Playing With Culture: Reframing Video Game Localization Discourse and Issues of Censorship

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ABSTRACT

Playing With Culture: Reframing Video Game Localization Discourse and Issues of Censorship

Mathieu Bourbonnière

This thesis sets out to explore the adaptation, or alteration, of unique elements in video games and their localization, questioning their relation and relevance to censorship. While translation studies has addressed issues of censorship within literary works, little attention has been devoted to this topic within localization, and less within video game localization. Due to and industry shift from America to Japan, localization became essential to the industry's survival, and a kind culture clash often arises when a Japanese video game gets localized for the Western market. This thesis analyzes elements that go beyond the textual or narratological aspects of video games, to include the domain of the ludological. Some concepts utilized here are from the field of video game studies and are used to elucidate how video game localization works within video game culture. Most importantly, video games are considered cultural products, as exemplified through the dynamic of gameplay, which can be extracted, analysed, and adapted to different locales One controversial issue often brought up by users and critics through video game journalism is the belief that some alterations constitute a form a censorship. A broader video game history and game studies perspective offers localization studies a more nuanced picture of the stated aim of cultural adaptation in localization, while a more complete depiction of standard localization offers an explanatory rationale to video game studies as to how and why certain decisions are made. A useful notion of "social censorship" emerges when analyzing video game localization in the domain of translation studies.

RÉSUMÉ

Un jeu de cultures : les questions de censure dans les jeux vidéo

Mathieu Bourbonnière

Le but de cette thèse est d'explorer la relation entre la censure et les éléments culturels dans le domaine de la localisation des jeux vidéo en discutant de modification de contenu culturel propre aux jeux vidéo. Ce faisant, nous pouvons explorer leurs relations face aux pratiques considérées comme de la censure. La question de la censure a été mainte fois discutée dans les domaines littéraires et médiatiques en traductologie, mais la question de la censure en localisation (et des jeux vidéo) est encore à ses débuts. À travers son existence, l'industrie du jeu vidéo a beaucoup développé de méthodes et de techniques de localisation et d'adaptation culturelles de ses produits. À ses débuts, l'industrie était essentiellement américaine; puis, le centre de production s'est déplacé vers le Japon. À cause de ce changement, la localisation est devenue essentielle à la survie de l'industrie. Cette thèse cherche à inclure des concepts ludologiques (par exemple le *gameplay*) afin d'analyser la localisation des jeux vidéo, et pour démontrer que les jeux vidéo sont des produits culturels. Le domaine des jeux vidéo a aussi sa propre communauté de joueurs avec une forme spécialisée de journalisme qui permet de comprendre les réactions des participants de l'industrie, ce qui permet d'identifier les enjeux importants comme la censure. En connaissant l'évolution de l'industrie, de même que ses participants, cette thèse établit une nouvelle forme de « censure », identifiée dans le présent travail comme étant de la « censure sociale ». Ce nouveau concept devient important afin de comprendre la localisation des jeux vidéo.

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Introduction

The discipline of translation studies encompasses a wide range of themes, approaches, and perspectives, from analysis of the linguistic strategies implemented for translation in a project, to analysis of the cultural impact of translation within a specific historical or geopolitical context. More recently, this interdisciplinary field has also situated translation within a contemporary digital context. For example, when translating a digital product such as software, and adapting it linguistically, culturally, and technically for circulation in the global market, this process is called localization. The volume of literature on localization, including that of video games, has steadily grown over the past two decades. The process of localization, including video game localization, involves challenges and issues that are similar in nature to other types of translation. One issue is that of censorship. This controversial topic is slowly starting to attract the interest not only of video game and video game localization scholars, but also of fans and users of video games themselves.

Video games are a fascinating object of study: they exist as cultural products and are subject to various interpretations and manipulations when translated into and for other cultures. Yet, a deeper exploration and contextualization of video games as culture, indeed video game culture itself, including its historical roots, is somewhat lacking in the current, often more descriptive or technically focused literature on localization in translation studies. In addition, the combined interdisciplinarity of the translation studies and localization fields, and the video game field, make it difficult to categorize and analyze the diverse aspects of video game localization without focusing on a specific case study, or to generalize more broadly. The broader goal of this thesis is to present some common ground between video game studies and translation studies (to which localization studies belongs), one that takes into account both cultural industry practices and academic approaches. In doing so, I hope to contribute to academic video game localization discourse with some points of view and perspectives drawn from actual practices and the history of the video game industry, expanding its depth and meaning. Although video games constitute a huge sector of the global entertainment market in financial terms, it is also a vital cultural sector, one that feels the impact and effects of localization practices. In order to

establish this common ground and highlight areas of convergence, it is necessary to present briefly the parameters and critical points of their associated historical trajectories.

The first chapter presents a brief overview of historical highlights of the video game industry. This industry has undergone many types of changes and passed through diverse phases. Its omnipresence is tangible, and visible within popular culture around the world. Many different sources document aspects of video game history; they range from books and magazines, to YouTube channels, and even to some recent museum exhibits in 2013 at the Musée de la civilisation (Québec City). The purpose of briefly reviewing video game history for this particular research is important. Firstly, during the eighties the industry went through a critical market crash, and secondly, it experienced a powerful renaissance. Both events are important, as they underscore how video games emerged as an American innovation but developed and matured as an industry almost exclusively controlled by Japanese companies. The shift in the production of consoles and major games from the United States to Japan made localization vitally important for its survival as an industry. This linguistic-cultural pivot in the industry brings unique specificity to the translation and localization dynamics of video games. The chapter proceeds then to a brief overview of the basic tenets of localization practice and the elements relevant to video game localization, within the history of the localization industry. Aspects of the current literature on video game localization in translation studies, with particular emphasis on censorship and cultural elements, are presented. The specific mandate associated with localization practice in general is to linguistically and "culturally adapt" content for the target audience/users. Target audience users of a localized product, in this case gamers playing localized games, are neither stereotypical culturally nor homogeneous within linguistic regions, as their assessments of games and various reactions within the video game cultural spheres testify. Video game localization research can shed light on how to more effectively situate video game localization within the discipline of translation studies through its growing discussions on cultural elements. It could also potentially make more tangible connections with the video game studies field and from video game cultural practices.

The second chapter explores some of the tensions that have existed between narratological approaches and ludological approaches to video game analysis in the game studies domain. In so doing, it not

only presents a brief overview of video game studies, with emphasis on how it became an academic field in its own right, but also suggests that video games as play or performance can be viewed and analyzed through the optic of gameplay and as a unique form of social-cultural expression. Gameplay has been addressed in video game localization research in terms of playability and entertainment value, and linked to processes of transcreation. Ascertaining what or "where" gameplay is coded or manifest within a game is undoubtedly critical for localization. Indeed, providers of localization services (in-house or otherwise) tend to seek translators or localizers who are first and foremost gamers. It seems evident, then, that analysis of video game localization must include an analytical component that takes gameplay and the (inter-)active participation of players into account, and this in relation to each diverse video game genre. And yet, even the more general category of video game genres is not exactly the same across linguistic and cultural geographical borders. In fact, video game studies is valuable and has proven to be useful in this work because it has provided a way to examine video games more wholly in historical and cultural context, and in terms of a unique vehicle for the transmission and negotiation of cultural values *beyond* the textual. The comparisons between American and Japanese game design are one example. Moreover, as video games continue to evolve in technological complexity, so have their cultural content and expression. While there are many ways to explore the cultural values associated with video games, such as through techniques of textual or visual content analysis, video game studies allows for a nuanced discussion on gameplay as an essential component of the original, source video game product. In this chapter I argue for gameplay to be envisioned as the system of rules created for and implemented within a video game, one that is inherently cultural. In the production of a game, it constitutes elements that can be extracted, observed, and even manipulated when localizing. A localizer's understanding of a game's gameplay can facilitate the creation of a translated version of the game that is as enjoyable and meaningful as the original.

The third chapter deals with video game journalism. While the more recent and growing area of sociologically oriented approaches to translation within translation studies has proved insightful, particularly in the sector of literary translation, it has not been tackled as vigorously in studies on video game localization. A

sociological perspective on translation investigates the more complex and nuanced network of actors partici-

pating in the production of a translation. These actors include not only individual translators and/or translation

agencies but also publishers and distribution agents, critical reviewers, and many others. Social practices and

networks of these type are similarly present in localization, where games are localized for diverse locales on a

global scale. Within the video game sector, the critical role of video game journalism cannot be underesti-

mated. In the age of social media, gamers themselves participate in the production of information and critiques

on games (including those localized) through their roles as player-user "citizen journalists." Their impact on the

reception and/or modification of a game can be significant, and can vary in different locales. The relatively

newly explored domain of video game journalism is more than a simple offshoot of traditional journalism. As

with other products that are digital, video games are constantly changing in form, and media outlets that speak

of video games have often found it challenging to keep up with the rapidly changing technology. With the grad-

ual digitization of journalism platforms and devices, and with the advent of Web 2.0, the video game journal-

ism that has emerged and developed is one that is highly participatory. Users now have some significant sway

over the decisions of video game studios, and over the industry at large. The rise of esports is a prime example

of how video game players are concretely involved in the creation of an entirely new culture, with its own he-

roes and champions. Furthermore, with technological barriers more easily crossed, a new global culture among

players is able to emerge. Given the relative lack of scholarly work on this important cultural component, this

section on video game journalism provides not only a noteworthy source of information, but also a lens

through which the cultural practice of video game localization can be understood. The practice of localization is

tightly linked to an understanding of the "target audience" (i.e. gamers) and market. Online video game jour-

nalism is a critical component of video games' relationship to localization.

The fourth chapter focuses on censorship in the context of video game localization, in particular

through the controversy that became known as "GamerGate." When adapting a complex product like a video

game from one locale to another, there are some controversial decisions that need to be made in order to ren-

der a product appropriate, or even legally acceptable, for target audiences. Some elements of a game, for

instance, might be removed for being deemed inappropriate. As a result, many video game fans may view this – at times very vocally – as outright censorship. Asking why this is so is an important question. The topic of censorship has been investigated in several areas within translation studies, most notably in literary translation, but also in audiovisual translation such as in the film industry. Censorship has been addressed as well in video game localization research, particularly in the context of China, where it is strictly regulated. Determining who or what does the censoring in the production of a translation is not always straightforward and is further complicated when many actors are involved in the production process. A Bourdieusian perspective potentially allows for a useful way to consider censorship mechanisms in the sphere of video game localization. On one hand, "censorship" operates within certain constraints and self-imposed content control, most notably defined by a ratings system. Because these structures were put in place by the industry itself in order to self-regulate in relation to societal norms, it does not seem to adhere to the traditional definition of "censorship." Systems of ratings also vary in different areas of the world, a situation which complicates the idea of a smooth transfer of the concept from one linguistic-cultural region to another. On the other hand, "censorship" as it is perceived in video gaming circles (both for non-localized and localized games) also emerges from elsewhere. Cultural and symbolic social capital become defined through players themselves, who are in turn immersed in their respective fields of digital social practices – all of which influence perceptions of acceptable or unacceptable cultural considerations of any given game. Because of the apparent inadequacy of the term "censorship" as it has tended to be used for analysis in translation and video game localization, I propose a notion of *social censorship*. Social censorship is heavily dependent on social practices (predominantly digital) and the socialization of individuals within specific cultural contexts. For video game localization, this means socialization within a linguistic, cultural regional area but also socialization within a globalizing video game culture.

The fifth and final chapter, for illustrative purposes, presents the case of one video game company in particular: Nintendo, a name which has become almost synonymous with video games. As a principal actor in the video game industry for decades, the company was firmly in control of the market from the eighties to the early nineties. Throughout its existence, this enterprise has implemented many technological changes, such as

the change from two- dimensional to three-dimensional graphics, and the change of support from cartridges to compact discs. Indeed, it has often been at the forefront of technological innovations, with its localization techniques consequently changing over time as well. Some of the more recent controversies about localization concern some of Nintendo's decisions to edit or change the content from the well-known *Fire Emblem* series. The chapter discusses the implications of these decisions for localization. By way of this example, I hope to exemplify some of the aspects and elements that play out within a dynamic of social censorship. For instance, Nintendo not only negotiates the boundaries and scope of its localized games within the constraints of different ratings systems and societal norms within certain markets; it also deals with the expectations of gameplay as it is perceived by gamers across cultural thresholds. More significantly, the awareness by gamers of the cultural modifications implemented between different language versions of a game through internet and social media contributes to the emergence of socially and digitally mediated discussions on diverse cultural mores, thus creating a very nuanced picture of what "censorship" means for diverse players.

By way of conclusion, this thesis ultimately seeks to portray a more in-depth view of our understanding of video game localization. It draws connections between video game studies and the video game industry at large and the localization practices that have emerged as standard over time. The controversial nature of certain localization decisions, in particular as they are perceived and received by the gamer target audience, merits an approach that can bring some clarity and nuance to these controversies. Localization is far from being a controversial practice itself if we think to too great an extent in terms of technical adaptation only. In the video game context, localization practices carry significant weight as cultural practices too. The notion of censorship is but one manifestation. As the thesis points out, there are some decisions, as reported by video game journalism outlets especially, that can lead some users and gamers to view changes through localization as censorship. As such, the notion of social censorship could be useful for analysis. With the concepts explored throughout the thesis, I hope to show that even while some decisions have been or can be considered as censorship, the overall impact of these decisions on the nature of the game seems to be negligible. The resulting product is still a game that is quite enjoyable, which is, after all, the goal of a well-made localized product.

Chapter 1: A Brief History of The Video Game and Localization Industries

1.1 The Video Game Industry: A Tumultuous Start

Before video games became a multi-billion-dollar industry, the sector was primarily an area of niche interest among American university researchers. In the 1950s, the field of computer sciences was still new, and mainly the reserve of U.S. government and university research. In fact, some of the most advanced computer programs during the fifties and sixties were video games. The game *OXO* (1958), for example, was a simple tictacto game that worked entirely on the basis of punchcards; *Tennis for Two*, created in 1958, and *Spacewar!*, created in 1961, are other examples (Dillon 2011, 3-7). Throughout the sixties, games still constituted a niche area of interest confined mainly to academic circles. A breakthrough came in 1971 when Ted Dabney and No-lan Bushnell, two students from the University of Utah, created the first coin-operated video game called *Computer Space* (Dillon 2011, 9). Dabney and Bushnell believed that video games could be a profitable industry, and they tried to install a few of their coin-operated machines in local bars.

