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Localization: Fans, the New Frontier

Item Type	thesis
Authors	Maroney, Caitlin
DOI	10.7275/14369440
Download date	2024-11-30 10:24:38
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/33867

Localization: Fans, the New Frontier

A Thesis Presented

By

CAITLIN CLAIRE MARONEY

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

MASTER OF ARTS

MAY 2019

Japanese

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Approved as to style and content by:

Bruce Baird, Chair

Stephen Forrest, Member

David K. Schneider, Unit Director
East Asian Languages and Cultures Program
Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures

Robert Sullivan, Chair
Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures

DEDICATION

To my family, friends, and especially my cat.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to take the opportunity to thank all everyone who helped me with this project over the last two years. To my chair, Professor Bruce Baird for his helpful advice and push to help me finish. Additionally, to the East Asian Language Librarian, Sharon Domier, for helping me find sources in places I would have never looked.

I would also like to thank my friends and family for generally putting up with me over the last few years. Especially my fiancé who moved internationally to help support me through this program.

ABSTRACT

LOCALIZATION: FANS, THE NEW FRONTIER

MAY 2019

CAITLIN CLAIRE MARONEY

B.A. BARD COLLEGE

M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS

Directed by: Professor Bruce Baird

The goal of this thesis is to examine the changing influence and role of the audience in the localization of Japanese video games. I examine the history of Japanese video game translation, honing in on Japanese Role-Playing Games, including the influence of Nintendo of America's policies and how they shifted from translating games to localizing games. I also explore the shift in which the internet and social media has allowed for increased interaction between localizers and fan bases. This can allow for localizers to have a more in-depth knowledge of the expectations of the intended audience of the video game, but has also further fueled the debate of whether or not localization constitutes censorship. Lastly, I do a close analysis of two long running game series and how they are adapting to the new changes with the introduction of social media.

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INTRODUCTION

Now it is the beginning of a fantastic story! Let us make a journey to the cave of monsters! Good luck! (Bubble Bobble, Taito, 1986)

The video game industry has grown to be a significant form of entertainment internationally. According to the Entertainment Software Association¹ (ESA), the industry's total sales amounted to 36 billion USD in the United States in 2017 and analysts expect it to continue growing.² In the 1980s, at the beginning of the industry, achieving this level of success was unprecedented. The video game console industry crashed in the United States during the 1980s, and Nintendo completely revitalized the market when they released their own Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) in 1985. From this point on, the Japanese influence on video games and the video game industry has been undeniable, and often people from outside of Japan are exposed to Japanese culture via video games. As a result, many games are initially developed in Japanese, and therefore must be translated before they can be consumed in other regions. However, video games—as a cultural product with multiple socio-cultural and gameplay factors—cannot be as easily translated like other forms of entertainment. This process is usually referred to as “localization,” to differentiate it from textual translation.

What exactly *is* localization? The localization process, as described by localizer Chris Mandelin, consists of four stages: 1. original (in foreign language), 2. raw translation, 3. clarification, and 4. adaptation. For example, Mandelin proposes the

¹For more detailed information see appendices A, B, and C.

²The Entertainment Software Association, *Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry: 2018 Sales, Demographic, and Usage Data*, (The Entertainment Software Association, 2018), accessed March 22, 2019 http://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/EF2018_FINAL.pdf

example “I’m gonna punch your lights out,” the original being in English for convenience, but would normally be in a foreign language. For this example, the “raw translation” stage, or if the phrase were literally translated, is “I will break all the light bulbs in your home with my hand!” This phrase is pretty nonsensical in English, thus, during the “clarification” stage, it is simplified to “I’m going to hit you!” However, as that translation is not the most interesting in English, it is changed in the “adaptation” stage to the more humorous, “I hope you’re thirsty, ‘cause I brought some punch!”³ Like in Mandelin’s example, the general goal of localization is not just to bring a game into a new language, but to translate the experience of the previous version.⁴ The issue of the lack of an existence of a one-to-one translation exists in all forms of translation, but for video games, is complicated by the fact that the consumer is a player. So, rather than being a passive participant, the consumer actively takes part in most actions of the game. This difference is apparent when participating in actions that are deemed inappropriate due to a different cultural context. However, in general, the target audience and the game creators’ expectations were the driving factors surrounding how much of a game was changed.

From the beginning of video games until the mid-2000s, video games were much like other forms of media, they were printed on cartridges or discs and could not be changed once they were completed. So, the games’ localizations were final. Occasionally, bigger video game companies would re-release games with updated

³Clyde Mandelin, *Legends of Localization Book 2: EarthBound*. (Brainerd, MN: Fangamer, 2017), 32.

⁴Alexander O. Smith, interviewed by author, January 29th, 2019.

localization,⁵ but usually, that did not happen. So, players would play games with English errors and changes that they were not pleased with, but there was nothing a fan could do about it. However, fan communities grew along with the spread of at-home internet, and many chatrooms discussed localizations, and some groups gathered online to do their localization. Starting in the mid-to-late 2000s companies started to patch⁶ games after release. So, games that were broken could be fixed, and localizations could be changed after a game was released.

With the rise of social media and the increased online presence of video game localizers and creators, many fans began to believe that localization could be changed based on their expectations of what the game should be. Thus, the audience influence over a translated product began. This expectation would be similar to if the recent unpopular Harry Potter movie was adapted to meet fan criticisms after release into theaters. Alternatively, if people found a translation of a Murakami book to be unacceptable, and the translator released a new translation quickly after publication. The importance of understanding the expectations of target audience has been valued for quite some time, but now fans have their own expectations of who the target audience should be and what they should want. Localizer Alexander O. Smith, while discussing the role of localization in a phone interview with me asked the question: when can a *kotatsu* be a table? He was asking specifically, when is it necessary to explain to the audience that a *kotatsu* is a Japanese low table, or when can it be called a table. However, now there is a third category more critical, fans that care that it was a *kotatsu* and do not want it to be changed for various reasons. Moreover, fans now have more power than ever before to

⁵Mainly just Square/Square-Enix rereleasing Final Fantasy games many times.

⁶Updates, like a smart phone or a computer

influence localizers than ever before. Thus, many video game fan communities now seem to expect that their opinion can shape and change a product. This thesis will discuss this new wrinkle in the localization process, and the importance of considering an audience's expectations and what happens when a game does not.

Chapter one will go over the early history of video game localization and the role that the video game company, Nintendo, played in the development of localizations. It will also go into the history the localization of Japanese Role-Playing Games (JRPGs) and how that is intrinsically tied to changes in the localization process due to the importance of story. I will delve into the *Final Fantasy* series to show how localization practices changed over time and Nintendo's influence. This chapter will set-up how many fan communities developed a contentious relationship with localizations, and saw them as companies trying to censor their product to sell more copies of the games.

Chapter two will continue with the negative relationship with fans, and discuss fan communities that verbally abuse video game creators and members of video games press due to differing opinions of what a localized product should be. I will discuss the importance of content and context, and how they interact in issues of different social norms in regards to gender and sexuality in particular. Moreover, I will discuss how these particular fan communities, through their sometimes-violent rhetoric, change the narrative surrounding a Japanese from discussing the merits of a game, to whether or not a game was censored — resulting in more attention surrounding the process of localization than the experience of actually playing the localized games themselves.

Chapter three will discuss what happens when a localization team can foster a positive relationship with fans, and what happens when a similar game ignores fans

almost entirely. Through a close analysis of the *Persona* series and *Yakuza* series, I will discuss the similarities and differences of the series and their localizations and how each localization team as approached the interactions with fans on social media or lack thereof.

Fans relationship with localizations can sometimes be contentious, as I will show the history of awareness of localization is due to poorly written games, altering the experience of the game for a foreign audience. However, with social media, it is becoming increasingly difficult for game companies to merely dictate to fans as many fans expect participation in the discussion of some form. I will explore the forms of these relationships and what caused them, as well as some of the side effects of giving particular fans power over dictating what authenticity in Japanese video games. Lastly, I hope to explore the potential results of fans having such an influence over a cultural product's localization.

CHAPTER I

LOCALIZATION AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN THE HISTORY OF JRPGS

“THIS ROOM IS AN ILLUSION AND IS A TRAP DEVISUT BY SATAN. GO AHEAD DAUNTLESSLY! MAKE RAPID PROGRES!” (*Ghosts ‘n Goblins*, Capcom, 1985)

Changing social norms and industry norms shifted how games have been localized throughout the history of video games. In order to understand the history of the importance of Japanese of video games, and thus the localization process as a whole, it is necessary to also understand the history of the video industry in the United States. The history of Japanese involvement in the American video games industry stems ultimately from the initial failure of the American company, Atari. Atari had a virtual monopoly over the at-home console market from the late 1970s through 1983 when the home console market dropped 97% in value within one year.⁷ As a result, analysts considered the market to be dead, believing that the home console was just a craze that could not sustain itself.⁸ However, many fans continued to play video games in the arcade and on new home computers – so, importantly, the appetite for games had not ended. Due to the success of the home consoles abroad, companies in Japan were interested in getting involved, most notably Nintendo. Atari’s implosion left a hole in the market that Nintendo would fill. Therefore, Nintendo through their continued success and their localization policies have had the most significant influence over the video game industry as a whole. Through looking at the history of video game localization, this chapter will

⁷Mark J.P. Wolf, “United States of America.” In *Video Games Around the World*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2015), 519

⁸Ibid, 519

break down where that influence stems from and what that influence looks like, especially for Japanese Role-Playing Games.

The same year that Atari spiraled out, the Kyoto-based toy company Nintendo launched the Nintendo *Famarii Conpyutaa*⁹ (or, Famicom for short). However, the Famicom was not Nintendo's first foray into electronics or video games, having experimented with a few electronic toys and their Game and Watch, a handheld single game system. The Famicom was on a whole new scale, however, Nintendo seeing the collapse in the United States would ultimately wait two years before bringing their Famicom to the United States in 1985. The then president of Nintendo, Yamauchi Hiroshi, taking a cautious approach to the American market, would completely re-model their Famicom, retitling it the Nintendo Entertainment System (or, NES for short) in addition to cosmetic and slight hardware changes of the model to make it appear less toy-like and more like video cassette players. Nintendo made the change due to the fear of association with the failed Atari but notably employed some of the hardware differences to appeal to the different regions.¹⁰



Figure 1: Images of the Japanese Famicom and the American Nintendo Entertainment System. In addition to clear cosmetic differences the Famicom (left)¹¹, the game

⁹Meaning: Family Computer

¹⁰Blake J. Harris, *Console Wars: Sega, Nintendo, and the Battle that Defined a Generation*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014)

¹¹Wikipedia, 2018. "Nintendo Entertainment System." Last modified, March 1. Accessed March, 21, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nintendo_Entertainment_System

controllers were not as easily detachable, and cartridges fit on the top of the system, and the NES (right)¹² had easily detachable controllers, and the cartridges were inserted in the front

The original Famicom design was based around the idea of a *kotatsu*, a small, low to the ground traditional Japanese table. Players could put the Famicom on top of the *kotatsu* and have the controllers and cartridge easily accessible.¹³ The NES, however, was designed around the entertainment setups of American homes. Ultimately the NES would grow to be extremely successful with the help of games like Mario and the Legend of Zelda, but this success started with a slow build. The NES was released initially in New York City with the test market of a single store, the toy store FAO Schwartz, to assess the feasibility of the home console in the United States.

Nintendo and Yamauchi himself were very aware of the failings of Atari and their poorly received software. As a result, they created the “Nintendo Seal of Quality” campaign, which in addition to only allowing publishers to release a maximum of five games per year, implied that Yamauchi personally approved all the games through marketing.¹⁴

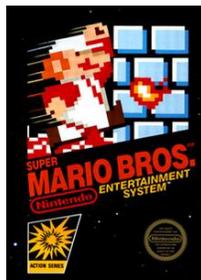


Figure 2: Image of an NES game box, the Seal of Quality, is visible on the bottom right corner¹⁵

¹²Ibid

¹⁴Blake J. Harris, *Console Wars: Sega, Nintendo, and the Battle that Defined a Generation*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014)

¹⁵Wikipedia, 2018. “Super Mario Bros.” Last modified, March 19. Accessed September 10, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Super_Mario_Bros.

The tight control Nintendo had on the software playable on their console was achievable because they also controlled the production of the game cartridges. So, Nintendo did have to approve all the games on their system, even if they were not actually all played by Yamauchi. This need for control and how they produced cartridges would become even more critical regarding producing games in English, after the release of the Legend of Zelda in 1986. Although the game would not be released outside of Japan until 1987, the Legend of Zelda became the first game cartridge that could both read and write data. This means that the player could save their data. The ramifications in game development were staggering. Before games had to be short arcade-like experiences with little to no story, so when a player turned off their console, they would not feel like they “lost” anything. Much like an arcade, games were frequently competitive and limited by lives, and once the player used up the lives, it was “game over.” This was not the case for The Legend of Zelda, however. Players gaining the ability to save made the gaming experience not just about skill and competition, and instead gaming experiences could also be about story and exploration. If a player saw the “game over” screen, they could reload their previous save and try again. Although some games had been story based before, the addition of a game narrative and text became much more feasible and popular without the need to start over or rely on the primitive password system continually.¹⁶ Due to memory constraints, stories would remain primitive on the NES, but as technology advanced, stories would become an increasingly important aspect of gameplay.

