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You Spoony Bard!: An Analysis of Video Game Localization Practices

Karrie Collins
University of Massachusetts - Amherst, karriencollins@gmail.com

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YOU SPOONY BARD!: AN ANALYSIS OF VIDEO GAME LOCALIZATION PRACTICES

A Thesis Presented

by

KARRIE N. COLLINS

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

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YOU SPOONY BARD!: AN ANALYSIS OF VIDEO GAME LOCALIZATION PRACTICES

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Approved as to style and content by:

_____________________________________
Bruce P. Baird, Chair

_____________________________________
Stephen D. Miller, Member

_____________________________________
Stephen D. Miller, Director
Asian Languages and Literatures
Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

_____________________________________
William Moebius, Chair
Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures
DEDICATION

To my father, who has always been an inspiration.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my mother for her love, unending patience, and support. I would also like to express my gratitude to my professors from whom I have learned so much. Lastly, a special thank you to all of the participants of my survey who helped to form this thesis and to my friends who encouraged me throughout this project.
ABSTRACT

YOU SPOONY BARD!: AN ANALYSIS OF VIDEO GAME LOCALIZATION PRACTICES

MAY 2015

KARRIE COLLINS, B.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Bruce P. Baird

This paper analyzes the appropriateness of the localization practices utilized in the Japanese video game series Final Fantasy and Pokémon. Its argument is informed by survey responses from players of both series. Immersion, the ability of the player to remain in the game-world without distraction, is believed to be an important goal for successful localization. In this paper, the appropriateness of the localization of the Final Fantasy series is judged based on player immersion and enjoyment. This study finds that immersion is not essential to player enjoyment and therefore is not essential for a successful localization. In regard to the Pokémon series, the appropriateness of the heavy alteration and censorship of elements in the American localization is analyzed via player response to the changes. This localization practice proves to be appropriate and an effective model for future localization of Japanese video games targeted toward children in America. In addition, this paper explores immersion in Pokémon strategy guides released in America and Japan. The aim of this thesis is to expand the dialogue on Japanese video game localization for America and to display successful, creative localization practices which can also be utilized in other media.
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INTRODUCTION

Localization and Japanese Role-Playing Games

The economic power of the video game industry in America is formidable. Many successful titles pull in greater profits than even the same year’s best performers at the box office.¹ This includes games which are brought over from Japan and localized for an American audience as well. In fact, the PlayStation 4 home console, developed in Japan by Sony, has sold nearly double the number of units in comparison to Microsoft’s Xbox One home console, and the Sony PlayStation 2 home console, the bestselling video game console of all time, sold over 150 million units.² The Japanese influence on America’s video game industry has been significant over the past thirty years and considering the aforementioned numbers, it shows few signs of slowing down.

In order to remain competitive in a market that produces tens of billions of dollars in sales,³ companies in Japan which develop video games must strategically approach the release of their games overseas and particularly in America. The process by which these games are translated and made appropriate for an audience outside of Japan is known as localization.

This thesis compares the localization approaches of Square Enix and Nintendo, two hugely popular video game companies responsible for the development of the Final

*Fantasy* and *Pokémon* video game series, respectively. Since one series is aimed at children (*Pokémon*) and the other for a wider audience (*Final Fantasy*), the appropriateness by which these localization strategies are judged is based on different criteria. For *Final Fantasy*, the criterion is player immersion: whether the player can remain focused on the world contained within the game (the “game-world”) without being distracted and brought out of it. *The Game Localization Handbook* promotes the importance of immersion as it relates to the quality of the localization of a video game: “Bad localization will stop players’ suspension of disbelief, destroy immersion, and undo the achievements of the best marketing campaign.”4 In this guide for developers, immersion is pushed as a goal of good localization. In addition, Douglas Schules has written a chapter in *Dungeons, Dragons, and Digital Denizens: The Digital Role-Playing Game* on a JRPG titled *Lux-Pain* which suffers from translation issues including a voiceover that frequently does not match the transcript on the screen. The difference in written and spoken word and the sometimes hard-to-decipher translation ruins his sense of immersion, and he comments that “interruption of game experience […] directly impacts a player’s ability to become immersed in the game-world, a condition that many players see as constitutive of the JRPG genre.”5 I will analyze immersion in *Final Fantasy* from the vantage point of character dialogue and the presentation thereof.

For the *Pokémon* series, I will analyze the appropriateness of the decision to heavily alter or censor certain elements in the games for the American localization.

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Player response to these altered elements will provide the basis of my analysis and will offer insight on how companies should localize Japanese video games which will be targeted toward American children. I will also explore immersion through game guides and compare American-released Pokémon game guides to a Japanese-released Pokémon guide to explore the differences in approach toward immersion in both countries. For both Pokémon and Final Fantasy, I interview players of the games for their reactions to character dialogue and altered elements in order to provide organized, quantified data on player response as well as to provide a unique and critically important perspective on my study.

Incongruous dialogue for the game’s setting or characters are prevalent in the earliest localized Final Fantasy games, suggesting that instances in which immersion is disrupted should be common in these games. However, despite expectations that disruption of immersion would negatively impact player enjoyment, this thesis finds that disruption of immersion does not seem to negatively impact the player’s experience and can, in fact, improve it. Many players enjoy these seemingly incongruous translations and even consider them appropriate in some cases. The exception to this arises when player expectations change and when Final Fantasy VII is localized, out-of-place language and typographical errors become less forgivable. Following this period, by the release of Final Fantasy X, new approaches to localization in character dialogue and gestures arise and bring about mixed but overall favorable responses from players as the Final Fantasy games approach a sense of realism. In the case of Pokémon, censorship and alteration of simulated gambling aspects and creatures perceived as racist caricatures are met with resistance from some fans but overall do not deeply affect player satisfaction, proving
that these alterations are appropriate for the localization of a game aimed at children. In part, this thesis aims to create further dialogue on the localization of Japanese video games for North America. I do this in the hopes of inspiring more American scholars to discuss localization and to engage with the numerous European academics who have been discussing the localization of Japanese video games for their region.

The two game series that this thesis analyzes fall under the genre of Japanese role-playing game, also known as JRPG. The genre of Japanese role-playing game is suitable to analyze for its localization for two reasons. First, it is characterized by its emphasis on storytelling and character development, allowing for a variety of dialogue spoken by a wide variety of characters to be studied. Carmen Mangiron and Minako O’Hagan describe in their article titled “Game Localisation: Unleashing Imagination with ‘Restricted’ Translation” that “RPGs have complex storylines, leaving ample scope for translation. These games tend to include the most text and are therefore considered most suitable to discuss the challenges involved in translation.”6 In addition, The Game Localization Handbook states that “role-playing games […] rely more heavily on telling a story through character dialogue, in-game cut-scenes, and books, notes, or other props found in the game world.”7

Second, JRPGs contain many elements that require translation including characters’ weapons, location names, and mini-games (games with their own set of rules contained within the game). These elements often require a great deal of creativity from


localizers to appeal to or be understood by a foreign audience. These elements as well as
the importance of character dialogue to tell the story offer challenges to localizers,
challenges that may not exist, or which are at the least less pronounced, in other video
game genres.

**Explanation of Terms**

Within the relatively small field of video game localization studies, there are
differing definitions for the terms “translation” and “localization.” Stephen Mandiberg
defines translation as a broader concept than localization:

> I define translation as the ‘carrying over’ of a text from one context to another, where
context can be understood as spatial, formal, or temporal. […] This broad definition
allows me to consider other forms of textual manipulation including video game
localization—the process of translating games for new cultural contexts, which includes
linguistic, audio, visual and ludic [play/action] alterations.⁸

Francesca Di Marco agrees on the point that localization includes the “game text, visuals
and sound,”⁹ while *The Game Localization Handbook* states that “[l]ocalization is the
process of translating the game into other languages.”¹⁰ I find that the latter definition
creates too much of an overlap between “localization” and “translation” for the purposes
of my study which treats these terms differently. Instead, this paper’s definition of
localization most closely matches that of Hirofumi Katsuno and Jeffrey Maret, who
describe localization as “the process of adapting a global product for a specific market”
and translation as “a major component of this process in the case of a written product […]

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⁸ Stephen Mandiberg, “Toward a Multi-Layered Digital Translation
Methodology (Qualifying Paper #1),” Trans(ference/lation/ition): the movement of
stephenmandiberg.com/?p=192.
⁹ Francesca Di Marco, “Cultural Localization: Orientation and Disorientat
ion in Japanese Video Games,” *Revista tradumàtica – Traducció i Tecnologies de la Informació
cat/tradumatica/revista/num5/articles/06/06.pdf.
¹⁰ Ibid., 8.
where there is a script that must be translated from one language to another."

In this paper “translation” refers to the more specific act of adapting the text on the screen, most often character dialogue, for the target audience. “Localization” refers to the broader process of preparing a game to be sold in another country. As such, localization includes non-text-based adaptation, such as the altering of graphics for the country’s audience. Localization also includes the act of preparing materials outside of the game, such as the instruction manual and the box, and sometimes the advertising campaign. Since people who work on bringing video games from Japan to America in the past five to ten years have been working on more than just translating dialogue, they are referred to as “localizers.”

Methods

I issued a survey online as well as on paper to receive player feedback on certain translations from the Final Fantasy series and on instances of censorship in the Pokémon series. Respondents were kept anonymous, IP addresses were not collected, and no demographical data was collected. Respondents were instructed to answer only questions about games which they have played. The results of my survey are also available in the appendix for easy reference.

Limitations of Survey

The paper surveys were given to college students enrolled in a manga and anime

course as well as some recent graduates. Distribution online was primarily conducted through Facebook, and so it seems likely that most of my respondents were aged between eighteen and late twenties. Responses from younger or older video game players may yield different results.
CHAPTER 1

ANALYSIS OF IMMERSION AND PLAYER ENJOYMENT IN THE LOCALIZATION OF THE FINAL FANTASY SERIES

Introduction

The Final Fantasy series is a well-loved, well-known JRPG series which has been localized for an American audience since its first installment released in 1990 for the Nintendo Entertainment System. Final Fantasy has met with great success in Japan as well as in America, and so far has fourteen main installments in the series, a fifteenth on the way, and inspired numerous spin-off games for mobile and handheld devices, a CGI feature film, and an ever-growing line of merchandise. The series has also been on numerous gaming systems, beginning with Nintendo’s two earliest home console systems and eventually moving on to Sony’s PlayStation systems. It has been witness to many evolutions in the video game industry and has presented evolving approaches to localization. Its genre and long-running status aside, the Final Fantasy series contains games that require many hours to play, often more than forty to complete the main storyline without taking “sidequests”—activities that do not progress the storyline—into account. One can imagine the myriad of content which must be handled by localizers of these games.

Final Fantasy

The first Final Fantasy title, perhaps not-so-aptly named Final Fantasy, was released in Japan in 1987 and localized for North America in 1990 by Nintendo of America for the Nintendo Entertainment System. The storyline of the game was simple, as was the expectation at the time: four warriors bearing special orbs seek to bring peace
to their world. Players could choose between different types of warriors who had
different abilities in battle to help advance the storyline. During this time, localization
was an effort that was often taken on by a single person, and this was the case for the first
*Final Fantasy* title. Maria Tymoczko argues that “[t]ranslation does not stand in a neutral
space: this is true whether we consider translation agents, processes, or products. All are
positioned politically, ideologically, and ethically.”

Nintendo of America’s choice to utilize one translator speaks to their approach to the first *Final Fantasy* in an ideological
and ethical manner. Ideologically, the localization of the game was not very important to them, otherwise they would have hired more than one person to work on the translation.

It is apparent that the sales of the game abroad were not a priority, but perhaps an
afterthought. Ethically, one could argue that Nintendo of America (NOA) was rather
negligent with the game, and believed that bringing a quality translation to an American
audience was not worth their time or money.

