessive swearing introduced in the PlayStation translation, and is largely more family-friendly, due to its release on a Nintendo game system. Although Nintendo no longer has its own censorship guidelines due to the establishment of the ESRB, Nintendo still maintains a family-friendly image and may frown on games that include things such as swearing or alcohol references. Therefore, instead of spicing up the script with swearing, this translation adds in a few sly pop culture references. For example, in the beginning of the game one character says: “I’ll bet you and your goons wrecked them up something awful.” Although not immediately apparent to those who are not familiar with it, this is a reference to the popular “Something Awful” website, whose forum members refer to themselves as “goons.” Another line by a minor character, “They’re cool...and by cool, I mean totally sweet,” references an old internet meme about ninjas that uses the exact same words.¹¹⁸ It also restores most of the PlayStation translation’s scene rewrites, suggesting that these translators privileged fidelity to the Japanese text.

The most recent 2011 PlayStation Portable translation of *Final Fantasy IV* ends up being a mix of styles, since it is based heavily on the 2005 Game Boy Advance translation with some editing. As such, it retains most of the Game Boy Advance translation’s pop culture references, but as previously mentioned it also takes some terminology and lines from the 2008 Nintendo DS translation. The edits made to the

¹¹⁷ Mandelin, “Comparisons: Final Fantasy IV,” <http://legendsoflocalization.com/final-fantasy-iv/fabul/#director>

¹¹⁸ Ibid. <http://legendsoflocalization.com/final-fantasy-iv/intro/#cid-speaks-out>, <http://legendsoflocalization.com/final-fantasy-iv/baron/#othertranslations>

Game Boy Advance translation tend to make the dialogue slightly more formal. For example, all instances of “alright” are changed to “all right,” and a line that previously read “He covets the Crystals as though he’s possessed,” now reads “He covets the Crystals like a man possessed.” More attention may have been paid to characterization as well. A line that is translated as “Still, I can’t defy the king... I’m a hopeless coward,” in the Game Boy Advance translation is now “So I should feel guilt but still never dare defy my king? I am a hopeless coward.” The fan translation of *Final Fantasy IV* also exhibits a mixed style, combining both the excessive swearing of the 2001 PlayStation translation and the pop culture references of the 2005 Game Boy Advance translation, suggesting that these styles of translation were popular among fans at the time.

These changing styles represent the development of translation norms in the video game industry, showing a trend towards both light-hearted and literary translations. The inclusion of pop culture references and accents seems to be perfectly accepted within the industry, while at the same time there is a growing movement to compose more serious, literary kinds of translations. It is possible that these two styles are not seen to be in conflict within the video game industry, as the 2011 PlayStation Portable translation of *Final Fantasy IV* appears to combine both of them.

Despite the range of styles exhibited by each translation of *Final Fantasy IV*, there are parts of the translation that have stayed the same in each version. Because *Final Fantasy IV* already had an established translation in America that many enjoyed as children, each successive translator had to pay attention to the translations that had come before, and retain elements that were deemed important to fans. Even though each new release of *Final Fantasy IV* was meant to draw in new consumers, it was equally

important to play on the nostalgia factor and attract old fans as well. Despite the fact that the original 1991 translation of *Final Fantasy IV* was less than ideal, riddled as it was with grammatical errors, it still holds a special place in the hearts of those who played it as children, such that even strange or grammatically incorrect sentences may have to be kept in an otherwise fluent translation so as not to upset fans.

The editor of the 2005 Game Boy Advance translation says this is what they struggled with the most:

“The big challenge is what super goofy parts of the original script do you keep in. You can wink and nod to certain old lines that were kind of cheesy, [but] where do you draw the line and where do you cut stuff. And that’s pretty hard. You want someone who’s coming in fresh to be able to enjoy it. To [have them] run into some completely bizzaro out-of-there line – we don’t want that. We’d like it to be more subtle, kind of a wink and a nod to the player.”¹¹⁹

The 2008 Nintendo DS translator wrestled with this as well. He was tasked with retranslating many classic games during his time at Square Enix, and always kept the fans in mind while translating. In an interview talking about another retranslation he did around the same time, he says:

“On the other hand, knowing that fans would compare each and every word to the original – that there would be some people upset by any line that changed, and others upset by any that didn’t – made it quite a daunting task. I did my best to strike a balance between preserving nostalgia and providing the best experience possible for new players...”¹²⁰

As a result of trying to preserve this nostalgia, every translation of *Final Fantasy IV* has kept in the infamous line: “You spoony bard!” Appearing towards the beginning of the game, this line is memorable not only for its strangeness but the dramatic context in which it takes place, only serving to make it stand out all the more. At this point in the

¹¹⁹ Williamson, “Colin Williamson on Codifying Final Fantasy,” by Aghbali.

¹²⁰ Williams, *Chrono Trigger*, 129.

game, the player has just entered a castle that has been attacked, and one of the characters has found the daughter he was searching for apparently lying dead. He attacks the man whom he assumes is responsible, a prince disguised as a bard, yelling at him in rage the entire time, and one of the lines he yells is “You spoony bard!” The line became well known on the internet and has since found its way into other games in the *Final Fantasy* series¹²¹, as well as games from completely different series and developers.¹²² Even though it is such a strange line and does not suit the context, it has become so popular and iconic that fans would probably riot if it were not included in a translation of *Final Fantasy IV*. In fact, the line was even kept in for the popular fan translation of *Final Fantasy IV*.