Initially, their first machine was not a success, but this did not discourage the duo. In 1972, they created a company called Atari, and proceeded to build a completely new coin-operated machine with a much simpler and easier game to play called *Pong* (Figure 1): it consisted of two paddles bouncing a ball back and forth. The first one to get the ball past the other player got a point (Dillon 2011, 14).
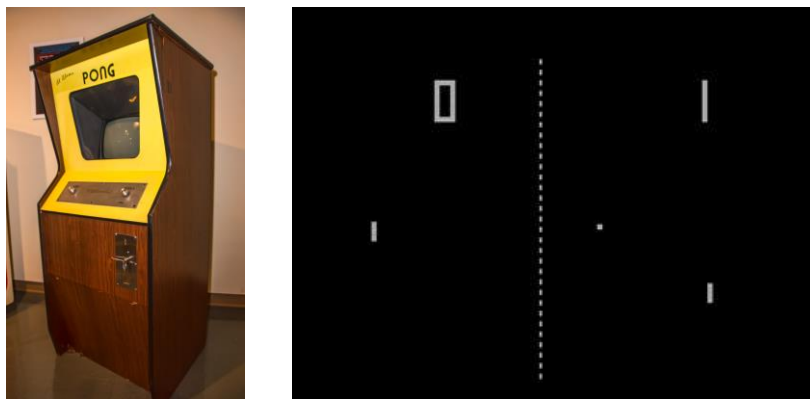
Figure 1: An original *Pong* cabinet (left) with an image of the game (right)

(source: Wikipedia commons)

In September 1972, they installed their first cabinet in a bar called Andy Capps in Sunnyvale, California. It was already a very popular bar for pinball machines, and with the first coin-operated machine, it would become the forerunner of what would eventually become known as the arcade. Two weeks after it was installed, the owner informed Atari that the machine had ceased to work. When Atari's technician assessed the problem, he realized that it no longer functioned because there were too many coins (quarters) jammed inside the machine! Over the next few years, Atari would sell over 19 000 *Pong* arcade cabinets (Rignall 2016). However, during this time, many other American companies would produce clones of the game *Pong,* in direct competition with Atari. Sometimes they built entirely new cabinets of the same game, other times they created a console that people could plug into their television sets at home. By 1976, there were over 500 different consoles on the market, largely consisting of *Pong* clones. In 1976, the overflow of clones caused the "industry" to crash for the first time. Atari survived this crash, due mainly to the release of their new console, the Atari 2600, which was one of the first to use a removable physical support for each game: it was the birth of the video game cartridge.

1.2 The Golden Age (1977-1982) and the 1983 Crash

By 1978, the global video game industry was experiencing a renaissance within the United States and Japan. This was primarily due to the competition incurred by Japanese companies for the first time. For instance, in 1978 the Tokyo-based company Taito released an arcade cabinet called *Space Invaders*. Two elements made the game unique at the time: it was the first video game to feature animated characters, and it was the first to feature a list of the players that had obtained the highest score on that cabinet (the high score). *Space Invaders* proved so popular that it provoked a shortage of 100-yen coins in Japan (Dillon 2011, 41). Taito's success inspired many other Japanese companies to enter the market with games of their own design: in 1980, the Japanese corporation Namco released another gaming cabinet that became an instant classic, *Puck Man*, later to be renamed *Pac-Man* when released in the West (Dillon 2011, 42). Another then-unknown Japanese company called Nintendo also released an arcade cabinet; its hit game was called *Donkey Kong* (Dillon

2011, 42). Designed by Shigeru Miyamoto, this game had a simple premise: a princess was kidnapped by a gorilla called *Donkey Kong*, and the hero of the game, Jumpman the Carpenter (later renamed Mario), had to jump over obstacles that *Donkey Kong* would throw down at him in order to save the princess (Figure 2).

Figure 2: *Space Invaders*; *Pac-Man*, *Donkey Kong*, respectively

(Source: Wikipedia commons)

The years from 1977 until late 1982 became known as the Golden Age of the arcade. During this period, there were over 13 000 dedicated arcades in North America alone (June 2013). Arcade cabinets appeared in corner stores, restaurants, movie theaters, and many other places that had not been traditionally associated with video games; they are still present to this day. At the time, the more popular games were generating around $400 (USD) in quarters each week (June 2013). Developers like Taito, Nintendo, Midway, and Atari continued to devise new game cabinets in order to keep players interested. This trend led to the arcade cabinet being designated as its own genre, as opposed to those operating with newer technologies that were also emerging at the same time. During the seventies, the first home video game consoles were released. In 1972, the American company Magnavox released its first home console, the Odyssey (Figure 3) (Wolf and Perron 2009, 202). This machine was capable of having more games than just *Pong* played on it. In fact, the console came with 12 integrated games among which the player could choose simply by turning a knob. The year 1976 heralded a major breakthrough: the Connecticut Leather Company (Coleco) released a game console called the Telstar; it was the first system to play games that were stored on removable computer chips (Wolf and Perron 2009, 201). Many other companies would also try to create their own versions of these products; among the

most popular were Atari 2600 (Figure 4) (1977), the Fairchild Channel F (1977), toy company Mattel's Intelliv-

ision (1980), and Coleco's ColecoVision (Figure 4) (1980). By the early eighties, the video game industry had be-

come an authentic powerhouse. In 1981, it generated over $5 billion (USD) of revenue in North America, sur-

passing the revenues of both pop music and the film industry. In 1982, the arcade and home console industries

generated $11.8 billion (USD) of revenues combined (June 2013).

Figure 3: Magnavox' Odyssey console (source: Wikipedia commons)

Figure 4: The Atari 2600 (left) and the ColecoVision (right) (source: Wikipedia commons)

1983 was indicative of another significant year in video game history, with the industry suffering a ma-

jor crash. Two main elements contributed to this crash. The first problem was supply overflow: Atari's popular-

ity within the market would lead to its downfall when the company decided to release two games: one, a con-

sole port of *Pac-Man*, and the other, a licensed game from the movie *E.T.* Atari was so confident that these

games would sell easily that they manufactured millions of cartridges for their Atari 2600 console. However,

both games were later revealed to be of very poor quality. For instance, the Pac Man port was actually a

prototype the company was working on, and the *E.T.* game was poorly designed, with many glitches and other technical problems.

The second problem was the loss of publishing control. Until the late eighties, the entire process of video game publishing was under the control of every individual company. Atari, Taito, and Magnavox were firmly in control of all of their own procedures, from the conception of the game, to building the physical cabinet, even to distribution. In 1979, some Atari employees left the company to create another company called Activision, where they started creating cartridge games for the Atari 2600 console. In doing so, Activision became the first third-party video game developer, and they are still active to this day. Inspired by the success of their games, many other companies, such as Mattel, Parker Brothers, and Imagic, decided to invest in video game cartridge manufacturing. The increased competition reduced Atari's market share, and suddenly, there was a huge flow of third-party games for a very limited number of consoles (Wolf 2008, 103). Atari suffered tremendous financial losses, and other companies quickly backed out of the video game industry, thinking that the home console and arcade cabinets were only another passing toy fad.

1.3 A Second Life: The Rise of Japanese Companies

Until the 1983 industry crash, the video game console industry was principally dominated by American companies (Wolf 2008, 105) which would ship their consoles all over the world. They were the lifeblood of the industry, and yet most of them would not survive the crash. Between 1982 and 1983, industry wide revenue dropped by 35 percent, totalling a loss of about 1.5 billion dollars (USD). (Wolf 2008, 105). Two Japanese console companies, however, did survive: Nintendo and Sega.

Nintendo started in 1889 as a company that made *Hanafuda,* Japanese playing cards (Figure 5) (Firestone 2011, 15). During the sixties, it decided to experiment with selling other types of home products. In 1983, it released the game *Donkey Kong*, which became an instant hit throughout the industry (Hansen 2016, 36). Shortly before the 1983 crash, the company had also developed a home video game console called the Famicom (a contraction of "family computer") (Figure 6). The console was initially sold only in Japan, where it

very successfully sold over half a million units in two months (Jones 2013). Although the company originally

wanted to make a deal with Atari for distribution of the console in the United States, the anticipated deal never

materialised in time to avoid the industry crash later that year. Consequently, Nintendo's president Hiroshi

Yamauchi decided to use a more cautious approach for marketing the Famicom in the United States: it would

be redesigned and renamed the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) (Figure 6). After a few test launches

that specifically targeted American markets, the NES was released nationwide in late 1985 and early 1986, with

immediate success. Nintendo became an industry titan (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013, 53).

Figure 5: Cards that were produced in 1889 by Nintendo (source: Wired.com)
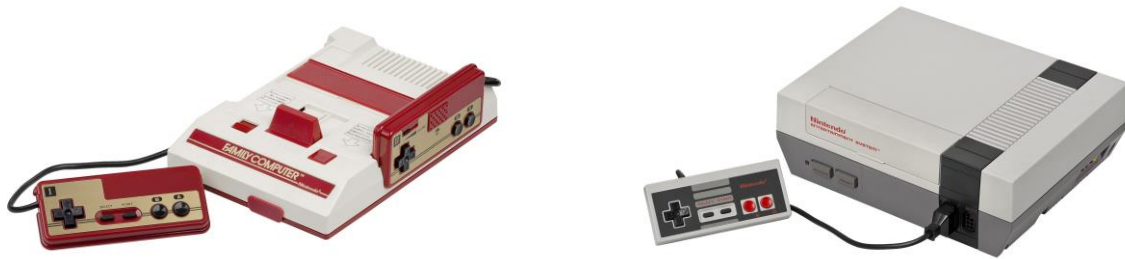
Figure 6: Nintendo's Famicom (left) and the Nintendo Entertainment system (NES) (right)

(Source: Wikipedia commons)

Nintendo also opted to change their policies on the way games were published for their console. Indeed, they did not want to repeat the same mistakes that fatally led to the 1983 industry crash. As a result, they decided to more tightly control the publishing aspect: each game had to receive a legitimate "seal of approval" from Nintendo, and all subsequent cartridges would need to have a "lock" (Oxford 2018). By proceeding in this manner, only officially approved games would be able to be played on the consoles sold by the company. They would be identified with a golden "Seal of Quality" that was "stamped" on the game boxes and cartridges, obliging consumers and players on Nintendo consoles to only play games that received the "Nintendo Seal of Quality" (Figure 7).

Figure 7: The Nintendo Seal of Quality was featured on NES cartridges (lower right)

(Source: Wikipedia commons)

For the remainder of the decade and into the early nineties, Nintendo vastly outsold all of its competitors, creating a near monopoly on the console market (Arsenault 2008, 113). It built on the success of the NES to become a veritable industry giant, with subsequent releases including successive consoles such as the Super Nintendo (1990), the portable Game Boy (1989) along with its multiple subsequent versions, the Nintendo 64 (1996), the Game Cube (2001), and more recently, the Nintendo Wii (2006) and Wii U (2012), as well as the Switch (2017).

However, there was also competition brewing from another Japanese video game company. Sega, which had originally entered the fray as a third-party developer in the late seventies, eventually developed its own gaming console after the 1983 crash, the SG-1000 (Dillon 2011, 44). Nintendo's success with the NES proved that the industry was far from dead, and Sega decided to push its new products into the Japanese market, starting with a new console called the Sega Master System (Figure 8), released in 1986 (Dillon 2011, 98). It failed to beat Nintendo's market performance, but Sega rapidly fought back with another console, the Sega Genesis, in 1989 (Figure 8). This time, Sega decided to directly attack its competitors with an aggressive marketing campaign, made memorable with the slogan "Genesis does what Nintendon't" (Figure 9). Moreover, it wanted to make its own mark on the industry by marketing its games and systems for a more mature audience (Dillon 2011, 124).

Figure 8 : Sega's Master System (left) and Genesis (right) consoles

Source: Wikipedia commons

Figure 9: A provoking fold-out ad for the Sega Genesis featuring the game *Michael Jackson's Moonwalker*)

(Source: Wikipedia commons)

The nineties witnessed a bitter fight between the two industry actors Sega and Nintendo, as they competed for the greatest share of the market. This phase of video game history is commonly known as the "Console War". Sega continued to release more game systems, such as its portable Game Gear (1990), the Sega Saturn (1994), and the Dreamcast in (1998). Dreamcast, however, would be its last hardware development; the company withdrew from this sector to become a third-party game developer only.

A third Japanese company, Sony, would also make its debut in the nineties. Sony had already established itself as an electronics manufacturer long before the video game industry existed (Wolf 2008, 181). It was first approached by Nintendo in 1988 to create a CD-ROM port that could be plugged into their Super Nintendo console; a prototype was indeed built, and an agreement was initially reached (Arsenault 2008, 177). However, when Nintendo realized that Sony was to retain licensing rights over the games, it cancelled the agreement (Arsenault 2008, 177). Sony continued to improve on this technology, and ultimately converted the plug-in port into a whole new system, which eventually became the Sony PlayStation in 1994 (Arsenault 2008, 178) (Figure 10). Sony and Sega both contributed to halting Nintendo's monopoly over the gaming industry: by the year 2000, at the start of the next generation of consoles, Sony and Sega accounted for 34 percent of the market share in consoles, almost twice Nintendo's share at 17.5 percent (Arsenault 2008, 178).

Figure 10: The original prototype installed at the bottom of a Super Nintendo (left), along with the first PlayStation console (right)

(Source: Wikipedia commons)

Thus, although computer games continued to do very well, the 1983 crash signaled the beginning of a very radical transformation of the video game market. First, the companies that overtook the industry were all Japanese. These companies did not simply compensate for the slack in video game cartridge manufacturing and arcade cabinets; they reshaped the way games were created, controlled, and distributed. It also meant that the dominant country in the video game industry was no longer the United States, but arguably Japan. For over fifteen years, until Microsoft launched its first Xbox console in 2001, Sega, Nintendo, and Sony were firmly in control of the video game market. This did not impede American or European third-party developers from creating games for each of these consoles. However, since the companies creating the consoles were all based in Japan, it meant that many publishers also had to compete with developers from Japan. At the same time, Japanese companies were also interested in porting and localizing some of their games to the American and European markets. The need to develop localization tools and practices became more and more imperative. They were required to handle and process the original game's digital content and interface files for adaptation and translation of the games into other languages.