In this first translation of this game, there is a piece of dialogue that received quite
a bit of fan attention. The four warriors stand before their greatest foe, Garland (whose
name, one could argue, could have been localized more appropriately as well to prevent
them from thinking of a household decoration). Garland says to them in his rallying cry
before the final battle (Figure 1) that “I, Garland, will knock you all down!!” Many fans
find this line humorous for the seeming incongruity between the opening of the sentence,
and the “threat” he gives at the end. The construction of meaning with regard to this
quotation is imbalanced, thus causing the humorous effect. This is an example of evoked
meaning as defined by Mona Baker: “Evoked meaning arises from dialect and register

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12. Maria Tymoczko, *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators*
(Manchester, UK: St. Jerome, 2007), 316.
variation” (emphasis removed). In particular, Garland’s speech displays a disconnect in register, “a variety of language that a language user considers appropriate to a specific situation.” The start of his declaration when he introduces himself seems formal or regal, meant to intimidate, while “knock you all down” sounds incongruently informal and hardly threatening. A line as silly as this one getting past the editors (assuming there were any) shows the lack of concern that Nintendo of America put into the localization of the first title in this series, and the attitude they had toward advertising the game to American audiences.

I asked a question about this translation in my survey: “If you have played the first Final Fantasy, you may have encountered the following line of dialogue from the final boss: “I, Garland, will knock you all down!!” If you remember this line, please describe your reaction to it.” I then asked participants if they did not remember that line to mention another that stood out to them and to explain why. I aimed to ascertain

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14. Ibid.
whether players were disappointed or otherwise bothered by the less accurate or inappropriate translations which were common during this time of the early-to-mid 1990s.

Participant response proved to be overwhelmingly positive and players stated that they were amused by the line. Four of the fourteen respondents mentioned that they laughed at it. Unfortunately it is not clear whether this laughter was derisive or joyful. One respondent answered “I laughed… a lot.” Another explained in more detail: “Honestly, that line made me laugh. It felt so hilariously out of place.” One participant seems to have laughed in joyful amusement but now views the line differently: “I laughed at the line at the time, but now that I know the history of it, honestly, I just roll my eyes.” This participant expressed exasperation with the policy that NOA held at the time to censor words related to death or killing (“God forbid, in a fantasy game, that a villain threaten to kill the heroes”). It seems that in the context of the game, though, this participant, and many others, were much more willing to forgive the seemingly odd line. Despite being brought out of the game with laughter provoked by knowledge of the inappropriateness of the line, players fondly remember this dialogue. This result differed from my expectation that moments which break immersion would be viewed negatively by players and lessen their enjoyment. On the contrary, for one respondent, it was the sole moment that continues to stand out in their mind from the entire game: “I was really little but I remember laughing at [that] line. It’s probably the only line of dialogue I actually remember from the first Final Fantasy.” For a few respondents, the line did not even seem out of place, perhaps due to the treatment of the entire game with age-appropriate dialogue. One respondent mentioned that it seemed appropriate for this character: “Seems like a line Garland would say.” Another exclaimed that they believed it
was “cute” and made him “less threatening.” Two participants mentioned that they were quite young when they played the game but they had different reactions. One “didn’t think much on it at the time” because they were too young to “really consider the awkwardness of it.” The other thought, “‘Huh. That’s an odd thing to say.’” The responses are quite varied but none of the respondents were bothered by the line in context. This may also be connected to the fact that Final Fantasy’s graphics were much less lifelike at this time with 8-bit graphics, and so players may not have played expecting realistic dialogue so much as cheesy dialogue. However, looking back on this as the first game in an iconic and genre-defining series, it would seem to make sense that players would regard it seriously and disagree with NOA’s guidelines for appropriate dialogue—but this was usually not the case and a lack of immersion did not negatively impact player enjoyment.

**Final Fantasy II (IV)**

The next Final Fantasy game to be released in America was titled Final Fantasy IV in Japan. In order to sell the product more effectively, this game was renamed Final Fantasy II and was released in America in 1991 on the Super Nintendo. In addition to the change in the title, localization approaches for Final Fantasy II were altered to ensure its success. Ted Woolsey, a former translator for the series, explained in an interview that

[b]ack in the 1990s Japanese developers were frustrated they weren’t seeing acceptable sales in the US. At the time […] it was thought that the look of Japanese games, combined with the fact that Americans didn’t have earlier games to train on, as Japan did, would mean they wouldn’t be familiar or satisfied with the [content].

Japanese developers expressed a concern that JRPGs were too difficult for American audiences to play and enjoy. With this in mind, Final Fantasy II released with a few elements altered: certain character abilities and items were removed and enemies were made easier to defeat.17 Now Nintendo of America was making changes beyond the dialogue that created distinct differences in the Japanese and American versions of the game. This localization method aiming toward an easier experience for American gamers would enhance immersion since the perceived familiarity of the game would keep the player engaged in the game-world.

But the difficulty of the game was not all that was changed for Final Fantasy II.

In terms of graphics, the game was censored. In one town, the main character can walk up to a “dancing girl” (Figure 2) and interact with her, and if he does, she performs a dance for him. In the Japanese version of the game, the girl’s small figure on-screen changes to reveal a bikini before she dances. Though her figure is not very detailed, it is clear that Nintendo of America believed it was inappropriate and decided to have her dance in a dress instead. Rebecca Carlson and Jonathan Corliss explain the expectations and approach that Nintendo of America took during this time with regard to censorship:

> In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Nintendo of America was well known for its intensive censorship policies; they regularly heavily localized (remade) games, particularly those from Nintendo Japan. […] [R]epresentations of violence and nudity, or sexuality deemed ‘excessive,’ were also toned down.18

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Carlson and Corliss believe that the extent to which Nintendo edited or localized the games could be considered “remaking” them. It is clear that appealing to an American audience was considered more important than loyalty to the original text at this time.

On a smaller scale, there were other considerations taken by the translator of *Final Fantasy II*. Near the beginning of the game, the main character, Cecil, receives an item from his king whom he feels has not been his usual self lately—his good nature seems to be giving way to unjust decisions. In the original Japanese, the item he receives is called a *bomu no yubiwa* or a “bomb ring.” Fans familiar with the series might make the connection that this ring could be related to the enemy creatures called “bombs” or assume that it is a ring set to detonate. American fans would be less likely to make the creature connection since only one *Final Fantasy* title was released before this one. Translating the item as a “bomb ring” could make them assume the worst. Likely with this in mind, the translator named the item a “package.” Tom Slattery, the translator for a remake of *Final Fantasy IV* released seventeen years later, agrees with this approach, stating that if the player receives a “bomb ring,” they will not be surprised when they reach their destination and the ring sets the entire village on fire by setting loose bomb creatures.19 This presents another question for localizers: is it more important to remain loyal to the original Japanese and let the ring’s powers be expected, or is it more important to offer the player a potentially more exciting experience by introducing an element of surprise? It may be an easier decision to simply translate the name of the ring literally as “bomb ring.” Maria Tymoczko explains that “[t]he view of translation as

transfer is useful for many cases of translation, but it utterly fails in other situations.”

Here, “transfer” is a one-to-one equivalent approach to translation where a phrase in the source language can be simply “transferred” into perceived equivalent words in the target language. In the case of Japanese, a language quite distant from English, translation as “transfer” can be a dangerous approach, risking loss of meaning or even creation of meaning which was not present in the original text. Tymoczko also describes that “[t]ranslators benefit from understanding that most ethical decisions are not simple alternatives between good and bad. Sometimes there are no obvious right choices.”

Ultimately, it may have been loyalty to the employer that informed the decisions of Final Fantasy II’s first translator—as mentioned before, the richer experience of surprise could prove more suitable for player enjoyment and immersion than loyalty to the original text, and therefore it was an appropriate localization approach.

One last translation decision in Final Fantasy II is remembered—and applauded—by fans even today. In one line of dialogue, an old wizard expresses his anger at a young bard whom he believes has caused his daughter harm. “You spoony bard!” he exclaims (Figure 3). The word “spoony” has elicited a humorous reaction from fans, especially the many who can only grasp the word as being some adjectival form of the word “spoon.” When presented as an angered exclamation, it is understandable that fans find the—again, seemingly incongruous—dialogue amusing. While the actual definition of the word is appropriate for the context, its use is out of place: the word is far removed from common vocabulary to the point where players misinterpret its meaning.

By Mona Baker’s definition, this is a (mis)creation of meaning through the use of dialect,

20. Tymoczko, Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators, 324.
21. Ibid., 318.
“a variety of language which has currency within a specific community or group of speakers.”

In particular, “spoony” is an example of “temporal” dialect as it is a word primarily associated with another, older time period. It seems likely that the translator’s word choice was influenced by a dictionary instead of native knowledge of the language. While this should have proven damaging to Nintendo as an inappropriate translation, it instead left a positive impression on players. In fact, this line of dialogue is iconic and has remained untouched throughout the number of rereleases and new translations of the game over the past 23 years. “You spoony bard!” is another example of dialogue which ought to break immersion by causing temporary confusion and disrupt the player’s enjoyment, but my survey results seem to prove otherwise.

Given the well-known status of this translated dialogue, I presented the following question to my survey participants: “If you have played Final Fantasy IV (known as Final Fantasy II on the Super Nintendo), what was your impression of the “You spoony bard!” line of dialogue? Did you know the definition of the word “spoony”? Please describe what you understand the meaning of this exclamation to be.” I held the
impression that while many players found this dialogue amusing, many were simply
guessing at the true meaning of this archaic word. In addition, I wished to determine
whether this unusual dialogue broke immersion for players.

Two of the twenty respondents correctly guessed the definition of “spoony” on
their own: “silly.” According to the Oxford English Dictionary, spoony as an adjective
means “foolish, soft, silly.” One more respondent had heard what it meant but did not
know when playing the game, and another came close, stating they believed the word to
mean “goofy.” Eight respondents directly stated they “didn’t know” what the word meant.
Three stated that they gathered it was an insult through context and a couple of others
believed it was a word made up for the game, with an additional two respondents
believing it was nonsensical. It is worth noting that none of the respondents went to look
up the definition of the word or to ask anyone else what it meant. Since the line is
delivered at an important, attention-grabbing moment in the game, I am not surprised that
players did not go out of their way to learn precisely what Tellah was saying. One
respondent explained this attitude very well: “I basically just brushed off that line and
kept playing.” Though none of the players were sure what the expression meant,
immersion does not appear to have been broken and they accepted Tellah’s dialogue,
creating their own definition and continuing to play.

None of the respondents had a negative reaction to “you spoony bard!” Rather, a
few respondents shared their enthusiasm for it: “[M]y brother and I got a kick out of it,
and often said it following that”; “I thought it was awesome”; “YOU SPOONY BARD
WAS GREAT[.]” Player response matched my prediction that they mostly enjoyed this

line of dialogue. However, it functions similarly to Garland’s line: both lines of dialogue took place in a serious moment in their respective game, but one was received with more enthusiasm than the other. It could be argued that both lines involve censorship: one avoids the word “kill” and the other avoids an expletive. So why are they different? The answer seems to lie in word choice. The mystery behind the word “spoony” intrigued many players and its context allowed them to engage with the language to figure out what was being said. The root of the word which everyone likely noticed, “spoon,” taking the form of an insult created a playful, comedic effect which did not seem inappropriate for an old, angry wizard to exclaim. The act of taking a few seconds to interpret the dialogue seems to be the difference between eye-rolling corniness and fun for the player. By stepping out of the game-world temporarily and working to understand the dialogue, players seemed to enjoy the dialogue more than those who brushed it off and continued playing. Final Fantasy II’s localization focused on the player but even when its translated dialogue seemed inappropriate, players enjoyed it even if they broke immersion to understand it.

Final Fantasy III (VI)

The next game that Nintendo of America would bring over from Japan was Final Fantasy VI, retitled Final Fantasy III and released in 1994 on the Super Nintendo. This game brought to American audiences a story and characters that were memorable, and a good number of fans place it as their favorite game in the series. Final Fantasy III brought Ted Woolsey on board as translator, and he is known for his occasionally quirky translations. Nintendo of America’s restrictive translation guidelines were still in place,
and this brought out another well-known line of dialogue among fans. In one scene, the villain named Kefka, who is dressed like a clown and presented as a deranged individual, curses out loud: “Son of a submariner!” The unnaturalness of the exclamation stands out and seems incongruous with the man who says it, similar to Garland’s line from the first *Final Fantasy*. In certain ways, it seems that Nintendo of America had not made much improvement in their attempts to provide a translation that seemed appropriate for the tone of these well-loved games. The curse phrase which Kefka nearly spoke could be considered a fixed expression which Baker describes as “frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form.”