The video game translation has come a long way since its beginning. Instead of being filled with short Engrish-y sentences like “A Winner is You,” many game translations now rival literary works, thanks to the increased awareness on the part of developers, who are more willing to accommodate and work with translators. Of course, not all companies live up to this new standard. Small companies in particular may still not understand the difficulties of the translation process, or may not have a big enough budget to allow for better translations.¹²³ Even large companies like Square Enix do not always do everything perfectly. The smart phone versions of older *Final Fantasy* games are often riddled with typos. For example, the smart phone version of *Final Fantasy IV* has exactly the same script as the Nintendo DS translation, but within the first five seconds of the game the main character is introduced as “Load Captain” instead of “Lord

¹²¹ Honeywood, “The Rise of Square Enix Localization,” by Fenlon.

¹²² Mandelin, “Comparisons: Final Fantasy IV,” <http://legendsoflocalization.com/final-fantasy-iv/damcyan/#spoonybard>.

¹²³ Honeywood, “The Rise of Square Enix Localization,” by Fenlon.

Captain,” a mistake that did not exist in the Nintendo DS version. Therefore, although the video game industry has made leaps and bounds in the area of translation, there is still room for improvement and game translators may still have to convince their employers to give them more resources and time.

1.4 Presentation

The way the text and narrative have been presented in *Final Fantasy IV* has changed gradually over the years. The 2008 Nintendo DS version in particular introduced a drastic change from the previous versions by upgrading from 2D to 3D graphics (Figure 7), and adding voice acting. These modifications served to highlight the drama of the story even more, something that was a large focus for the Nintendo DS version as previously discussed. In an interview, the developers said they were not originally going to include voice acting at all, because if they suddenly gave a voice to characters who previously had none, the voices might not match up with what fans imagined them to be, creating a conflict. But when they were able to see the story scenes played out in 3D, it seemed unnatural for there to be no voice acting, so they went ahead and added it in anyway.¹²⁴ Of course, this meant the English translator also had to find suitable voice actors for the characters that would not upset fans. Although the translator does not talk much about this process, in an interview he confirms that translators working at Square Enix are responsible for “auditioning and casting voice talent, [and] overseeing voice recording...”¹²⁵

¹²⁴ *Fainaru Fantajī IV kōshiki konpurīto gaido* 「ファイナルファンタジーIV 公式コンプリートガイド」 (Final Fantasy IV Official Complete Guide), (Tokyo: Square Enix, 2008), 350.

¹²⁵ Slattery, “An Interview with Translator Tom Slattery,” by Cunningham.



Figure 7: *Final Fantasy IV*, 2D versus 3D graphics

The new 3D graphics changed the way the game was translated as well. The more detailed graphics allowed players to finally see character emotions more clearly, so that the translation had to match up with character facial expressions and mouth flaps. In one case, the updated visuals changed the name of a key item in the game. Known as the “light of the desert” in the Japanese version, it had previously been translated as “Sand Ruby,” but this name was no longer feasible in the Nintendo DS version, since the item was shown in the game for the first time and was clearly not a red jewel. Therefore, the name was changed to “Sand Pearl” to reflect its white color, while keeping the precious jewel theme established in previous translations.¹²⁶

The scenes in the game played out differently in 3D than in 2D, so the way the text was presented and divided between dialogue boxes had to be changed to line up with the new visuals. This is one of the reasons the Nintendo DS version received an entirely new translation. Although the developers initially wanted to re-use the 2005 Game Boy Advance translation, it was not possible because of the way the Nintendo DS version was made. The Nintendo DS translator comments:

¹²⁶ Ibid.

“Dialogue was split differently between windows to correspond to the characters’ motion on the screen for dramatic effect in the DS version, but it had not been translated in previous games with such a fine degree of correspondence to the Japanese that it could simply be split in the same places in English, pasted in, and work.”¹²⁷

Most games are now rendered in highly detailed 3D models, with expansive voice acting casts, so that translators must match their translations with the actions and emotions of the characters that are being played out on the screen. This is especially difficult in regards to voice acting, where the translation has to correlate to the increasingly intricate character mouth movements allowed by new technology. Still, this technological improvement allows games to tell more cinematic and emotional stories than ever before.