1.4 A brief history of the localization industry

The above brief history of video games is critical for some contextualization of video game localization, particularly when emphasizing the relevance and importance of not only its technical/technological implications, but also its cultural dimensions. The breadth and scope of the video game industry is extensive and global, a feat unachievable without localization of the games that it constitutes. Every localized video game

product becomes an integral part of a growing worldwide video game culture. Localization, or the translation and linguistic, cultural, and technical adaptation of digital content, emerged in the eighties along with the growth of modern computing. As Keiran Dunne correctly notes, "Until approximately the mid-1990s, 'localization' generally meant the translation of software user interfaces and Help, along with any necessary re-engineering that might be required to ensure the correct display of all on-screen information and to maintain full functionality in target-language versions" (Dunne 2006, 3). However, the history of localization is always ongoing. The changing technologies, and their interface with and integration within human social and cultural practices more broadly, all define and redefine specific tasks of localization in different areas of the world. Furthermore, with every major technological turn, for example the World Wide Web, mobile devices, games, social media, collaborative technologies, cloud computing, etc., localization processes acquire new needs and dimensions. Dunne, drawing on earlier definitions formulated by the Localization Industry Standards Organization [LISA] and early practitioners Pierre Cadieux and Bert Esselink, provides one of the most concise yet comprehensive definitions of "localization" to date:

> The processes by which digital content and products developed in one locale (defined in terms of geographical area, language and culture) are adapted for sale and use in another locale. Localization involves: (a) translation of textual content into the language and textual conventions of the target locale; and (b) adaptation of non-textual content (from colors, icons and bitmaps, to packaging, form factors, etc.) as well as input, output and delivery mechanisms to take into account the cultural, technical and regulatory requirements of that locale. (2006, 4)

Over time, localization processes have become elaborate and complex. Their interdependence with other critical processes is commonly expressed through the acronym GILT: globalization, internationalization, localization, and translation (GILT). Chronologically, in terms of historical emergence, globalization (G) and internationalization (I) comprise the most recent facets of localization broadly speaking, with the former referring to global business objectives and the latter designating the procedure of separating software or Web code from translatable text strings in order to facilitate subsequent localization (L). Translation (T) is the necessary

basis of any localization project, constituting its fundamental linguistic and cultural adaptation into other languages for other regions of the world. In reality, the term localization refers both to the specific procedures *within* GILT but also to the broader industry *encompassing* GILT. From the perspective of academia, the differences between more conventional translation practices and localization have become clearer over time. While from a professional industry point of view localization is seen as a domain that subsumes practices of translation, the academic discipline of translation studies has considered it to be a specialized, technical subcategory of translation. In the context of the localization industry at large, processes of translation are by default technical and associated with diverse technologies.

Within the localization industry worldwide, game localization has its own specificities, which will be briefly described here. They reflect its relevance and convergence both with the histories of video game development and the development of general localization practices, as well as more specifically the gaming industry. A fundamental component of this specificity derives from the history of software localization practice. According to specialist technical translator and software localizer Bert Esselink, localization activity began to take place at the very end of the seventies and the early eighties, with American companies opening their first offices outside the United States. Microsoft opened its Japanese offices in 1978 and its European offices the following year, while Sun Microsystems opened its offices in Europe in 1983. Their initial goal was simple: they sought to introduce their products to new markets. While the user base targeted by Microsoft was initially corporate, it also gradually came to include the general population, which at the time was neither very familiar with computer products nor how the technology even worked (Esselink 2003, 4).

As Esselink explains (2003, 4), there were many early challenges and developments that set various practices in place for the growth of the localization industry. Products needed to be adapted for non-English-speaking countries and locales and to the average needs of individual cultures and countries. The adaptation was not only linguistic and cultural (the usual concerns of translators until that point); it was technical. As the experience of translating the Microsoft Office suite software programs indicated, everything from keyboards to user interfaces had to be adapted and adjusted. There was also a gradual defining and refining of procedures.

More often than not in the context of professional practices, a finished product at the source was simply handed over to localizers at the end of the project, without a localization team participating in or comprising an integral part of the development process. As a result, the translation and adaptation of software was handled by a team separate from the developers, a practice which became problematic due to the rapid turnaround times required. This practice led to the specialization of localization within certain companies of language service providers (LSPs). Over time, software developers learned to foresee the needs of the localization team, structuring the source software product with enough technical features in order to facilitate and enable later localization, a process which became known as internationalization. Likewise, in turn, the technical needs of the localization team sparked the growth of a subsidiary industry: translation and localization technology tools.

The localization industry grew and evolved over the following decades, keeping pace with the ever-expanding realm of technological requirements. Although companies specializing in localization today are based around the world, Ireland was clearly the cradle and strategic hub for localization. In the early nineties, the Irish government created government incentives and subsidies to support and assist corporations with their production and research, which for the latter included developing and fine-tuning current localization tools (e.g. [SDL] Passolo and Catalyst) (Esselink 2003, 4-5). In addition to mainstream computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools and functionalities, these tools focused on specific technical functions like decompiling and recompiling code, and performing quality control checks on localized files (Esselink 2003, 6).

A result of this early phase of localization history was the creation of a traditional corporate organizational paradigm that included a particular sequence for software localization processing. This typical sequence is succinctly illustrated by Reinhard Schäler as follows (Figure 11) (2010, 211-213):

ANALYSIS ➡ PREPARATION ➡ TRANSLATION ➡

ENGINEERING/TESTING ➡ PROJECT REVIEW
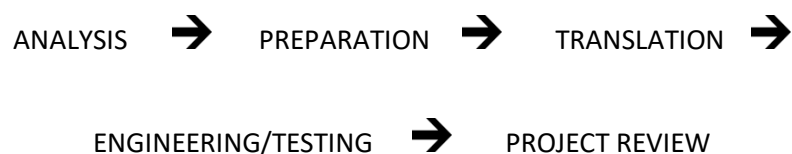
Figure 11: Localization project sequence

In other words, a localization project initially starts by carrying out an *analysis* of the source product (in the original language). The aim of this analytical stage is to assess and determine all the questions of relevance to the project before organizing the subsequent workflow parameters and details. The limits and scope of a project are determined. The next step is *preparation*. It includes the allocation of human and technical resources and the creation of a project budget. Workloads are organized and distributed among localization project managers, programmers, or engineers. A localization kit is then generated. It contains all the textual elements and other content to be modified, along with any details or information that are crucial to the project, including glossaries and reference materials. The next step is *translation*. The localization kits are sent to translators (in-house or outsourced) who will use CAT and localization tools as they translate, creating and maintaining translation memories (a repository of matched bilingual segments) and terminology databases as they work. The next step is the *engineering and/or testing* phase. At this point the task of computer engineers or programmers is to incorporate the translated elements into the software. It is more than a simple matter of replacing or substituting the source language text with target language text. They also have to make sure the resulting software runs smoothly, and that every modification is well integrated. This requires a great deal of testing by quality assurance (QA) specialists and testers. The final step is the *project review*, where clients, vendors, and other agents involved review all the tasks and the finished product to make sure there are no other problems. As technologies have developed and diversified, this basic sequence has been adapted for different types of localization: websites, mobile devices, social media, and games.

Generally speaking, the foundation and early history of localization project cycles basically established a similar structure, one that began with analysis of the project and the preparation of resources and tools, proceeded with the translation and the integration of translated content into the product, and ended with the testing and quality control, and delivery. However, video games are a multi-channel product. They combine different elements like image, text, and sound, which must be adapted into different locales, and therefore

contain their own unique challenges and specificities (Bernal-Merino 2007b). Moreover, at their very core, video games are games: they are a structured body of rules, mechanics, and content "sewn" together into a comprehensive, entertaining whole for players. A localized video game, much like a localized software product, and for translation in general, seems flawless and natural when done well. However, if the final product is of lesser quality, the errors or misadaptations will stand out and make the finished product less enjoyable. Ensuring that the enjoyment of a translated/localized game is not hindered by inadequate adaptation is fundamental for successful localization.

The localization process for video games is similar in some ways to that of software localization. While some of the steps described previously remain intact, there are other differences within these steps that are unique to video games (Figure 12).

Analysis	The localization team must familiarize itself with the product to be localized. This not only means getting a grasp of the cultural elements and language used in the game, but also understanding the gameplay and dealing with various types of content, including for accessibility.
Preparation	The game is prepared for translation. A localization kit is also prepared: it contains all the material that needs to be translated or adapted, along with any explanation needed to clarify the nature of the content.
Translation	In most games, there is more than just text to be translated: there are also dialogues that need to be recorded by voice actors; the user interface also needs to be specially adapted.
Engineering/testing	These steps are often separated. Once the adapted content is integrated into the game, extensive quality control (QC) is needed to make sure the text is not only devoid of grammatical errors and cultural missteps, but also free of any technical problems in the user interface, to ensure that there is no noticeable impact when playing the game.
Project review	Final review of the final product, followed by delivery.

Figure 12: Specificities of video game localization

During the analysis phase, a localization team needs to be aware of any elements in the content that need to be adapted into the target locale. For multilingual games produced by larger studios, the finished products are shipped out to different language-cultural locales simultaneously, a practice referred to as *simship* (simultaneous shipping). When games are in the development phase, content creators must be keenly aware of any kind of cultural content that is added to a game, and whether or not it will cause problems upon release (or even after release). At the 2006 Game Developer Conference, Tom Edwards delivered a talk about cultural content in games entitled "Fun versus Offensive – Balancing the Cultural Edge of Content for Global Games," in which he defined a concept called the *cultural edge*: "the tipping point at which a content element stretches the limit of the intended context, changing the game from 'fun' to 'offensive'" (Edwards 2006). In order to reduce negative feedback in a target locale, developers need to be aware of the balance between what is offensive and what is fun. Furthermore, this kind of analysis needs to be fully ingrained throughout the process of game creation (Edwards 2006). In a certain way, the analysis step is one that needs to be constantly present during all steps and phases of the localization project, especially when making a larger game, as they are more subject to changes than are smaller projects.

The preparation phase is one of the most technical ones. There are many different tasks that fit into this step, and which should be taken care of by the development team and the localization team. One of the major aspects, present in both video game and software localization, is preparing the structure of the game in order to accommodate all the translated and adapted elements (Bernal-Merino 2007b). For instance, when creating a user interface, it is important to allow larger dialogue boxes for languages that require more space. It also entails integrating different kinds of fonts for languages that require a different script, such as the Latin alphabet, the Greek alphabet, Cyrillic, or even different characters for Asian languages. In contemporary times, Unicode, the international protocol for character encoding, is normally used. This aspect used to be a problematic issue during the early days of Nintendo's dominance of the American market in the late eighties. In those games, the Japanese characters were created as image files, and translating them into English required redesigning a large part of the game to accommodate a script rather than images! (see also Heemsbergen 2016,

44). Adapting a game's inner structure early on in the production cycle renders the integration of different content easier later on; it also facilitates the inclusion of new content without adversely affecting the game. This practice of internationalization is commonly implemented when localizing games, software, websites, and mobile applications (Bernal-Merino 2007b).

Since video games include several different types of communication content, the translation step presents many diverse characteristics as well. For example, video games usually contain a narrative, much like a movie or a book. When dealing with the translation of a narrative, some of the more creative techniques similar to literary translation can be used, especially if the game takes place in a fictional setting, with many neologisms and fantastical elements. It sometimes requires a different kind of translation altogether, known as *transcreation*, understood generally as the freedom and license to create that is granted to the translator when re-envisioning and re-creating original source content for translation purposes (O'Hagan 2007; O'Hagan 2009; Bernal-Merino 2018). In addition, Miguel Ángel Bernal-Merino describes many of the different translatable elements that are consequently generated by video game localization projects. They include game manuals, packaging information, all the dialogues that need to be either subtitled or dubbed, graphics, and other elements such as a game's website (Bernal-Merino 2007a). Furthermore, it is worth noting the more technical aspect to language that is present within video games, i.e. the different kinds of language used and found in menus, tutorials, and throughout the user interface, all of which are not always directly related to the narrative itself. The same localized game may also contain its own translated version: there is often a decision to be made as to whether to include the option of different languages in the game or to create another physical language product (Bernal-Merino 2007a). These days, the option to include multiple languages is almost automatic, given the improvement of the storage medium and the increased use of digital platforms. A game sold in a digital store will often have more than one language already included. On the sales platform of the video game distribution service Steam [Valve Corporation], games have a chart on their page that showcases which languages are available, and whether the game is dubbed or simply subtitled.

In terms of the engineering and testing phase, the procedures are usually very technical. Incorporating the translated and localized content into the game is very closely related to the internationalization aspect mentioned earlier. Many quality sources exist to guide a localizer through these technical steps (Esselink 2000; Chandler 2012). The crucial part of this step, however, is the testing phase. The importance of quality assurance (QA) and quality control (QC) cannot be understated. When testing a localized product, video game testers are required to scrutinize every element that has been modified, and make sure that it fits within the game. This means that every dialogue option must fit within their appropriate spaces, that special characters appear when they need to, and that the translated text or voice appears at the correct moment. By verifying all these steps, they also have to make sure that the game works. For these tasks, testers not only need to be native speakers in order to properly correct the grammar; they must also *understand* video games and its culture.

A few examples from the history of video games are worth pointing out. One of them is a well-known anecdote about one of the most iconic game characters of all time, *Pac-Man*. The original Japanese name for the game and character was Puck Man, a derivative of the Japanese onomatopoeia "*paku paku*", which described the sound one would make when opening and closing one's mouth while eating in a gluttonous manner (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013, 49). However, according to Midway Games, the company that held the distribution license for the game in the United States, there was a problem with the name: they believed that if the game kept the name Puck Man, there was a risk that pranksters would vandalize the arcade cabinet by scratching out part of the "P" and turn it into an "F", subsequently turning an innocent character name into an obscene one. The name was therefore changed to "*Pac-Man*" (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013, 49). This can be considered as one of the first instances of games localization, since the game was modified accordingly in order to be properly adapted to a new locale!