Nintendo’s cautiousness was also apparent in how games were translated on their systems. If a game were to appear on a Nintendo System, the game developers had to

¹⁶A system to denote progress before the ability to “save.” The player would be shown a password that they could enter in the main menu next time they played to start where they had left off.

play by Nintendo's rules. These rules centered around keeping the English versions free from anything that could be deemed offensive, namely rude language and images (or language) about race, overt violence, religious symbols, and sexuality. Nintendo, as they had done with the original release of the NES, were considering regional and cultural difference, and how they may affect the reception of their games. In short, Nintendo was not translating their games; they were *localizing* them. In video games, there can be voices, text, images, actions, context, and many other aspects touched on during gameplay, and as the player is an active participant (as opposed to a passive reader or observer), cultural differences can be that much more striking. As Minako O'Hagan states, "unlike other entertainment genres, such as literature, cinema or theatre, modern video games constitute a technologically constructed multimodal space that renders itself to various adjustments beyond textual components during localisation."¹⁷ As a result, the localization can involve changing elements of the game including its art assets, language, and even a game's story. In short, localization differs from standard textual translation due to Mandelin's last stage of localization, adaptation. Author Chris Kohler further defines localization as involving a group of four specific changes: symbolic, gameplay, graphical, and language.¹⁸ These changes can happen throughout all the stages that Mandelin describes, but primarily they happen in the final stage—adaptation. The first three stages are primarily limited to standard translation, and the adaptation stage is when

¹⁷Minako O'Hagan, "Video games as a new domain for translation research: From translating text to translating experience." *Tradumàtica: traducció i tecnologies de la informació i la comunicació*; Núm: 5 (2007). Accessed March 28, 2018. <http://www.fti.uab.es/tradumatica/revista/num5/articles/09/09.pdf>, 4

¹⁸Chris Kohler, *Power Up: How Japanese Video Games Gave the World an Extra Life*. (Indianapolis, IN: BradyGames, 2005), 206-207

the localizer makes changes to the original text to adapt it to a new region. Initially, however, technical and graphical limitations lessened the need for much more than language changes. As a result, translations were mostly done by non-native English speakers and resulted in strange or incorrect English.



Figure 3: Metal Gear (Konami, 1986), a typo in the final product.¹⁹

This change would typically be fixed in both the Mandelin’s raw translation and clarification stages, as it is a linguistic error that changes the meaning of the text.

However, another instance of language change would be due to the potential inappropriateness of the language. Infamously, a translator for the Square’s *Final Fantasy IV*²⁰ translated the word 貴様 (generally translated as bastard or son of a bitch) to “You spoony bard!” Although this is also an example of a non-native speaker being unaware of a phrase sounding odd to native speakers, it is also due to how Nintendo wanted games to be on their system, as uncontroversial as possible. The other area in which changes were sometimes made during the NES era, was due to race. Although

¹⁹Gergo Vas “The Funniest (And Worst) English In Classic Japanese Video Games.” *Kotaku*, February 1, 2013. Accessed March 21, 2018, <https://kotaku.com/the-funniest-and-worst-english-in-classic-japanese-vi-5980508>

²⁰Technically *Final Fantasy II* at the time in the US, but I will refer to it as *Final Fantasy IV* for the sake of consistency and simplicity.

graphics were quite basic, many games in Japan would portray characters, especially villains, using crude stereotypes. In some cases, like with Nintendo's *Gumshoe* (1988) and Sofel's *Casino Kid* (1989) characters would be altered graphically because of what would be generally considered racist stereotypes. In other cases, games were simply not released. Infamously, Nintendo blocked the release of Square's *Tom Sawyer RPG* (1986) in the United States. Staff at the Nintendo of America branch cited the blackface-like portrayal of the character Jim in their decision.²¹



Figure 4: An image from the Japan-only *Tom Sawyer RPG*. The character Jim is on the right of this image²²

American players were often completely unaware of the fact that these changes were made, or that they were missing out on games because communication with players who could play the Japanese version was limited. Although the emphasis on early localization is often placed on the poor or often strange English, Nintendo had begun a pattern that would affect the industry for years to come. Nintendo's goal seems to have been, for better or for worse, to create a culturally odorless and "non-offensive" product.

²¹Chris. Kohler, *Power Up: How Japanese Video Games Gave the World an Extra Life*. (Indianapolis, IN: BradyGames, 2005), 206-207

²²Byydo. "Square's Tom Sawyer." The Rom Pit Column, November 14, 2000. Accessed March 15, 2018. <https://www.somethingawful.com/rom-pit/squares-tom-sawyer/>

The localization process would become more prominent from the late-1980s through the mid-1990s, as console technology would allow for higher amounts of storytelling. Consoles were improving allowing for far more graphical detail, longer games, and more advanced gameplay input (controllers with more buttons). This would also allow for more text on the screen, greater character detail, and more elaborate backgrounds.



Figure 5: Graphical fidelity in *Final Fantasy*²³ versus *Final Fantasy IV*²⁴

Further, the home console industry had developed so companies such as Konami, Enix, Capcom, and Square were releasing games that would become synonymous with their separate platforms. In 1996, Sony entered the market as Nintendo's newest competition in the console industry with their first PlayStation, a system that seemed miles ahead of the contemporaneous SNES. Both the increased technological capabilities and a more diverse industry allowed for the blossoming of the Role-Playing Game genre, and specifically Japanese Role-Playing Game (JRPG), a genre intrinsically tied to the ebbs and flows of the localization process due to the story-centered nature.

²³Lucas M. Thomas, "Final Fantasy Review." IGN, October 5, 2009. Accessed April, 1, 2018. <https://www.ign.com/articles/2009/10/05/final-fantasy-review>

²⁴Lucas M. Thomas, "Final Fantasy II Review." IGN, March 19, 2010. Accessed April, 1, 2018. <https://www.ign.com/articles/2010/03/19/final-fantasy-ii-review>

The development of JRPGS was greatly influenced by two early computer-based American-produced Role-Playing Game Series, *Ultima* and *Wizardry*.²⁵ RPGs, both Western and from Japan have a few core qualities. The true original RPGs are paper-based, like *Dungeons and Dragons*, where players use pen and paper (among various rule/gamebooks) to construct their own story or adventure. Therefore, the video game equivalents, although much more limited in scope, are story and exploration centered as well. There are a few “core” roles as well, different types of magic users, sword fighters, axe wielders, and so-on, each with their strengths and weaknesses which the RPG gamer would understand before playing a new RPG game. The player controls teams of these characters (called a “party”) often using strategy to maximize the strengths and limit the weaknesses of each character. Additionally, combat is often “turn-based.” Rather than most other genres where the player attacks the enemy at the same time the enemy attacks the player, the RPG often alots time for each character to have their own turn to fight. This allows time for the player to strategize and plan each move. While JRPG really is a subtype of RPG, it has developed into a separate entity for the non-Japanese gaming industry, often attributed to the fact that JRPGs often had infamously poor localizations, filled with awkward English and mistakes. Other localization mistakes were often forgiven and forgotten because text/symbolism was not as crucial to those specific games, whereas these were often intrinsic to the JRPG experience. Moreover, JRPGs are often released in North America more than a year after their release in Japan to allow time for the localization to finish but would result in a game looking older than games being released at the same time.

²⁵Both series released their first games in 1981

Games such as Enix's *Dragon Quest*²⁶ released in Japan in 1986, and Square's *Final Fantasy* in 1987, received initial acclaim in Japan. Although they were both released on the NES and were therefore still relatively primitive, they were different from many other contemporaneous NES games because they were RPGs. As a result, both games had a story as a central focal point, and despite the primitive graphics and technical limitations grew to be successes. The *Dragon Quest* series continued to be successful, growing to be the most successful RPG series of the late-1980s through the mid-1990s, resulting in the localizations of *Dragon Quest I-IV* being released in North America. Although *Dragon Quest I* was reasonably successful, II, III, and IV did not sell as well as expected. *Final Fantasy* likewise was much more successful in Japan than it was in North America. Square would not choose to localize a *Final Fantasy* game until *Final Fantasy IV*—calling it *Final Fantasy II* to make American gamers less aware of the missing two games. *Final Fantasy IV* would be the beginning of a *Final Fantasy* resurgence in the United States and would result in their re-release over several console generations.

In addition to a general appetite for *Final Fantasy* games leading the charge for rereleases, lackluster localizations were at the heart of the issue as well. The localization for *Final Fantasy IV*²⁷ was a particular issue for Square at the time. *Final Fantasy IV*, although loved by the core RPG fan base, did not sell according to expectations. *Final Fantasy IV* was released on the new SNES and, as a result, developers achieved much greater character detail and story depth—a story that is still lauded as one of the greatest

²⁶Called *Dragon Warrior I* at the time of release in North America. Enix did not have the copyright for the name “*Dragon Quest*” until 2002, after the release of *Dragon Warrior VII*. I will call them all *Dragon Quest* for the sake of simplicity.

video game stories of all time. Previous games in the *Final Fantasy* series, although story-driven, were not character-driven. Each character was merely a type of character, or “class,” that were able to perform specific tasks in combat. This is in part due to the origins of JRPGs, which drew influence from the open-ended nature of *Dungeons and Dragons*. However, it was also due to technical limitations. Video game cartridges and consoles could only read so much data, so the more unique looking characters on the screen, the more data it would need to process. So, if a game only had a set number of characters that could only appear specific ways (especially if they used similar shapes and simple color palates/designs) the game would be far more playable on the limited NES. However, although SNES had its limitations, they were far less than the previous iteration, so characters were finally able to be their own unique sets of pixels.



Figure 6: Final Fantasy character selection screen²⁸ versus Final Fantasy IV character menu²⁹

As you can see from the above images, *Final Fantasy IV* characters each had unique names, and appearances. Whereas, *Final Fantasy*’s characters did not have names

²⁸MobyGames, 2018. “Final Fantasy Screenshots.” Accessed, September 30, 2018. <https://www.mobygames.com/game/nes/final-fantasy/screenshots/gameShotId,31429/>

²⁹Ocean. 2012. “Final Fantasy VI (SNES) – Guest Post.” *Super Adventures Gaming* [Blog], February 16. Accessed September 15, 2018. <http://superadventuresingaming.blogspot.com/2012/02/final-fantasy-iv-snes.html>

specific to them, they were simply titled their “class” name, and look fairly similar to each other.

The greater story and character detail however made *Final Fantasy IV* much more difficult to localize than its localization predecessor, *Final Fantasy*. The localization of *Final Fantasy IV* is an infamous example of a critically successful game riddled with localization mistakes. The localization was not primarily handled by native English speakers, a problem that had its roots in the NES era, and the localization team was small and not given enough time (common problems of the time period). Portions of the story were omitted, there were many mistranslations and translation inconsistencies, and the North American version had less difficult gameplay. The North American difficulty would be later released in Japan as easy version. The difficulty change was due to what was seen as necessities of the region—as North America had fewer JRPG games, and they were afraid of scaring off American children due to the game’s difficulty. But this decision did not just mean that they just made everything simpler, it changed many fundamental aspects of the game, “Many character-specific special skills... were removed from the North American version and not replaced with anything else. Many items and magic spells similarly vanished...A few of them appeared in scripted battles, for instance, tantalizing North American players with exciting powers that they would never get to use themselves.”³⁰ Thus, the game that North America received was fundamentally different from the game originally released in Japan. This was going beyond the scope of most adaptation stages. Fan communities with Japanese speakers

³⁰John Friscia, “The Development of Final Fantasy IV.” *Nintendo Enthusiast*, June 25, 2018. Accessed September 18, 2018. <https://www.nintendoenthusiast.com/2018/06/25/final-fantasy-iv-development/>

were infuriated by the decisions—adding to a contentious relationship with localizations and fan communities that has only increased with time.

In addition to the difficulty related changes in *Final Fantasy IV*, there were also changes made to meet Nintendo’s own localization rules. Nintendo’s goals with localization was to make a game as unoffensive as possible for American families. Even if a scene, character, or event was present and published onto a Nintendo platform in Japan and deemed okay, Nintendo of America would often change their region’s product (and thus, many other region’s final products as English was often used to translate to various languages). All references to religion were written out, the “holy” spell was changed to “white.” Moreover, *inori*, which translates to prayers, was usually translated to wishes. However, it was not changed everywhere, resulting in the audience’s awareness of the change.