The way the text is formatted and presented within the dialogue boxes plays a significant role in making a translation look professional. In the first translation of *Final Fantasy IV* in 1991, the dialogue boxes were made slightly larger to accommodate the longer English text. The text does take advantage of the extra space allotted to it, although some characters’ lines are still split mid-sentence between two dialogue boxes, a problem that would not be amended until the 2008 Nintendo DS translation. The 2001 PlayStation translation actually ends up looking a little bit worse than the original 1991 translation because the text is not formatted to fill the entire dialogue box, only going half way over before forming a new line (Figure 8). This most likely happened because the text was given a new variable-width font that allowed for more space, but the translators were not made aware of it and continued to use the original limitations given to them.¹²⁸

The 2011 PlayStation Portable translation edits the previous 2005 Game Boy Advance

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Mandelin, “Comparisons: Final Fantasy IV,” <http://legendsoflocalization.com/final-fantasy-iv/intro/#format-doormat>

translation such that lines are not broken up between dialogue boxes, but ends up looking slightly unprofessional anyway because it uses different fonts for numbers versus letters, showing that formatting continues to be a problem for game translation. Therefore, game companies may want to consider hiring translators that also have some knowledge of graphic design.



Figure 8: Unused text box space in the 2001 PlayStation translation

Source: <http://legendsoflocalization.com/final-fantasy-iv/intro/#format-doormat>

The amount of space allowed for the translation affects the formatting (as seen in the 2001 PlayStation translation), as well as the way the text is translated in the first place. Space restrictions were a major issue in the initial 1991 translation of *Final Fantasy IV*. Character names were only allowed to be six letters long, meaning that some of the official names had to be changed to fit. A character named “Gilbert” was changed to “Edward,” and the villain’s name “Golbeza” was shortened to “Golbez.” These changes have been retained for all subsequent translations, despite the fact that space restrictions are no longer a problem, most likely because fans are now accustomed to these new

names. Additionally, “Golbeza” may not sound as intimidating to English audiences as “Golbez.”

Many item and spell names were also shortened or renamed due to space restrictions. Instead of using the Japanese spell progression “Fire/Fira/Firaga” or “Blizzard/Blizzara/Blizzaga” they used numbers instead: “Fire1/Fire2/Fire3,” “Ice1/Ice2/Ice3” and so on. This may also have been done to simplify the game for children and make it clearer which spells were more powerful. In some cases Japanese naming conventions were left in. In Japanese, the English letter “W” may be used to substitute for the word “double” since the letter is pronounced “double-u.” So the spell “W. Meteor” would stand for “double meteor.” However, either due to space restrictions or the translator’s misunderstanding or both, this was left as “W. Meteor” in the English translation. There was no space within the item names to allow for each weapon name to be written out, so instead of “Ancient Sword” and “Poison Axe” items were named things like “Ancient” and “Poison,” making the player rely on the little icons that prefaced the name to determine what type of item it was.

Monster names also had to be severely reduced and abbreviated, producing weird names such as “Balnab” instead of “Barnabas,” “D. Mist” instead of “Mist Dragon” and “Octomamm” instead of “Octomammoth.” Because of this, four major enemies that were supposed to be references to demons from Dante’s *Inferno*, “Scarmiglione,” “Cagnazzo,” “Barbariccia,” and “Rubicante,” are changed to “Milon,” “Kainazzo,” “Valvalis,” and “Rubicant.” However, these may also have been changed because the translators were unaware of the reference.

The translators faced another kind of space restriction as well. Because video game technology was still relatively recent, game cartridges at the time could only hold a small amount of information. For example, floppy discs can hold less data than a CD can. This restriction limited even the original Japanese script. The Japanese script writer has said in recent interviews that the script included in the game was only one fourth of what he had originally written.¹²⁹ The space restrictions helped him cut out unnecessary dialogue and keep up the pacing of the story. English, however, takes up even more space than Japanese does, forcing the translators to cut out even more of the script. Many lines were removed entirely, while others were rewritten to be shorter. The focus was to keep in the basic storyline so that the players could understand what was going on and what to do next, but to get rid of extra backstory and characterization. Dialogue not related to the main storyline was also reduced. One of the translators who worked on the first translation of *Final Fantasy IV* talks about this process:

“Thinking back, it was a tough job translating at that time. We had so very limited memory capacity we could use for each game, and it was never really ‘translating’ but chopping up the information and cramming them back in. ...Usually, the ‘beautifully translated’ version of the text had six to eight times more letters than we can afford for screen text. So the toughest job was to chop them off and squeeze them back into the allocated area.”¹³⁰

The 2001 PlayStation translation seems to suffer from the same space restrictions that affected the first translation. Even though PlayStation games are stored on CDs and should be able to hold more information, the PlayStation version of *Final Fantasy IV* is a direct port of the original game. This means that it uses the original Super Nintendo game file, and an emulation program included on the CD that imitates a Super Nintendo allows

¹²⁹ “FF interview 3 Final Fantasy IV,” *Famitsu.com*.

¹³⁰ Collette, “Spotlight: Final Fantasy II.”

the PlayStation to be able to run the game. Since the original file is the same, the same space restrictions apply. As a result, while the PlayStation translation does add lines that were missing from the original translation, it removes almost as many lines that were previously there. It is bound by the same name length restrictions as well, so that the Dante's *Inferno* names are still lost, although a couple of them are upgraded to "Caignazzo" and "Rubicante," suggesting that the translator did at least understand the reference.