After the 1983 crash, and especially after Nintendo released the NES in the United States in 1985, the video game industry shifted from the United States to Japan. At this point, localization needs truly began to emerge, since both the actual hardware and a majority of the games came from a non-English speaking country. During the late eighties and nineties, after this initial shift towards Japan, a large amount of very poorly

localized games emerged from both Nintendo and Sega (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013, 54-55). One notorious

example refers to the 1991 Japanese game *Zero Wing.* This space-themed game is a side-scrolling one, meaning

the player automatically moves along the levels, and new enemies appear on the right side of the screen as the

player moves along. In the original Japanese version, the player's enemy, called CATS, announces that "CATS

has taken over all your base stations"; however, it was badly translated to "All your base are belong to us"

(O'Hagan and Mangiron 2013, 56) (Figure 13). This translation, which borders on the hilarious, achieved cult

status among gamers. It is an example of a poor localization choice. This does not mean that *all* localized games

were that bad, but it clearly illustrates how localization for games needed to evolve.
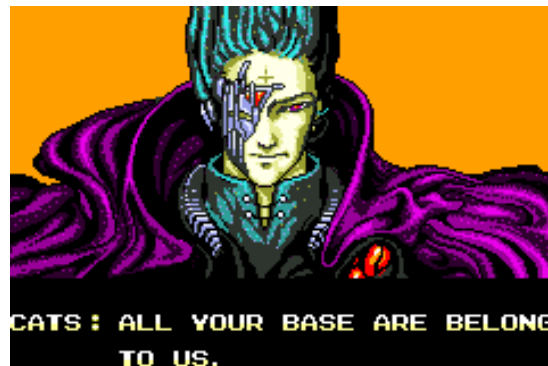
Figure 13: A poor localization choice which became very popular

(source: Wikipedia commons)

The video game localization industry would eventually go through the same kind of evolution as the

software industry did. As video game technology increased in complexity and in performance, so did the locali-

zation needs. The PlayStation's CD-ROM support offers many great examples, but the most notable one is Japa-

nese studio Square Enix's massively successful game *Final Fantasy VII* (1997). It was originally released in Japan

in January 1997, with an American version released in September. The Japanese game was a huge success, and

prompted localization into other languages in Europe (O'Hagan 2009, 155). The European versions, however,

were based on the English version as a pivot language, not the original Japanese, which resulted in many ver-

sions of the game being judged poorly by users (O'Hagan 2009, 155). As a result, Square Enix made the decision

to handle all future localization of its games in-house, a practice adopted as well by other large studios. In fact,

the producers of AAA games (games with complex developments and huge budgets) which were faced with the

situation of producing a game simultaneously into many languages upon release eventually would benefit from this type of internal, organized structure. This is a significant change from Nintendo of America's initial choice to use only one translator in the localization of their first *Final Fantasy* game (Collins 2015, 9).

Chapter 2: Video Game Studies and Game Localization Perspectives

2.1 The study of games as a new field

As video games have grown in economic importance, they have also grown in cultural significance. Within academia, the interest in studying games has recently gained a great deal of momentum. A similar comparison can be drawn between video games and cinema. Initially, cinema was seen as a passing fad; as its importance grew, it was eventually accepted as a "legitimate" art form. The popularization and "validation" of both cinema and video games as art forms subsequently sparked the academic interest that continues to this day. Early on, video games were also viewed as a passing fad, and the 1983 industry crash led observers to believe it was the case, until a revival led by Japanese companies proved them wrong. Since the late eighties and early nineties, the video game industry has kept growing exponentially. It is now a well-established industry.

Academic interest in video games is more recent than one might think. The study of games, both digital and otherwise, dates back to a colloquium held in 1990 at the British Museum. It was organized by Dr Irving Finkel, from the University of Birmingham. Interestingly, Dr Finkel is an Assyriologist, and is currently the Assistant Keeper of Ancient Mesopotamian script, languages, and cultures in the Department of the Middle East at the British Museum. He is also an avid scholar of the history of board games. Out of this first colloquium grew the International Board Game Studies Association (IBGSA) (Parlett, n/d). The IBGSA published the first issue of the *Board Games Studies Journal* in 1998. The study of digital games followed a similar development: in 2001, Espen Aarseth, at the time a professor at the University of Bergen, published the first journal dedicated entirely to the study of digital games, titled *Game Studies,* which is available online*.* The creation of this publication is often seen as the "birth" of video game studies (Crawford and Muriel 2018, 41). In 2003, the Digital Games

Research Association (DIGRA) was created in Finland, with scholar Frans Mayra as its founding president, further solidifying the study of digital games as an academic field.

As explained previously, the video game market has grown in size and importance since the arcade's modest beginning, and is now a multibillion-dollar industry within the global entertainment sector. The sheer size of this industry makes video games an undeniable part of the social fabric, particularly in terms of cultural production. In *Understanding Digital Games* (2006), Crawford and Rutter note that one way to analyze video games is through the scope of cultural studies: "Cultural theorists from the UK, Europe, and North America have built upon [Raymond] Williams in an attempt to understand our own societies through the production and consumption of cultural products." Video games not only exemplify a specific type of cultural production within the broad context of "culture," they have also created a culture from within. With the ever-increasing presence of the digital in society, one can even argue that video games have become an *essential* part of society, due to the extent to which video game culture has become embedded in society: "the institutionalization of video game practices, experience, and meanings in contemporary society...places video games and video gaming as an important part of our social imaginary" (Muriel and Crawford 2018, 18). This assertion by Muriel and Crawford is expounded upon at length in their work *Video Games as Culture,* where they dissect the term "culture" within a video game context by proposing its description as a collection of shared experiences "built upon layers of learning and experience among all the previous games that the particular group of individuals sharing this culture have interacted with before" (Muriel and Crawford 2018, 18). This definition is relevant for this thesis for an essential reason: it not only places video games as an important object within society; it also traces the distinction between that object and the act of video gaming as play. In her book *On Video Games: The Visual Politics of Race, Gender and Space* (2017), Soraya Murray notes how the act of play has a place within society and culture in a way that is unique to the digital age. Play conjugates itself differently within every culture. This premise is very important. It is through this lens that we can begin to attempt to explain important questions in the world of video games, such as: why are Japanese games different than the games

made in the West? What happens when different expectations confront one another? Through game studies, it is possible to gain insight into the mechanics of play, particularly within a digital context.

The growing importance of video games within cultural production is evident, as can be seen by the rise of esports, for example. Esports is the colloquial term for "electronic sports." In the past decade, an increasing number of esports events and leagues have been created, each with their own unique style of game. Participants from all over the world compete in major tournaments and win important prizes. As these esport leagues and events grow in popularity, some participants become world famous, gaining as much popularity as conventional sports athletes do. These tournaments do not include just any random game. There are certain characteristics that make a game likely to become an esport: the number of players, spectator appeal, and depth of gameplay. Once included in a tournament's rotation, they give way to vivid discussions about gameplay. These discussions reveal the differences that emerge between different styles of play, and are indicative of how the same game can be played differently, indeed how they are in fact *performed*. For example, one of the most popular esports games in recent years is Riot Games' *League of Legends*. The game has inspired the creation of many tournaments all over the world, with the *League of Legends* Championship Series (LCS) becoming one of the most widely viewed esports events globally. In this game, two teams of five players confront each other in order to destroy the other team's home base. Each one of the players plays a different character with its own unique abilities, and has a very specific role to play within the team. The variations between choice of characters and how to play a certain character can influence the direction, flow, and evolution of the game. This is called a "meta;" different metas exist between European, North American, and Asian teams (Efranian and Rabinovitch 2019).

2.2 An important perspective of Game Studies: the controversy between ludology and narratology

The recent study of digital games has yielded diverse concepts and theories. Within video game studies, two opposing "schools of thought" were initially the subject of considerable debate, although it did not have long-term effects on the discipline overall. The first focused on narratology, while the other had ludology

as its main objective. Both perspectives can be effective for analyzing the cultural elements in games, albeit from the bases of differing core concepts, which according to some scholars results in conceptual incompatibility.

2.2.1 Narratology: what is told

Narratology stems from structuralist approaches used to examine literature. The origins of narratology can be traced back to Russian scholar Vladimir Propp's 1928 work *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, in which he lays the foundation of a common structure for the folk tale. Narratology retained a structuralist approach as it developed, and sought to create a sort of common language or structure to properly analyze and describe narratives through different literary forms (poem, novel, novella, short story, etc). Its criteria for analysis were then applied to other forms of media, in order to bring about the same kind of conclusions from them. The transition from these more "traditional" means of narrative to digital games only dates back to the start of games studies as a field of study. Thus, one of the first approaches used to study video games was the narratological approach, with its associated social and cultural features: "The view that our perceptions of reality are socially and culturally produced, rather than independent and objective facts" (Mayra 2008, 14). This would imply that any virtual world that is created also has roots in culture, and can be tied to representations of society and its cultural norms. Characteristically, a cultural product embodies meaning that can be communicated to others. If we take as a premise that video games are cultural products, then we can accept that they also embody and are capable of generating cultural meaning. Meaning is produced in different ways depending on the type of media, such as in film, books, or television programs. Their common denominator was mostly through the narrative.

The narrative has exerted considerable force in analysis of forms that are textual, especially in the early theorization of digital media. Indeed, when computers first began to leave the confines of the academic world and become immersed in society at large, theoreticians on the hypertext claimed that interactive, computer based media would bring "a textual medium of a new order… the fourth great technique of writing to take its

place beside the ancient papyrus roll, the medieval codex, and the printed book" (Bolter 1991, 6). It was clear that the digital medium would have ramifications on narratology scholarship, and change the storytelling of games in the context of video games. There can potentially be as many different narratives as there are different games in the world.

Some of the most relevant key concepts pertinent for the study of video games are useful to recall. Michael Mateas, in the article "A Preliminary Poetics for Interactive Drama and Games" (2001), describes three crucial concepts. The first is immersion: that is, the feeling of being present within the world of the game being played. That place may have a logic that is different from the real world. For example, it may be a world where humans are in control of a vast galactic empire, or perhaps it is a fantasy world populated with magical creatures. The essential part is the "suspension of disbelief", whereby a player accepts the logic of this world as something that exists. The second is agency: that is, the feeling of empowerment that gamers have when their decisions have an impact in the world in which they are immersed. When a player makes a choice, there should also be a consequence, be it to the story itself or even just between two protagonists. The third is transformation: in short, that is when the player becomes the character, and the resulting story leads to subsequent transformation within the player. Each of these concepts can exist in varying degrees within a game, and not all of them are necessarily present: one can even prevail over another in a game. In sum, the narratological approach puts significant emphasis on the story of a game, arguing that the primary pleasure of video games is to play through a narrative. Immersion, agency, and transformation constitute the three main pillars of this perspective.

2.2.2 Ludology: what is performed

While game studies have included narratology as a way of analysing video games within a narrative framework, some scholars believe that a focus on the narrative doesn't adequately take into account the fundamental features of this particular medium. Indeed, narratology mostly relies on concepts that have been applied to traditional media. However, unlike these media, video games depend on one critical, tangible element: interactivity. The user/player is involved throughout the process, and the experience of one specific player may

not even be the same as that of others. There may be even more than just the element of interactivity at stake. Frans Mayra, for instance, raises another dimension when drawing comparisons between video games and dance or music: "The basic character of playing music, or dancing to its rhythm or melody is *performance*, as is also in the case of playing games" (Mayra 2008, 14). Interactivity relies on performance, usually described as a series of actions by players playing the game. Interactivity also implies participation. Alexander Galloway, in his *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, begins his first chapter with this fundamental assertion:

> Let this be word one for video game theory. Without action, games remain only in the pages of an abstract rule book. Without the active participation of players and machines, video games exist only as static computer code. Video games come into being when the machine is powered up and the software is executed; they exist when enacted (Galloway 2006, 2).

He further qualifies this assertion, and adds that video games are above all an "*action-based* medium".

While "action" and "interaction" are essential, another crucial element needs to be considered. To envision games as a mere series of interactions between the game and a player would be simplistic and neglect a wealth of information contained within another contributing source of meaning: the game's rules and structure. Frans Mayra, in his *An Introduction to Game Studies,* proposes two constitutive elements of a game: "(1) core, or game as gameplay, and (2) shell, or game as representation and sign system." (Mayra 2008, 17). Although an abstract "core" of games able to be transferred in different shells is disputed, Mayra describes it as the mechanical rules of the game, meaning: "[…] it's what you do. It's not the interface […], it's not the graphics, and it's not the story. It's the part of the game that absolutely requires the player's participation" (Mayra 2008, 17). In simpler terms, the rules dictate the goals, the means of achieving the goals, and what the player is and isn't allowed to do. The shell encompasses all the elements that "add significance to that basic interaction". Figure 14 below, extracted from Mayra, shows the interaction between the two:
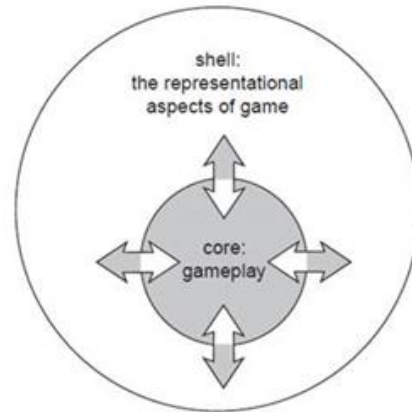
It is important to underscore that within core gameplay, there is something "abstract and transferable" (Mayra 2008, 18). In so many words, this "abstract and transferable" object constitutes the "essence" of a game, one that can be modified between different games. One can always navigate one's way through the shell in order to find the heart of the game, and therefore the game's true identity, so to speak. As a way to illustrate this concept even further, we can take two examples of video games that are based on tennis: the first is the early *Pong* first released in 1972 as an arcade cabinet by Atari, and the second is the most recent addition to the *Mario Tennis* franchise that was released in 2018 on the Switch console, *Mario Tennis Aces.* By juxtaposing these two games, taken from different time periods, we can clearly see the differences between the core game and the shell. They are especially well highlighted because of the differences in technology available during each of those years. In 1972, the release of *Pong* signaled the birth of the video game industry, and in 2018, the industry grew in size, complexity, and technological requirements. Despite the time differential, certain elements in both can be argued in favour of both games being the *same*, even while the many characteristics of the *Mario Tennis* games effectively turn them into *different* games (Figure 15).

Pong	*Mario Tennis: Ultra Smash*

(Atari, 1972)	(Nintendo, 2015)
Both games can be played against a computer opponent or against a human opponent	
Strictly one or two players, and always one player against another	Up to four players, can be played in teams, with any combination of human or computer opponents
Players must hit a ball with a paddle or racket to the other player's side, and the first player to miss a ball grants points to the opposing player.	
Missing a ball grants a single point to the opposing player.	The rules of modern tennis like sets, 15 points per win, deuces, and others are included.
A simple paddle knocks the ball to the other side.	Players can get power ups, which drastically increase a player's strength, or even hinder their opponents.
	Players can also choose between different characters, each with their own strengths and weaknesses.
	Different game modes, like tournaments, or "battle modes," each with different rules, are available.
The ball increases in speed as the game progresses.	While this option is present, it is completely optional for the player(s).