The variation here creates a humorous effect, one which continues to please audiences despite its inappropriateness which might distract the player from the otherwise threatening nature of this character.

### Final Fantasy VII

The translations of these early games left an impression on many players. Richard Honeywood, a current localizer at Square Enix, has stated in an interview that the localizers sometimes “receive backhanded compliments as people lament the loss of the silly mistranslations that were the norm in the Eighties.”

Though he specifies the eighties, it is clear that more than some of those translations carried on into the nineties. Whether these translations are missed because of nostalgia or because they were enjoyed even when they came out is unclear, but it appears that Nintendo of America’s localization strategy did not negatively affect their sales. Minako O’Hagan and Carmen

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24. Ibid., 67.
Mangiron describe that “the market seemed to have been generally tolerant of translation errors.”

But tolerance began to wear thin when the next Final Fantasy title, Final Fantasy VII, was released in 1997. Two major changes occurred by the release of this game: Final Fantasy VII was the first FF title developed for the Sony PlayStation home console system, and in the world of translation, Lawrence Venuti had published his famous book titled The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation. Though the book may not have had an influence on the gaming world at this time, its presence was felt within the translation world and it is worth noting the approach that localizers took with the series after this point. Being released on a new console, the Final Fantasy series began to reach a new audience. This factor called for a change in video game localization.

Final Fantasy’s shift from Nintendo to Sony had a tremendous effect on the series. Initially, Final Fantasy VII was in development for the Nintendo 64 console, but developer Squaresoft soon realized that the scope of their game was too large, and it could not be contained in the cartridge system that the Nintendo 64 utilized. The Sony PlayStation, on the other hand, utilized CD-ROMs which could hold more memory and games could be split onto more than one disc. Unwilling to downsize their game, Squaresoft made an agreement with Sony and began to develop Final Fantasy VII for the PlayStation. The official game ratings system from the ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board) had surfaced at this time, and gave Final Fantasy VII a “Teen” rating to indicate that the game was suitable for ages 13 and up. Between the new console and the

more mature rating than the very family-friendly Nintendo games, Squaresoft was bringing *Final Fantasy* to a new player audience.

Meanwhile, Lawrence Venuti’s *The Translator’s Invisibility* argued for better conditions for translators and discussed a variety of issues within the world of translation. One of Venuti’s arguments that left a lasting impression defined “foreignizing” translation versus “domesticating” translation. In brief, a foreignizing translation retains the foreign feeling of a work rather than significantly altering it to seem more familiar to the audience, and a domesticating translation aims to make the work seem very familiar as though it was originally written in the target language. Carlson and Corliss relate these concepts to video games:

A domesticating translation might replace details that are deemed too culturally specific to the source language with parallel materials more familiar to the target language reader—substituting slot machines for pachinko and dollars for yen as a text moves from Japanese to English, for example. A foreignizing translation would, of course, retain the pachinko and yen.27 They go on to explain that “either technique entails compromise.”28 As Tymoczko argues, there is no clear right answer, and this can be especially relevant in the discussion of foreignization versus domestication. *Final Fantasy* games up to this point have utilized a more domesticating localization strategy in the interest of reaching a wide audience for greater sales, aiming to increase familiarity which can have a direct effect on player enjoyment, and therefore it can prove to be an effective localization strategy.

Being released on a new console and with a higher rating did not slow *Final Fantasy VII* down. It was the best-selling *Final Fantasy* title to date, and became one of the most beloved video games of all time. In their book published in 2009, Bill Loguidice

28. Ibid.
and Matt Barton describe the game’s lasting effect: “Final Fantasy VII’s legacy is hard to overestimate. Its incredible popularity and record-breaking sales helped launch the RPG as a viable genre for the console market. Countless Japanese RPGs of varying quality followed in its wake.” 29 Squaresoft struck gold with this game and its immense popularity continues today, which Loguidice and Barton contribute to its “highly polished gameplay, lavish production, intricate storyline, and well-developed characters.” 30 Though all these elements were enjoyed, Final Fantasy VII’s translation is littered with misspellings, mistranslations, and typographical errors. Since Nintendo of America was no longer involved in the series’ localization, a single translator was used for the huge game that spanned three CD-ROMs, and the lack of resources poured into the translation is visible. Some of the typographical errors are particularly jarring, such as “off course!” for “of course!” and “no, way!” instead of “no way!” Other grammatical mistakes occur as well, such as the well-remembered line, “This guy are sick.” But some errors directly impact the gameplay. Near the beginning of the game, the main characters Cloud and Barret battle against a giant robotic scorpion, which raises its tail from time to time (Figure 4). Cloud warns his companion, “Barret, be careful! Attack while it’s (sic) tail’s up! It’s gonna counterattack with its laser.” These sentences are difficult to decipher. The word “counterattack” makes it seem that it would be unwise to attack, and yet the command to do so is clear in the second sentence. If the player decides to attack while the scorpion’s tail is up, it does indeed counterattack, proving that the translation is meant to say don’t attack while the tail is up, otherwise it will counterattack. A translation error this serious

30. Ibid., 78.
can have a very negative effect on the player and their experience. The risk of employing
a single translator for a game with a great deal of dialogue is too high; errors which affect
gameplay ruin immersion as the player becomes confused and frustrated, and lowers the
player’s enjoyment. In contrast with the earlier games’ break of immersion, Final
Fantasy VII’s is forgivable to some players but not the majority.

I wished to discover how my survey respondents reacted to the typographical
errors in Final Fantasy VII and how the players proceeded in response to Cloud’s
distinctly unclear message to his companion. I made two separate questions for these
topics. In regard to the typographical errors, I presented the following: “If you have
played Final Fantasy VII, how do you feel about its English translation? Did the typos in
the dialogue (such as “this guy are sick”) detract from your experience with the game or
did they not bother you?” I felt it was relevant to mention one of the better-known
typographical errors in the game to give an example of what I meant and to perhaps assist
them in remembering other similar instances in the game. This question also sought to
determine whether player immersion was affected by the quality of the translation.
Eleven out of twenty-eight respondents reacted negatively to the typos and the translation of *Final Fantasy VII*. Thirteen stated that they were not bothered by the translation, while four did not give a distinct answer either way. This places a slight majority as not being affected by the errors. Some of the respondents argued that they did not remember any of the typos now (“It’s been a long time […] I don’t remember being particularly bothered”). Another respondent indicated that they “never even noticed [the “this guy are sick”] typo and I even played this game recently. I suppose it didn’t bother me.” Two respondents even indicated that they noticed the typographical errors and enjoyed the translation (“I think I mostly found the typos funny”; “actually liked it, it made the feel of the game more classic even”). For them, this kind of error was characteristic of a game from this time. Unlike the players who were neutral about the “spoony bard” dialogue and brushed it aside to keep playing, some players enjoyed the nostalgic feeling of typographical errors in *Final Fantasy VII*. One respondent made reference to another form of media and explained that they were not bothered by *Final Fantasy VII*’s translation. “I’m used to a lot of subtitles in imported movies. I understand the meanings. The grammar doesn’t bother me,” they said. This respondent looked beyond the medium of video game to explain their experience with and expectations for translations, finding movie translation comparable to video games. A similar response revealed that a participant, “watched lots of subs and dubs” and it was not “a big deal” to them. While the medium is not explicitly stated, the participant is probably discussing anime subtitled and dubbed into English. Another pair of respondents reasoned that they were not bothered by the translation because it was normal for that time period. “Those were simpler days… you kinda just rolled with it,” wrote one. Some players adapted to
the prevalence of grammatical and typographical errors and continued to enjoy the game, and it seems that even some of them were not pulled out of the game or had their immersion negatively impacted.

Those who were bothered by the typos explained a number of problems they posed for their experience with the game. “Poor dialogue ruins a game for me,” one described. Another explained that “[m]istranslations detract from the series and remove the player from the story.” This response relates to my theory that typos and English which does not seem to flow well ruin immersion for players. Another stated that “the typos bothered me only in that I expect more quality.” The typos were “distracting” according to another participant. In comparison to the seemingly out of place dialogue in the first Final Fantasy and Final Fantasy IV, players seem to express overall more discontent or a more neutral reaction to the translation of Final Fantasy VII. One reason for this could be the more serious tone of Final Fantasy VII. As software and hardware for video games developed and games were able to appear more like the real world, the Final Fantasy series began to take itself more seriously. In conjunction with that, some players’ expectations rose while others learned to adapt to errors that could be considered more grievous than the incongruous translations from the earlier Final Fantasy titles.

For the line of warning, I asked respondents to choose between two answers rather than asking for an open response: “How did you interpret this warning? Please check one of the following.” The two options were “I attacked the boss because I believed Cloud was telling me to attack it” and “I did not attack the boss because I believed Cloud was telling me not to attack it.” As mentioned previously, the correct action to take was to not attack the boss. Out of thirty-two respondents, twenty attacked
the boss and twelve did not. This means just over a third of these players took the correct action and nearly two-thirds were counterattacked by the boss and learned what Cloud actually meant (or perhaps remained confused for longer than that). Being unable to ensure that all lines of dialogue in the game were understandable is a particularly serious error on the part of the localization staff. This dialogue also occurs very early in the game and could have left a rather poor impression on players or ruined their enjoyment for fear that they were not adept at *Final Fantasy VII*’s battle system. As the first major battle in the game, it is also surprising that the error was not caught.

The responses favoring attacking the boss are not particularly surprising. JRPGs and the *Final Fantasy* series in particular encourage players to attack their enemy. Many JRPGs introduce other strategies for battle, such as using a limited number of magic spells, defending, or moving closer to an enemy or further away, to name a few. But since this is the first serious fight that the player cannot run away from, it would be logical for the player’s primary instinct to be to attack since that is the strategy they are most familiar with so early in the game. Instead of attacking the boss, the player can choose to use an item (which they will not have many of so early on), defend, or simply wait and not choose to take an action until the mechanical scorpion boss lowers its tail again. Cloud’s warning exists to inform the player to fight their natural instinct to attack and try a different strategy and failing to communicate that eliminates its purpose.

It is reasons such as this that some players criticized the translation of *Final Fantasy VII*. Though the game sold millions of copies, not everyone was content with the clear lack of proper attention to typographical errors and other serious mistakes in the translation which seem like they could have been avoided. Typographical and
grammatical errors in the localization of a video game show a carelessness that is not present in the original Japanese product. Squaresoft must have believed that the American audience would not be bothered by a less-than-excellent translation, but while some players were able to adapt and carry on without much disruption, others were disappointed when their expectations for a smooth, properly edited script were not met.

**Final Fantasy IX**

The numerous fan complaints and the excellent sales of *Final Fantasy VII* proved to Squaresoft that their approach to localization needed, even deserved, to be changed. Localizer Richard Honeywood joined Squaresoft following the release of *Final Fantasy VII* and has described how the company’s localization practices changed significantly after its release: “[*Final Fantasy VII*] was probably the turning point, as it showed the company that foreign languages could sell huge numbers. […] Over the years, we have increased the in-house localization staff in Tokyo from just two to over thirty members.”

“Over the years” refers to the period from 1997 to 2007, but *Final Fantasy VII*’s role in instigating the major change should not be underestimated. This marks the period where Squaresoft began to take localization more seriously and truly consider the ethics of presenting an effective and worthy translation of their games to their new audience containing members with increasingly higher standards.

The change in Squaresoft’s approach to localization became evident when *Final Fantasy IX* was released in 2000, the last game in the series developed for the PlayStation. The clear difference came in the form of Alexander O. Smith, a professional translator.

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32. “Interviews.”
hired by Squaresoft to lead the localization efforts for the game. Smith brought smoother, more natural and more varied English to the game. There was no longer glaring incongruity in the dialogue; kings sounded like kings and characters’ dialogue conveyed natural levels of formality. In addition, Smith translated the lyrics to the song that played during the credits of the game: “Melodies of Life.” For the English release, the song was rerecorded with his translated English lyrics instead of putting subtitles over the original Japanese lyrics. This shows a greater effort put into the localization over the previous installment in the series, *Final Fantasy VIII*, where a song is played in English during a pivotal scene with occasionally awkward lyrics such as “whenever sing my songs,” and “if frown is shown then.” Fans responded well to the better translation in *Final Fantasy IX*, but one aspect of the translation stood out negatively to them: some names of locations and items meant to reference earlier *Final Fantasy* titles were not translated the same way. For example, the first *Final Fantasy*’s “Mount Gulg” was now translated as “Mount Gulug.” This created a disappointing experience for fans and seemed to indicate a lack of dedication to long-time players of the series. Though Squaresoft worked to bring a more polished and edited translation to their audience, they disappointed core fans who would have benefitted from the references to games they played five to ten years ago. Tymoczko’s argument about translation often never having one correct answer is very relevant to this consideration. Former Square Enix translator Tom Slattery worked on providing new translations for remakes of older *Final Fantasy* games, and stated in an interview that “you have to consider in every instance whether improving accuracy is worth destroying nostalgia for long-time fans.”