Since many items that were removed in the 1991 Super Nintendo version were restored for the 2001 PlayStation version, the translators had to think up new names that would still fit within the space given. For example, items known as "Antarctic Wind" and "Arctic Wind" in Japanese were shortened to "Notus" and "Boreas" after the Greek gods in charge of those winds. Other clever names include "Unihorn" instead of "Unicorn Horn," and "Eagle Eye" instead of "Gnomish Bread" for an item that allows the player to see the world map. At times the translators did have to resort to abbreviations or misspellings to get a name to fit though, as in "Cockatris" instead of "Cockatrice," and "MaidKiss" and "Hrglass" instead of "Maiden's Kiss" and "Hourglass."

The 2005 Game Boy Advance translation got rid of most of these space restrictions since the hardware was finally able to hold more information. The Dante's *Inferno* names are finally spelled correctly; the spells followed the Japanese progression of "Fire/Fira/Firaga," and items could finally display their entire names, such as "Ancient Sword," and "Iron Armor." Some abbreviations still exist within the menus, such as "W. Mage" and "B. Mage" instead of "White Mage" and "Black Mage," most likely because the screen itself was too small to be able to display the entire name, being a handheld

system. The 2008 Nintendo DS and 2011 PlayStation Portable translations feature no abbreviations whatsoever, and the Nintendo DS version in particular contains the longest script out of all of the translations. Because today's technology is much more advanced, space restrictions no longer pose as much of a problem to video game translators, but may still appear every once in a while, especially on mobile devices that have smaller screens, such as phones or handheld game systems, or when dealing with languages that take up more space than normal.

While technological improvements have been the main cause of the disappearance of space restrictions, developer awareness has also helped. Now, the majority of games are programmed to accommodate foreign languages at the beginning of development, and most developers understand that foreign languages often take up more space, and design around that fact, or implement things like variable-width font to give translators more room. Developers have slowly become more concerned with the technological problems that face game translation, and have helped to make the process easier in other ways by organizing files more coherently and providing more context. Technology can still stand in the way of good translations, however.

It is clear that dealing with the programming code generated some problems for almost every translation of *Final Fantasy IV*. In the original 1991 translation, two characters within the special "training room" area tell you about a large bird called a "Chocobo" that you can ride. However, their lines were slightly mixed up. In Japanese the first person is supposed to end his speech by saying "They live in round-shaped forests," but in the English version, this line is moved to the beginning of the second

person's speech, so that it is slightly confusing at first what "they" is referring to. A professional translator speculates on how this could have happened:

"What most likely happened is that the translator forgot to press the Enter key at the right spot, causing the end-of-line control code to get applied at the wrong part in the text data. That or the translator added the end-of-line control code to the wrong part of the text. Either way, I could definitely see this happening while working in a big and messy text file."¹³¹

An end-of-line control code is used to tell the program where one character's lines end and another character's lines begin, so messing it up can easily result in this kind of error.

Another instance of messed up programming code affected not only the first translation of the game, but the original Japanese version as well. At a certain point in the game, the player has to fight a character named Yang that used to be a comrade. The original intention was to have Yang attack the main character, Cecil, at which point Cecil would say a few lines pleading with him to snap out of it. However, Yang never attacks Cecil due to a programming error. At this point in the game, Cecil has recently undergone a "class change," and is now classified as a paladin instead of a dark knight. But the programming has set Yang to attack "dark knight" Cecil, which is not possible since "dark knight" Cecil no longer exists. Hacking the game to have Yang correctly attack Cecil reveals that the missing lines were actually translated in every version of the game, but never appeared in the official versions due to this error.¹³² It was not until the 2008 Nintendo DS version that this error was finally corrected.

The 2005 Game Boy Advance translation appears to suffer from the most technical errors, despite being a relatively recent translation, showing that technology continues to hinder translators despite the improvements that have been made over the

¹³¹ Mandelin, "Comparisons: Final Fantasy IV," <http://legendsoflocalization.com/final-fantasy-iv/baron/#you-spilled-a-chocobo>

¹³² Ibid. <http://legendsoflocalization.com/final-fantasy-iv/baron-2/#yang-time>

years. There are a couple instances of a control code being messed up, causing one character's name to be displayed when it should be another's name. Just like in the calendar example given previously, control codes are used to stand in for certain items or names within the game. In this case, a control code is used because the player is free to give the characters any name he or she wishes. Once the player inputs the name the control code causes that name to be displayed for that character for the rest of the game. Because this version of the game also displays character portraits when main characters are speaking, these kinds of control code accidents are made very obvious. For example, towards the end of the game, a line shows the character Rydia's picture and is clearly meant to be spoken by her, but the text displays another character's name instead because the control code was altered.

There is also an instance in one town in the Game Boy Advance version where several characters' dialogue lines are switched around. A dancer character that usually says "Watch me dance!" in every other translation suddenly says a completely different line that is meant to be said by an old lady within the same town.¹³³ The old lady now repeats the same line that is said by another man within the town, except with slightly different wording and formatting. Although it is not known what exactly caused all of these lines to be so mixed up, the line repeated by the old lady matches exactly the 2001 PlayStation translation of the man's line, suggesting that it was accidentally copied and pasted into the wrong area.¹³⁴

Even though video game translators have it easier now that developers are starting to adjust to their needs, they are still directly responsible for errors of functionality like

¹³³ Ibid. <http://legendsoflocalization.com/final-fantasy-iv/agart/#olde-tyme-dance>

¹³⁴ Ibid. <http://legendsoflocalization.com/final-fantasy-iv/agart/#agart-lore>

this, and have to be careful not to alter the game code in any way. Although these are minor infractions because the game itself is still playable, even small mistakes like this could cause a game to crash, or make it so that the player does not know where to go next, so extra attention has to be paid to avoid creating game-breaking problems.