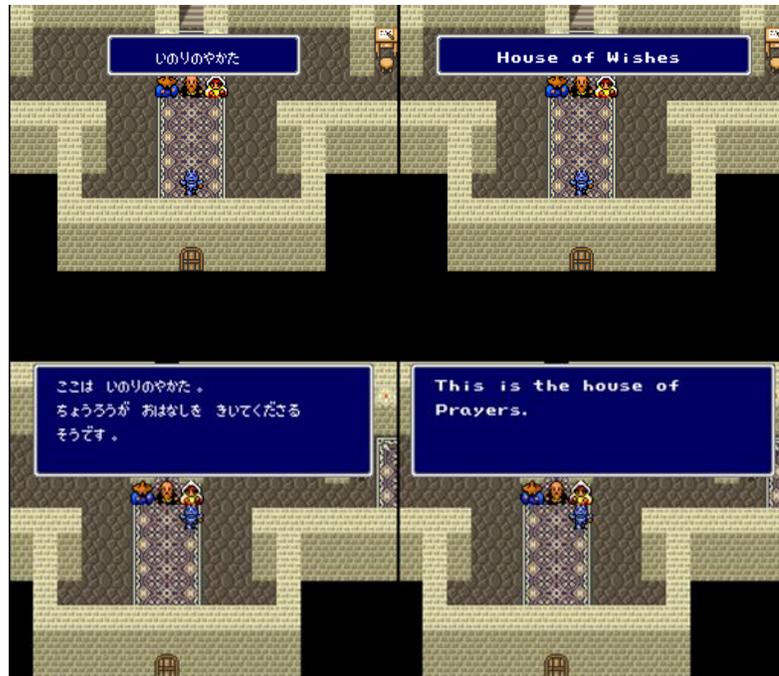


Figure 7: Images showing localization discrepancies in *Final Fantasy IV*. When the player first enters the building, the Japanese states: *inori no yagata*, which is translated as House of Wishes. However, later in the scene, when the player initiates conversation, in

Japanese, the NPC ³¹states “This is the House of Prayers. It sounds like the elder will hear what you have to say.” In the English version, it is oddly translated to “this is the house of prayers.”³²

The second line translates the original translation and the punctuation, which are important differences for English. In addition to the confusion between prayers and wishes (which was called out as a form of “Nintendo censorship” and probably would not have been noticed if the translation was consistent), the punctuation changes change it from being the name of a building to a description. Additionally the next line in the Japanese help guides the player to the next objective, whereas localizers omitted it in the English. So, the NPC seems superfluous in English, rather than helpful. These mistakes frustrated American players and helped fuel the notion that a localized product was a subpar version.

Further, due to Nintendo’s localization policies, violence (outside of the fighting part of gameplay), death, and especially, violent death, were not allowed. This means scenes that referenced death, would be written out or altered entirely—they could not make a character return, as they were working with the same assets, but they could change the language not to acknowledge the death entirely.



³¹Non-playable character, a term to refer to characters in a game that cannot be controlled by the player.

³²Clyde Madelin, “Final Fantasy IV Translation Comparison: Mysidia.” *Legends of Localization*, March, 4, 2013. Accessed September 18, 2018. <https://legendsoflocalization.com/final-fantasy-iv/mysidia/>

Figure 8: Images showing localization discrepancies in *Final Fantasy IV*. The Japanese translates roughly to “Thank you for killing me. In death, the power of Scarmiglione of Earth is even more terrifying... Die as you slowly savor it!”³³

In the above scene, the fact that the player killed the character is washed over, and the command to die is awkwardly changed to the “I drag you all to abyss.” Grammatical errors aside, the change makes the scene less impactful as the original because it is less direct and much vaguer about the intent of the NPC. Such changes irritated fans of the *Final Fantasy* series, especially as they waited for so long for a new one in English.

After the lackluster sales of *Final Fantasy IV*, Square changed how it would localize games. Square and many studios around the same time would start having native English speakers lead localization teams. Although largely attributed to Ted Woolsey and his hiring at Square’s headquarters in America, he was merely a part of a trend that was happening throughout the industry that would increase the quality of the English of localization to try to match the expectations of the players. The differences in the quality of the English in *Final Fantasy VI*³⁴ (Woolsey’s first mainline *Final Fantasy* game) and *Final Fantasy IV* are striking. Chris Kohler summarizes these changes as, “Written naturally, and even beautifully at times, it brings across the feel of the original in a way that previous games’ English scripts utterly failed to. Woolsey still had to slice and dice lots of content out of the script and was still under extreme time pressure, but he made a serious effort to compress and retain as much as humanly possible.”³⁵ Woolsey and

³³Clyde Madelin, “Final Fantasy IV Translation Comparison: Mt. Ordeals.” *Legends of Localization*, March, 4, 2013. Accessed September 18, 2018. <https://legendsoflocalization.com/final-fantasy-iv/mt-ordeals/>

³⁴Originally titled, *Final Fantasy III* as *Final Fantasy V* was not released in North America until much later on the first PlayStation.

others were learning how to adapt to Nintendo's localization policies, while still trying to retain as much material as possible. Woolsey would go on to work on many of Square's JRPGs, many considered the best of that era, but as the quality of the English increased, the attention to localization was less about the quality and more about the difference between the original and the localized versions. This happened coincidentally with the increased availability of the internet at homes, and the growth of even more chatrooms where fans could show localization differences easily.

The increased quality of the language and graphical fidelity in games turned attention away from mistakes and towards the content of games. Surrounding this change was the controversy surrounding the release of the 1993 releases of *Night Trap* and *Mortal Kombat 3*, games that seemed much more violent than any game that came before it due to the increased graphical fidelity. There was a discourse around the violence in video games, and how parents could police their children, and if the government should be involved in keeping children away from in video games. There were two Senate committee hearings, one in 1993 and one in 1994 about this issue, and the video game industry came together in the United States and formed the Entertainment Software Ratings Board, or ESRB, in fear of the American government censoring games. While the ESRB rating system kept the American federal and state governments out of policing games, the fear of censorship did not leave the game community as a whole. While *Night Trap* did not appear on Nintendo's console, *Mortal Kombat 3* would make it onto the console by making characters have green blood (to be less realistic). As the company

³⁵Chris Kohler, *Final Fantasy V*. (Los Angeles, CA: Boss Fight Books, 2017), 124

with a larger share of the video game market at that time, the pressure was on Nintendo to reassure parents that games on their system would be family friendly.

Thus, while the language of localized games on Nintendo's platforms was improving, the content was subject to much more strict and concrete rules and policies in regards to offensive material. In 1994, Nintendo of America released an official statement regarding the content that would appear on their platform. Nintendo of America stated that they would not allow games or game material published on their or for their consoles that, “

- Include sexually suggestive or explicit content including rape and/or nudity;
- Contain language or depictions which specifically denigrates members of either sex;
- Depict random, gratuitous, and/or excessive violence;
- Depict graphic illustration of death;
- Depict excessive force in a sports game beyond what is inherent in actual contact sports;
- Reflect ethnic, racial, religious, nationalistic, or sexual stereotypes of language; this includes symbols that are related to any racial, religious, nationalistic, or ethnic group, such as crosses, pentagrams, God, Gods (Roman mythological gods are acceptable), Satan, hell, Buddha;
- Use of profanity or obscenity in any form or incorporate language or gesture that could be offensive by prevailing public standards and tastes;
- Incorporate or encourage the use of illegal drugs, smoking materials, and/or alcohol (Nintendo does not allow a beer or a cigarette ad to be placed on an arena, stadium or playing field wall, or fence in a sports game);
- Include subliminal political messages or overt political statements.”³⁶

The interpretation and implementation of these rules were left to Nintendo of America, not Nintendo headquarters. Therefore, images that appeared in Nintendo games in Japan could be deemed inappropriate by Nintendo of America due to regional differences.

Although these policies were the general rules that had always shaped localization for

³⁶Clyde Mandelin, *Legends of Localization Book 2: EarthBound* (Brainerd, MN: Fangamer, 2017), 41

Nintendo consoles, this statement solidified the policies and made them public, reaffirming assumptions fans had about how Nintendo handled so-called offensive content, and thus fueled fears that Nintendo was censoring content. Most of these changes were small, but reached beyond Nintendo consoles. Most JRPGs released throughout the 1990s received a similar localization treatment. Changes regarding sexuality, religion, and drugs or alcohol remained common. When Sony released its PlayStation in 1995, the SNES was growing old, and so PlayStation became the default console for the JRPG. They would release *Final Fantasy* games, and previously unreleased *Final Fantasy* games for North America. However their localization practices had already been shaped by Nintendo's policies. Other game development companies such as Capcom followed suit, even while making games that were inappropriate for children in other ways. A common adaptation was calling bars cafés in English, while retaining the original images making it clearly appear to be a bar.



Figure 9: A very bar-like café in *Final Fantasy VI*³⁷

While these changes do not usually change the crux of the game, many fan communities reacted negatively to the changes because they were not having the “same experience” as

³⁷MobyGames, 2018. “Final Fantasy III Screenshots.” Accessed September, 18. 2018. https://www.mobygames.com/game/playstation/final-fantasy-iii___/screenshots/gameShotId,38689/

the Japanese version. Also, in many cases games took years to come out, and so fan communities would wait for a version they viewed as inferior, especially if they had already translated it.

Internet chatrooms fueled the increased connectivity between JRPG fans. Moreover, to help bide the time they began to translate the games themselves. Quietly, and behind the scenes, the internet-fueled “romhacking”³⁸ communities would often translate games before they were officially released in North America. Although they are usually considered of subpar quality because romhakers are usually amateurs, they are not subject to the same rules that professional localizers are. Thus, fans may have a greater appreciation for the amateur version over the official version because it's supposedly closer to the original experience. The amateur localizers are fans themselves, and therefore understand what fans want out of the localization, and create a localization for other like-minded fans. This community did not go away over time. There is often still a gap between Japanese release and American releases, and companies still decide not to release popular games in North America for various reasons. Famously, *MOTHER 3*, the follow up to Nintendo's *Earthbound* (called *MOTHER 2* in Japan), has not been released in English. Amateur and professional localizers, including Clyde Mandelin, grouped and created an English version which is publicly available online.

The fans involvement and criticism of localizations have only increased with time. The proliferation of the internet has only made these changes even more apparent.

³⁸Romhacking is a term that roughly equates to the pirating of a video. Romhackers go into a game's code and can translate, and make it available online. This is usually illegal in the United States because it breaks copyright law. When a game has not been released or copyrighted in the United States however, it is of dubious legal status

Especially as social media has only increased global connectivity, it has become easier for fans to import Japanese games, and see the differences between the versions. At the same time, localizations still occur. However, it varies from company to company how many adaptations will occur. Moreover, the intended audience often influences the number of adaptations. While the controversy surrounding violent games has died down, and the number of adults playing games intended for adults has increased, Nintendo and other companies have changed their localization process in order to meet the current gamers expectations as much as possible. The current President of Nintendo of America, Reggie Fils-Aime, has said, “In terms of what gets localised, there's a simple collection of words that we use to define how we think about this: It's 'cultural relevance' and 'understanding of the ratings and ratings implications’”³⁹ Many fan groups disagree with Nintendo’s stance, however, especially given the history of heavy-handed localizations. They want the previous experience retained at all costs, and fail to take into account the intent of the original creators who come from a different cultural context. Something that is offensive in English may not be offensive in Japanese, and the creator does not want to offend, so localizers adapt the game to carry across the intent of the creator. But fans can sometimes want what they consider to be a “purer” translation, in other words, one that does not change (or, in their words, censor) the English version. The next chapter will explore particularly opinionated groups of fans that can shape the dialogue surrounding localization in general through style of argumentation online.

³⁹Jason Schreier, “Xenoblade Chronicles X's Director On Localization Changes: 'I Didn't Mind Much At All'.” *Kotaku*, June, 16, 2017. Accessed February 18, 2018. <https://kotaku.com/xenoblade-chronicles-xs-director-on-localization-change-1796157409>

CHAPTER II

DOES LOCALIZATION EQUAL CENSORSHIP?

"If there's anything I hate in this world, it's cockroaches and crying babies! ... Though, I suppose a crying baby cockroach would be TRULY terrible." (Bayonetta, PlatinumGames, 2009)

Fan's awareness of localization grew when localization practices began to change in the mid-to-late 1990s in order to account for game companies growing understanding of the significance of the cross-cultural and globalized nature of the video game industry. This understanding, and how it shapes localization, can be referred to as culturalization, "as it takes a deeper look into a game's fundamental assumptions and content choices, and then gauges their viability in both the broad, multicultural marketplace as well as in specific geographic locales."⁴⁰ This process, instead of trying to merely market to the needs of different regions, acknowledges that video games, as a cultural product coming from a particular locale, must consider how specific scenes, characters, and actions will read in a foreign marketplace. In other words, localization began to account for video games position as both a creative cultural product as well as a commercial product, placing a heavy emphasis on the cultural aspect. Therefore, as defined by industry leaders Heather Chandler and Stephanie Deming, culture in video games is a combination of *content* and *context*. Thus, it is easy to understand how socio-political aspects of games can be non-offensive in one region but can become completely offensive in another region if they remain unchanged. However, audiences can see these changes as censorship, especially when the information reaffirms their own sensibilities and are only offensive towards marginalized groups. This chapter will focus on how audiences and

⁴⁰Heather Maxwell Chandler and Stephanie O'Malley Deming. *The Game Localization 2nd Ed. Handbook*. (Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Learning LLC, 2012), 20

games media react to culturalization especially in regards to sexuality and gender and how that shapes localization.

When localizers work on a project, the assumption is that the creators did not intend to be offensive to any audience. In an interview, localizer Alexander O. Smith stated, “Depictions of adult sexuality, particularly homosexuality (sometimes controversial), and sexual deviance such as pedophilia (always controversial) pose two questions merely by existing in a title. 1. Is sexuality depicted in a way that will unintentionally offend a significant segment of the gaming population? 2. Is the sexuality depicted in a way that will affect the rating of the game?”⁴¹ Firstly, he mentions the term “unintentionally offend.” By stating “unintentionally offend,” he suggests that if the content marginalizes or offends a different audience that exists in a different context, then the game should be adapted so they can have an experience closer to the one intended by the creators. Secondly, when he discusses the rating of a game, he is also talking about the commercial viability of the game. The Entertainment Software Association (ESA) has a rating scale that typically places games as E (everyone), E10+ (10 and up), T (13 and up), M (17 and up), and AO (adults only). Games with an AO rating typically cannot be sold at major video game retailers, and moreover, an M rating can also limit its commercial viability, as children and most adolescents are not a part of the intended audience. So, when Alexander O. Smith discusses the unintentional offensiveness and ratings, he is stating that video games must balance being both a commercial and cultural

⁴¹Patrick Klepek. “From Japan, With Changes: The Endless Debate Over Video Game ‘Censorship’” *Kotaku*, December, 14, 2015. Accessed April 25, 2018, <https://kotaku.com/from-japan-with-changes-the-endless-debate-over-video-1747960323>

product, and this may necessitate changes being made to the product. However, changing a game, or adapting it for a different audience, is not without controversy.