33. Cunningham, “Inside Gaming.”
accuracy, a decision that is more foreignizing than domesticating, focusing more on the source text. This marks a difference in localization from previous games in the series which took a distinctly domesticating approach. Many players likely did not notice the lack of references but for those who did, the foreignizing translation decreased their enjoyment and made them aware of the translation process, destroying their immersion.

**Final Fantasy X**

*Final Fantasy X* released in 2001 for the brand-new PlayStation 2 console. As the capabilities of the hardware and software improved greatly, Squaresoft showcased a new game with lifelike graphics never seen before and introduced voice acting to their beloved series. With characters that looked more realistic than ever and an entirely new aspect to the localization, Squaresoft had to change their approach once more.

The graphics that could be produced on the PlayStation console did not allow the characters to make many gestures that did not involve the whole body. Brief movie-like sequences without gameplay called “cut-scenes” used to showcase the game’s best graphics and were an exception to this rule, but they made up a very small portion of the game. But in *Final Fantasy X*, characters could easily gesture and express all of their emotions on their faces. This led to a new consideration in the localization of the game: visual localization. As Francesca Di Marco explains, “a problematic issue in the cultural localization of Japanese video games is related to the depiction of characters, locations, explicit representations of sex, gestures, and so forth.”

34 Richard Honeywood reveals that there were gestures made by characters in *Final Fantasy X* which would not be

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34. Di Marco, “Cultural Localization,” 2.
appropriate for audiences abroad: “the blitzball [a sport in the game-world] 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.”\textsuperscript{35} Unlike the editing in the localization of earlier games in the series, the error was noted early in the process and the gesture was recaptured instead of the scene being removed for international audiences. As Honeywood explains, “The [Final Fantasy] series didn’t just become international-minded. We’ve had to work for it, building up good relations with the team so that we can check for content issues during the early planning and development stages.”\textsuperscript{36}

It is clear that a strong effort was put forth by the growing localization team at Squaresoft to ensure a localization of Final Fantasy X that would be appropriate for audiences outside of Japan. However, one could argue that this approach is neither foreignizing nor domesticating since it affects the game while it is still in development—the Japanese audience sees the same visual representation that audiences abroad see. As gestures became easier to program into characters’ motions, it became necessary for the localization team to consider how to handle them in the future. Honeywood explains the solution they developed:

To avoid wasted efforts, we have made internal homepages with our localization staff posing for motions that should be avoided by the [development] teams. Also, the teams have learnt to run things—both motion and graphics-wise—by us before it is too late to change them. As a result, you don’t see too much bowing and other Japanese motioning in recent titles by [development] teams from Square’s side.\textsuperscript{37}

This is no longer a case of censorship as with the early titles in the series—this is the development of games to be appropriate, or not overtly Japanese, for international

\textsuperscript{35} “Interviews.”
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
audiences. Di Marco defines this approach to localization as “cultural localization,” where signs of the original (developer’s) culture are removed so that the game becomes more suitable for international audiences.\textsuperscript{38} With regard to the classification of domesticating and foreignizing, she argues that cultural localization “is about unsettling, recombination, hybridization, ‘cut and mix’; it is a process that stands between so-called reader-oriented or ‘domesticating’ translation and source-oriented or faithful translation.”\textsuperscript{39} Video games appeared to have necessitated a new approach that lies between them to ethically create meaning across cultures.

The introduction of voice acting to the series presented another challenge to the localization team: lip-syncing. According to Honeywood, lip-syncing is “rare” in Japan, even in games developed there.\textsuperscript{40} However, “some [development] teams have realized that lip-syncing does matter for the Western audience.”\textsuperscript{41} For \textit{Final Fantasy X}, the American localization team did the best they could to write dialogue for the voiceover that would match the movement of the characters’ lips developed for the Japanese script.\textsuperscript{42} Despite this dedication to maintaining immersion for American players who might have difficulty experiencing it with voices that do not match lip flaps, one decision that the localization team made stirred up great debate among fans. In one of the most moving scenes that takes place near the end of the game, Yuna is about to bid farewell to Tidus, her love interest who saved her life and helped her save the world. In Japanese, her final words to him are “thank you” (\textit{arigatō}). O’Hagan and Mangiron explain the

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\textsuperscript{38} Di Marco, “Cultural Localization,” 3.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{40} “Interviews.”
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
appropriateness of this expression: “In the Japanese cultural context this seemingly common and simple word is perfectly appropriate and able to convey multiple layers of meaning behind the word’s familiar surface.”\textsuperscript{43} In American culture, in contrast, “thank you” seems to be an underwhelming response in light of all he did for her and the depth of their relationship. In the English version of the game, Yuna instead tells him, “I love you.” O’Hagan and Mangiron cite Alexander O. Smith, a localizer for this game as well, as arguing that “this solution served both the necessary cultural and technical (lip-synch) requirements.”\textsuperscript{44} “I love you” fits Yuna’s lip movements better than “thank you” would and the American audience would expect a stronger reaction from her at such a dramatic moment in the story. In order to meet the demands for an accurate lip-sync and a heartfelt send-off for Tidus’ character, a more domesticating approach was taken with the voiceover. With regard to creation of meaning, Baker would define this as an example of difference in expressive meaning.\textsuperscript{45} Yuna’s arigatō conveys the same expressive meaning, the same emotions and contextual meaning, as “I love you” does in English, but it does not bear the same expressive meaning as “thank you” in English.

However, not all fans were pleased with this seemingly dramatic change in meaning: “some followers of the series […] believed it was too explicit and did not fit in with Yuna’s characterization.”\textsuperscript{46} This displays the start of a shift in critique of the series’ localization: fans are not critiquing typos and grammatical errors like they did with \textit{Final Fantasy VII}, they are not critiquing phrases that sound laughable as in \textit{Final Fantasy} and \textit{Final Fantasy III}, and they are not critiquing the failure to reference earlier English

\begin{itemize}
\item[43.] O’Hagan and Mangiron, \textit{Game Localization}, 173.
\item[44.] Ibid.
\item[45.] Baker, \textit{In Other Words}, 20.
\item[46.] O’Hagan and Mangiron, \textit{Game Localization}, 173.
\end{itemize}
translations of the game as in *Final Fantasy IX*. With *Final Fantasy X*, fans began to look to the original text, the Japanese version of the game for their criticisms. The domesticating approach and attempt at immersion created discontent among players who heard about or witnessed the original Japanese dialogue. The localization of games in the series began to be further contextualized by fans as the stories and characterizations deepened. Increasingly easy access to the Internet brought about the rise of an audience that began to favor foreignizing approaches to localization. While these fans were not the majority, their presence is noticeable online and Smith’s statement in defense of the translation choice shows the reach of the argument for foreignization. The expectations of players were changing once again.

In my survey, I asked a question about video games in general while keeping *Final Fantasy X* in mind (Table 1): “On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being not important and 10 being very important, how important is it to you that spoken dialogue match up with lip movement (aka lip syncing)?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (not important)</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 (very important)</td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

Most respondents answered between 5 and 8. I was surprised to see that 5 and 7 were the most popular choices since the localization staff expected American players to care a
great deal about lip-syncing. In fact, later on, *Final Fantasy XIII*’s development staff in Japan would put in a rarely seen effort to reanimate character lip flaps to match the English dialogue when released overseas. Given this fact, I expected many more responses between 8 and 10, but perhaps players have again adapted to what they have been given with some games that do not offer the most accurate matching up of voices to lip flaps, and lip-syncing does not affect immersion and enjoyment as much as I had expected.

**Final Fantasy X-2**

Miguel Bernal-Merino describes that “[t]he first decade of the new millennium [saw] many companies specializing in game localisation only, which is evidence of the volume of demand.”47 Despite this, Squaresoft was not among the developing companies that chose to hire a localization company to handle their series. With their localization team in place and working alongside their developers in Tokyo, they had no need to outsource their localization. However, shortly after releasing *Final Fantasy X*, the company merged with another game developing company called Enix (famous for another wildly popular JRPG series in Japan called *Dragon Quest*), and the two formed Square Enix. Fortunately, the merger did not appear to affect Square’s side of localizing its games, and in 2003, Square Enix released *Final Fantasy X-2*, the first direct sequel in the series’ history, for the PlayStation 2. Carmen Mangiron and Minako O’Hagan discuss some of the localization strategies utilized by Square Enix for this game, and ultimately

describe them as taking “a domesticating approach in a Venutian sense.” It is worth noting that the tone of *Final Fantasy X-2* is much lighter than its prequel’s, and very arguably it is the lightest in the entire *Final Fantasy* series: it opens with a pop concert and introduces the three main female characters whose initial focus is to track down hints to Tidus’ whereabouts. In comparison to the heavy themes of self-sacrifice and combating the inevitability of death present in *Final Fantasy X*, it is understandable that localization for *X-2* would be different. In particular, *X-2* is a much more humorous game filled with plays-on-words which pose new demands on localizers in order to heighten player enjoyment and ensure immersion.

Mangiron and O’Hagan describe the creativity utilized by the localizers of *X-2* by citing the example of O’aka, a merchant character. “Oaka (sic) speaks Cockney, although there was no specific accent present in the original Japanese versions,” they explain. O’aka does not play a particularly large role in the game, and so it is all the more surprising that the localization staff chose to have him speak in a foreign dialect when this did not occur in the original text. This is an overtly domesticating approach which must have been employed to bring further enjoyment to *X-2*’s international audience. This presents a difference between the translation of video games and literary translation, where the inclusion of dialects and non-standard accents is generally discouraged. However, Square Enix’s localization team would continue to use this strategy in later games as well, bringing their fantasy games closer to the real world in some regards, adding depth to the characters and perhaps even making them more familiar to players.

49. Ibid.
Another strategy that Mangiron and O’Hagan define in X-2 is what they call “contextualisation by addition.” The example they cite occurs near the beginning of the game when Yuna, now the main character, encounters her rival named Leblanc. Leblanc cleverly insults Yuna and her sphere-hunting group, known as the Gullwings, by calling them the “Dullwings”:

[T]he phrase ‘perfect for the Dullwings’ was deliberately inserted by the translators. […] This addition, which is also a play on words, helps to make explicit the adversarial relationship between Leblanc and Yuna, drawing a smile on the players’ (sic) face and hopefully engaging them more in the game with the inclusion of this amusing touch.50

Mangiron and O’Hagan touch upon important aspects of localization in this explanation, particularly the enjoyment and immersion of the player. The play on “Gullwings” is not present in the original Japanese dialogue, and so Square Enix’s localization team has clearly placed their larger target audience (rather than the smaller number of die-hard fans who prefer as much loyalty to the original text as possible) in the forefront of their mind. As Mangiron and O’Hagan argue, “game localisation[’s] […] ultimate goal is to offer entertainment for the end-user”51 and the localization team for X-2 has aimed to achieve that with the majority of their audience.

Mangiron and O’Hagan detail another strategy they found employed in X-2: recreation of play on words. As mentioned previously, this title in the series is rather humorous in comparison to the others, leading the localization team to be creative with jokes and puns. The authors explain that many jokes “are based in language deviance, mainly puns, which often cannot be translated literally. They have to be adapted to the target language and culture.”52 In one example, a character whose native tongue is not

50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
that of the rest of the characters exclaims that the current situation is *daijoubanai*—a word that is grammatically incorrect but which can be understood by native speakers to mean “not okay.” It takes the adjective *daijoubu* (“okay”) and adds a negative verb ending instead of the grammatically correct negative adjectival ending. In English, this word is translated as “disasterrific,” a playful modification of a noun into an adjective with a grammatically incorrect ending. This retains the feeling of the original Japanese and adapts it for an American audience in a way that is familiar and easy to understand, a domesticating approach that is effective for player enjoyment and immersion.