Technological improvements have also allowed games to give players more choices, such as designing their own characters or exploring branching storylines. Today, many gamers demand or expect games to give them a large amount of freedom, and the term “linear” is most often used to describe why a game is bad. When *Final Fantasy XIII* came out in 2010, the overwhelming criticism of the game was that it was too linear, a phrase repeated by both fans and reviewers alike.¹³⁵ This sort of negative reaction to linearity might be one of the reasons that the 2005 Game Boy Advance version of *Final Fantasy IV* added in some level of choice at the end of the game.

In general, the story of *Final Fantasy IV* is very linear, with players having no control over how events unfold, because the game was produced in the early 90s when just fitting a normal script into a game was a struggle, let alone allowing for branching story paths. The 2005 Game Boy Advance version changes things up a little bit at the end, though, by allowing players to choose four characters out of the entire cast to bring with them to the final confrontation with the game’s main enemy, instead of being assigned a certain set of characters. This allows the player to experience multiple endings depending on which characters they bring. While the final outcome itself is not affected, characters will say different things, encouraging the player to try various combinations to see what all the possible dialogue options are.

¹³⁵ Jason Schreier, “Why Final Fantasy XIII Just Didn’t Work,” *Joystiq*, January 13, 2012, accessed March 10, 2015, <http://www.joystiq.com/2012/01/13/why-final-fantasy-xiii-just-didnt-work/>

While gamers may demand non-linear narratives, this kind of open-endedness can conflict with the writer's vision of his or her story. For example, the 2008 Nintendo DS version of *Final Fantasy IV* removed the ability to change characters because the developers felt that it would weaken the drama of the story, which was a major focus during the creation of that game.¹³⁶ Therefore, a game translator has to be prepared to deal with linear games, non-linear games, and everything in between, depending on the goals the developer has for a certain game.

1.5 Conclusion

Video game translation has met with drastic improvement over the years, from a profession that was not recognized even within the game industry,¹³⁷ to a process requiring the formation of an entire department to successfully carry out. Video game translators initially faced censorship, strict spatial limitations, and unorganized files, with no access to help from the development team. Now translators can work closely with developers and are increasingly being given more resources to make game translation easier than before. However, while progress has been made, there are still more things that can be done to make the translation process easier.

Technology can still be a hindrance to the translation process, requiring many edits to be made during the quality assurance period, but it does not have to be this way; technology can also be used to make translation easier. The incorporation of audiovisual tools such as *Catalyst* or *Passolo* would allow translators to see their translations as they would appear in the final product, eliminating the need to go back and fix errors during

¹³⁶ "FF interview 3 Final Fantasy IV," *Famitsu.com*.

¹³⁷ Mark MacDonland, "PROJECT CAFÉ OLÉ," (includes an interview with Richard Honeywood), *8-4 Play*, podcast audio, April 22, 2011, accessed March 17, 2015, <http://8-4.jp/blog/?p=381>

the testing period. Unfortunately, according to scholar Tarquini, “[these] tools ... have still not been deployed in the gaming industry due to the technical complexity involved in the game code, intellectual property issues, and also because of a lack of interest.”¹³⁸

Spatial limitations could also be avoided “by programming resizable interfaces or by taking into account the average text expansion for foreign locales.”¹³⁹

On the other hand, the breakthroughs that have been made have allowed game translators to start experimenting with different translation styles, creating their own norms. The tendency to use archaic or colloquial language, or accents and pop culture references, all of which were seen in the translations of *Final Fantasy IV*, suggests a shift in what is considered a “fluent” translation compared to Venuti’s conception of it, at least within the game industry.¹⁴⁰ Because these tendencies could also be seen within the fan translation of *Final Fantasy IV*, and did not hinder the success of the official *Final Fantasy IV* translations, it can be assumed that this is a norm for video game translation. This means video game translators have more freedom of expression than other professional translators, and do not have to conform to the strict standards of fluency that may inhibit other translators.

When compared to other translators, video game translators are expected to carry out a wide variety of jobs. Instead of just working with the linguistic text, game translators advise developers on cultural differences, make changes to the art assets, reprogram the game to change the difficulty, hire and direct voice actors, and more. Depending on the company and the role, a “translator” may not even work with the

¹³⁸ Tarquini, “Translating the Onscreen Text,” 168.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 160.

¹⁴⁰ Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility*, 4-5.

written text at all. This broad view of the task of the translator calls for an expanded definition of translation as well.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION: EXPANDING THE DEFINITION OF TRANSLATION

Considering the extended role of the translator in video game translation, and the amount of non-linguistic changes made during the process, most people would be comfortable calling it “localization” instead, according to the Western view of translation. But just because the process deals with non-linguistic material does not mean that it cannot be considered under the realm of translation. A wider definition of translation can easily incorporate such aspects. If we define translation as the process of “represent[ing] a product in a new linguistic and cultural context,”¹⁴¹ then we can also consider the alteration of images, sounds, and even gameplay as part of the process.