In the past five to ten years, the gaming community has grown increasingly divisive, often leading to explosions of anger surrounding localizations. This is especially true due to the lasting effect of the movement called #GamerGate. Ostensibly, #GamerGate stated that it existed to promote transparency in gaming media. However, this message was hidden by the extremely confrontational argumentation style utilized by many members of the community, often resorting to threats of various acts of violence and utilizing ad hominem, especially towards women within the industry. The group I will call “aggressive fan communities” is both a part of the #GamerGate community and stems from it.⁴² Due to the nature of some of the acts committed as a part of #GamerGate, I find it inaccurate to label fans as #GamerGate supporters, and #GamerGate was only an extreme subsection of a larger problem within gaming culture. This larger problem is the politicization of the fan base, which places the aggressive fan communities at odds with the majority of the gaming media due to the disparate politics of the two groups as well as the gaming media’s antagonistic relationship with these fans. Aggressive fan communities have, at best, a contentious relationship with localization. While most gamers these days laugh at the so-called “censorship” of the early JRPGs⁴³ on Nintendo consoles, the changes that continue to take place through the localization process are usually deemed censorship amongst this minority within the larger gaming community.

⁴²Often erroneously associated with Alt right communities due to overlapping political ideologies.

⁴³Japanese Role-Playing Game

Despite existing as a minority within the game community, I argue that the increasing influence of the aggressive fan communities is precisely due to the ferocity in which they interact on social media. Moreover, their style of argumentation shapes not only the discourse surrounding a localization but the media covering a release as well. When issues regarding the presentation of gender and sexuality in a Japanese video game within a localized American version emerge, the aggressive fan communities' effects are especially clear when it involves LGBTQ+ sexualities, the age of the characters, and the sexualization of a female character. News stories that surround aggressive fan communities' actions further added fuel to the cycle. As Alexander O. Smith explained, "that is a news story, those are real world ramifications. Media generated. You can still kinda point a finger at media for creating that news cycle or giving it legitimacy. You have to look at it carefully though to see where the signal is being amplified more than it should be."⁴⁴ Thus resulting in media outlets incidentally giving more power to aggressive fan communities by creating a cycle of negativity surrounding controversial localizations.

Localizers pay special attention to LGBTQ+ sexualities, age, and sexualization of female characters because of disparate cultural understandings and expectations especially between the United States and Japan. The aggressive fan communities believe that games should be preserved as closely to the original as possible in order to maintain the Japanese experience – i.e., "authentic" experience.⁴⁵ Changes due to deeming something inappropriate or offensive for another reason is therefore censorship through

⁴⁴Alexander O. Smith, interviewed by author, January 29, 2019.

⁴⁵Comments, 2016, on "The line between censorship and localization. AKA how you should wait until official sources confirm things." Reddit, accessed May 1, 2018. https://www.reddit.com/r/fireemblem/comments/436jv2/the_line_between_censorship_and_localization_aka/

this lens. Many localizers disagree with this, however. For example, localizer Alexander O. Smith has said,

“Something intended to be simply humorous or risqué in a Japanese game might come across to an American gamer as creepy or worse, like pedophilia. Keeping the problematic content in there with the intent of preserving the creator’s original vision is misguided, because the creator presumably didn’t intend for the audience to feel uncomfortable or offended. The original vision is better served by making adjustments so the new audience appreciates the work on (as closely as possible) the same terms as the original audience.”⁴⁶

The process Alexander O. Smith describes above is similar to what translation scholar Minako O’Hagen has called translating experience.⁴⁷ In this, she emphasizes that a localizer’s job is to translate the intended experience of a product, rather than assume that the game can be enjoyed on similar footing with no changes made. This places localized video games on a battleground so-to-speak, one in which they must make adjustments for commercial viability as well as not making adjustments that could potentially anger a particularly abusive group of fans. In the remainder of this chapter, I hope to present localized games that are exemplary of this problematic dynamic, which had adjustments made due to cultural differences surrounding the topics of LGBTQ+ sexualities, age, and sexualization.

The first game I would like to discuss is the 2016 Nintendo 3DS game *Fire Emblem Fates*. *Fire Emblem Fates* was originally released in 2015 in Japan as 『ファイ

⁴⁶Patrick Klepek. “From Japan, With Changes: The Endless Debate Over Video Game ‘Censorship’” Kotaku, December, 14, 2015. Accessed April 25, 2018, <https://kotaku.com/from-japan-with-changes-the-endless-debate-over-video-1747960323>

⁴⁷O’Hagan, Minako. “Video games as a new domain for translation research: From translating text to translating experience.” *Tradumàtica : traducció i tecnologies de la informació i la comunicació*; Núm.: 5 (2007). Accessed March 28, 2018. <http://www.fti.uab.es/tradumatica/revista/num5/articles/09/09.pdf>

アーエムブレム if』 (*Faiaa Emuburemu if*). It is a grouping of three games that cover different perspectives from the same story. The versions are titled *Birthright*, *Conquest*, and *Revelation*. The *Fire Emblem* series is a long-running strategy role-playing game whose main gameplay centers around the player simulating war battles in which specific classes of characters maneuver different ways, each having their strengths and weaknesses. The gameplay mixes elements of chess-like strategy with rules for weapon weaknesses and strengths, similar to rock-paper-scissors (a common mechanic in Japanese video games). As the series has advanced, more story elements have become involved. The games now include a mechanic that allows the player to build up relationships with other characters in the story as well as other characters to each other, with each relationship level having their own rank, marked by the letters C, B, A, and S. S rank is the “marriage” rank. Each rank is accompanied by a narrative scene that shows the furthering of the characters’ relationship, with dialogue representative of the growth. Not every character can achieve an S rank with every character, and most have to be heterosexual couplings – only two characters are bisexual in *Fates*, and the only homosexual option is with the player character (which results in the player character losing the ability to have children). The controversy surrounding the release of *Fire Emblem Fates* centers on that mechanic in the *Conquest* version.

The controversial scene appears if the player chose to play as a male character in *Conquest* and decided to achieve an S rank with the female character Soleil. In both the Japanese and American versions, there is a clear implication that Soleil is homosexual. She relays to the main character that she lacks composure around “cute girls” and wants to know how to remedy this situation. The player character spikes Soleil’s drink with a

“magic powder” that enables her to see all men as women and all women as men. Through this experience, Soleil learns that she is very attracted to the main character after seeing him as a woman, the implication in Japanese being that she is attracted to the player character no matter his gender.



Figure 10: Roughly translates to: “Sorry but, before this, I put something in your drink.”⁴⁸

However, given the long history of conversion therapy in both the United States and Europe, this scene was taken out of the localized English version. A similar dialogue in which the player character asks Soleil to imagine him as a woman was added instead. Soleil decides that she does not want to pretend the player character is a woman because she loves him. In Heather Chandler and Stephanie Deming’s terminology, this is due to the different contexts in which the content would be presented, resulting in something that would be completely offensive especially to LGBTQ+ gamers in the United States, which was not the intent of the original version.

The gaming media’s interpretation of Nintendo of America’s announcement of these changes was almost universally positive. Allegra Frank of the website Polygon

⁴⁸Eric Kain. “‘Fire Emblem Fates’ and the Curious Case of Localization Gone Terribly Wrong.” *Forbes*, February, 29, 2016. Accessed April 24, 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/erik-kain/2016/02/29/fire-emblem-fates-and-the-curious-case-of-localization-gone-terribly-wrong/#a281cf617ed8>

stated in her headline that “No drugging allowed state-side.”⁴⁹ Further, in the website Kotaku’s coverage of the incident, Brian Ashcroft tries to cover both sides of the story, but relates that he “can see how people might be highly sensitive to these implications” and that both the giving someone a substance to change what gender they are attracted to and spiking someone’s drink are thorny, controversy-laden topics. Ashcroft also states that “I don’t think the developers were trying to be malicious or mock anyone’s sexuality or gender identity. The in-game language doesn’t come off as sinister, even if summaries of the scenes can come off poorly. It feels like less thought went into the larger subtextual readings and how said subtext could be construed or even misconstrued.”⁵⁰ Therefore the media portrayed the content containing a joke surrounding LGBTQ+ characters in a different context comes off as offensive to people and are largely understanding of the adjustments made.

However, the aggressive fan communities were far less understanding of this scene being changed, labeling it a blatant example of Nintendo’s censorship state-side. Less aggressive fans such as a user named rocknrollbitches made comments on Reddit such as “They can *make* as many diverse games as they want. They just can't change other people's games because it offends them.”⁵¹ Other comments, however, take it much

⁴⁹Allegra Frank. “Nintendo Changes Controversial Drugging Scene for Western Launch: No Drugging Allowed Stateside.” *Polygon*, January 21, 2016. Accessed March 15, 2018, <https://www.polygon.com/2016/1/21/10810944/fire-emblem-fates-nintendo-drugging-scene>

⁵⁰Brian Ashcroft. “Why Some People Are Calling Fire Emblem Fates 'Homophobic'” *Kotaku*, July 6. 2016. Accessed, May 1, 2018, <https://kotaku.com/why-some-people-are-calling-fire-emblem-fates-homoph-obi-1715602826>

⁵¹rocknrollbitches, comment, 2015, on “Vox and other outlets are claiming we want to stop "diverse" games from being made. Don't let them get away with that, the SJWs are the ones that want to censor people.” Reddit, accessed March 30, 2018. https://www.reddit.com/r/KotakuInAction/comments/2k50k0/vox_and_other_outlets_are_claiming_we_want_to/

further. Patrick Klepig, in his article addressing the controversy on Kotaku, cited a Twitter user who responded to his support of the adaptations who said, “OF COURSE not because you don’t give a shit, do you? Buy those games like the retarded little ape you are! Don’t give a shit about quality!”⁵² Reactions to these sorts of comments are understandably angry in tone and lead to debates between fans and the media as well as fans and other fans, particularly online fans who found the adjustments necessary. Thus, these groups shaped the debate in the media as journalists ended up using the vocabulary that the aggressive fan communities thrust at them and words like “censorship” and “social justice warriors” (SJW) become buzzwords with controversies surrounding localization. Therefore, rather than discussing the changes and the reasons for these changes, it becomes a debate about whether or not localization is or is not censorship. Their attacks centered on a female Nintendo of America employee named Alison Rapp because of presumed involvement in the *Fire Emblem Fates* controversy and another game that will be discussed later, and these disagreements soon turned to threats of violence and various other forms of harassment despite the fact she had nothing to do with the localization team in the first place.

Attacks of violence also accompanied feminist critiques of the video games *Bayonetta* and *Bayonetta 2*, released in North America in 2009 (on the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360) and 2015 (on the Wii U) respectively. The genre of these games is action (hack n’ slash)⁵³ and the narrative centers on a witch named Bayonetta. Bayonetta can

⁵²Patrick Klepek. “The Ugly New Front in the Video Game Culture War.” *Kotaku*, March 4, 2016. Accessed March 15, 2018. <https://kotaku.com/the-ugly-new-front-in-the-neverending-video-game-cultur-1762942381>

⁵³A subgenre named for the players actions primarily being violent attacks

travel through time and must do so at several points to save the world, often interacting with her former self and her parents on various points of their timelines. Bayonetta must fight various monsters called “angels” and enemies called “lumen sages.” Gameplay centers around the player dodging and attempts to string chains of attacks to gain a higher score. The controversy surrounding the game is not related to the violence but instead the character of Bayonetta herself. She is a hypersexual character; the camera frequently focuses on her chest and pubic area, which is usually covered by tight black clothing that resembles leather. Furthermore, she has attacks called “torture attacks” that use BDSM-like imagery and “climax attacks” that utilize her hair magic. Of note, her hair is usually the clothing covering her body, so she is left naked during these attacks. The localization of the games interestingly is left largely intact. Both the North American and Japanese versions of the games allow you to play it in either language, but the marketing presents Bayonetta differently.

When Bayonetta is discussed in the United States, she is either an example of female empowerment or an example of objectification due to the male gaze. The empowerment argument focuses on how she is wielding her sexuality as *power*, with no one else sexualizing her in-game (in fact, the only characters who do sexualize her are labeled perverts). Much of the discussion surrounding Bayonetta emphasizes this. Britney Vincent of SyfyWire wrote, “Bayonetta is sexy and powerful, and she doesn’t care what you think about that. Whether it’s a crazy yet functional outfit or a provocative pose she’s striking, she owns her sexuality in a way that’s empowering to anyone who watches her

blow enemies away.”⁵⁴ This argument exists due to the type of advertising (especially from Nintendo) that emphasized her skill as a fighter, and power, and portrayed her sexiness as something that existed in addition and was her choice; i.e., Bayonetta, as a character, has agency because she *chooses* to behave and dress in a provocative way. Herein lies the distinction between Bayonetta in the United States and Bayonetta in Japan. The Japanese advertisements emphasized her sexuality and did not show her as a fighter at all.