The last strategy that Mangiron and O’Hagan touch upon is the “deliberate use of regional expressions.” In a later scene of the game, Yuna puts on a concert which is simply referred to as a concert in the Thunder Plains in the original Japanese text. For the localization, it is renamed “Yunapalooza”: “This is a play on words with the American term ‘Lollapalooza’, an annual rock festival held in different US locations.”53 The authors go on to explain that by “using this local term, the American translators have included a target cultural reference, bringing the game closer to the players and allowing a greater degree of identification.”54 Though the localizers did not need to add this touch to the game, they opted to for the sake of enjoyment of the players, bringing familiarity that would maintain immersion while causing player enjoyment.

**Final Fantasy XII**

The next *Final Fantasy* title released in the JRPG genre was *Final Fantasy XII* for the PlayStation 2 in 2006. (*Final Fantasy XI* and *XIV* are massively multiplayer online

53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
RPGs, a distinct genre from JRPG.) In this game, a greater effort was made by the localization team, again headed by Alexander O. Smith, to work directly with the voice actors. Smith decided to build on the strategy of foreign accents used in previous titles, and decided on a mostly British casting for XII. He explains in an interview that the world contained within the game was “large and multicultural” and “thus requir[ed] several different regional variations in naming schemes and spoken language.” By doing this, Smith and his team reimagined Final Fantasy XII’s world for its audience in a way that could only be achieved in an English version of the game. Di Marco argues that this can disrupt immersion: “it is preferable to avoid the use of dialects in video game localization, since they belong to the ‘real’ world.” It seems that Smith precisely wanted Final Fantasy XII to feel real in some respects, as it would present a clearer world picture to the players. The player reaction to the localization of Final Fantasy XII was positive (though the gameplay was hit-or-miss), disproving the use of foreign accents and non-standard dialects in video game localization as a mistake. This approach to localization greatly differed from the Japanese version but seemed to remake the game to great effect, bringing a new and effective strategy into the world of game localization.

To gauge player reaction to the variety of accents utilized in Final Fantasy XII, I presented a question to the survey participants: “If you have played Final Fantasy XII, please check off words that describe how you found the use of foreign accents in this game.” I presented respondents with six choices: annoying, appropriate, distracting, 

inappropriate, realistic, and pleasing. I chose these words while keeping a balance in mind in order to gauge the overall reaction of players: three of them are positive qualities (appropriate, realistic, pleasing) and three are negative (annoying, distracting, inappropriate). In addition, I was curious whether Di Marco’s argument that foreign accent use in a game should be avoided for belonging to the real world would prove true, and so I included the options related to appropriateness and realism. It is clear that Smith believed adding realism to Final Fantasy XII would only enhance immersion for players. If it broke immersion, it could have proved “distracting.” Lastly, to get a feeling for players’ overall enjoyment, I gave them the options of “pleasing” and “annoying.” Of course, this can be affected by players’ perceptions of the accents used in the real world, but it is clear that players are expected to bring some of their real life experiences to the game, and so even this kind of response would seem relevant.

Table 2. Player response regarding foreign accents in Final Fantasy XII.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annoying</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasing</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distracting</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eighteen respondents answered this question about Final Fantasy XII (Table 2). Two pairs of words have clear majorities, but one does not: realistic and distracting as measurements of immersion are almost tied. Yet far more players believed the use of foreign accents to be appropriate for Final Fantasy XII. A player could find the foreign accent to be appropriate in the context of the game-world but still find it distracting. If the accent is unfamiliar to them, this may break immersion because it does not match what
they hear in reality, that is, in their daily lives. They may have to work harder to understand the dialogue which could create a less smooth gaming experience. It should be noted as well that this question can refer to dialogue written on the screen as well as to voice acted cut scenes. By stating that the accents can be distracting, respondents have admitted that such dialogue has caught their attention. It appears to stand out with a greater majority of respondents to this question than did the typos in Final Fantasy VII. This could be in part due to the fact that written dialogue can be quickly skipped through by the press of a button but spoken dialogue cannot be avoided unless the television is muted. On the other hand, differences in accents could make understanding the game’s plot more difficult for players whether it is written or spoken. Unlike Final Fantasy VII’s typographical errors, foreign accents are used frequently and with a long duration in Final Fantasy XII, and this could cause more distraction and confusion for players.

Overall, player enjoyment, even with this localization strategy, does not appear to be directly tied to immersion.

These responses appear to disprove Di Marco’s argument. According to these respondents, the realism of foreign accents and dialects does have its place in localization of video games. It is precisely their realness, their appropriateness, which develops a game world and makes it all the more enjoyable and immersive. The overwhelming majority of responses indicates that players favored a sense of reality in their game in the form of foreign accents to distinguish characters from different regions in the game’s world or even to distinguish these characters as being part of a fantastical world. In response to the question about other pieces of dialogue or aspects of Final Fantasy’s localization which stand out, one survey participant answered that they “loved the
localization of *Final Fantasy XII* since “it was perfect and felt like high fantasy.” This respondent went on to explain that they strongly enjoyed the use of foreign accents to determine what region characters came from within the game. For most players, it appears that the decision to use foreign accents in *Final Fantasy XII* was effective and conducive to player enjoyment and overall immersion.

**Final Fantasy V Advance**

Only a week after the release of *Final Fantasy XII* came the remake of *Final Fantasy V*, titled *Final Fantasy V Advance* after the handheld console it was released on, the Nintendo Game Boy Advance. The first English release of *Final Fantasy V* on the PlayStation system in 1999 did not present anything particularly new to the localization of JRPGs, but *Final Fantasy V Advance*’s translation takes an unexpected approach for its time. The tone of *Final Fantasy V* is more lighthearted than that of the games which follow it, particularly after the success of the more serious storylines contained in *VI* and *VII* established the success of a more serious tone in *Final Fantasy* titles. Given this overall lighthearted tone, there is more humor to be found in this game and more opportunities for translators to utilize creative language. Two survey respondents mentioned that out of the whole series, a particular line of dialogue stood out to them which I had not mentioned in the survey, a line from *Final Fantasy V Advance* spoken by one of the recurring villains of the game (Figure 5). This villain, Gilgamesh, exclaims to the heroes, “Enough expository banter! Now we fight like men! And ladies! And ladies who dress like men! For Gilgamesh… it is morphing time!” Gilgamesh is not a villain
who is particularly threatening in the game, and neither is he the main villain of the game; he often appears for comedic effect. In this situation, he is about to “morph” his body into a more powerful form. This piece of dialogue stands out in players’ minds because of its resemblance to “it’s morphin’ time!”—a commonly used phrase in the hit children’s television series *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*. It is unclear whether Gilgamesh’s dialogue is meant to be a reference since *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* debuted in 1993, thirteen years before *Final Fantasy V Advance* hit the shelves. But given the wild popularity of the television series, players who grew up watching it made a connection when playing *Final Fantasy V Advance*. The two survey participants remembered this translated line fondly; one even claimed it was the “best line” and “an example of when a less direct translation is better.” Gilgamesh’s dialogue proves to be yet another example of how immersion does not need to be maintained in order to draw out player enjoyment. The reminder of elements outside of the game actually increases enjoyment for many players who make the connection. This strongly domesticating
translation makes *Final Fantasy V Advance* similar to other early *Final Fantasy* games and its real-world cultural references are also different from *Final Fantasy XII* which focuses on creating its own contained game world without popular culture references.

**Final Fantasy XIII**

The latest JRPG in the *Final Fantasy* series was *Final Fantasy XIII*, released in 2010 for the PlayStation 3. Square Enix’s localization team utilized similar strategies with this title in terms of characters and foreign accents, such as heroes from a different world speaking with an Australian accent and some villains speaking with British accents. They again avoided a foreignizing approach by renaming the main character—she is known as Lightning throughout the game but her real name is revealed near the end of the story, and it is this real name which is changed. In Japanese, her real name sounded out is very similar to the English “éclair.” Tom Slattery explains their approach to the real name: “Lightning’s real name in the English version […] is not Éclair, because to an English-speaking audience, that is a pastry. The name was phoneticized differently from the dessert in Japanese, so the problem didn’t exist for a Japanese audience.” The team localized her name as Claire instead, taking into consideration the appropriateness of this serious, burdened character’s name. This is a change from the localization of the first *Final Fantasy* where Garland’s name was kept the same despite the additional meaning of his name in English. The values of localization have changed to reduce the incongruity that was once prevalent. One other change in the localization for this game came in the form of the lip movements: Square Enix agreed to perform motion capture of the English

57. Cunningham, “Inside Gaming.”
voice actors to ensure that in the English version of the game, the voices perfectly matched the characters’ lip movements. This was a revolutionary approach to the localization that is uncommon even today, and reveals that the developing company was willing to go to great lengths to support the localization of the game and increase player enjoyment and immersion. This goes a step further than changing the original text for the American localization since it also makes the lip sync less accurate for the Japanese audience. However, Square Enix must have felt this would be worth the effort, perhaps considering that Japanese audiences are less concerned with the accuracy of lip syncing than American audiences.

**Conclusion**

Over the history of the *Final Fantasy* series, Square has dedicated an increasing amount of attention to its localization for audiences abroad to bring enjoyment to its players. Localization was originally considered more of an afterthought but following the incredible success of the seventh title in the series, the company developed a localization team dedicated to creating a more enjoyable experience for its players in America. While overall more domesticating in their approach to translation, the games have displayed a few instances of foreignization, and more than anything, creativity that falls somewhere between or outside of Venuti’s terms. The *Final Fantasy* series proves to overall have an effective localization where interruption of immersion certainly does not guarantee a lapse in player enjoyment. Even as player expectations shift, Square Enix now seems capable of adapting to those expectations to bring a satisfying, localized experience to the majority of their fans in America.
CHAPTER 2

ANALYSIS OF CENSORSHIP IN THE POKÉMON SERIES

Introduction

The wildly successful Pokémon series debuted in America as a TV show, soon followed by its related video games titled Pokémon Red and Pokémon Blue versions months later.\(^\text{58}\) Since 1998, 24 titles have been released in the video game series, not including numerous spinoffs such as the Pokémon Pinball or Pokémon Stadium games. The most recent pair of Pokémon titles, Omega Ruby and Alpha Sapphire versions, released in Japan and America simultaneously in November of 2014 and sold three million copies within three days.\(^\text{59}\) With its great success and popularity, the series has proven to be a hallmark of the JRPG genre. Pokémon’s success is in no small part due to creative localization efforts.

In comparison to titles developed with an older audience in mind such as Final Fantasy, Pokémon contains dialogue which is simpler and less complex. As such, strict fidelity to the original Japanese text is not considered as important. As Katsuno and Maret explain, “[t]he successful localization of children’s television programs, video games, and toys nearly always follows the reader/audience/consumer-centered approach, and Pokémon is no exception.”\(^\text{60}\) With this approach in mind, it would not be fruitful to analyze the accuracy of the translation utilized in the Pokémon video game series. Instead, I will focus on the censorship of the series over time, ranging from changes made solely

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\(^{60}\) Ibid., 85.
for American and overseas releases of the games to changes which influenced the
development of the games in Japan. I would like to explore the reasoning behind the
alterations that were made, player reaction to these changes to determine their
appropriateness, and the future of localizing JRPGs aimed at children.

**Simulated Gambling and the Game Corner**

When *Pokemon Red* and *Pokemon Blue* were released in America in 1998, they contained elements which would later cause controversy. One of these was the Game Corner, a pair of buildings within the game dedicated to slot machine gambling and the cashing in of earnings for prizes. A sign outside of the Game Corner advertises it as a “playground for grown-ups” because of its rows and rows of slot machines.