Figure 15: Comparison between *Pong* and *Mario Tennis Aces*

As the chart above illustrates, the two games share many common characteristics, yet they also have many notable differences. Essentially, the core game remains the same: a player must use a paddle/racket to bounce a ball towards an opponent, and if the opponent misses, the player gets a point. It's also a game that can be played against a computer opponent, or even with two players. Those two characteristics, highlighted in red, are the core elements of the game, and despite the difference in technology, it remains the same from game to game: this is the "abstract and transferable" part of both games. All the other characteristics that are proper to each game are part of what Mayra describes as the "shell." While there are unique features to each,

they are only superficial, despite the fact they add a certain amount of meaning to each interaction with the player(s).

Both the narratological and ludological approaches offer valuable information, and it is not the purpose of this thesis to validate or justify one approach over the other. It is noteworthy, however, that both the ludological approach and the narratological approach can contribute important insights to the study of video game localization in translation studies. Admittedly, the narratological approach has some very distinct advantages for research within translation studies due to its many resemblances with literary studies. Examining structures of narration is akin to studying approaches to literary writing, and so makes for very familiar parallels for translation studies researchers. In this sense, a video game is treated as another genre in historical continuity with previous studies on other genres from a translation perspective. Regardless of whether or not one approach or the other is preferred, the conceptual ludological approach cannot be cast aside, nor its aspects with regard to games ignored when analyzing a game for localization purposes. Many of the ludological aspects are rooted in cultural sources, and result in a performance that greatly differs from one game to another, and from one cultural setting to another.

If we try to strip away all the narratological aspects of a video game, does anything remain other than action? When describing what happens in a video game, what is often enumerated is a series of actions. We can take one of the earliest arcade games, *Space Invaders* (1978), as an example. One could argue that this game does have a narrative, albeit a very basic one. There are aliens that wish to invade the Earth, and it is the player's job to halt this invasion by destroying the alien vessels that are slowly approaching. However, this narrative isn't exposed through any classical plot exposition, literary techniques and devices, or story structure. Rather, once the player inserts a quarter and the game begins, the player must immediately start firing away at the incoming ships, all the while avoiding projectiles from the aliens fired at the player.

This example from one of the most successful arcade cabinets is a very simplistic demonstration of how performance within a video game would look like. With the growing complexity of video games, and the

differences in game design between Japanese and American game production, a comparison between both yields some interesting results. By examining the different types of games made in both markets, we can clearly see that two different performances (implicitly or explicitly) are required from the players. If we consider other traditional media like theatre, we can make the same distinction between kabuki plays in Japan and the *comedia dell'arte* in the West. Both mediums have broad similarities, but within their performances there are differences that do arise. In order to have a deeper understanding of any given play (or digital game), one cannot limit oneself to only observing the players and what they say or do. It is only by questioning the manner and context in which the performances transpire that it is possible to understand the object more profoundly. In the following section, we will present an example of how cultural elements intervene to distinguish two games of the same genre in two different cultural contexts. Within the video game market there is a specific genre of video game that is very popular: the role-playing game. We will see how this kind of game is typically produced in Japan and in the United States. Examples like this, which compare and contrast the cultural aspects of two games of the same genre produced in two different cultural, linguistic contexts, provide valuable information for nuancing localization.

2.3 Worlds Apart: Two RPGs, Two Different Performances

A role-playing game (RPG) is commonly defined as a game where a player assumes a role within a specific fictional setting. The players enact responsibilities, and play out the consequences within the rules and setting of that world (Grouling Cover 2010, 6). The RPG was not invented for video games: they were heavily inspired by tabletop RPGs that were published in the early seventies, most notably the *Dungeon & Dragons* books by Gary Gygax and Dave Arnesen. The *Dungeon & Dragons* books were, in essence, a fantastical approach to wargames, where players would take control of figurines that represented armies and would recreate historical battles on a tabletop battlefield. *Dungeon & Dragons* is widely seen as the first modern tabletop RPG, and it coined many of the central game characteristics that would later be used in video games and other tabletop games (Dyson 2011).

RPGs have a few core characteristics that remain the same from one locale to another. For instance, RPGs are designed to enable players to take control of a single character (or in some distinct cases, a party of characters), and to explore a fantastical world full of danger. Within the game, there is a main quest for the character to save the world from a powerful foe; there are also a few side quests for extra content. A leveling system is also present, i.e. the more foes a player defeats, the more experience a player's character gets. Each game has its own leveling system, but the core concept remains the same: the more experience a player's character accumulates, the stronger he or she becomes, until the character defeats the final villain. Along the way, more powerful items and equipment can be looted or accumulated in order to help the player fight more powerful enemies. One can argue that these elements constitute the core of what RPGs are, but in the video game industry, RPGs made in Japan and in the United States also have many differences. Although the whole Japanese RPG genre stems from an adaptation of the Ultima series made in the United States, the most obvious differences are aesthetic ones. Differentiating them allows localizers to take them into account during localization processes. For example, Japanese video games have a more colourful, even cheerful visual than do American video games. One can easily see this by comparing the following two screenshots. The first, *Final Fantasy XIII*, or FFXIII (Figure 16), was developed by Japanese studio Square Enix in 2010, and the other, *The Elder Scrolls: Skyrim*, or simply called *Skyrim* (Figure 17), was developed by American studio Bethesda, and released in 2011. Both were released around the same time, and they are both striking examples of the two countries' interpretation of a role-playing game.

Figure 16: *Final Fantasy XIII*

(Source: TheFinalFantasy.com)

Figure 17: *The Elder Scrolls*: Skyrim

(Source: Nintendo)

These two screenshots depict some preliminary observations worthy of note. The first is the colour scheme. Japanese RPGs use a wide palette of vibrant colours, while in American games colours tend to be more subdued and naturalistic. The games' settings are also very different. While both games take place in fictional worlds, Japanese designers tend to design worlds in a more fantastical style, both in terms of the environment and the creatures the players face in combat: the enemies faced in *FFXIII* are often a combination of many other animals, and they all share the same vibrant colours as the environment. In *Skyrim*, the creatures are all rooted in the more familiar figures of giant spiders or crabs, but even the more fantastical ones encountered later on during the game, such as dragons and giants, have some sort of anchor in real world mythology. In the case of *Skyrim*, the game's setting is heavily inspired by ancient Norse mythology and culture.

A more detailed observation reveals some deeper differences, such as differing elements of gameplay. For example, *FFXIII* uses a third-person camera angle to follow the player around; thus, the player is always visible on the screen while playing. In *Skyrim*, this option is actually customizable: a player can switch from a third person view to a first-person view. This may seem like a technical difference, but it reveals a lot about how

designers conceptualize their games, and how players will view their own characters. When a third person point of view remains limited to that angle, it is as if the player was the narrator of the character's story. A first-person view creates a whole different level of immersion: the player *becomes* the character; and so the character becomes an extension of the player's identity. In a way, it reinforces the impression that their character's choices are also their own.

The two screenshots were also chosen because of the way both portray combat, which is a crucial element within this genre. In *FFXIII*, the combat is turn-based: the players will have a chance to use their actions to inflict damage upon enemies or power up their characters with spells or potions. The enemies will then have a turn to do the same. When looking at the background of the image, we can also see a round railing, and we can see that the players are in a limited space. This is due to the fact that when a fight begins in this series, the participants are "transported" to an arena-like representation of their surroundings. It means that once a fight begins, the player must either finish the fight, or select an option to run away (an option that can very well vanish during some important battles in the game). Furthermore, when players are roaming in the game's world, the enemies they encounter can detect them; if they do, they will attack. Players can also sneak up on the enemies in order to perform a "surprise attack." This concrete element of surprise gives the player certain advantages during the first moments of the fight. By contrast, as seen in the *Skyrim* screenshot, no limitations to the surrounding area are visible. In fact, we can clearly see a winding road up ahead, and a giant spider making its way towards the player. This is because *Skyrim* is an open world game: players are free to roam anywhere they choose. The enemies they encounter may attack; if ever a fight begins, the player will always have the option to simply run in a different direction, or even use a stealthier option to avoid the confrontation altogether.

These differences have a profound impact on the way players handle combat within these games. Typically, in a turn-based system, players have access to statistics and other information about their own moves set, weapons and defenses, and sometimes it is possible to have access to enemy data as well. In the *FFXIII* screenshot above, we can see that a variety of menus are available to the player during a fight, indicating that more planning and strategy are required than their American counterpart. In the *Skyrim* screenshot, no such

menu is displayed or activated: the action is entirely in real time. This fact does not mean that players do not have access to menus that would allow them to modify their strategies during the fight; these menus are in place strictly for them to change equipment and certain items. They do not have the same access to statistics as in the *Final Fantasy* games.

Although not intended to be broadly generalizable, these observations clearly show that there are differences in game design for Japanese games and American games of the same genre. The examples shown are from two very popular franchises from very large and popular studios, both with a long history of published games. They represent some of the typical differences found between American and Japanese RPGs. These differences become subjects of heated discussion among fans and experts alike. Ultimately, the biggest difference in design between the two is that Japanese RPGs tend to be more linear, both in narration and in gameplay, and American games tend to adopt a more "sandbox style," meaning an open world wherein the players are free to immerse themselves and create their own stories. Famed Japanese video game producer Hideo Kojima has often spoken out about how Japanese video games are different from video games made in the West (Kohler 2015). In fact, he has often been critical about Japan's game industry, and even more specifically about those differences that make Japanese games *unique* according to many people. This does not necessarily mean that Kojima wishes the games to be more homogenous, nor does it necessarily mean that he advocates for Japanese games to be less *Japanese.* These types of comments, however, especially coming from one of the world's most famous game designers, are very striking. It is also noteworthy that some Japanese games have taken a slight turn towards the sandbox style, mostly with the recent release in 2017 of Nintendo's *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* and *Super Mario Odyssey.* In sum, core characteristics of a game may be similar from one country to another, but there are substantive differences that make these similar titles into different games. These structures not only vary between countries, but they also vary between video game studios.

To conclude this chapter, and with the aim of bridging game studies and translation studies, the concept of gameplay is a critical element of video games that is gradually being introduced into the video game localization research in translation studies. While Minako O'Hagan and Carmen Mangiron have used

"gameplay" in the "popular sense of 'playing the game'" (2013, 55), others have designated it in terms of "entertainment value" (Heemsbergen 2016, 34). It has also been formulated as the play and entertainment value that are recreated in a localized game; it is integral to the purpose or "skopos" (O'Hagan 2009, 148) of a game's localization. As summarized by translation scholar Christiane Nord,

> According to *Skopostheorie* [in translation studies], the prime principle determining the choice of method and strategy in any translation process is the purpose (*Skopos*) of the overall translational interaction, which takes place between cooperating parties across language and culture boundaries. This means that the decisions taken by the participants of the interaction are guided by the communicative intentions of the person initiating the process (client, initiator). [...] In *Skopostheorie*, it is therefore no longer the source text but the target text's functionality or *adequacy* that sets the standard for translation. (Nord 2010, 121-122)

In other words, initiation of a game's localization process is guided by the reasons why the developers want to localize a game for a different market. One of these reasons is financial, but another (related) reason is to please gamers, the target group of potential consumers of the localized game. Gaming culture and gamer expectations, in turn, guide the conceptualization and implementation of the actual localization process. The successful transfer of gameplay is critical. Gamer expectations imply other challenges too. For example, as Bernal-Merino points out, "the challenge in the translation of multimedia entertainment arises from the commercial imperative to maintain the illusion that a product remains the same[,] yet, ... each localised version is necessarily different", with 'playability' necessarily guiding the measure of localization quality (2018, 103, 120, 125).

All of this leads to the important cultural underpinnings of games and games culture. Although it may not seem obvious at first glance such as in linguistic translation or adaptation of a user interface, the content in video games is inherently cultural and needs to be analyzed and dealt with before release. There is an increasing interest in the "cultural" within video game localization studies. In her seminal work "Game On! Burning issues in game localization," Mangiron not only notes the predominantly descriptive nature of localization research (e.g. technical aspects and translation and localization strategies); she also discusses the need for a

more "ontological perspective" and "solid theoretical foundation and methodology" in video game localization

research (2016, 124). Qualifying and nuancing the definition and scope of what is culture is one important as-

pect. For example, although the term "translation" traditionally assumes both linguistic and cultural textual

elements, Bernal-Merino suggests further breaking down the term "localization" by distinguishing it as *either*

"linguistic" *or* "cultural" localization for more precision (2006). Francesca Di Marco refines video game "cultural

localization" in more precise and inclusive terms:

> …the adaptation of visuals, sound and scripts conceived in one language by members of one culture to
>
> another language and another culture, in such a way that they seem at once fully consistent with the
>
> assumptions, values and other boundaries and outlooks of the second culture, and internally consistent
>
> within the semiotic strategies of the original video game text, visuals and sound. (2007, 2)

By this definition, the adaptation embodied by the term "cultural localization" includes its relationship with the

textual scripts, but highlights more concretely the assumptions, values, boundaries, and outlooks of culture.

O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013, 215) propose considering analysis of cultural adaptation at two levels, macro

and micro, summed up by Dong and Mangiron (2018) as follows:

> At macro level it can affect the overall design of the game, such as the game mechanics, graphics, char-
>
> acter design, and the story line. Adaptation at micro level refers to textual changes made to the in-
>
> game text, the script and dialogues, the text in graphics, and printed materials (O'Hagan and Mangiron
>
> 2013: 215). In addition, the level of cultural adaptation will depend on the overall localisation strategy
>
> adopted by developers and publishers … (2018, 151).

Finally, while reiterating how "developers and publishers expect translators to produce target versions that are

as good as originals in order to lead players to believe that the game has been designed specifically for them,"

Mangiron notes three further distinctions:

> [E]mphasis on the user and their experience has been pointed out by authors such as Díaz Montón
>
> (2010), who uses the expression *emotional localization* to refer to attempts to facilitate players' immer-
>
> sion in the game. O'Hagan uses the expression *emotion engineering* (2010, 2016; O'Hagan & Mangiron,

2013) to highlight the need to understand players' emotional experience and replicate it for target

players. Lepre (2014) uses the term *ludological localization* – from ludology or the study of games – to

emphasize the importance of reproducing the gameplay experience of the original version for target

players, even if this means redesigning the visual aspects or the story line. (2016, 129)

Along these lines, a deep analysis of the cultural localization between language versions (source original and

target translation/localization) is potentially very valuable and beneficial through these framing distinctions.