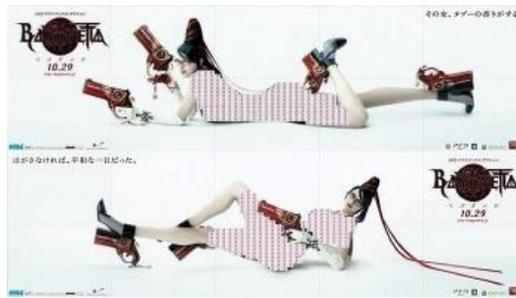


Figure 11: Interactive subway posters that allowed Bayonetta to have posters stripped off her by passersby⁵⁵

Additionally, given the inclusion of the English audio and text in the Japanese release of *Bayonetta*, PlatinumGames wrote conversational English lessons using the vocabulary of the English text, teaching words such as “spank,” “naughty,” and “fuck.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴Britney Vincent. “Bayonetta is Now Nintendo’s Coolest Female Character.” *SYFYWire*, February 28, 2018. Accessed, May 1, 2018. <http://www.syfy.com/syfywire/bayonetta-is-now-nintendos-coolest-female-character>

⁵⁵John Funk. “Strip Bayonetta in These Innovative Japanese Ads.” *Escapist*, October 23, 2009. Accessed April 12, 2018. <http://www.escapistmagazine.com/news/view/95683-Strip-Bayonetta-in-These-Innovative-Japanese-Ads>

⁵⁶Tsukuma Kazuyo. “ベヨネッタに学ぶ ‘いい子は絶対マネしちゃいけない’ 英会話” (*Bayonetta ni manabu “ii ko wa zettai maneshichaikenai” eikaiwa*). PlatinumGames Official Blog, April 24, 2017. https://www.platinumgames.co.jp/magazine/detail/?id=2_11279

Bayonetta and *Bayonetta 2* upon their initial releases were surrounded by controversy, especially with *Bayonetta*'s release as it was the start of the series. Much of games media (and people from outside of games) found her portrayal to be disheartening. Anita Sarkeesian, of Feminist Frequency fame, lobbed an interesting critique of *Bayonetta* despite some inaccuracies. Mainly, her critique is that there was no reason presented for Bayonetta's sexiness, and her sexuality is therefore made for the consumer (a presumably heterosexual male consumer).⁵⁷ In Arthur Gies' review of *Bayonetta 2* for the website Polygon, he praises the fighting and gameplay but criticizes the overt hypersexuality. He stated that *Bayonetta 2* was the "the kind of game that left me asking how many times and how many different ways developer Platinum could run a camera up the main character's spread legs and cleavage," and, "I won't guess why the blatant over-sexualization is still there, often more intensely than before. But it causes an otherwise great game to require a much bigger mental compromise to enjoy."⁵⁸ Although Polygon had the lowest scores of popular media outlets, similar critiques can be seen throughout the gaming community and media.

There is some objective truth to these critiques. From the official PlatinumGames blog and interviews with the director Kamiya Hideki, it is clear that he wanted to create the "sexy" version of another Japanese action game Devil May Cry (which has a male sexualized protagonist). Kamiya additionally has noted that usually Bayonetta's hair is

⁵⁷Anita Sarkeesian. "Bayonetta Subway Advertisements in Japan." *Feminist Frequency*, May 18, 2010. Accessed April 11, 2018. <https://feministfrequency.com/video/bayonetta-innovative-advertising-or-sexual-harassment-training/>

⁵⁸Arthur Gies. "Bayonetta 2 Review: Heaven and Hell." *Polygon*, October 13, 2014. Accessed, April 27, 2018. <https://www.polygon.com/2014/10/13/6957677/bayonetta-2-review-wii-u>

covering her body and is therefore not wearing anything most of the game; her nudity while using her hair magic cannot be helped. It is further striking that Kamiya said in an interview that,

“As to Bayonetta, she is also a very original character design, but in many ways this character is my ideal woman. And the reason that we chose a woman for the main character is just because I have had male characters for all my games and wanted to do something different. I stuck to my guns with Bayonetta’s sexiness, and we try to express the sexiness with the design of her character. But I always told my designers to not show her skin too much; we don’t want to give everything away.”⁵⁹

Kamiya simultaneously equates having a female character as expressing her sexiness as well as describes her as his ideal women. This is a completely contrasting representation of the character in most western media, where Nintendo of America and marketing focused on her abilities, not her appearance.

Conversely, one of the main critiques by aggressive fan communities of media’s perspective is that the character design artist of Bayonetta is female, so, therefore, cannot be sexist. In the comments on Gies’ review, user InAGaddaDaVida stated “Indeed, but the character design, including all sexual aspects, was designed by a woman. If she had moral issues with it, she wouldn’t have designed her in such a way. She designed Bayonetta in a powerful, sexual way, which is hardly a negative.”⁶⁰ However, aggressive fan communities fail to accept the fact that the character design artist, Shimamai Mari (a woman), did not have final say on the design, and frequently cited that something was

⁵⁹Randolph Ramsay. “Q&A: Hideki Kamiya on Bayonetta.” *Gamespot*, April 9, 2009. Accessed April 10, 2018. <https://www.gamespot.com/articles/qanda-hideki-kamiya-on-bayonetta/1100-6207621/>

⁶⁰InAGaddaDaVida, comment, 2014, on “Bayonetta 2 Review: Heaven and Hell” Polygon, accessed April 27, 2018. <https://www.polygon.com/2014/10/13/6957677/bayonetta-2-review-wii-u>

created due to Kamiya's desires in her blog entry on PlatinumGames Official Blog.⁶¹ So, the aggressive fan communities were, in this case, more concerned with people being offended by a product that was not altered in-game as much during the localization process because *Bayonetta* and *Bayonetta 2* are therefore more "authentic" experiences. They began to personally attack both Arthur Gies and Anita Sarkeesian for their criticisms, resulting in police protection for Sarkeesian. They found out that Gies supported a porn service on a crowdfunding site and proliferated the information all over the internet, claiming there is no way he could be a feminist because he likes porn. Users in a GameSpot forum page for the Polygon review stated: "don't let some hypocritical male feminist prude make you feel guilty about playing what otherwise might end up being one of the most memorable and awesome games of the generation because he pretends to be a saint to women;" "Isn't Arthur Gies like the Ebola of video game journalism?"; and "More feminism infecting the stupid people."⁶² So rather than starting a rational debate on the issue of *Bayonetta*'s sexuality, a debate was formed with two polar opposite opinions, ignoring a large amount of gray in between. Thus, the debate created a situation where if a game is altered, aggressive fan communities claim censorship, and if a game is not altered and offends some of the gaming media and community, aggressive fan communities attack those who critique the more "authentic" game.

⁶¹ Shimamai Mari. "Designing Bayonetta." PlatinumGames Official Blog, April 17, 2009. Accessed April 15, 2018. <https://www.platinumgames.com/official-blog/article/1278>

⁶²Comments, 2014, on "Bayonetta 2 given 7.5/10 by Polygon, BUT..." *GameSpot* forums, accessed April 27, 2018. <https://www.gamespot.com/forums/system-wars-314159282/bayonetta-2-given-7-5-10-by-polygon-but-31636812/>

This tricky situation surrounding the relationship between localized games and fans is exemplified in the controversy surrounding 2015's *Xenoblade Chronicles X*⁶³ (released for the Wii U). *Xenoblade Chronicles X*, a spiritual successor to the Wii's *Xenoblade Chronicles*, and a part of the metaseries *Xeno*, is a role-playing game that takes place on a fictional planet, Mira, after the destruction of Earth due to the fighting between two alien species. The destruction results in the survival of only a few humans, including the eight playable characters. Gameplay alternates between tradition role-playing battle mechanics, open world exploration, and the ability to assume a mecha.⁶⁴

The controversy surrounding *Xenoblade Chronicles X* was due to the changes surrounding the female character Lin. Localizers made three main changes with the character Lin. Her age was raised to thirteen, the swimsuit costume was removed, and the “boob slider” (ability to change breast size) was removed from the character creation options.



Figure 12: Character in swimsuit in the Japanese version (left)⁶⁵ localized version with the character clothed as no swimsuit is available (right)⁶⁶

⁶³Pronounced “cross”

⁶⁴A giant robot that is controlled from inside by an operator, in this case human.

⁶⁵Jason Schrier. “Xenoblade Chronicles X's Director on Localization Changes: 'I Didn't Mind Much At All.'” Kotaku, June 19, 2017. Accessed April 25, 2018. <https://www.kotaku.com.au/2017/06/xenoblade-chronicles-xs-director-on-localisation-changes-i-didnt-mind-much-at-all/>

⁶⁶Ibid

In general, the idea of a sexualized thirteen-year-old girl, especially with the ability to change the size of her breasts, comes across as a tad creepy to many people. Lin's voice actor, Cassandra Lee Miller, in an interview about the controversy said,

“[It] honestly makes me cringe a little bit because she's only 13 years old. People are calling it censorship. I really see it as localization. There are a lot of cultural differences between Japan and the US and Europe. I, personally, don't mind that Lin's outfits were changed for the US version. My hope is that players will be able to concentrate on Lin's abilities and what she can bring to your game and what she can do for the other members of her party and not just how she looks. I also think that covering Lin up a little bit will make parents more comfortable with kids playing the game, so it also opens the game up for a wider audience.”⁶⁷

Here she is talking about the need to balance the socio-cultural differences with the commercial viability of the title. The game was commercially successful, considering the limited amount of Wii U owners, but had it included a sexy thirteen-year-old, more mainstream controversy may have occurred.

Due to these two opposing objectives, localizers must choose between offending a mainstream audience, or the seemingly more dedicated role-playing games fans, the aggressive fan communities. Localizer Brian Gray said this succinctly in an interview about the *Xenoblade Chronicles X*'s localization adjustments:

“Outside of Japan—and especially right now—you have one loud segment of the market saying, ‘The artistic integrity of the game is more important than the feelings of the people playing it.’ And the other segment [is] saying, ‘Games have no integrity unless they respect the feelings of people playing them.’ As a translator, it's kind of a terrifying debate to be in the middle of because someone is going to be upset no matter what choice you make.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷Ibid

⁶⁸Jason Schrier. “Xenoblade Chronicles X's Director on Localization Changes: 'I Didn't Mind Much At All.'” *Kotaku*, June 19, 2017. Accessed April 25, 2018. <https://www.kotaku.com.au/2017/06/xenoblade-chronicles-xs-director-on-localisation-changes-i-didnt-mind-much-at-all/>

Due to economic pressures, video games companies, like Nintendo and Nintendo of America, tend to be cautious. As Nintendo America President Reggie Fils-Aime told Kotaku at E3⁶⁹ previously, “Regarding what gets localized, there’s a simple collection of words that we use to define how we think about this: It’s[sic] ‘cultural relevance’ and ‘understanding of the ratings and ratings implications.’” Again, this is a clear example of the necessity to balance video games status as both a cultural and commercial product. Localizers take this into account especially considering that the common assumption is that the original creators did not intend to alienate any portion of any audience and, moreover, did not necessarily know that their product could be offensive to people in another context. When interviewed about these changes in the midst of the aggressive fan communities’ outrage, director Takahashi Tetsuya was confused by the anger surrounding the changes, explaining that “I think what’s important is that we make sure that the end user who actually plays the game doesn’t have a bad experience. If that change is going to help alleviate that, then I think we should definitely make it.”⁷⁰ While Takahashi could have been attempting to save face due to the controversy, it’s clear that he’s trying to convey the importance of the audience having a good experience. Proposing that the importance is a localized experience and not a word-for-word translation (as there is a different context surrounding the consumption of the content) changes the end product. In a more extreme sense, not adapting the context could result in seemingly different content entirely, despite it appearing the same.

⁶⁹Electronic Entertainment Expo – the big American trade show held in June every year.

⁷⁰Jason Schrier. “Xenoblade Chronicles X’s Director on Localization Changes: ‘I Didn’t Mind Much At All.’” *Kotaku*, June 19, 2017. Accessed April 25, 2018. <https://www.kotaku.com.au/2017/06/xenoblade-chronicles-xs-director-on-localisation-changes-i-didnt-mind-much-at-all/>

More recently, to the aggressive fan communities, the localizer's own bias has shifted the localizations into a more "politically correct" model. For example, user NE_OC on a GameFAQs forum page in response to Kotaku's interview with Takahashi Tatsuya stated, "Well, my point is that Treehouse⁷¹ is doing a bad job because they're letting their own bias and preferences get in the way when it comes to might-be-controversial subjects instead of evaluating if it really would be that bad, especially for the target demographic."⁷² NE_OC's clear assumption that the target demographic is, or at least should be, dedicated Japanese role-playing games fans who would be more offended by the localization's alterations, rather than remaining controversial. However, looking at the comments of the director of *Xenoblade X*, the target demographic is an English-speaking consumer, many of whom would feel uncomfortable playing as a sexualized thirteen-year-old. Moreover, his intent was not to offend such people with a young sexualized character.