The slot machines have simple rules. The player uses their in-game money to buy Game Corner “coins” which are required to play with the slot machines. By talking to other people playing at the machines, the player can receive free coins to get started. To play, the player chooses to bid between one and three coins; the more they bid, the better the chance they have of winning. Bidding one coin only allows the player a chance to win if panels match horizontally in one of the three rows. Two coins will give them the chance to win if panels match horizontally in any of the three rows. If they bid three coins, they have a chance to win if the panels match diagonally or horizontally across the three rows. The player controls when the slots stop spinning, and if they get three matching panels, they win more coins that they may use to purchase prizes. Win or lose, they forfeit the coins they bid.
Exposure to this area in the game is inevitable: to progress in the game, the player must search the building’s main floor for a switch to find the hideout of the thieving antagonist organization named Team Rocket. If the player also wishes to “catch ‘em all,” they must either earn 9,999 coins through their winnings from the slot machines or trade with a friend in order to obtain the very rare Pokémon named Porygon. If the player desires, they may also purchase the Game Corner’s coins with their in-game money, but the prices are steep and the process for buying coins is tedious and lengthy—you can only purchase 50 coins at a time—for the amount required to cash in for a Porygon. There are other valuable prizes offered through the Game Corner, including powerful attacks that Pokémon can learn to gain an edge in battle to progress the story and other difficult-to-catch Pokémon. There is enough to keep the player busy for a long time. In later years, the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) began to include warnings in its ratings for “simulated gambling.” This likely influenced the censorship which would come in 2009’s *HeartGold* and *SoulSilver* versions.

I asked the participants in my survey two questions related to the Game Corner in the *Pokémon* game series. The first pertains to the earliest *Pokémon* games (*Red, Blue, Yellow, Gold* and *Silver* versions) and the second to remakes released in 2009 and 2014 respectively (*HeartGold* and *SoulSilver; Omega Ruby* and *Alpha Sapphire*). For the first question, I asked the following: “If you have played the earliest *Pokémon* games, please describe your experience with the Game Corner in Celadon City. How often did you play with the slot machines? Did you play with them because the slot machine mini-game was fun and/or to buy a Porygon or other rare Pokémon with your winnings?” In asking this set of questions, I was curious to find whether players felt they had been addicted to the
slot machines in the Game Corner as it seems parents feared they would be. I also wanted to ascertain whether players enjoyed the gambling aspect of the mini-game or whether they played with the slot machines with the larger goals of the Pokémon game in mind (catching them all or making their Pokémon stronger to defeat the Elite Four trainers). An analysis of this information could explain how players—particularly children—interacted with the gambling aspect of the slot machine mini-game and whether later censorship of this particular mini-game was necessary.

Forty-three participants answered this first set of questions. However, not every respondent answered each question in the set. Eighteen participants answered the question of how often they played with the slot machines. Almost two-thirds (eleven) of the respondents gave answers which indicated that they did not play with the slot machines often and a little more than a third (seven) answered that they did play with the slot machines often. This result did not surprise me considering that the Game Corner is not a very large part of the Pokémon games and yet, for players who were dedicated to catching all of the Pokémon, it was a necessary part of the game if they did not have a friend who had already obtained and was willing to trade their Porygon. None of the respondents indicated that they were addicted to the slot machines; the response which indicated the greatest frequency of play was “a lot.”

Responses to the second question, regarding why the participants played the slot machine mini-game, can be split into two main categories: why some kept playing it and why some did not. The first category can be further broken down into two more groups: aiming toward the main goals of the Pokémon game, and enjoyment of the slot machine mini-game as it stands on its own. The most common response by far—perhaps prompted
by my suggestions in the question—indicated that players interacted with the slot machines in order to obtain Pokémon, particularly the rare Pokémon Porygon. Several respondents indicated that they played with the slot machines solely to obtain Porygon. Others explained that they “wanted to collect everything,” including the Technical Machines (known as TMs) sold at the Game Corner which are used to teach Pokémon powerful attacks. The game encourages this reaction by making these Pokémon and items very rare and hard to obtain, but three respondents took this quite seriously, answering that they continued to play with the slot machines even though they were not fun. It seems quite practical for a parent to be concerned about a child finding gambling to be very fun, but what about a child who has learned and can acknowledge that gambling is not fun? Looked at from this perspective, it seems that the slot machine mini-game could have been teaching children first hand that gambling is not a fruitful pursuit. Perhaps like real life, some people get lucky, and some do not. Though if this were the sole interpretation of the Game Corner’s function, of course, it would not have needed to be censored later on.

Responses indicating that players did not continue playing with the slot machines all center on the concept of them not being fun. Given that a goal of a video game and its localization is to cause the player to have fun, it appears that the slot machine mini-game failed to serve its purpose for some of these respondents. Three respondents indicated that they are not skilled at playing gambling mini-games, though the game is almost entirely based on luck. Three more respondents indicated outright that the mini-game was “not fun.” The most common response indicated that players were bored with the slot machines or found them boring. All other aspects of the early Pokémon games were not
determined by luck but could be overcome with time and training as Pokémon would grow stronger the more they were used in battle. By winning Pokémon battles, players would become able to buy better items to succeed in the game. It seems quite possible that for some players, having control taken from them and replaced with the illusion of control did not hold any appeal. Moreover, boredom in this case seems to implicate a loss of immersion or interaction with the game, leading to player dissatisfaction. Given the not-so-uncommon response that the slot machines were not fun, it would seem that the censorship of this element in the game would not negatively impact player enjoyment.

Six respondents discussed utilizing methods of obtaining coins that are different from playing the slot machine game and following its rules. In the first method, mentioned by three respondents, players would play with the slot machine until they earned a lot of coins and then would save the game. If, after that point, the tide turned against them and they began to lose coins, they would simply shut off the game and resume from the point they saved at. Two of these respondents admitted this was cheating. But considering that they were still following the rules of the larger Pokémon game, could it really be considered cheating? Since there is no “save” function in real life, it does not seem likely that this method of playing would be teaching children poor practices for later in their lives; one could argue it shows versatility. The second method mentioned by the other three respondents is the purchasing of coins rather than playing the slot machine mini-game. This is also a long, tedious process since only 50 coins can be purchased at a time and the goal so many players are working toward, Porygon, costs 9,999 coins. The player has to mindlessly press the A button to scroll through the seller’s dialogue each time and cannot speed up the process. Nonetheless, this is a process that
The interior of the Game Corner in *Pokémon HeartGold* and *SoulSilver* versions. Shown here are the slot machines in the Japanese release (left) and the table for Voltorb Flip in the American release (right).

some players (myself included) utilized. As such, there is a way to avoid using the slot machines, and two respondents recognized that using the slot machines was “inefficient” and “not worth [their] time.” For these players as well, it would seem that the removal of the slot machines would not negatively affect their game experience.

*Pokémon HeartGold* and *Pokémon SoulSilver* are Nintendo DS remakes of the Nintendo GameBoy *Pokémon Gold* and *Silver* versions. In *Gold* and *Silver*, the Kanto region from *Red* and *Blue* is a part of the game, and so the Game Corner is also present. In *HeartGold* and *SoulSilver*, the Game Corner is preserved in the Japanese release, but it is heavily altered for its overseas release (Figure 6). Instead of containing a number of slot machines, the Game Corner in the American release has a single table in the middle where a new game called Voltorb Flip can be played. Voltorb is a ball-shaped Pokemon known for self-destructing. In this card game, the player bids coins like in the slot machines and selects cards to flip over. The cards have a number from one to three or a picture of a Voltorb on the front. The player earns the number of coins shown on the card and builds up their earnings with each card they flip over. However, if they flip over a card with a Voltorb on the front, they lose all of their earnings. The player may choose to
end the game and keep their earnings whenever they like, or they can bid again to try to win more. Perhaps due to this editing by the localization team, *Pokémon HeartGold* and *SoulSilver* did not come with a warning of simulated gambling from the ESRB. It seems likely that it would have been labeled with that warning had the slot machines in the Game Corner been kept in. According to the ESRB’s website, “simulated gambling” is a characteristic of Teen-rated games suitable for players aged 13 and older. If a *Pokémon* game had been rated suitable for teenagers, it would have likely lost many members of its target audience. The localization team’s reaction to the pressure from the rating board is understandable and appropriate—a warning of gambling in the game and a Teen rating may have turned away a significant number of parents looking to buy it for their children. Given the risks and the solid amount of players who did not particularly favor the slot machines, the Voltorb Flip game was a reasonable alternative solution.

Another alteration to the Game Corner is presented in 2014’s *Pokémon Omega Ruby* and *Alpha Sapphire* versions (henceforth *ORAS*), the remakes of the original *Pokémon Ruby* and *Sapphire* versions released in America in 2003. In the American release of *ORAS*, the owner of the Game Corner stands outside of his closed store. Should the player decide to speak with him, he laments, “People used to come to my place and play games like crazy. […] Sigh… Times change.” A sign on the door indicates that the Game Corner has closed for good. Though changes were made in the Japanese release of *Pokémon* games in response to claims of racism, the Game Corner appears to be a different case—the *ORAS* Game Corner is still present and usable in the Japanese release of the game.

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In my second set of questions regarding Pokémon, I asked respondents, “If you played in the Game Corner in the earliest games, how do you feel about the alteration of the Game Corner in more recent games, such as the new Card Flip mini-game in the HeartGold and SoulSilver versions or the closing of the Game Corner in Omega Ruby and Alpha Sapphire versions?” In these questions, I aimed to ascertain whether players were discontent with the changes made to the Game Corner and whether this censorship had a particularly negative effect on long-time players of the series. I categorized responses by whether they were positive, neutral, or negative toward the changes. Responses were split: eight were positive, thirteen were neutral, and nine were negative.

The most common response (six out of thirteen respondents) from those who answered in a neutral manner indicated that they did not care about the changes to the Game Corner. As previously mentioned, the Game Corner was not a central aspect of the Pokémon games and for those players who were not looking to obtain every Pokémon—a task made much harder in the more recent games as more and more Pokémon are added, the present total standing at 720 in comparison to 1998’s 151—the Game Corner may seem optional. One respondent answered to this effect, explaining that they “don’t think that a lack of a Game Corner [in ORAS] detracts significantly from game play.” Another respondent saw both sides of the censorship issue: “I think adding new [mini-]games was fun, but I think shutting the game corner down was a good idea. It could develop addictive habits in people.” This respondent also answered to the previous set of questions that they enjoyed the slot machine mini-game because they “just really like to gamble” and may have been speaking from personal experience. One other respondent

62. Known as Voltorb Flip in the game.
wrote that “Voltorb Flip […] wasn’t my thing, so I don’t mind the Game Corner going away.” Apparently having seen the direction that localization of the Game Corner was going in, this respondent was content to have nothing to play rather than a mini-game which was not to their liking—a rather strong statement. For these players, there were notable positive and negative aspects to the decision to change the Game Corner in the American releases, but the overall impact on their experience was not negative.

Respondents who answered positively about the changes only indicated that they enjoyed the Voltorb Flip mini-game rather than agreeing with the closing down of the Game Corner completely. They explained that the newer mini-game was “fun,” “a great addition” and that they enjoyed it, liked it, and one even “loved” it. Two respondents respectively claimed that it felt “less rigged” and was “easier”—observations related to player agency and control. Though Voltorb Flip also depended on chance to a degree, players were allowed to think and strategize more than they could with the slot machine mini-game, which likely led to their greater enjoyment of Voltorb Flip. Another respondent indicated that “anything had to be better than the damned slot machines.”

While no respondents in this category agreed that the Game Corner should be shut down, this could be due to the fact that ORAS went on sale only two months prior and not all respondents had had a chance to play them and give their opinion firsthand. Nonetheless, it does not seem to sit well with players to take away the mini-game opportunity in the Game Corner. Certainly it is more noticeable that they have been deprived when the mini-game has been removed instead of replaced. The presentation of the closed Game Corner is effective, though: the store is boarded up and somewhere in the development process, the graphics were edited to allow this. Players who have not heard that the Game
Corner is still accessible in the Japanese version would never know this looking at the American release. Without inside knowledge, the Game Corner is effectively altered, though there is some player dissatisfaction at being left with no mini-game at all in this location.