In the end, it is not that much of a stretch to include these elements. After all, if a translator can change an *onigiri*, a Japanese rice ball, into a donut within the text, then they should also be able to translate a picture of an *onigiri* into a donut when dealing with a visual medium. Perhaps resistance to the idea of translating images comes from the notion that pictures are universal. There is an impression that when given a certain sequence of images, everyone around the world will automatically draw the same story from it. However, this is not necessarily the case. Pictures can carry culturally specific meanings the same way words do. For example, while drawing a light bulb over someone’s head may signify someone having an idea to Americans, other cultures may not have such an association. In one game a translator had to change a light bulb icon in a help-text window into a text translation of the word “idea” because light bulbs did not

¹⁴¹ Mangiron and O’Hagan, *Game Localization*, 97.

signify anything in the target culture.¹⁴² In the same way, a depiction of a famous person from one culture would be instantly recognized by the people of that culture, who would then form their own meaning based on what that person is generally associated with. But people from another culture may not recognize the person at all, and so will not fully understand the reference. In this way, it is possible to talk about the translation of images.

Like pictures, sounds can also be culturally specific and carry meaning. Different cultures have different styles and tastes in music. One theater translation scholar, Ortrun Zuber, wrote an article about the use of sound cues in the famous play *A Streetcar Named Desire* and its German translation. In her article Zuber finds that there are certain sound effects, such as a cat screech, that add to the meaning of the play, but are lost on a German audience because they do not draw the same associations.¹⁴³ Therefore sound is another aspect which should be considered within translation.

Gameplay is not universal either, as demonstrated by the first translation of *Final Fantasy IV* which had to reduce the difficulty of the game so that its new audience could successfully play it. I have also discussed the way gameplay can affect the meaning of the narrative in the beginning of this paper, showing that it can alter the characterization of the protagonists and determine whether or not the player can receive the closure of finishing the story. The extra-textual materials included with video games are also important in this regard. The box art can change the consumer's understanding of a character. If an American child picks up a Kirby game and sees Kirby with angry eyebrows, he or she will be more likely to interpret Kirby as a serious, tough character, while Japanese players will only see Kirby for the cute pink blob that he is.

¹⁴² Bernal-Merino, *Translation and Localisation in Video Games*, 64.

¹⁴³ Ortrun Zuber, "The Translation of Non-Verbal Signs in Drama," *Pacific Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (January 1980): 61-74.

Considering non-linguistic materials such as these during translation can help the target audience to more fully understand and engage with the work. When the written message is reinforced by visual and aural signs, as well as gameplay in the case of video games, it can result in a more compelling form of expression. Translators are already tasked with the work of making a particular product understandable in another language and culture, and acknowledging these other sign systems can only result in a more complete translation.

Localization then can be understood as one kind of strategy that translators can use when approaching these issues. By localizing particular cultural features, the translator changes them into something more familiar to the target audience, so that localization and domestication become the same thing. Some scholars have tried to differentiate the two by putting localization within the industrial realm,¹⁴⁴ pertaining to changes made strictly for business reasons.¹⁴⁵ However, this implies that translators cannot make decisions about how to translate based on financial concerns, which is not the case. Translating is a profession that people (try to) make a living with. Even if a translator's main goal is to introduce a new kind of literature or art to the target culture, he or she will most likely still hope that it is successful enough to make a profit, such that the translator can go on living. Money can be a large factor in every translation process, and it is not unreasonable to think that a translator might decide to translate a certain way precisely because it will make them more money.

¹⁴⁴ Miguel Bernal-Merino, "On the Translation of Video Games," *The Journal of Specialised Translation* 6 (July 2006): 31.

¹⁴⁵ Milla Hyttinen, "Bringing the Foreign into Play: Cultural Transfer in Video Game Localization" (master's thesis, University of Tampere, 2010), 22, accessed April 5, 2015, <https://tampub.uta.fi/handle/10024/81557>

This wider understanding of translation is not necessarily a new concept. It could perhaps be seen both in the original definition of the word “translation,” which meant “to carry across” in specific reference to the physical relocation of the bones of saints,¹⁴⁶ and the historical Chinese understanding of the process, which involved a group of people in which only one person actually dealt specifically with language transfer.¹⁴⁷ When translation is seen as a physical relocation, then all of the changes that occur when a product is released in a different country can be considered. Under the Chinese definition, the entire process of translation is recognized, even the contributions of those who are monolingual.

This can be a productive way to view video game translation as well, because it also involves a group of people who may or may not directly handle the written text, but who are all vital to the process anyway. Even in other more traditional forms of translation, the translator is really “only one among those who contribute directly to a translation’s production, quality, circulation and reception.”¹⁴⁸ Editors, publishers, and a myriad of other people are also an essential part of the process, without which translations might never see the light of day. They therefore deserve to be acknowledged for their work and included within the idea of translation.