Unfortunately, the controversy continued. It was at this time when the Nintendo employee Alison Rapp, mentioned earlier in this paper in regards to *Fire Emblem Fates*, gained the ire of the aggressive fan communities. Users such as NE_OC posting comments like "you guys are fucking slowpokes if you're just catching on to the shit show now. Alison Rapp: used the word mansplaining at an E3 conference (during a *Hyrule Warriors* segment), has a tumblr, describes herself as some gender queer

⁷¹The name of Nintendo of America's main localization team. Note: They were not solely responsible for the localization, and in fact worked with the Japan-based 8-4 on the localization throughout the project.

⁷²NE_OC, comment, 2017, on "Takahashi is cool with localization changes." *Gamefaqs*, accessed April 29, 2018. <https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/boards/204208-xenoblade-chronicles-2/75468585>

bullshit.” Also, the same user suggested that they, “burn the bitch.”⁷³ These comments resulted in the media having to discuss whether or not the game has been censored, rather than focusing on the merits of the product. Moreover, this left video game journalists in a position where they felt compelled to demonize the acts of the aggressive fan communities, as some of the gamers were verbally harassing and threatening Alison Rapp (who had nothing to do with the localization) because they blamed her for the changes.

Eventually, in the aftermath of Alison Rapp’s harassment, Nintendo of America fired her for an unrelated contract violation. However, this added fuel to the aggressive fan communities, as many believed that it was their actions that led to her dismissal. Julie Muncy, in an article about Rapp’s termination on the website Wired, stated, “The trouble here is not that Nintendo fired an employee... The trouble is that Nintendo remained silent during an unwarranted campaign of harassment against an employee. Now that she’s been fired—regardless of whether that campaign played a role in it—it sends a message that the bullies behind that campaign have won.”⁷⁴ No matter the reaction that companies, media, or fans have, the aggressive fan communities will not stop. It is in this way that they have shaped the localization process. Localizers must decide to whom they cater: the larger audience (and possibly receive the wrath of the aggressive fan communities) or the more “dedicated” fans, aggressive fan communities (and possibly

⁷³Patrick Klepek. “From Japan, With Changes: The Endless Debate Over Video Game ‘Censorship’” Kotaku, December, 14, 2015. Accessed April 25, 2018, <https://kotaku.com/from-japan-with-changes-the-endless-debate-over-video-1747960323>

⁷⁴Julie Muncy. “Nintendo Firing a Female Gamer Only Makes the Trolls More Rabid” Wired, April 2, 2016. Accessed May 1, 2018, <https://www.wired.com/2016/04/alison-rapp-intendo-harassment/>

making their product too controversial to sell to a broader audience). Nintendo of America's silence about the abuse of Rapp was due to this awkward situation. If they defended her, they could have increased the harassment or lead to other employees being harassed, but by not saying anything and ultimately firing her, they made the aggressive fan communities feel like they can effect change through their argumentation tactics.

Despite being a clear minority in the gaming community, the aggressive fan communities take up a large portion of the online discussion boards and social media interaction, especially with the gaming media. Their clear belief is that the video game industry and media, which as a whole tends to be viewed as progressive, is full of social justice warriors that want to censor all Japanese media of anything that offends them (often resulting in comments like “snowflake⁷⁵ SJW agenda”⁷⁶). In this chapter, I used three examples to analyze the fan and media reaction to localizations that were surrounded by controversy. Two involved in-game changes and one was more due to a lack of in-game changes and marketing. Within each example, I demonstrated how the interaction with the aggressive fan communities, due to their style of argumentation, shaped the discourse surrounding the games releases. No matter how localization teams decided how to change (or not change) a game in its American release, keywords that the aggressive fan communities used (like “censorship”) would appear in the media rather than discussing the merits of the game in itself. Moreover, the verbal abuse and

⁷⁵An insult aimed primarily at progressives, which implies that the target is being overly sensitive.

⁷⁶Comments, 2015, on “Vox and other outlets are claiming we want to stop "diverse" games from being made. Don't let them get away with that, the SJWs are the ones that want to censor people.” Reddit, accessed March 30, 2018. https://www.reddit.com/r/KotakuInAction/comments/2k50k0/vox_and_other_outlets_are_claiming_we_want_to/

harassment of people who disagreed with the aggressive fan communities' narratives led to video game companies and media having to decide whether to respond or not. This then led to the aggressive fan communities obtaining power and control over the media surrounding games, especially during the termination of Alison Rapp. The aggressive fan communities' feelings of power in combination with the ability to update games post-release both shapes how localizers try to interact with the audience and aggressive fan communities are not letting up until they get what they want or have moved on to their next controversy of choice. However, as I will show in the next chapter, aggressive fan communities are not the only fans who care about localizations, and fans can have more civil and positive relationships with localizers.

CHAPTER III

RECENT CHANGES VIA THE *PERSONA* SERIES VS. THE *YAKUZA* SERIES

“Wanna avoid dangerous cults? ...Just practice safe sects!” (Yakuza 0, Sega, 2015)

As shown in the previous chapter, certain groups are becoming more and more aware of localization and that dynamic can create a contentious relationship between aggressive fans and media, as well as aggressive fans and localizers themselves. Using their extremely negative rhetoric, they have shaped the dialogue surrounding a localization, shifting attention to the changes made in the last step of localization. The dialogue can shift from discussing whether or not the game is good, to whether or not the game is censored, giving more attention and therefore more power to the aggressive fans themselves. However, the relationships between fans and localizers does not have to be negative. This chapter will discuss how two specific games series, the *Yakuza*⁷⁷ series, and the *Persona* series are addressing the connectivity with fans. The *Yakuza* series localizers have been utilizing their direct connection with their fans and have adapted how the game is localized based on their audience needs, and thus, has grown in popularity despite being considered “too niche” to garner mainstream success. On the other hand, the *Persona* series’ localizers have not utilized social media, and the most recent game has frustrated long-term fans due to the quality and lack of understanding of who the target audience is. The relationship of these two games and their dynamic with the audience is emblematic of the changing importance of audience in games products. This chapter will discuss the history of these two series and how their localization practices have changed with the introduction of social media, for the better and worse.

⁷⁷Called 龍が如く (like a dragon) in Japanese

The *Yakuza* series and the *Persona* series. Although they are wildly different in gameplay and visual aesthetic, both series take place in “real Japan.” All locations are based on real places within Japan, even containing complete matches. Therefore, the game series are often compared as they are the two biggest series in a new “game tourism,” allowing you to experience real Japan-like settings, such as a convenience store or school, in combination with the more fantastical elements of the games (e.g., shooting yourself in the head to summon your inner power in the shape of a monster). The series each span over a decade, and thus, have been localized differently over time. Currently, with their most recent releases, each series have taken different approaches to localization—*Yakuza*, usually considered the more “faithful” localization, and *Persona*, with ups and downs over time. However, each series in their own right started to try to portray their own “real Japan,” and have achieved different effects due to their efforts.

The *Persona* series began due to the success of the Japan-only release of the 真・女神転生 *if...* (*Shin Megami Tensei if...*). The *Shin Megami Tensei* series is a series of games in which the player usually portrays an adult who fights demons to save the world. Rather than a having a through the line of characters or stories, the *Shin Megami Tensei* series connection relies on utilizing the same monsters and game mechanics (a turn-based role-playing game with specific attacks and moves a character can make). *Shin Megami Tensei if...*, released in 1994, was different however as it took place in a high school which had been overrun by demons. The player took the role of a high school student who was fighting the demons as well as centering on the internal struggle of a young

adult student.⁷⁸ The game was praised in Japan for its high school setting and spawned a new spin-off series, starting with the 1996 release of *Revelations: Persona*⁷⁹ for the PlayStation, the first Shin Megami Tensei game released in the United States. However, the localization for *Revelations: Persona*, was not well received. Several changes were made in the last stage of the localization that even resulted in the change of location out of Japan and the change of many character's names. Additionally, infamously, the race of a character was changed as well. All of these cultural changes were made in the name of suiting an American audience⁸⁰.

Persona 2 was broken up into two games; the first was released in Japan in 1999 *Persona 2: Innocent Sin*⁸¹ (originally not released in the United States until its remaster⁸² in 2011) and *Persona 2: Eternal Punishment*⁸³, released in Japan and the United States in 2000. After *Revelations: Persona*, the development team updated the game mechanics, and, most notably, changed their localization tactics. In an interview with Senior Project Manager Namba Yu, “starting with *Persona 2: Eternal Punishment*... we wanted to keep to the original content as much as possible. Of course, there are so many things that are so different... the games had so much Japanese content that our goal was to try to

⁷⁸GameSpot, “History of Persona” (History of Games Season 1 Episode 1), posted April 2, 2017, accessed September 30, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YC7168R2-NA>

⁷⁹Originally called 女神異聞録ペルソナ (Goddesses Odyssey Persona)

⁸⁰GameSpot, “History of Persona” (History of Games Season 1 Episode 1), posted April 2, 2017, accessed September 30, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YC7168R2-NA>

⁸¹ペルソナ 2 : 罪

⁸²A new updated version released later often for a different system, in this case the PlayStation Portable

⁸³ペルソナ 2 : 罰

maintain that to... I wouldn't say educate, but maybe introduce Japanese culture to western game players."⁸⁴ This trend continued with *Persona 3*, the first of the series on the PlayStation 2.

Persona 3, often considered the first *Persona* game to achieve widespread acclaim both in the United States and Japan, added many core features that are unique to *Persona* games. First, is the calendar system. Each day functions similar to an average Japanese High Schooler's day. They wake up, go to school (except on Sundays and holidays), and then there is the "after school" period. At school, the player will be asked academic questions, take tests, and socialize with their classmates. During the "after school" period, the player has much more flexibility and can then choose to participate in typical activities such as club activities, work part-time jobs, study for tests, do homework, or hang out with friends. Each activity the player chooses increases specific abilities and increases the main character's relationship with a specific character, another unique core feature now associated with the *Persona* series. In *Persona 3* and *Persona 4* these were called "social links" and in *Persona 5*, "confidants." These links would give the main character powers when they fight monsters, an activity that only took place at night in *Persona 3*. The activities the player chooses to do during the day may make the character tired, and thus will be unable to go out at night, and sometimes adults restrict the character's nighttime wanderings. The player must plan their time wisely around calendar events such as midterms, cultural days, or monsters coming to destroy the world which can only be fought on specific days. To complete every activity in each game, the

⁸⁴Silicon era interview

player must usually play the game more than once and utilize previous save files where they can bring over completed abilities or social links.

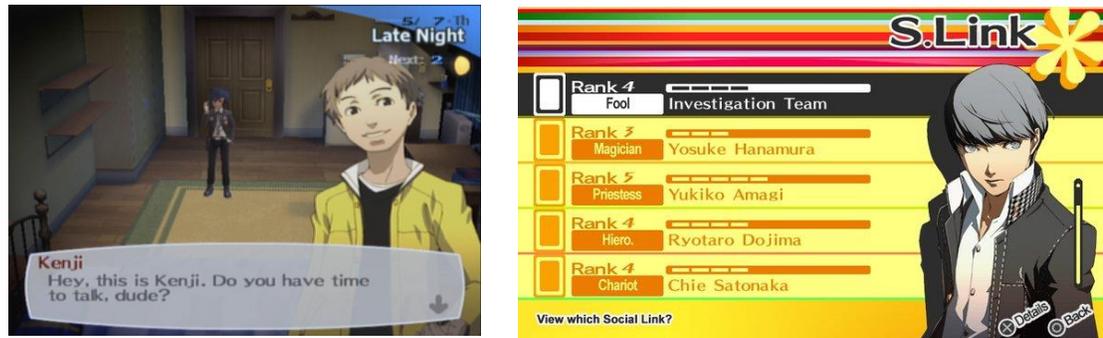


Figure 13: A character is initiating a social link event in *Persona 3* (left)⁸⁵. The list of social links with the associated rank showed in *Persona 4* (right)⁸⁶

The daily nature of the *Persona* series starting from *Persona 3* makes *Persona*'s setting to seem much more like “real Japan” to the fan base. The player immerses themselves in the school year of a Japanese student, making new friends, going to the beach, and completing mundane activities like working at a fast food restaurant and remembering orders. However, the nuance surrounding the mundane, although it may often seem dull, can help make a player feel like they are actually in Japan when they are thousands of miles away in another country. The setting changes in each game represent different parts of Japan. *Persona 3* takes place in a metropolitan suburb, *Persona 4*, in the countryside, and *Persona 5*, in Tokyo. Each with their offerings and unique activities. For example, there are many more places to go in *Persona 3* and *Persona 5* because they take

⁸⁵Megami Fuse, 2018. “Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3.” Accessed September, 15, 2018. <https://www.megamifuse.com/games/shin-megami-tensei-persona-3/>

⁸⁶IGN, 2013. “Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 4 Wiki Guide.” Last Modified, March 15, 2013. Accessed, September 15, 2018. https://www.ign.com/wikis/shin-megami-tensei-persona-4-golden/Social_Links

place in cities, whereas in *Persona 4*, everyone gathers at the local department store. This realism is in part since, as stated before, the team chose to retain Japanese cultural elements in the localization. The controllable demons are named after gods and goddesses, like Amaterasu and Susano-o, and the main villain is not the local town policeman turned murder, but Izanami pulling all the strings, fighting against the player's first demon, Izanagi. Rather than adjusting for the non-Japanese players that do not know these terms, they instead left them as they were an intrinsic part of the game.