Among respondents who reacted negatively to the changes, the most common response, from three participants, was that they missed the slot machines because of nostalgia. Another more common response was being displeased with Voltorb Flip, one respondent claiming they were “frustrated” by it. Two respondents revealed strong reactions to the changes, one explaining that they “feel that these changes are shallow and cheap” and another that “the removal of slots due to moral panic was ridiculous.” It can be said that player discontent stemmed from three areas: nostalgia for the slot machine mini-game, a dislike of the Voltorb Flip mini-game, and disagreement with the censorship in general. One respondent defended the presence of the Game Corner: “Thinking back to Red version, I think the game corner actually aided the atmosphere for Team Rocket as it was obviously a more adult place in the game and aided in the idea that Team Rocket was run by bad guys.” This statement could also support the argument that the Game Corner could teach children that slot machines were bad since the Game Corner was owned and operated by the main antagonists of the game, Team Rocket. In conclusion, some players believed that the altering of the Game Corner in later Pokémon games could have been handled better by introducing a different mini-game which would have been more enjoyable. Others understood why the changes may have been made and accepted them. Overall, the changes made to the Game Corner in the Pokémon games
over time were handled appropriately and did not lead to great dissatisfaction of American players.

These results become increasingly interesting when compared to how survey participants responded to this question (Table 3): “On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being not important and 10 being very important, how important is it to you that Japanese video games be uncensored when they are brought to North America?”

Table 3. Player response regarding importance of games being uncensored.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (not important)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 (very important)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
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</table>

A strong majority of respondents answered that a lack of censorship in Japanese games coming to North America was important to them. This data seem to suggest that if most respondents had played ORAS, they would have been against the censorship of the Game Corner. On the other hand, perhaps censorship of the Game Corner is not a kind of censorship respondents had in mind when answering this question.

**Racism and the Pokémon Jynx**

Within the release of *Pokémon Red* and *Pokémon Blue* versions was another controversy. Children’s book author and critic Carole Boston Weatherford declared
Figure 7. The Pokémon Jynx. Shown with black skin from *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* versions (left) and edited to have purple skin in the American release of *Pokémon Gold* and *Silver* versions (right).

that a Pokémon named Jynx (Figure 7) was a racist caricature of African Americans. She describes the character as having “decidedly human features: jet-black skin, protruding pink lips, gaping eyes, a straight blonde mane, and a full figure, complete with cleavage and wiggly hips” and as a depiction of “descendants of Africa through the bigoted lens of white supremacy” which could “adversely affect black children’s malleable self-images.” Weatherford witnessed Jynx first through an episode of the *Pokémon* anime aired on TV, but the character’s design is the same in the Pokémon games. When Weatherford wrote her article about Jynx, the *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* games had already been released. However, her comments left their mark on the rest of the game series.

In the North American release of the next pair of games in the series, *Pokémon Gold* and *Pokémon Silver* versions, Jynx’s skin color was edited to be purple instead of black, though the rest of her appearance remained the same. Jynx’s skin remained black in the Japanese release of those games, but a notable change occurred when *Pokemon Ruby* and *Pokemon Sapphire* versions were released in 2002: Jynx’s model was given purple skin even in the Japanese release. Since then, the Pokémon Jynx’s skin has officially changed to purple.

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In addition to Jynx, Carole Boston Weatherford made similar comments regarding a black-skinned character in the anime *DragonBall* (and its sequels) named Mr. Popo. He is also animated with thick lips and is seen in a subservient role to a god who watches over planet Earth. But instead of editing this recurring character out of the show, distributing company Funimation altered Mr. Popo’s skin to be a bright shade of blue in his TV appearance of the rerelease of the series, *DragonBall Z Kai*, which began airing in America in 2010. Though I did not mention Mr. Popo in my survey, several respondents compared or made reference to this similar situation when discussing the Pokémon Jynx.

I asked my survey respondents the following question regarding the Pokémon Jynx: “Do you agree with the change of Jynx’s skin color from black to purple in response to claims of racism in *Pokémon*? Please briefly explain why or why not.” By phrasing the question in this manner, I hoped to get a fairly clear yes or no response with some additional commentary. Out of thirty-nine responses to this question, nineteen agreed, twelve disagreed, and eight were neutral. Though there was a majority, it is fair to say that these results are mixed.

What appears central to the debate among respondents is whether representation in a video game is based on reality or whether it is self-contained within a game and not related to the “real” world. None of the respondents answered that it was “just a game” or that this would not be an issue worth discussing. It is clear that representation matters in video games, especially one as popular as *Pokémon*. One respondent commented on the act as censorship: “I have mixed feelings on principle, I oppose censorship, particularly since Jynx was never intended to cause offense. However, I understand that it is a sensitive issue.” A few other respondents argued the same: they did not feel Jynx was
offensive but they were understanding of the idea that the design might cause offense. Others argued that there was “no racial reference” or that they “never associated Jynx’s color with human race.” Another respondent argued that “not every full lipped dark skin character is created to represent another race.” Others believed Jynx has “exaggerated features that are similar to racist propaganda from back in the day” and bears “a startling resemblance to black face.” Similar to the responses about the changes made to the Game Corner, most fans agree with the edits made to Jynx though there are those who were displeased by it and felt that no harm was intended with its design. Overall it appears that the editing of Jynx’s skin color was appropriate to continue selling the series and it did not have a strong negative impact on players. Censorship of gambling and elements which could be construed as racist were appropriate actions to take with the localization of the Pokémon games and even with a wildly popular series as this which is enjoyed by people of varying ages, it is better to err on the side of caution.
CHAPTER 3
ANALYSIS OF IMMERSION IN JAPANESE AND AMERICAN POKÉMON GAME GUIDES

Introduction

In most cases, localization for American audiences involves more than just the game contained on a cartridge or a disc. Boxes, manuals, and—if the game series is popular enough—strategy guides must also be translated and presented to a new audience. I would like to focus on these elements outside of the game as they are presented for the Pokémon series. The American release of guidebooks, known as strategy guides or game guides, for the Pokémon series are more focused on gameplay in comparison to the Japanese game guidebooks which are comparatively more focused on the story. The American localization approach is domesticated with a different approach to immersion (keeping the player engaged in the game-world) compared to the Japanese game guides.

The market for video game strategy guides has changed over time in America since the release of Pokémon Red and Blue versions. In the late 1990s, it was not uncommon for video games with official published guides to also have unofficial published guides. Designated companies published the official guides such as Prima, still a main publisher of video game strategy guides today, and Nintendo Power, the official Nintendo magazine in English which published its final issue in December of 2012. With the birth of the Pokémon craze during this time, it is unsurprising that various independent groups and websites published their own unofficial guides to the video games. But as the Internet became more accessible and entered more homes, video game players began to write their own game guides which they posted online. Entire websites were created to host guides like these, and GameFAQs.com is a primary example of one
which has survived through today. It would be difficult to imagine that these free-to-read guides did not have an impact on the strategy guide market. Currently, video game strategy guides are published in print by one company per game, often a company which specializes in the publishing of such guides like Prima Games and Piggyback. Meanwhile dozens of unofficial strategy guides are uploaded online, written for fun by players of the games. Other unofficial guides can be bought cheaply online through e-book vendors such as Amazon and iTunes, but unofficial guides in print are now nearly non-existent.

Unofficial guides written by fans and uploaded online are surely not the only reasons why fewer printed video game guides exist today. As video game cartridges and Blu-ray discs are capable of storing more content, many popular video game series have evolved to have many more gameplay elements such as mini-games and sidequests. Some of these additional gameplay elements are harder to play through and complete in comparison to main storyline objectives. As such, players will want to read about strategies on how to complete these optional objectives—an official strategy guide cannot afford to overlook even seemingly trivial gameplay details in order to satisfy its consumers. With all of this extra content added, strategy guides are becoming longer and longer, often in the range of over 300 pages. In the Pokémon series, an official strategy guide for Pokémon Gold and Silver versions was 120 pages, while the longest single guide for a Pokémon game, Pokémon Platinum version, was over 600 pages. Paperback guides containing over 600 pages are thick and heavy, even unwieldy for a player who uses a portable video game system on-the-go. Maintaining a balance between including enough details and not making a guide that is too heavy is crucial.

Fortunately, the *Pokémon* series has established a successful solution to this. The hefty *Pokémon Platinum* guide was the final *Pokémon* strategy guide to be published in one volume; all subsequent titles in the series have received two-volume strategy guides published months apart from each other. The first volume is a “region guide” which walks the player through how to progress through the towns in the game and reach the common storyline goal of defeating the most skilled trainers in the game, the Elite Four, and become the Champion. The second volume is a catalog of information regarding how to obtain every Pokémon in the game. *Pokémon* is the only video game series to release two-volume strategy guides (though there are some rare titles with multiple guides focusing on different aspects of gameplay, such as *Minecraft*, whose current popularity is reminiscent of *Pokémon*’s just before the turn of the millennium and makes it an exception). For other game series, this would be too great of a risk to take; a guide released months after the game will be significantly less in demand as word-of-mouth and online advice becomes more prevalent. But in the case of *Pokémon*, there is one aspect of its gameplay which can allow the success of a later-released second volume guide: catching all of its 700 Pokémon. With so many creatures to find, capture, evolve, and trade, it will take a player hundreds of hours of play to achieve this goal. In addition, the diverse methods by which players have to evolve their Pokémon in order to obtain new ones are not often easily predictable, thus requiring the player to find sources outside of the game to achieve their goal. This necessity for players who want to “catch ‘em all” ensures the sales of a guide which details how to obtain every Pokémon. For the game creators, this double-volume release also increases revenue: the single-volume guides of
Pokémon retailed for under twenty dollars and now the double-volume guides usually retail for $19.99 per volume.

In Japan, multiple guides for a single game is not uncommon. Separate guides focusing on the main storyline or objective completion outside of the storyline exist for series including Final Fantasy. Unlike in the West, releasing multiple guides in print for a video game has not died out. Pokémon is no exception to this, though there are guides which attempt to cover all aspects of the game in a single volume.

But how might supplementary elements such as game guides impact player immersion? By their very nature of being something “outside” of the game, it would seem that they would bear a negative impact on immersion. But could they bring a player deeper into a game by expanding the game world in the player’s mind and extending the reach of the game beyond playtime? Is there a difference in the approach between America and Japan toward the story of the Pokémon games versus its gameplay? Looking closely at the presentation of the Pokémon games, one can see that Japanese and American guides differ in their emphasis placed on player self-insertion and real-world elements within the game and related to the game.

Immersion in a Japanese Pokémon Guidebook

Anne Allison analyzes a Pokémon guidebook covering the earliest games in the series in a chapter of her book Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination. The guide she analyzes is the Poketto Monstā Zukan whose layout she notes “is one of overlapping cartographies, charts, and accounts where the coordinates continually vacillate between phenomena that actually exist (the creators of the game, a
nature of rivers and grass) and the imaginary *Poké*-world (monsters who live, evolve, and advance as tools of and for humans).” 

This balance of game-world and real-world elements is striking: the guide discusses a deeper background of the *Pokémon* world’s story, engaging them further in it, just as easily as it presents interviews with the developers and brings the player back to reality.

Allison explains that the guide begins with an explanation of the origins of *Pokémon* and the study of these creatures in the *Pokémon* game world. Among the pieces of this origin she describes is a character named Count Tajirin, “an eighteenth-century French writer” who was the first to study these *Pokémon* carefully. This piece of information in the guide contains both aspects of game world elements as well as real-world elements: Satoshi Tajiri is the creator of *Pokémon*. Children reading the guide may not notice this connection, but the creator’s name does appear in another section of the book containing interviews with the creators. This clever integration of the real-world into the game-world would seem to disrupt immersion by calling attention to *Pokémon* as a fictional, created world.

Another intriguing element contributing to immersion located in the background story in the *Poketto Monstā Zukan* is its display of Japanese pride. This is achieved through the frequent mention of Japan and its scholars in the involvement of the study of *Pokémon* within the game-world. The English version of the early games does not mention anything about Japan but this Japanese guide explains that Japan is a leading country in the research of these creatures named *Pokémon*:

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66. Ibid., 208.
Professor Nitsunomori (the Japanese founder of *Pokémonology*) greatly advanced the field, and upon the publication of his thesis [...] Japan has become a *senshinkoku* (advanced country) in *pokémon* research. Since that time [...] research has progressed further thanks largely to Japan’s Ōkido Hakase (Professor Oak), professor at the Tamamushi Daigaku Keitai Jyū Gakubu (Department of Portable Beasts at Scarab Beetle University).67

Allison describes this as a reflection of Japan’s international power as a producer of cultural goods for children.68 The English release of the early *Pokémon* games does not say anything about Professor Oak being Japanese and neither does it mention anything about Japan. (Curiously, a character named Lt. Surge is referred to as the “Lightning American!” even in the English release despite no other mention of America being made in the game.) Further hybridization of real-world and game-world comes in the form of discussion of the towns and cities and nature in the game. *Pokémon* live in the wild as well as in cities, and *Pokémon* temperaments and their biology are described to be affected by their environment just like real-world animals: “sea *pokémon* rarely evolve or have high intellects (a result of their relatively unchanging environment), and town *pokémon* have been subjected to industrial pollution.”69 In this presentation of real-world elements in the game, players, especially children, can become more attached to the familiar elements of the game that relate to the world they live in.