For this thesis, the localized cultural elements have been presented in general terms with the purpose of con-

necting them to the video game and video game localization cultures from another angle. When referring to

culture within the context of video game localization, it is important to remember that *two* cultures are refer-

enced: the more conventional culture, which can be defined in terms of adaptation for specific geographical or

linguistic regions, and video game culture, a culture that has emerged as global, and even transnational, and

which has other elements to consider.

The combination of these two cultural angles is very important to this thesis. When adapting a video

game for a specific locale, localizers are not only adapting the game's content to the target language; they are

also adapting for and participating in an entire culture that has materialized and proliferated around video

games. This specific culture is tied to the way the video game industry has evolved from its humble beginnings

to its current position as an extremely lucrative entertainment market. The market is vast and complex, with

many diverse power dynamics at play. Within this market are critical actors and influencers capable of swaying

public opinion. Today, the degree to which a video game is considered acceptable by users is influenced by

video game journalism. This subgenre of journalism has emerged gradually and has become a valuable source

of information about video games and gamers, that is to say, the target public for which video game localiza-

tion is destined.

Chapter 3: Video Game Journalism

Both as a professional domain and as a lucrative business field, the video games sector has cultivated its own brand. The goal of this chapter is to examine the types and practices of video game journalism, and in so doing to identify certain parameters of the social-cultural discourse that underlies the domains of video game production and localization. This discourse potentially provides a great deal of insight for the localization field, which has as its primary focus the market and culture of target receivers of localized products. In spite of the many parallels and insights to be drawn with standard journalism, some of the characteristics typical of video game journalism clearly distinguish it from conventional journalism. Their differences would become more and more obvious with the rise in production of Web-based content and new technologies (collaborative, social networking, etc.), which would subsequently affect and transform relationships between users, game companies, and journalism outlets. While video game journalism shares commonalities with other sectors that transitioned from print to digital, its adoption of such forms as blogs and score aggregate websites, as well as personality YouTubers and streamers has configured the industry in unique ways, giving rise to specific kinds of power dynamics. These dynamics must be acknowledged, as they are a contributing factor for the determina-tion of user-player reception of games – an integral component of game localization, and worthy of academic localization study as well.

With Web 2.0 and the age of social media, users now have more and more access to games and to other or previous versions of games that were previously unavailable to them (Eisenbeis 2014). At the same time, Web 2.0 has also molded and shaped certain aspects of user participation and the user profile (i.e. "tar-get audience" in translation studies terms). The publications associated with the video games industry are pre-dominantly digital in form, such as blogs and news websites (McDonald 2014). Additionally, the "traditional" model of the press is slowly being eroded by the presence of a new kind of news source: YouTube users (Rose 2014). Critically, blogs, websites, and high-profile Youtube users have a direct impact on the reception of a game, more so than in any other product on the market (McDonald 2014). These are the very agents which shed light on the modifications that incur during the localization process. In many cases, taking stock of these

sources of video game journalism is the only way to understand the tightly knit processes that exist behind the making of these games. Video game websites like Gamasutra, Polygon, and Kotaku, as well as various social media users, are the ones that reveal the controversial discussions on localization methods and decisions; their stories and reviews spark an often-lively debate within the player community about issues such as censorship and other types of content modification.

3.1 The Emergence of Specialized Print

The birth of video game journalism coincides with the birth of the video game industry in the late sixties and early seventies. The first periodical to focus specifically on video games in terms of a purely commercial product was a trade magazine called *Play Meter*. Its first issue was published in 1974; it is still published to this day. *Play Meter* defines itself as a trade magazine, that is, it specifically targets owners and operators of arcades, shopping malls, or any other entity interested in purchasing arcade cabinets. It is also credited with having created such basic industry standards as individual game reviews and a one-to-ten rating system for games. Generally speaking, *Play Meter* was essentially a catalogue of products that arcade owners could consult before choosing the games they wished to purchase. *Play Meter* was thus not a periodical aimed at the video game public, but rather at business owners. In the late seventies, other magazines not entirely dedicated to games started to show an interest in this new field. In 1979, the writers Billy Kunkel and Arnie Katz pitched the idea of a video game column called "Arcade Valley" to the editors of the technology magazine *Video*. This is a year after the arcade game *Space Invaders* had been released to the public with worldwide success.

The early eighties ushered in an explosion of video game publishing. Chronologically speaking, the first publication entirely devoted to video games was a British magazine called *Computer and Video Games Magazine* (CVG), published in 1981 by EMAP (Lee 2014). In the United States, Kunkel and Katz, who were already known for their column "Arcade Valley," launched the first American gaming magazine called *Electronic Games Magazine* (EGM) just a few weeks after its British equivalent. These magazines may seem similar, especially due to their titles, but there were some notable differences. In Europe, *CVG* covered all aspects of video games, from consoles to arcades to personal computers. In fact, they even featured some games that readers could

program into their own home computers. These games were usually very long and complex, and required a good deal of patience to install (Figure 17). The American-made *EGM* magazine on the other hand, focused mostly on reviewing games and giving tips to players on how to win games more effectively. For the most part, it avoided the "do it yourself" aspect of gaming, i.e. publishing the entire game code so that players could build the game in their computers (Figure 18). Because of *EGM*, and because Kunkel is at the origin of many activities being carried out today, many believe him to be the founding father of video game journalism (Rignall 2015). He is credited for creating a particular sort of lexicon and style of writing that set the tone for video game journalism for years (Rignall 2015).
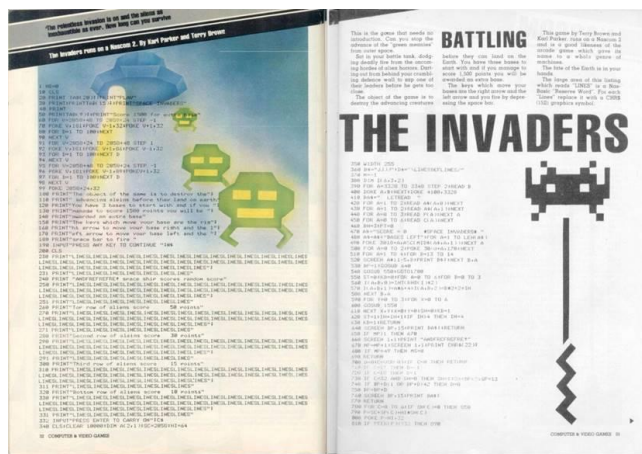
Figure 18: Instructions on how to install *Space Invaders* in BASIC language

(Source: BBC.com)

The English language magazines share a major point in common: their writers were classically trained journalists who became game enthusiasts afterwards. The columns and reviews were written the same way one would find when reading a newspaper. Some magazines would later change this style and format by hiring newly emerging writers who were above all avid gamers from the start. The transforming style of these columns and articles would gradually display a more enthusiastic tone, along with some slang and other popular language. This trend led to one of the first divisions between "serious" journalism and "not-so-serious" journalism. However, the 1983 Crash caused many magazines to go bankrupt; the only pre-Crash magazine to survive was *Computer Gaming World*, founded in 1981. The years subsequent to the Crash were extremely difficult for

publishing in video game journalism. A good illustration of how difficult it was to publish anything about video games during that period is an article by Frank Cifaldi for the video game website Gamasutra titled "Sad But True: We Can't Prove When *Super Mario Bros.* Came Out." In this article, Cifaldi writes about the murky details following the first launch of the NES and its legendary game *Super Mario Bros*. He points out that there is still some debate over the original date the game and the system launched in the United States. Officially, most video game historians and fans agree that the launch year was 1986. However, Cifaldi's research could not unearth any official press release or any document announcing a launch date. Indeed, his investigations led to Nintendo of America's PR runner at the time, Gail Tilden, who stated "I don't know that we got any coverage at that time that we didn't pay for" (Cifaldi 2012). By today's standards, a company like Nintendo having to pay for its own product to be advertised would be unheard of.

After the industry's resurrection in the late eighties, specialized print magazines had a resurgence. Many official magazines were published in English by video game developers in order to promote their own products directly, most notably *Nintendo Power*, which ran from 1988 until 2012; *Official Xbox Magazine* (2001-ongoing), published by Microsoft; *Official Dreamcast Magazine* (1999-2001), published by Sega; and *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine* (1997-2007), published in the United States by Sony. Other examples of magazines are *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (1989-2009), *PC Gamer* (1993), *Edge Magazine* in the United Kingdom (1993), and *Game Informer* (1991). A significant amount of material for news in the video game industry in many countries still exists in print form, despite the rise and omnipresence of material online.

3.2 Online Journalism: a complicated issue

The introduction and permeation of the internet in households during the early to mid-nineties changed a great many things. At first, the internet was viewed as a new communication tool in the most basic sense: it was a way to send emails and to chat; websites were not yet widespread. This first version of the internet was still heavily tied to traditional means of communication: websites were not updated daily (let alone hourly), and the cost of hosting Web content was still very high. In order to publish content, one needed to be proficient in coding with markup languages such as HTML. Video game websites slowly made their first

appearance on the Web in the form of webzines, which were basically the online equivalent of a magazine already in print. One of the first examples of such webzines is *Game Zero Magazine* (not to be confused with *Zero*, a UK-based print magazine), which claims to have published the first online magazine as early as November 1994. Although the website is no longer in operation, its archives can still be consulted online. The first entirely Web-based video game publication was *Intelligent Gamer Online,* created by Joe Barlow and Jeremy Horwitz in 1993. Originally in the form of a downloadable issue, it then transitioned to a website hosted on AOL from late 1994 to early 1995. During this time, a great number of printed publications created online versions of their own magazines. Some notable examples were *Game Informer*, which originally started publishing in 1991 but then created its online website GameInformer.com in 1996; *PC Gamer*'s, which went from a print edition first published in 1993, to the creation of its website PCGamer.com in 1996; and *Game Developer,* created in print in 1994, and in website form as GDMag.com in 1998. As the years went on, the newer publications were exclusively created online. They include: *Gamespot* (1996), *IGN* (1996), *Gamasutra* (1997), *Eurogamer* (1999), *1up.com* (2003), *Joystiq* (2004), *Kotaku* (2004), *Rock Paper Shotgun* (2007), and *Polygon* (2012).

Many media and communications historians now recognize that the internet has been one of the most ground-breaking inventions in media, analogous to the impact the printing press had on the printing industry. Throughout the late nineties and early 2000s, and as websites increased in popularity, users started to abandon print magazines in favor of their digital counterparts, to the point now where many new journalism outlets no longer have a printed version. At the same time, another kind of journalism also arose from video game culture: video reviews. This kind of video game journalism is vastly different from "traditional" video game journalism, if it ever existed. It is usually a video a few minutes long, usually hosted by a single individual, showing a review of a game. Sometimes these hosts even present a video stream of themselves playing these games. The reviews are not usually fair, balanced, or even handed. They are essentially a comedy routine, in which the reviewer shows video clips of the game being reviewed, and the host comments on that footage. Most of them are done in a humorous fashion, usually with a goal of entertaining the viewing public. This viewpoint shifts from that of traditional video game journalism, with the reviewer him or herself becoming the center of

attention in the role of a performer. These reviews not only focus on the game, they also direct attention to the performance being given by the host.

3.3 Video Game Journalism: From Community Managers to Esports

Video game journalism has been effective in blurring the lines between users and video game companies, but there are other ways for users to completely bypass the barrier of journalism and have a direct impact on a game developer's decisions. For example, the user base itself can critique and review the game. There are many outlets for users and gamers to voice their comments in a very direct fashion to developers, mostly by writing their own reviews of games on social media. These platforms have led to the creation of a very specific kind of job within video game companies: social media community managers. Their sole job is to cultivate an online relationship with the users and to host message boards, addressing any kind of concerns that users may have with the game. Certain platforms have risen to the forefront as a principal means of communication, most notably Reddit, Twitch, and YouTube. For example, community managers will sometimes host events on Reddit called "Ask Me Anything", or AMAs. They have become very popular among community managers of user groups, gamers or otherwise.

The rise of these platforms quickly gave way to a culture that is more participatory. In *Video Games as Culture*, Muriel and Crawford explore the extent to which games have become part of contemporary culture, with emphasis on their interactivity. They build on the work of Henry Jenkins to demonstrate how video games and gamers are part of *participatory culture,* defined as "a greater active involvement of audiences in the consumption and production of media", which "… has been an evolution both in technology and the expectations and behaviour of audiences" (Muriel and Crawford 2018, 187). According to Muriel and Crawford, three processes have brought about the change to participatory culture: the first is the rise of new technologies like the internet; the second is the horizontal integration across different media types; and the third is the changing nature of audiences (2018, 76). Video games perfectly exemplify these modern changes. For instance, many different types of media have been inspired or arisen from a video game, such as fan art, walkthroughs, video channels, etc. These creations extend beyond the game itself, and bring participation into the real world. There

are many illustrative examples of the level of commitment demonstrated by gaming communities, especially when issues are centered around a specific game with an extremely competitive scene. For instance, in 2017, Ubisoft released a medieval themed online fighting game called *For Honor*. In this game, players take control of a warrior, join a clan or group, and engage in multiplayer combat against other players. There are different categories of fighters with their own strengths and weaknesses, and this calls for a certain level of planning and strategy. While the game was initially well received, there was some public outcry about certain warriors being unbalanced and about disruptive technical issues like connectivity. In an interview with *Eurogamer*, game director Roman Campos Oriola directly addressed these issues, making it clear that the modifications had stemmed from the results of active testing with users, with attention having been paid to their feedback (Yin-Poole 2017). This sort of interaction between developers and the players is constant. Ubisoft also produces *The Warrior's Den*, a weekly show produced on the streaming website Twitch in which the company updates the community with events and news. This is an example of video game developers taking charge of communication without the involvement of traditional journalism outlets. In this way, they are able to address and interact with users directly.