Furthermore, the localization retained all the Japanese honorifics, such as “san” and “kun,” and chose to translate only when necessary. For example, in *Persona 4*, the young character Nanako called the player-character “Oniichan” in Japanese, and rather than replacing it with the more culturally appropriate name, they translated it as “big bro.” While there are changes made for western audiences, they were few and far between compared to many previous JRPGs, and thus was labeled a “good” localization by much of the fan base—meaning that both the language was well written, and it seemed to stay faithful to the original material. This reputation continued through the re-releases of *Persona 3* and *Persona 4*, each gaining a bit more mainstream acclaim in the United States. The series grew popular enough support new games across different genres, and cause various anime, manga, and movie adaptations. However, I will discuss later that *Persona 5*'s localization did not reach similar levels of acclaim as previous entries.

Unlike the *Persona* series, where the popularity of the localization has dipped recently, the *Yakuza* series' localization has only grown in popularity over time. The *Yakuza* games follow several former and current *Yakuza* in Japan. Like the *Persona* series, many of the locations are based off real-world locations, the main one being the

red-light district Kamurocho (based off Tokyo's Kabukicho). Largely the narrative follows the character Kiryu Kazuma, a character that, for most of the series, is trying to leave the Yakuza. Kiryu is forced out of the Yakuza after taking the blame for a murder his friend committed, and when released, wants to use his freedom to help raise the orphan of a friend but keeps ending up involved with various Yakuza problems. Additionally, throughout the series the player controls multiple characters, including the fan favorite, Majima Goro. The series is known for its cinematic nature, including utilizing real famous Japanese actors and Japanese wrestlers. Gameplay centers on the player fighting various groups of street thugs using outlandish fighting techniques and skills. The player can participate in various side-quests⁸⁷ that help break the stress of the often tense storyline, including winning a chicken at a bowling competition or dressing up and acting as a town's mascot. Also, there are various mini-games⁸⁸ spread throughout the games, some of which are Sega's arcade classics.



Figure 14: The character Hirose Toru in *Yakuza 6*, played by Beat Takeshi (left)⁸⁹ and Beat Takeshi (right)⁹⁰

⁸⁷Quests or missions not related to the main storyline

⁸⁸Mini-games are small games that the player can chose to participate in. Other Yakuza mini-game examples are fishing, crane games, or karaoke music games.

⁸⁹Fandom. "Toru Hirose." Accessed September 30, 2018. http://yakuza.wikia.com/wiki/Toru_Hiros_e?file=Yakuza-3-0.jpg

⁹⁰Wikipedia, 2018. "Takeshi Kitano." Last modified, March 14. Accessed September 20, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Takeshi_Kitano

Starting with *Yakuza* on the PlayStation 2 in 2006 (nearly a year after the original Japanese version), almost every single mainline *Yakuza* game⁹¹ has come to the United States. There are currently six original games, a prequel, two remakes, and three more remakes planned. Since the release of *Yakuza 0* and *Yakuza 6*, the series has garnered a new level of popularity often praised for its tourism-like settings, sense of humor, and the quality of its localization. Initially, despite Sega's efforts, the *Yakuza* series remained fairly niche in the United States. When *Yakuza* was released in Japan, it enjoyed nearly universal success, praised for the depth of its storytelling and its cinematic-like experience. However, in the United States, despite a star-studded cast, including, most notably, Mark Hamill, it received mixed reviews for its gameplay and localization. The *Yakuza* localization seemed odd to people. Lines and storylines were often condensed to fit American sensibilities, and some of the characterizations did not seem to fit the animation. Furthermore, despite the talent of the actors, the voicing was often made fun of by gaming communities for its absurdity. In other words, players were continually confronting the fact that they were playing a localized game, rather than immersing themselves in the gameplay and story⁹².

When *Yakuza 2* was localized, the localization team decided to take a different approach, and they decided not to add English voicing, just using subtitles to translate the speech. A decision that would affect the rest of the series' releases in the United States as none of the subsequent games would feature an English voice track, including the remake

⁹¹Many spinoff games, and a few PlayStation 3 remakes were limited to Japan.

⁹²GameSpot, "History of Yakuza" (History of Games Season Season 2 Episode 1), posted February 10, 2018, accessed October 1, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UitU16o1ALU>

of *Yakuza*, *Yakuza Kiwami*. Although often considered by press and fans to be a money issue due to *Yakuza*'s lackluster sales, the current localization insists that it is a choice and that they are replicating the foreign film experience. The lead of the *Yakuza* localization team Scott Strichart has stated about his mindset in more recent releases, "The game is set in Japan, obviously, and it is steeped in Japanese culture. In the original we kept the honorifics and slang, so we were already keeping a lot of the original Japanese culture. So why change it to English?"⁹³ However, large portions of the video game industry still considers the inclusion of English voice acting to be necessary for achieving mainstream success. Thus, the lack of English voicing was considered to be the reason for its limited niche following. Through *Yakuza 3*, *Yakuza 4*, and *Yakuza 5*, the *Yakuza* series only continued its niche success. Adding to the lack of success, *Yakuza 5* would only be released on PlayStation digital store on the PlayStation 3 after the release of the PlayStation 4 and would not have a physical release at all. As a whole, the *Yakuza* series gained a reputation of being a strange (weird) Japanese game. However, in January 2017, almost two years after its release in Japan, *Yakuza 0* would become the most successful game in the *Yakuza* series in the United States.

Yakuza 0 was the first game handled by Sega's new localization team, a team led by Scott Strichart, who also worked on the *Persona 4* localization. *Yakuza 0*'s success is primarily attributed to the quality of the localization but was due to a myriad of factors. First, *Yakuza 0* is a prequel game, dating before the first *Yakuza* game, in the late 1980s, before Kiryu goes to prison, and before Japan's decades-long ongoing recession. Thus,

⁹³Kat Bailey, "The Yakuza Series Is Left Purposefully Undubbed to Emulate a 'Foreign Film Experience'." USGamer, June 14, 2017. Accessed October 2, 2018. <https://www.usgamer.net/articles/the-yakuza-series-is-left-purposefully-undubbed-to-emulate-a-foreign-film-experience>

the game offers a unique experience for people to experience 1980s Japan. However, also, as a prequel, it allows players to be able to enjoy the game without having played any other game in the series. *Yakuza* games are known to be heavily story-based, a factor that may have scared off would-be fans in the past. Internally it was considered more than a prequel, according to the Strichart, “We internally consider [*Yakuza 0* as] a reboot. As we have been rolling our⁹⁴ localizations, we have been improving our styles and strategies and refining what we wanted to do.”⁹⁵ Furthermore, it was praised critically for its seemingly unusual tone, a mix of serious and silly. In Julie Muncy’s review on Wired, she stated that “the *Yakuza* series is not quite as serious as I’ve made it out to be. This is another way it diverges from its Western crime games. It is completely, joyfully aware of itself as a game...Its narrative moments are broken up by pitched battles of absurd, anime-esque brawling that exists completely apart from the dead-serious posturing of the main plot.”⁹⁶ Moreover, through social media, interest in its serious juxtaposed with silly tone only grew.

The PlayStation 4 introduced a “share” function, a button that a player can press and almost instantly share in-game photos and short videos. The previous releases did not have this functionality, so many players instantly started to share funny scenes all over social media. This social media interest drew attention to the localization, and how funny

⁹⁴GameSpot, “History of *Yakuza*” (History of Games Season Season 2 Episode 1), posted February 10, 2018, accessed October 1, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UitUI6o1ALU>

⁹⁵Alex Wawro, “Q&A: Translating the humor & tone of *Yakuza* games for the West.” Gamasutra, February 5, 2018. Accessed October 10, 2018. https://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/314068/QA_Translating_the_humor__tone_of_Yakuza_games_for_the_West.php

⁹⁶Julie Muncy, “*Yakuza 0* Is a Brilliant Prequel to Japan’s Best Crime Games.” Wired, January 27, 2017. Accessed October 1, 2018. <https://www.wired.com/2017/01/yakuza-0-review/>

(or more accurately, “punny”) the localization was in English. Humorous lines are some of the hardest to localize, so games that are funny in Japanese often struggle to find a balance between humor and accuracy.



Figure 15: This scene, where Kiryu wins a chicken in a bowling tournament and decides to name him “nugget” became particularly popular, trending all over social media sites.⁹⁷

Later that year, Sega released a remake of the first *Yakuza* game for PlayStation 4 in the United States, called *Yakuza Kiwami*, these releases were quickly followed by *Yakuza 6*, a game that wraps up Kiryu’s story, and *Yakuza Kiwami 2*, a remake of *Yakuza 2*. So, after waiting years for a *Yakuza* game to be released, four games were released in two years. In an industry where it often takes over five years to develop a video game, that release schedule is astounding.

That time crunch made it impossible for the localizers to account for fan impressions until the release of *Yakuza 6*. Strichart and his team had become very present on twitter and reddit and hosting a show on the video game streaming platform Twitch, responding to fans questions and discussing localization changes that were made in the previous games. Before *Yakuza 6*, there was controversy surrounding the localization

⁹⁷[u/2wicked4cricket 2018, “\[Screenshot\] Went bowling in Yakuza 0. Won a chicken. We talked a bit.” Last modified 2018. Accessed, September 30, 2018. https://www.reddit.com/r/PS4/comments/6s0jzm/screenshot_went_bowling_in_yakuza_0_won_a_chicken/](https://www.reddit.com/r/PS4/comments/6s0jzm/screenshot_went_bowling_in_yakuza_0_won_a_chicken/)

team's translation of the honorific "aniki" as "sir." Aniki means big brother, but it is also a term of respect in the Yakuza world. "Sir," according to the fans was too inaccurate of a translation, and a culturally appropriate replacement would also be inadequate due to its Yakuza-specific connotations. Therefore, the localization team decided to use "anki," and leave it untranslated. This is directly due to fan reaction in addition to Strichart's opinion that the "Japanese language has become a little more common and ingrained in English lexicon over the years. So that some words which, ten years ago people would have said "what is that?", Are now commonplace. Senpai, for example. Everyone knows senpai now. So, we are pleased to be able to use that word, just straight up. Okay, this is my senpai."⁹⁸ To accommodate such changes, on loading screens, they took the opportunity to explain different words and cultural aspects of the game for players who may be unaware.

When Strichart is assuming that the players will know the term "senpai" he is also assuming the type of fan who would be interested in playing a *Yakuza* game. Namely, the fan would be interested in Japanese media, probably anime or manga, enough to recognize often used honorifics. Many fans of anime prefer to watch their anime "subbed" (subtitled) and not "dubbed" (given an English voice track), and this group of people would be well acquainted with Japanese honorifics as they are often left untranslated in subbed anime. While Strichart is not saying that fans of *Yakuza* like anime or vice versa, the localization team is assuming that the general audience of a *Yakuza* game is a fan who has prior knowledge of certain Japanese linguistic and cultural norms

⁹⁸Cathy McCarthy, "Inside Yakuza 6's In-Depth Localization." USGamer, February 7, 2018. Accessed September 30, 2018. <https://www.usgamer.net/articles/inside-yakuza-6s-in-depth-localization>

because of other interests in Japanese culture. Therefore, he is catering to a specific audience rather than a growing mainstream audience.

Strichart continued support of no English voicing after the “soft relaunch” further supports the idea of a specific target audience for the *Yakuza*, influencing the overall success of the *Yakuza* series as a whole. Alternatively, as Peer Schneider of IGN stated in my interview with him,

“just like with movies, some players may find subtitled scenes to be distracting as they prevent the focus from being on the "spectacle" or character animations. Some players do not want to read. Thus, including a dub is a requirement for games seeking mainstream success. However, for more niche titles that are directly aimed at Japanophiles or are so rooted in Japanese culture that hearing the original language heightens the immersion, I think that skipping the dub is not detrimental. For example, players of *Yakuza* or *Samurai* games may actually like hearing the original voices even if they need to read a bit more. For dialog-heavy games, however, this may still be an issue.”⁹⁹

Thus, it depends on what defines success. While *Yakuza* has achieved far greater sales over the past few years than previous releases and has become much more of a known quantity in North America in Europe, it will never compete with the sales numbers of blockbuster series such as *Call of Duty*. However, that is not Sega’s goal with *Yakuza*. They want to be successful with a group of people, what Schneider refers to as Japanophiles. Thus, the success can also be due to a growing fan base that like the fact that *Yakuza* games take place in Japan, and are full of Japanese cultural nuances, so the experience is not hampered by the lack of English but enhanced. The localization instead utilizes the load screens instead, as a means to footnote the game, as to not alienate newcomers, and to give cultural and language lessons. By catering to the taste of their fan base, they expanded their player numbers rather than trying to appeal to an audience that has not been interested before.

⁹⁹Peer Schneider, interviewed by author, February 5, 2019.

Conversely, as I alluded to before, *Persona 5*'s localization suffered a different fate from *Yakuza*'s success story. Despite its overwhelming success in sales, with initial sales almost five times greater than *Persona 4*, and critics claiming that it is one of the greatest RPGs of all time, a controversy began to surround the localization in particular. Fans pointed to oddities throughout the script that seemed to point to a rushed English script, and possibly too many translators working on one project. The quality of the English varies from scene to scene, and unfortunately for *Persona 5*, the script is compared negatively to its predecessor, *Persona 4*. Images of seemingly strange dialogue with awkward English circulated on social media and the massive anticipation for the release fueled the fervor.