**Immersion in American *Pokémon* Guidebooks**

In contrast with the Japanese guides, the English guides to *Pokémon* do not include a lengthy backstory or discuss real-world elements. The *Official Pokémon Gold and Silver Adventure Guide* released by Versus Books in 1999 and the *Pokémon Ruby*
Version and Sapphire Version Player’s Guide published by Nintendo of America in 2003 served as my guides on the localization of Pokémon strategy books into English. Both guides are official and are quite different from the Japanese guide that Allison analyzed in terms of organization as well as the focus of their content.

The English guides do not discuss the origins of the Pokémon world or how Pokémon are initially discovered in Pokémon Gold and Silver versions or in Pokémon Ruby and Sapphire versions. In fact, the Gold and Silver Adventure Guide begins with a section titled “What’s New in Gold & Silver” and instead of presenting the story, it explains that “if you’re new to the world of Pokémon, you may want to start by reading the game’s instruction manual first.”70 The guide assumes that players have spent time with the first Pokémon games: Red, Blue and Yellow versions. Given the immense popularity of the games at this time, this was not an unreasonable expectation. In addition, by the release of the Gold and Silver versions, many people knew the basic plot of Pokémon from the earlier games and other media such as the anime series. However, no introduction to the story is given in this guide; it instead takes a technical approach and discusses the first town strictly in terms of how the player may advance through it and what might benefit them as they play. Hints of story are overshadowed by the emphasis on advancement through the game. In an early section, the guide discusses the story briefly, but with a goal-oriented approach: “The first step of your quest to become a Master Trainer is conquering the Gym in Violet City and earning the Zephyr Badge. Assemble a party of captured Pokémon and head back to Route 30. Take the left fork and

run the gauntlet of trainers to get to Violet City.”

Even the advice the guide gives to look at the instruction manual does not tell the player much about the story that is not presented in the game; it dedicates a few sentences to this purpose. It introduces the concept that Pokémon live in the world and have worked alongside humans peacefully. “Nevertheless,” it goes on to explain, “there are still numerous mysteries surrounding [Pokémon]. In order to find out more about these strange and marvelous creatures, many scientists—such as Professor Elm of New Bark Town—have dedicated their lives to Pokémon research.”

Unlike in the origin story presented in *Poketto Monstā Zukan*, the professor, Elm, is not connected to a real-world location. New Bark Town is the town the player starts in in *Pokémon Gold* and *Silver* versions; it is the player character’s hometown. Professor Oak in the *Red*, *Blue*, and *Yellow* versions also lives in the hometown of the player character but in the Japanese guide he is from Japan, creating, presumably, a sense of affinity and familiarity for the player that extends outside of the game. In the English version, no such connection is established. The player is not brought back to the real-world while reading—there are no interviews with the game staff either—but neither are they immersed in the game world given the guide’s technical approach. It would seem in this case that the *Gold and Silver Adventure Guide* offers fewer opportunities for immersion than the *Poketto Monstā Zukan*, offering players a strictly goal-oriented approach to the games rather than providing background and fleshing out the story.

In the *Ruby Version and Sapphire Version Player’s Guide*, the approach to the

71. Ibid., 20.
The guide addresses the reader as “you” and treats the player character as if they and the player were one entity: “After you’ve met your neighbor (May or Brendan), walk north to Route 101.” Even when directing the player on where to guide the player character to go, the guide treats the player and player character as one. The Player’s Guide also attempts to set the scene by describing the circumstances of the beginning of the game: “Your family’s move to Hoenn is complete. The journey was long, but Littleroot Town’s peaceful atmosphere is welcoming—and you’re closer to your dad’s Pokémon Gym in Petalburg City.” This is a much more narrative style than the Gold and Silver Adventure Guide and encourages the player to insert themselves into the game. However, this information is mostly covered by conversations in the game, and therefore cannot be compared to the extensive background story given in the Poketto Monstā Zukan. The Ruby Version and Sapphire Version Player’s Guide does not provide reference to the real world and instead promotes self-insertion into the game world. It is more immersive than the Gold and Silver Adventure Guide and presents a different approach to immersion compared to the Poketto Monstā Zukan.

**Conclusion**

Allison’s analysis of the Poketto Monstā Zukan reveals that in a Japanese guide book for Pokémon, immersion is approached through familiarity using elements from the real world. Two localized English guides approach immersion differently, with one guide taking a technical, non-immersive approach, and the other utilizing self-insertion as a

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74. Ibid.
means toward immersion. These two English guides take a domesticated approach toward localization which can help (in the case of the *Ruby Version and Sapphire Version Player’s Guide*) or hinder (in the case of the *Gold and Silver Adventure Guide*) immersion based on the approach. The difference in approaches toward immersion between American and Japanese publishers is curious and may indicate a difference in the way players enjoy video games—a consideration that could be crucial for localizers.
CONCLUSION

Outlook on the Future of Japanese Role-Playing Game Localization and Summary

Many respondents answered my final question about other quotes which stand out to them in the Final Fantasy series with overall reactions to the English localization of the series. Only one respondent made a negative comment: “Maybe the translation teams could be… larger? It’s hard to believe that a series like [Final Fantasy] could have so many little errors in translation along the way.” As previously mentioned, thanks to the efforts of localizers like Richard Honeywood, Square Enix has increased the size of its localization team and has moved it from the United States to Tokyo to work alongside the developers and programmers. Final Fantasy has very much become a global product over the years, changing from a single game in a genre believed to be too difficult for Americans to understand to an international hit series where changes are made as early as in the development stage to make it appropriate for a global market. With the importance of international sales rising, it seems that Square Enix has looked back on its past and realized the necessity of a larger localization team and dedication to the localization process of its games.

Players appear to be optimistic about Square Enix’s localized Final Fantasy games. Thinking back on past titles in the series, one respondent commented that they find them “easy to forgive because of how much I enjoyed them and their nostalgia value.” Another reported that they “never had any negative feelings” toward the translations of the games. In addition, two other respondents expressed their belief that the translations have become “better” and “more polished” over the years. As for members of the industry, localizer Steven Anderson comments, “My feeling is that Japanese developers
are becoming more and more aware of the need to present their translatables in a coherent manner in order to get the best localization results, so I think these issues will present less and less of a challenge in the future.”

With the developing company placing greater focus on the global market and localization teams supported by greater staff and developers, domesticating translations will become less necessary as the source product becomes more globally appropriate and its foreign aspects become more recognized and accepted by players, bringing enjoyment to the player without requiring as much careful and creative effort from the localization team. As translator Matthew Alt explains, “There is a much firmer awareness of Japanese culture (and particularly subculture) abroad now than there was in the ‘90s, and games that have a lot of Japanese-specific cultural references tend to use them as a selling point.”

This player awareness and developer effort with regard to localization will lead to smoother immersive experiences which Square Enix will be prepared for.

For games like Pokémon whose target audience is children, domesticating localization will always be a reality. Rating guidelines must be strictly adhered to in children’s entertainment, though even these guidelines have seen a shift over time. However, most older players of these games understand why certain elements must be altered or censored and their enjoyment is not deeply affected.

Conclusion

Video games are a rapidly growing medium requiring unique approaches to localization to accommodate all of its elements in written, spoken, and visual forms.

75. Jayemanne, “Generations and Game Localization.”
76. Ibid.
Square Enix and Nintendo have displayed effective localization approaches for their series without requiring congruity between the dialogue and the setting or characters of their games. The element of immersion has proven to not be a necessity for players to enjoy a video game and its disruption can actually lead to greater player enjoyment. In addition, elements which are censored or heavily altered can be handled creatively in a way that will not be a detriment to the player’s experience. Both Pokémon and Final Fantasy provide examples of how localization of a product requires creativity and a dedication to player enjoyment which can serve as an inspiration for the localization of other media exported from Japan.
APPENDIX

SURVEY RESULTS

Presented here are the questions from my survey and a summarization of the responses. The questions are presented here in the same order they were given to survey participants.

Question: On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being not important and 10 being very important, how important is it to you that spoken dialogue match up with lip movement (aka lip syncing)?
Response (out of 83 total):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (not important)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 (very important)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is it to you that Japanese video games be uncensored when they are brought to North America?
Response (out of 83 total):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (not important)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 (very important)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: Do you agree with the change of Jynx’s skin color from black to purple in response to claims of racism in Pokémon? Please briefly explain why or why not.
Response (out of 39 total):
Answer | # of Respondents
---|---
Agree | 19
Disagree | 12
Neutral | 8

Question: If you have played the earliest *Pokémon* games, please describe your experience with the Game Corner in Celadon City. How often did you play with the slot machines? Did you play with them because the slot machine mini-game was fun and/or to buy a Porygon or other rare Pokémon with your winnings?

Response (not every respondent answered each question):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Play</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Often</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Primary reasons why players played with the slot machines:
- Aiming toward the main goals of the game (catching all the Pokémon)—21 respondents
- Enjoyment of the slot machine mini-game—12 respondents

Primary reasons why players did not play with the slot machines:
- They were boring—4 respondents
- They were not fun—3 respondents
- The players were not good at playing with them—3 respondents

Respondents who mentioned using methods other than slot machines to obtain coins: 3

Question: If you played in the Game Corner in the earliest games, how do you feel about the alteration of the Game Corner in more recent games, such as the new Card Flip mini-game in the *HeartGold* and *SoulSilver* versions or the closing of the Game Corner in *Omega Ruby* and *Alpha Sapphire* versions?

Response (out of 30 total):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: If you have played the first *Final Fantasy*, you may have encountered the following line of dialogue from the final boss: “I, Garland, will knock you all down!!” If you remember this line, please describe your reaction to it. If you do not remember this dialogue, do any other lines from this game stand out in your memory? Please explain why (i.e. it was amusing, awkward, moving).

Response (out of 14 total):
No respondents mentioned other lines of dialogue from Final Fantasy.

**Question:** If you have played *Final Fantasy IV* (known as *Final Fantasy II* on the Super Nintendo), what was your impression of the “You spoony bard!” line of dialogue? Did you know the definition of the word “spoony”? Please describe what you understand the meaning of this exclamation to be.

Response (not every respondent answered each question):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents who said they “didn’t know” the meaning of “spoony”: 8
Respondents who correctly guessed its meaning: 2

**Question:** If you played *Final Fantasy VII*, how do you feel about its English translation? Did the typos in the dialogue (such as “this guy are sick”) detract from your experience with the game or did they not bother you?

Response:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bothered</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Bothered</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question:** In *Final Fantasy VII*’s first boss fight, one against a giant mechanical scorpion, Cloud warns his companion, “Barret, be careful! Attack while it’s tail’s up! It’s gonna counterattack with its laser.” How did you interpret this warning? Please check one of the following:

- [ ] I attacked the boss because I believed Cloud was telling me to attack it
- [ ] I did not attack the boss because I believed Cloud was telling me not to attack it

Response (out of 32 total):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attacked</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Attack</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question:** If you have played *Final Fantasy XII*, please check off words that describe how you found the use of foreign accents in this game:

- [ ] Annoying
- [ ] Distracting
- [ ] Realistic
- [ ] Appropriate
- [ ] Inappropriate
- [ ] Pleasing
Response (18 respondents):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annoying</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasing</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distracting</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: Does anything not mentioned above stand out to you about the English translations of games in the Final Fantasy series? Please briefly explain why it stands out.

Response:
Respondents who mentioned Gilgamesh’s dialogue from Final Fantasy V Advance: 2
Respondents who mentioned Kefka’s “Son of a submariner!” from Final Fantasy III: 1
Respondents who reflected positively on the series’ translation: 7
Respondents who reflected negatively on the series’ translation: 1