Translators themselves are starting to gain more respect within the video game industry. Video game translators may collaborate heavily with the game’s creators, influencing the way the game is presented even to its original audience. This kind of collaboration is unheard of in other mediums. Even if a translator is able to contact an

¹⁴⁶ Maria Tymoczko, “Translation, Resistance, Activism: An Overview,” in *Translation, Resistance, Activism*, ed. Maria Tymoczko (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 4.

¹⁴⁷ Eva Hung, “‘And the Translator is –’ Translators in Chinese History,” in *Translating Others*, ed. Theo Hermans (New York: St. Jerome Publishing, 2006), 1:152.

¹⁴⁸ Hung, “‘And the Translator is –’,” 158.

author to receive feedback, they would not be able to influence the author in such a way so as to change the way the original is written. This is probably because most translations do not take place while the original is still being constructed, whereas this is increasingly becoming common practice in the video game industry.

Their new status as co-authors offers a new way to look at translation. Especially when combined with the practice of simultaneous shipment, translators who act as co-authors call in to question the nature of an original versus a translation. When a product is released on the same day in two different countries, and the same combination of translator and author helped to produce both, then the line between original and translation becomes blurred, if not completely meaningless. This is a big breakthrough for translators, who have always lived in the shadow of the original work. Although game translators are still not given the same level of regard as developers, they are becoming more appreciated. The translator of the 2008 Nintendo DS version of *Final Fantasy IV* was able to have his name appear in the opening credits, and the development team also added him into a secret area in the game known as the “Developer’s Room,” showing that translators are finally starting to be respected and valued by developers.¹⁴⁹

Similarly, the additive process incorporated into video game translation shows that translations may even surpass their originals, instead of being subordinate. International versions of games can feature extra content or more coherent stories, so much so that sometimes the translation is brought back to the home country as an improved product. Scholar Minako O’Hagan refers to this as a “reverse localization model,” and notes that in this model is most common in Japan, where the English voice

¹⁴⁹ Slattery, “An Interview with Translator Tom Slattery,” by Cunningham.

acting is often left intact with additional Japanese subtitles.¹⁵⁰ The retention of the English voices shows that the translation itself is part of what is being privileged, not just the additional content, suggesting that translated games can in fact be thought of as being superior to their originals. Translators have struggled for decades to have their translations regarded as original creative works instead of poor imitations, and now in the field of video game translation they are finally beginning to make some headway into the issue.

However, in empowering the translator there may be some concern raised that the author then becomes the one who is disrespected. By freely changing the source text, it seems like the translator is disregarding the author's wishes and intentions for the text. I would argue though that this does not necessarily have to be the case. In general, the translator chooses a text that he or she thinks is worthy of translation, suggesting that the translator starts out with a deep respect for the author. The translator is so inspired by the source text that he or she wants to bring it to a new cultural context so that it may influence other people. But in order to make this possible, the translator may feel the need to make certain changes such that the audience is able to interact with the text in the way he or she wants them to. Without these changes, the original author's ideas may not reach new audiences at all. In this way, translation extends the life of the source text and helps it to become part of something bigger. Of course, this is not a simple issue, and the translator's changes may not in fact be so benign, but that does not mean that changes to the source text should always be viewed in a negative light.

¹⁵⁰ O'Hagan, "Transcreating Japanese Video Games," 190-192.

Allowing translators the ability to pursue different approaches when translating a text can help give it new meaning, and produce a more complete view of the work that celebrates the translator's views along with the author's. This idea can be related to the kind of freedom that video game players often enjoy. Games are interactive, meaning that two people can experience a game in completely separate ways. The multiple endings and branching storylines found in games support the idea of alternate versions all representing the same story. This is similar to translation, where a translated text is different from its original and yet similar. In this way, a particular translation can be viewed as just one possible way a story could be represented in another country or language. For example, the translations of *Final Fantasy IV* are each unique but still portray the same story, and each version has its own fans. This view of storytelling encourages the audience to accept diverse interpretations of the same story, opening up the world of translation to new approaches that are equally valid with standard methods. Of course, translations could still fail when they do not uphold the translator's intentions, and there will always be dominant styles of translation that translators will be pulled to, but this approach to storytelling could still make it easier for translators to experiment with their translations.

By combining multiple translations into one product and permitting the reader to openly switch between them, just like video games offer multiple outcomes for the player to explore, the reader can obtain a more holistic comprehension of the text. If the reader does not understand something in one translation, or does not like its style, then he or she can quickly access another translation that might clarify the passage or prove more satisfying. This would also enable translators more room to experiment, because their translation would not have to stand on its own or try to appeal to the widest possible

audience. With the prevalence of technology, it could be possible to create a downloadable book or application that can support such shifting between translations. In fact, there is even now a smart phone Bible application that lets the user download and swap between an array of different Bible translations. Video games as well could easily incorporate this feature, because they currently allow the player to change languages during play. This practice would also make the translator's work more visible and force readers to confront the fact that multiple translations of the work exist.