3.3.1 The world of Esports and the "Gamer Athlete"

An example that best illustrates the convergence and overlap of online and onsite events of video game journalism, and the impact they have on user and player dynamics, is the proliferating domain of esports. Over the past decades, esports have experienced a meteoric rise, with video game competitions only emerging quite recently. The first known video game tournament took place in 1972 at Stanford University (Good 2012). Students were invited to the "Intergalactic Spacewar Olympics," which was a very interesting way to describe a *Spacewar!* championship. The grand prize at the time was a year's subscription to *Rolling Stone* magazine. Other tournaments featuring different games like *Space Invaders* took place over the following years. The goal of these events was simply to obtain the highest score. The game that definitively brought the "tournament" format to the forefront was 1991 Capcom's fighting game *Street Fighter II* (Patterson 2011). In this game, two players each control a specific character in a one-on-one fight for three rounds. The original game had eight

different characters, each with their own unique special moves and combos. The game has been credited for having a significant level of depth in its gameplay, and players can practice combos in order to improve at the game. *Street Fighter II*'s subsequent competitive growth changed the perception of how game tournaments work: instead of focusing on the high score, it was now a one-on-one competition (Woolums 2017). During the nineties, a few tournaments were organized by companies as a way to promote their products. For instance, Nintendo of America organized the Nintendo World Championship in 1990, and another in 1994 called the Nintendo PowerFest. These events were not a regular occurrence, and were mostly used as promotional tools by Nintendo.

The nature of video game competition changed with online gaming. During the late nineties and early 2000s, games played online created a more global and interconnected following. Many games released during that period became tournament staples, of which two have made a lasting mark: Blizzard's 1998 sci-fi themed strategy game *StarCraft* and Valve's 2000 first person shooter *Counter-Strike.* The actual gaming context of a given society, culture or linguistic geographical area is not necessarily uniform. Gaming in South Korea is a case in point by which to illustrate the evolving specificity and complexity of the video game context.

3.3.2 South Korea and the first professional gamers

The first large-scale online tournaments were created during the nineties. A very specific context at that time created the perfect conditions for these events. The first professional gamers also appeared during this time. In 1995, the government of South Korea enacted the very ambitious *Framework Act on Information* (Jin 2010, 20). The goal was to construct a nationwide information infrastructure, consisting of high-speed internet connectivity, services, and products. The South Korean economy was severely impacted by a financial crisis in 1997, and the plans to modernize the information highway were accelerated. Before that crisis, the South Korean economy was still heavily reliant on traditional industrial production, and the government identified information technology (IT) as the ultimate way to fight the negative impacts of the crisis and push the economy forward (Jin 2010, 20). The resulting policies created fierce competition among telecommunication companies, resulting in price drops for internet subscriptions, which consequently led to an increased number

of households gaining access to high speed internet services (Jin 2010, 21-22). Furthermore, the 1997 crisis

forced many large companies to go bankrupt, and unemployment skyrocketed. Many laid-off workers turned

to internet start-ups, and a great number of them created internet cafés, which were called *PC Bangs* (*Bang*

being the Korean word for "room") (Jin 2010, 25). These *PC Bangs* were a popular option for business owners

because they were very cheap to operate. In fact, in 1997, there were an estimated 100 *PC Bangs* in South Ko-

rea, and by 2001 that number had grown to 23 548 (Jin 2010, 25). When Blizzard release its real time strategy

game *StarCraft* in 1998, the localized version rapidly became popular in South Korean *PC Bangs*. In 2000, a

small cable television channel called OnGameNet (OGN) started broadcasting *StarCraft* games, and in 2003

they created Starleague, the first professional *StarCraft* gaming league (Larch 2019). Many other games be-

came very popular in esports over the years, with *StarCraft II*, *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive,* and *League of

Legends* the most popular of all time. International tournaments regularly took place and featured these

games, which included incentives of large cash rewards for winners.

The players and teams competing in local tournaments became very popular, enjoying high earnings as

the professional gaming scene developed. Most of these video game stars first emerged out of the South Ko-

rean gaming circuit. One of the most influential of these professional gamers is Lim Hyo Wan, better known by

his gaming handle "SlayerS_BoxeR" (or simply "Boxer" for short). Boxer won many Starleague competitions,

and is widely known for playing the game in very creative and ingenious ways. His play style and charisma

brought unparalleled popularity both to the game and to South Korea's professional gaming scene (Nordmark

2017). Boxer started competing in StarCraft tournaments in 1999, and ultimately retired in late 2010. Another

notable esports star is *League of Legends* (LoL) player Lee Sang-Hyeok. Better known by his gaming handle

"Faker," he took the LoL esport scene by storm in 2013 when he was only 17 years old. He is the only player to

win three LoL world championships. In a special issue dedicated to esports, ESPN called him "the first true

global star of gaming," and his impact upon the sport has often been compared to that of sports champion Mi-

chael Jordan (Kimes 2015). Faker is also one of the most highly paid esport stars, earning approximately five

million U.S. dollars in salary, sponsorship, and tournament winnings combined (Newell 2018). Both Boxer and

Faker are not stars who became popular on their own: they are each part of an esports team; in this case, they were both part of SK Telecom T1, a team owned and operated by one of South Korea's largest telecommunications companies, South Korea Telecom. The team was founded in 2003 after they took over Boxer's previous team, simply called Team Orion at the time. Since the late nineties, many esports teams have been created all over the world. Some of the more popular Asian teams include SK Telecom T1, Samsung Galaxy (South Korea, 2013), Invictus Gaming (China 2011), and Royal Never Give Up! (China, 2015). In the United States, some of the most popular teams include Evil Geniuses (1999), Team SoloMid (2009), CounterLogic Gaming (2010), and Cloud9 (2012). In Europe, some notable teams include SK Gaming (Germany, 1997), Team Liquid (Netherlands, 2000), Team Dignitas (United Kingdom, 2003), and Team Fnatic (United Kingdom, 2004).

Esports is one of the fastest growing sectors of the entertainment industry: Forbes magazine reports that esports generated over 493 million U.S. dollars in 2016, with expectations of revenues to exceed 900 million USD in 2018, and most probably cross the threshold of one billion USD in 2019 (Perez 2018). While most of this revenue comes from sponsorship, a great deal also comes from esports viewership. Events held in such major sports arenas like Madison Square Garden in New York are always sold out. In 2014, the final confrontation between Samsung Galaxy White and Chinese club Star Horn Royal Club took place at the 45 000 seat Seoul World Cup stadium, the very same stadium that held the final FIFA World Cup match between Brazil and Germany in 2002. In 2017, Riot Games organized its annual LoL World Championship in China, and the final match between Samsung Galaxy White and reigning champions SK Telecom T1 drew more that 60 million unique viewers (Li 2017). Samsung Galaxy White won the championship that year, bringing an end to SK Telecom T1's two-year domination of the tournament. (Figure 19)

Figure 19: Samsung Galaxy White lifting the 2017 LoL World Championship trophy

(Source: ComicBook.com)

The viewership number for that year alone is nothing short of outstanding. The LoL World Championship is the most widely watched esport event by far. Its popularity is an example of how video games can cultivate and generate a huge following. Esports is highly competitive, drawing a large number of viewers not only online but also into major stadiums as prime events, on par with traditional sports like soccer or American football. Esport fans are not only fans of teams but also of players. They bring in a level of participation unlike anything ever seen before in the video game industry. Coverage of esports is now a huge part of video game journalism, and just as important as journalism that covers video game development.

3.4 Localization and esports

Esports and video game journalism both have a major impact on localization production and reception-consumption practices, up to now undocumented and unexplored in localization studies literature. One primary objective of localization, as consistently reflected in localization literature, is to adapt a product linguistically, culturally, and technically so that users feel as though the product (here, the game) was originally created for them in their own language. Indeed, one could say, without passing through the "filter" of translation. However, localized video games reception by users can defy this expectation, or at the very least, introduce new elements to consider analytically. Esports is one example, where community management and esports coverage are now more widely and more quickly exposing issues concerning the localization and cultural adaptation of a product. Also, in recent years, some apparent localization decisions with regards to localized games have been met with a very vivid reaction from the gaming community. Such was the case with Ubisoft's *Rainbow Six Siege*. The game is part of a long and established video game franchise inspired by the American author Tom Clancy. It is a military style first person shooter (FPS) game composed of two teams: one of which is a specialized counter terrorism unit from a specific country. Players have the choice to play either a British, French, American, or Russian tactical intervention team. The opposing team plays the terrorists, who defend a certain

objective from the intervention team. There are many kinds of objectives, such as securing a capture point, defusing a bomb, or rescuing hostages. Originally released in 2015, *Rainbow Six Siege* slowly grew in popularity to become an extremely popular game among fans of FPS and team games in general, with more than 40 million registered users in 2018. Ubisoft also partnered with ESL, the world's largest esport company, to create a professional circuit of *Rainbow Six Siege* around the globe. In November 2018, Ubisoft Montreal, the game's developer, shared an article on their development blog announcing their expansion into the Asian market. In order to comply with Chinese regulations, they had decided to bring some visual changes to the game. In fact, the article clearly mentioned that the studio is "adjusting art and visuals, but are not compromising what makes Rainbow Six Siege the game you know today." The company even included some examples of the alterations (Figure 20).

Figure 20 : Ubisoft's examples of changes

(Source: Ubisoft)

The big difference in this situation is that Ubisoft wanted to create a "global version" of the game.

Here, it could be presumed that Ubisoft was in some way conforming to internationalization practice prior to

the localization phase, an often mentioned "best practice" in the industry. In their blog article, they state pre-

emptively and proactively, vis-à-vis the gaming community, many different reasons why they wanted to do so:

one was to "streamline production" in order to avoid retaining two different builds of the game; another was

to make sure all the work done on the game could be completed only once by a single team. The community

reaction to this information, however, was swift: there was very vocal opposition to the changes that were be-

ing proposed. Over the next few days following the announcement, the game was "review bombed" on the

video game distribution platform Steam. A "review bomb" is a coordinated strategy used by online communi-

ties to purposefully sabotage a video game's rating on Steam in order to discourage future customers from pur-

chasing the game (Morgan 2018). Many issues were raised by players. Most of them clearly expressed anger

that Ubisoft seemed to be "bowing its head" to China, and simply conforming to laws perceived by some as

"anti-Western."[1] Others pointed out that the concept of a "global version" meant that the game they had origi-

nally purchased would be completely changed as well. Those players argued that the upcoming "censored ver-

sion" of the game was not the original version they had purchased, and that the company was imposing the

same censorship as that imposed on the Chinese version (Morgan 2018). Shortly afterwards, a Ubisoft commu-

nity manager attempted to clarify the announcement, mentioning on a Reddit thread specifically titled "Aes-

thetic Changes in Y3S4" that the global changes would not modify the core gameplay, and that there would

also be another version of the game region-locked within China. This did not really help to clarify, however, be-

cause at this point the community was truly doubting the usefulness of having a global "censored" version,

while a region-locked game was still being used within China. Ubisoft's reaction to this backlash was very quick

as well. On November 20, 2018, the studio announced that they were reverting all aesthetic changes that had

been announced earlier (Parlock 2018). This whole censorship experience with Ubisoft perfectly encapsulates

the reach that the video game community has within the industry. The official Ubisoft announcement words

the decision to change simply as a result of having listened to player's concerns (see Appendix 2). At the same

time, however, others began to question the attitude of the community: did the gamers who voiced their op-

position and participated in the review bomb campaign really represent the majority of the player base? If the

target user is the main focus and object of localization operations, in practice and in theory, then how to gauge

user feedback effectively in both for production and reception purposes?

Localization poses another kind of problem with regard to esports, in that it may impose a language

barrier on an industry that prides itself on being international, even "borderless". In 2016, gaming giants Bliz-

zard (of *StarCraft* fame) released a game called *Overwatch*, a FPS game where teams of five players control a

character with specific talents and fight another team of five players in different types of challenges. The mas-

sive success of this game led Blizzard to create an esport league, dubbed *Overwatch* League (OWL), in 2017.

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[1] This kind of problematic is becoming ever more present within the video game public. Recent pro-democratic demon-
strations in Hong Kong have even led some video game esports personalities to publicly denounce the actions of the Chi-
nese government against demonstrators in Hong Kong. This led some video game publishers such as Blizzard and Riot
Games, who organize esport events that are very popular in China, to admonish these personalities in order to appease
the Chinese authorities.

Through this league, Blizzard sought to establish something entirely different. For the first time ever, teams

would have their bases in specific cities, much like traditional sports leagues. These teams included the New

York Excelsior, Toronto Defiant, Seoul Dynasty, Paris Eternal, London Spitfire, and Shanghai Dragons. The

teams are located all over the world. It is very difficult for a specific team in a place like China to gain followers

in Toronto, especially if players do not speak the language. Moreover, the linguistic challenges of translating

and adapting a game that is part of the esports scene has its own kind of challenges. Much like traditional

sports, esports has developed its own brand of marketing and language, and fans already have very high expec-

tation of the content they read. Terminology is extremely game-specific, especially for fantasy-based games

like *League of Legends*, or science fiction-based ones like *StarCraft*. All of these aspects contribute to defining

social practices in specific cultural contexts.

Chapter 4: Censorship

4.1 The GamerGate Controversy

The undeniable importance of the video game market globally demonstrates a basic fact, that is to say,

the world loves games. While video games were initially a niche interest, the arcade era proved that they could

become a dominant cultural product. With their status as a cultural product, games were ultimately bound to

receive the same level of scrutiny as would any other media product. Notwithstanding, criticisms have met

with a certain resistance from some subgroups of dedicated fans who consider themselves to be "hardcore" or

"real gamers." This attitude of resistance led to a controversy in 2013 known as GamerGate.