Figure 16: The character Morgana saying “It means they’re holding nothing back and are serious to kill us” (left). English teacher character saying “Just to say ‘heavy rain,’ as many things fall as are countries in the world” (right)¹⁰⁰

Molly Lee, a translator, in an article for the gaming site Polygon, stated “The ideal line in a game (I’m playing rather than working on) flows smoothly and doesn't trigger that snag in my brain that makes me try to mentally rewrite it. If it makes me feel funny, it’s often a clue it will pull the player out of the game. It’s hard to enjoy the story when you’re

¹⁰⁰Molly Lee, “Persona 5 Deserved Better: a translator's take on a subpar script.” Polygon, April 20, 2017. Accessed February 3, 2018. <https://www.polygon.com/2017/4/20/15356026/persona-5-translation-localization>

distracted by the writing.”¹⁰¹ If the goal of a localized game is to help immerse the player in a game in a new language, when the localization draws attention to itself, it failed for these players.

However, the so-called failure of the *Persona 5* localization seems to not be not just due to similar English issues as with older games with English such as “I feel asleep,” but seems to also suffer from inconsistency of who their target audience is. On the one hand, they leave awkward English to remain more faithful to the Japanese script (e.g., translating teenagers using the phrase しょうがたい as “it can’t be helped” repeatedly throughout the game, despite it being awkward wording in English, especially coming from a teenager). On the other hand, they seem to over Americanize pronunciation of character’s names, making them sound awkward in English. For example, one of the main characters, Sakamoto Ryuji’s name is adjusted to be pronounced as Suckmatoe Riyuji (such pronunciation changes were not made in the previous two main-line *Persona* games). Seemingly to accommodate such changes, for the first time, the Japanese voice track was included as free downloadable content on launch day. Many groups of fans began to insist that the game, therefore, must be played with the Japanese voice track to experience the immersion properly, and to protect other players from a bad “dub.”¹⁰²

Exacerbating the issue was Atlus’ new streaming content policy. They threatened to take legal action against any player who posted video content past the in-game date of

¹⁰¹Ibid

¹⁰²Comments, 2018, on “Persona 5 English Dub is Horrible.” Reddit, accessed September 30, 2018. https://www.reddit.com/r/Persona5/comments/7rpq1r/persona_5_english_dub_is_horrible/

July Seventh, and restricted what kind of content could be shown otherwise. In an online post, it was clearly stated that “Sharing is currently blocked through the native PS4 UI. However, if you do plan on streaming, video guidelines above apply except length. **If you decide to stream past 7/7...you do so at the risk of being issued a content ID claim or worse, a channel strike/account suspension.**”¹⁰³ So, while the *Yakuza* series achieved greater popularity due to players posting videos of odd side missions, fighting techniques, and funny characters by opening up large parts of the games for sharing, Atlus was limiting the content surrounding the release due to their streaming policy. Therefore, the discussion at the time of release shifted to the localization controversy, and fans and media debated whether the localization was “bad,” if it wasn’t as “good” as previous games in the series, or if the localizations of the previous games were similarly undeserving of praise.

Persona 5 sold over two million copies in its first year worldwide, and the vast majority of the players do not care enough about the localization to make a note of anything remarkable. However, many long-time *Persona 5* fans do seem to care about the localization, which they see as not catered to them, but was instead catered to gather new fans. Localization project manager Yu Namba explained in an interview, “working on the base game like *Persona 3* or *Persona 4*. Of course, there are Atlus fans we want to cater towards, but we also want to bring in as many of the new players as well. Now, if you’re talking like *Persona 4: Arena*, *Persona Q*, or *Persona 4: Dancing All Night*... that’s moving to a different genre, and I think it’s more important to stick to

¹⁰³Atlus, 2018. “A Note on Persona 5 and Streaming.” Accessed, September 30, 2018. <https://atlus.com/note-persona-5-streaming/>

the base game and focus more on the people who will enjoy the storyline or the character development..”¹⁰⁴With a history of retaining Japanese cultural elements and trying to cater to that fan, a goal of more mainstream audience shifted the way that they localized the entire game. As with the the issue with the lack of English voicing, many fans do not care about retaining Japanese-elements, and instead, care more about the style and gameplay factors. Now, while the overall sales of the game were not affected by a comparatively small group discussing one aspect of the experience, Atlus and the *Persona* localization team have effectively ignored the complaints about the localization. Whereas, the localization team for *Yakuza* has continually received praise for directly interacting with their fans and it has helped fueled greater success.

As shown throughout previous chapters, fan interaction adds a new layer of complication to the localization process. Fans can now directly share their expectations for a games’ release and when a localization does not meet their expectation. It is easier to talk about localization while discussing when changes represent distinct cultural differences. Debates surrounding the purity of the Japanese products aside, in general, video game localization necessitates such modifications to accommodate for different cultural contexts. However, that necessity further fuels the arguments of fans who equate localization to censorship and the endless debates around which games have “good” localizations and which games have “bad” localizations. It becomes even harder to discuss localization for games that take place in Japan, as the main fan base attempts to use those games to experience being in Japan. The *Persona* series and the *Yakuza* series

¹⁰⁴Robert Ward, “Localizing Persona: An Interview with Atlus’s Yu Namba.” Siliconera, July 20, 2015. Accessed September 30, 2018. <https://www.siliconera.com/2015/07/20/localizing-persona-an-interview-with-atlusa-yu-namba/>

both have taken different approaches over the years, but both are usually regarded to be “faithful” localizations. The *Yakuza* localization team has thus far shown itself to be both reactive to fan critique and proactive in fan interaction by discussing the games with fans directly. This has furthered the *Yakuza* series’ popularity within the fan base that want to play the *Yakuza* games. Sega has since announced that they are remaking all the games, even including new updated English scripts due to its recent growth in popularity. The *Persona* localization team has, until recently, shown itself to be inventive in its approach to localization, in that they kept many cultural elements that other contemporaneous games edited out. However, starting with *Persona 5*, the team seemed to be less in tune with its’ audience and largely ignored their criticism.

Fan pressure will only increase as fan agency grows. Around the time *Persona 5* was released, another game, *Y’s VIII: Lacrimosa of Dana*, was released in a similar situation. The game itself was well liked, but it was despite the localization. Shortly after initial release, the president of NIS America released a statement addressing the issue. “It has come to my attention that the quality of the *Ys 8* localization has not reached an acceptable level by our standards, but most importantly by yours. As president of NIS America, Inc. I want to apologize to you personally for this grave error.”¹⁰⁵ He announced that they would be rewriting the localization and patching the game as soon as possible. NIS America reacted directly to fan criticism and started to write blogs in order to update fans on the new translation. Fans interaction directly changed the quality of a localization that they considered to be poor. The success of recent *Yakuza* games’

¹⁰⁵Frank, Allegra. “NIS America is Fixing the Worst Part of an Incredible RPG.” Polygon, October 17, 2017. Accessed March 26, 2018. <https://www.polygon.com/2017/10/10/16455388/ys-8-localization-translation-patch-ps4-vita>

localization is also changing how Sega is handling localizations universally. Sega links strong international sales of *Yakuza* games directly to its quality localization. Therefore, Sega stated that they are working towards making that level of localization a priority and making simultaneous releases with that level of quality possible. Moreover, as Sega owns Atlus, due to the growing success of the *Yakuza* games and the localization team's connection to its fans, the *Persona* series' localization team's relationship with fans will probably change as a result. Thus, the importance of the intended audience may increase as well, as fans will feel as they have more power to shape the overall process.

CONCLUSION

“Take care, ho!” (Final Fantasy II, Square, 1991)

The audience, for better and for worse, has become a substantial part of the localization process. While part of this is a negative shame-based dynamic, and perpetrators accidentally given power by the press coverage surrounding such hate-filled attacks, it is not inherently a negative addition. As succinctly stated by Clyde Mandelin, “Localizers seem to be more aware of the target audience, as the Internet allows instant feedback. As such, localizers are more aware of what each target audience looks for and can aim for those expectations.”¹⁰⁶ Localizers can adapt games to fan feedback and shape games around what fans want out of a localized game utilizing social media and technological advances

Throughout the chapters, I gave examples of various relationships game companies (and localizers themselves) have with the fans who are passionate about localization. However, companies who deny the importance of social media, and limit communication with fans, often end up with a product that may end up alienating their core audience. While alienating a small portion of their audience may not affect overall sales significantly, it can shape the press discussion surrounding a release, and therefore the overall reception of a game. However, arguments surrounding political correctness, and differing ethical standards may result in game companies simply not wanting to give any energy towards fans with significantly different politics from the people working on the games themselves. When there are more civil discussions, fan interaction is primarily

¹⁰⁶Clyde Mandelin, interviewed by author, March 16, 2019.

considered a good thing, because it can lead to greater consumer satisfaction and therefore more sales.

What are the consequences of fans having power over localizations? With *Ys 8* fan criticisms lead to an updated release as the original was riddled with mistakes. These mistakes detracted from what was generally considered a good JRPG. That is generally considered a good outcome. A game came out with a subpar localization, and then a new team went in and fixed the localization so players can enjoy a similar experience to the Japanese game. However, what about fans expectations of what should or should not be retained? What if it is offensive to particular groups of people, but not longtime fans? This communication is, therefore, a two-way street. While fans can now communicate what they want, or what they do not like, the localizers and game companies have a responsibility to try explaining localization changes and the importance of content and context. It is up to game companies to balance fan expectations of power over localizations, and how much power they want to give them. If game companies give too much power to fans, it can result in non-experts dictating that their assumptions about Japanese culture and social norms should shape what their experience of a Japanese cultural product should be, rather than the authenticity they seemingly crave. Right now, however, game companies and localizers are trying to find the right balance for each product.

APPENDIX A
GAMER DEMOGRAPHICS



64% OF US HOUSEHOLDS OWN A DEVICE THAT THEY USE TO PLAY VIDEO GAMES.

The average gamer is **34 YEARS OLD.**

Gamers age 18 or older represent more than **70 PERCENT** of the video game-playing population.

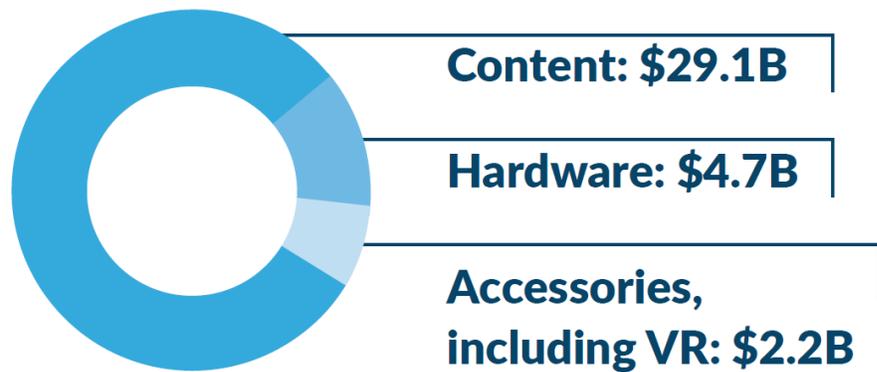
60 PERCENT of Americans play video games daily.

The description of the demographics of Americans who played video games in 2017¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷The Entertainment Software Association, *Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry: 2018 Sales, Demographic, and Usage Data*, (The Entertainment Software Association, 2018), accessed March 22, 2019 http://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/EF2018_FINAL.pdf, 5

APPENDIX B
INDUSTRY SALES DATA

The **total** consumer spend on the video game industry was
\$36 BILLION IN 2017.



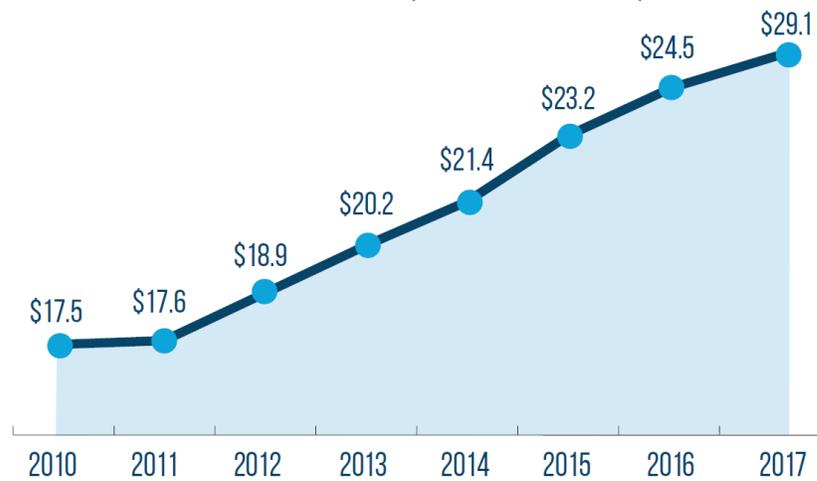
Source: The NPD Group

The breakdown of total consumer spending in the video game market in 2017¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸Ibid, 10

APPENDIX C
CONTENT SALES DATA

**ANNUAL US VIDEO GAME CONTENT SPEND,
2010 - 2017 (IN BILLIONS)**



Source: The NPD Group

A graph showing the sharp increase in consumer spending on video game content alone (excluding hardware and other accessories) between 2010-2017¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹Ibid, 10

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