Video game translators are already becoming more visible through the direct contact they have with fans. The process of translation is laid bare for video game fans on translators' blogs and Facebook pages, so that fans can affect the very way video games are translated by posting comments that let translators know what they want from a game. The audience therefore takes on new significance to game translators as they try to design a product that lives up to fan expectations, and address fan concerns personally.

The desires of the audience could be seen as restricting the creativity of the translator, however. Instead of being free to experiment, translators must weigh every decision against how fans might react. On the other hand, fan translators are free to take whichever approach they deem best, despite any kind of fan indignation, because no one is being forced to play their translation. Implementing multiple translations into one game, both fan and official translations alike, could give all translators new freedom. As previously noted, many games now include a language selection screen and offer updates or revisions to the game via downloadable patches. These features could theoretically be used to allow fans to upload their own translations of a game, or even revise the story as they see fit.

Fan translators themselves would likely be very eager to see something like this implemented, because it would mean their work would be finally recognized by the companies they so adore. For many fan translators, just seeing their beloved games come out in their country in any kind of official capacity would be reward enough. The fan translator of *Mother 3* even made a blog post saying he would offer his translation to Nintendo completely for free if it meant the game saw an official release, writing:

“I realize that localizing a game this size can cost a lot, so if it’ll help in even the slightest, I’ll gladly offer to let Nintendo use my text translation files for any use at all, completely for free. I’ll even edit the files to fit whatever new standards are necessary (content, formatting, memory size, etc.), completely for free. I’ll even retranslate everything from scratch if need be. Just whatever it takes to get an official release out.”¹⁵¹

Just the experience of translating a game can be beneficial to fan translators, giving them insight into an unfamiliar process that is not widely taught in translation schools.

Implementing fan translations alongside official ones could encourage more people to become interested in the profession of game translation, and give them hands-on experience to help them break into the professional world.

On the other hand, this kind of crowdsourcing could only encourage game developers to take translators for granted. After all, there is no reason to pay substantial sums to professionals when others would happily do the same work for free. One game translator says:

“There’s automatic translation machines, there’s fan translators, and there’s the perception that you shouldn’t have to pay for anything today. If you’ve got a machine on Google which translates a page for free in two seconds, even if it’s

¹⁵¹ Clyde Mandelin, “Offer to Nintendo,” *The Mother 3 Fan Translation* (blog), April 20, 2013, accessed March 16, 2015, <http://mother3.fobby.net/blog/2013/04/20/offer-to-nintendo/>

not so great, suddenly paying 20 cents a word for a translation that's good doesn't sound like a great idea."¹⁵²

Translators are already struggling with getting developers to recognize their hard work and convincing developers to give them more resources. Implementing fan translations may only undermine their efforts, so that any kind of benefit it might hold would be quickly erased. Still, it is an interesting concept to consider. Even if it is not feasible, it would make for a view of translation that is not defined by fidelity to an "original," but rather one that celebrates the creativity and originality of each translator.

The idea of integrating multiple translations into one product would also ultimately be restricted by how many translations of a single work are available. This limitation is also present in video games, which only offer a set amount of choices and story branches for the player to choose from. These finite story branches could also be compared to the constraints that normally regulate translation. If a translator wants a translation to be published and be successful, he or she will generally have to conform to the norms currently present in society. For example, the translators had no choice but to censor the first translation of *Final Fantasy IV* so that Nintendo would allow it to be released on its system, because society at the time was very concerned about the detrimental effects of video games. In this way, translation can be compared to a video game, with the constraints imposed on the translator like the rules that a game player must adhere to in order to beat the game. Translation studies articles could perhaps be related to walkthroughs or instruction manuals that help guide the player or translator

¹⁵² John Szczepaniak, "The Life and Games of Jeremy Blaustein," (includes an interview with Jeremy Blaustein), *Hardcore Gaming 101*, June 2, 2010, accessed March 16, 2015, <http://www.hardcoregaming101.net/jb/jb.htm>

through the process. Naturally, this metaphor has its limits, but it might prove to be an interesting way to think about translation.

If translation is like a game, then there might be the question of who exactly the translator is playing against. In a video game, the player is commonly playing against the computer, but that does not mean the player thinks of the computer as his or her true opponent (unless the computer cheats). Instead the player is focused on developing enough skill to overcome the challenges presented in the game while working within the game's rules. The same could be said of the translator. The rules of the game are not demonized; they are simply facts of life.

If the rules are deemed unfair, then there is always some sort of recourse. For video games, the player could hack the game or use cheats to remove some rules, although this may or may not introduce new glitches into the game. The translator here may at first appear to have the advantage. Instead of having to find and input the correct cheats, the translator just has to ignore the rules established by society. Of course, ignoring these rules may also possibly result in a broken translation, as it could result in a broken game. On the other hand, in order to change the rules on a long-term scale, all the game player has to do is complain to the developer and convince them that that aspect of the game is not fun. Translators cannot as easily persuade society to adopt new views on translation; that is a change that can only happen gradually over time.

By trying to argue for a definition of translation that includes non-linguistic elements, and likening translation to the paths of a video game, I hope to start the slow process of altering society's perception of translation, opening up new directions for translators to explore.

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