In essence, the GamerGate controversy was a massive online reaction to what many perceive to be a

culture war within the video game industry. In February 2013, video game developer Zoe Quinn published a

text-based game called *Depression Quest*, in an attempt to illustrate Quinn's personal experience in the format

of a video game (Massanari 2017, 179). While the game received several positive reviews, the overall reaction

from the community of gamers was not very favorable. The "controversy" occurred several months later, when

in August 2014, Eron Gjoni, Quinn's ex-boyfriend, published a lengthy and detailed blog post about their rela-

tionship, in which he mentions Quinn's other intimate relationships, most notably with Nathan Grayson, who

works as a video game reviewer for the website Kotaku (Mantilla 2015, 83). Many thought the post meant that

Quinn had intimate relations with Grayson in order to get a favourable review of her game *Depression Quest,*

and they started harassing Quinn with death (and even rape) threats and by "doxing" her (i.e. researching and

publishing her personal coordinates) (Mantilla 2015, 83-4). This controversy was later dubbed GamerGate, and

proponents of GamerGate justify this harassment campaign by labeling it as an ongoing battle for ethics in

video game journalism (Mantilla 2015, 84). Despite an official statement from Kotaku denying any sort of rela-

tionship between Grayson and Quinn, the harassment still continued (Totilo 2014). The GamerGate "contro-

versy" expanded beyond questions of ethics in journalism, and became a veritable crusade against *any* critic of

video games, especially against those who espoused feminist views. Other notable targets of the GamerGate

movement were Brianna Wu, an independent game developer, and Anita Sarkessian, a prominent feminist

critic of video games who also hosts a show on YouTube called "Tropes in Video Games." Defenders of GamerGate often mention that those spreading the word online were not affiliated with the movement, but this is something that is very difficult to track, due to the anonymity of the actions (Aghazadeh et al. 2018, 180). One way to explain the spread of this controversy is in light of the changing nature of video games. Over the years, video games have transitioned from a predominantly male niche subculture to a widespread and popular pastime enjoyed by many different groups of people (Aghazadeh et al. 2018, 180). Indeed, according to the 2017 Electronic Software Association (ESA) survey, "Adult women represent a greater portion of the video game-playing population (31 percent) than boys under age 18 (18 percent)." (ESA 2017). They also mention that 41% of gamers in the United States are female, and that casual gaming is on the rise. GamerGate is a response to these changes, as its adherents believe that "gamer identity" is at risk (Aghazadeh et al. 2018, 179). They also lament the influence of "social justice warriors" (SJWs) infiltrating the game industry and imposing a feminist agenda.

After a few months, excitement over GamerGate seemed to dwindle, until another incident in 2016. This one concerned Nintendo and one of its employees, Alison Rapp, who held a mid-level marketing position at Nintendo of America. When Nintendo released the game *Xenoblade Chronicles X*, it removed some options that were considered offensive, most notably in the character creation screen where the size of a female character's breasts could be customized (Schreier 2017). Many fans who were upset with these changes claimed it was censorship, and pointed to Rapp as the source of the decision to remove these options. It is important to note that Rapp did not work on the localization team, and mentioned many times that she had no involvement whatsoever in those decisions (Klepek 2016). However, she was an outspoken critic, with progressive and feminist views, which made her a target for the proponents of GamerGate. Very rapidly, her personal information was released online, and she started receiving anonymous threats, much like Quinn, Wu, and Sarkessian had (Muncy 2016). The anonymous trolls even went so far as to dig up an old undergraduate paper Rapp had written, in which she asserts that America shouldn't try to impose anti-child pornography laws in Japan, and used it to claim she was defending child pornography (Singal 2016). They also uncovered that she was moonlighting

under a fake name while working at Nintendo. Rapp ended up losing her job at Nintendo in March 2016, but in

a press release, Nintendo claimed that she was fired for breach of contract instead of any (imagined) impact on

localization decisions (Singal 2016). Rapp clarified that she was in fact moonlighting anonymously on the side in

order to pay off student loans, which was technically against her work contract at the time, and asserted that

Nintendo wouldn't have found out about it had she not been subject to the incessant harassment online

(Muncy 2016). The reactions against female members of the video game community were indeed shocking.

These incidents, however, raise important questions, in particular that of what exactly constitutes censorship in

video game localization in an age of social media.

4.2 The Study of Censorship

Censorship is a central topic in many fields of study, including within translation studies. Due to its cru-

cial role in transmitting knowledge and information across linguistic and cultural boundaries, translation has

always encountered issues associated with censorship. Its manifestation can be found in the subtleties and nu-

ances of language, and not always so overtly as in the passages struck out by a government agent armed with a

big black marker. Denise Merkle (2010, 18) correctly observes how censorship studies in translation studies

takes into account important aspects of ideology and its justifications for censorship on political, moral, mili-

tary, and religious, as well as aesthetic grounds, all of which contextualize the networks of agents involved in

the transfer and rewriting processes of translation. Referencing Michaela Wolf (TTR 2002), she also raises the

notion of "cultural blockage,, whereby certain selection mechanisms intervene (at the point of entry of a cul-

tural product into the target culture) to block the entry of cultural products deemed undesirable or to influence

the form of cultural transfer through various forms of rewriting (Merkle 2010, 19). As pointed out by Francesca

Billiani, censorship can be understood as a discourse: "often the dominant one, produced by a given society at

a given time and expressed either through repressive cultural, aesthetic and linguistic measures or through

economic means" (Billiani 2007, 2). She qualifies further that censorship "operates largely according to sets of

specific values and criteria which are established by a dominant body over a dominated one" (Billiani 2007, 4).

This definition allows for a broad description of censorship. It also highlights the different forms that it may

take. Identifying the agents or entities responsible for censorship is not always straightforward: at times it may

concern the translator, or the translator's patron, or any other agency that is involved in the translation pro-

cess. What makes the localization process –similar to audiovisual and film adaptation- stand apart from tradi-

tional translation is the wide variety of agents (teams) involved in production. In most large video game compa-

nies, the localization team works with the developers and game designers simultaneously (Bernal-Merino

2007b, 2-3). Furthermore, a great deal if not most localization work is outsourced by and to outside firms and

freelancers (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2004, 58). This kind of complex, multi-sectorial workflow increases the

number of different actors involved at any given point of the localization project production cycle, with each

one concerned with their own specific issues. It also multiplies the number of points of entry where compo-

nents of a cultural product can potentially be blocked during a localization project. Subjectivity and ideology

intervene at every point within the networks of agents. In the case of contemporary video game localization,

the networks include communities of gamers and others (e.g. journalists, critics) involved with the reception,

feedback loops, and other activities that constitute an ever-globalizing video game culture. The developers and

publishers of the games, as observed by O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013, 224), ultimately have two options when

faced with censorship: "a) to withdraw a game and not release it in that particular country, or b) to edit the ob-

jectionable content or remove it from the game" (cited in Dong and Mangiron 2018, 161).

4.3 A Bourdieusian perspective

The translation studies discipline offers approaches undertaken in other translation contexts (e.g. news

or journalism translation) which potentially could be useful for considering video game localization and gaming

as social practices in diverse cultural contexts. For instance, it could be argued that the more recent sociologi-

cal approaches be extended to include localization contexts such as those of video games. As translation stud-

ies scholar Michaela Wolf states:

> Sociological approaches to translation have been developed on the basis of the insight that translation
>
> is an activity deeply affected by *social configurations*. The search for understanding of the mechanisms
>
> underlying translation viewed as a *social practice* has promoted the development of a number of

analytical tools which have helped shed light on the various constituents accounting for the involve-

ment of translation in larger *social contexts* in general and the social nature of translation in particular.

The newly developed approaches have shifted attention to various research fields which so far have

been partly under-researched and/or under-theorized: training institutions, working conditions, profes-

sional *institutions and their social role*, questions of *ethics* in translation, (auto)biographies of transla-

tors and interpreters, larger accounts such as translation on the *global market*, sociopolitical aspects of

translation, translation and its role in activism, and many more (Wolf 2010, 337) [emphasis is mine].

It is clear that "localization" could easily substitute the word "translation" in this statement. While the objec-

tive of this thesis is not to conceptualize a full sociological approach to video game localization, its relevance for

considering the issue of censorship in video game localization will be raised.

In sociologically-informed research in translation studies, various concepts as proposed and formulated

by Pierre Bourdieu have proven useful when analyzing actors and roles within a social context. As Merkle ex-

plains, a Bourdieusian perspective views "structural censorship" as "a set of unwritten rules shaped by habits

and the symbolic capital of discursive products in the field, often not consciously acknowledged." (2010, 18). As

explained by Michaela Wolf, within Bourdieu's sociological epistemology, "social reality can be seen as the sum

of relations that both reflect the mutual dynamics of individuals within society and reveal the mechanisms of

how social agents are constructed" (2010, 338). As understood by Jean-Marc Gouanvic in the context of trans-

lation and the literary field, this cultural sociological action reveals translation practices operating between dif-

ferent social spaces. It is a textual production "in the process of being carried out, of the product itself and of

its consumption in the social fields, the whole seen in a relational manner" (Gouanvic 2005, 148)" (Wolf 2010,

339). The terms of translation "are continually renegotiated and are thus the driving force of the social game

(Gouanvic 2002, 167)" (Wolf 2010, 339). Although this sociological perspective has not been implemented and

developed yet in the localization research of translation studies, and despite the challenges of examining inter-

connecting social dynamics that are global, local, and internet and social media-driven, some relational aspects

are worth considering. For example, in a translation project, the translator actor will more likely be concerned

with linguistic issues, while external entities such as publishers, patrons, and vendors will be concerned with others, including marketing, funding, etc. Combined, all these fields and agents produce a translation as the end result. Within localization, we see the same kind of dynamic evolve, although in a completely different market: there are different teams of developers (gameplay, database, audio, visual, etc.) working on the game design, conception, and production; there is a team of developers specializing on adapting content technically with the aid of localization tools; there are outside firms and agents (translators, revisers, subtitlers, editors, project managers, etc.) who work on the actual translation; and there is technical and linguistic quality control. Different fields and a whole plethora of agents are involved in the creation process, and ultimately, those same teams are also involved in the adaptation process for other languages and locales.

Although Bourdieusian-informed approaches in translation studies have been used to analyse and explain certain translation contexts (e.g. literary translation production), they have not been implemented in localization research. Some recent attempts to transpose concepts to a contemporary digital context, however, have been useful in disciplines outside translation studies. Two important concepts from Bourdieu's analytical framework are *field* and *habitus*, both of which complement one another. Bourdieu's concept of field is a social one, a space within which individual actors exist and interact in their various roles. His concept of habitus entails the internalization of an actor's behaviours and dispositions. An individual's socialization transpires in relation to existing norms and social structures and practices. Consequently, the habitus is both "an empirical and theoretical principle which accounts for the social formation of taste and judgement as well as for its transnational and universal significance" (Billiani 2007, 6). In sum, the habitus is a "structuring and structured structure" which operates within a given field of cultural production.

Also relevant is Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital. Bourdieu has argued that an individual's capital forms the basis of social life and dictates one's position within the social order. An individual's cultural capital is a collection of symbolic elements such as skill, fashion, mannerisms, credentials, etc. (Saraceno 2014, 2-4). In the video game market, there is a specific value associated with different kinds of games and the worlds associated with them, all of which have an impact on gamer tastes. Games produced in Japan have certain gameplay

attributes and aesthetics that have remained relatively stable throughout the years. American gamers have very mixed views about the value of this cultural capital from Japan: some believe that Japanese games are objectively better than American games, and that it is a worthwhile (even commendable) goal to master and appreciate these games, since this will prove they are "better gamers"; others believe this to be of little importance (Byford 2014). Nonetheless, when exporting these games to the American market, Japanese developers are always concerned about the ways their products will be treated or transformed. As such, the goal of the localization process is not only contingent on translation and adaptation, but is also concerned with preserving the unique "Japaneseness" of the product, because the biggest selling point of the product is that it still contains all the elements of a Japanese game (Pelletier-Gagnon 2011, 88-89). American games exported to Japan face the same types of obstacles, and the Japanese market also has its own reactions to the American nature of video games (Byford 2014).

4.4 "Censorship" in video games

The differences in the understanding of cultural capital as it materializes in different areas of the world leads us to ask: is there really censorship in video games? To answer this question, it is useful to consider Billiani's previously cited definition of censorship as operating according to specific values and criteria established by a dominant body. As far as cultural production goes, the video game industry has considerable freedom of expression, as seen by the countless different games that are released every year. While there are some clearly defined cases of censorship in the industry, it has not always been as overt a censorship as seen in other more traditional media. It may seem paradoxical, but the description "structuring and structured structure" (Billiani 2007, 7) associated with habitus seems to perfectly encapsulate the way content gets moderated within the video game industry. The relationship is not overtly oppressive, but rather is conditioned by a "set of unwritten rules, shaped both by the current habitus and by the symbolic capital a text [in this case, digital content] enjoys in a certain field" (Billiani 2007, 8). Censorship in the game industry seems to be self-imposed, defined by prevailing values and criteria of the gaming community at large, composed not only of gamers but also the actors of the video game journalism sector that reviews and shapes the reception of the game.

It resembles another historical example, i.e. the self-imposed censorship in the performing arts and censorship in the comics industry. In the first instance, from 1848 until 1968 the Office of the Lord Chamberlain had censorial powers over all theater texts entering London, and any play that hoped to be performed needed to be approved by the Lord Chamberlain (Krebs 2007, 167-8). Contrary to what many may think, the Lord Chamberlain did not always operate like a repressive bureau that blacked out passages of texts before banning a play. In fact, there are many situations where there was some complicity and anticipation between the Lord Chamberlain and translators of plays (Krebs 2007, 178). In the second case, there are examples of content control to be found in the history of the comic book industry. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, American psychiatrist Fredric Wertham published a book called *Seduction of the Innocent*, in which he argued that the main cause of juvenile delinquency was the younger generation's interest in comic books. The subsequent moral panic prompted the United States government to organize the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency in 1953, where comic book publishers had to explain their choice of content. The negative press surrounding those hearings pushed the major comic book publishers at the time to form the Comics Code Authority (CCA), which was loosely modeled after the 1930 Hollywood Production Code. The CCA was an explicit set of rules that prohibited very specific elements in comic books produced in United States (which can be seen in Appendix 1). The Code was aimed at toning down any drawings or texts appearing in comic books that were deemed to be lacking in taste. It was a system of absolutes that was put in place by the industry itself in order to prevent governmental involvement (Nyberg, n.d.).

This latter type of censorship resonates with situations that have occurred in the video game industry during the mid nineties, at the height of the fighting game *Mortal Kombat*'s popularity. A senate hearing was organized in 1993, and the video game industry was faced with the threat of government intervention, much like the comics industry (Chalk 2007). The result was the founding of the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) in 1994 (Electronic Software Ratings Board, n/a), still in existence today. It is an independent ratings board whose role is to assign ratings and descriptive elements to video games (Figure 21) (Chalk 2007).

RATING CATEGORIES

EVERYONE

Content is generally suitable for all ages. May contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.

EVERYONE 10+

Content is generally suitable for ages 10 and up. May contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language and/or minimal suggestive themes.

TEEN

Content is generally suitable for ages 13 and up. May contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling and/or infrequent use of strong language.

MATURE

Content is generally suitable for ages 17 and up. May contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language.

ADULTS ONLY

Content suitable only for adults ages 18 and up. May include prolonged scenes of intense violence, graphic sexual content and/or gambling with real currency.

RATING PENDING

Not yet assigned a final ESRB rating. Appears only in advertising, marketing and promotional materials related to a physical (e.g., boxed) video game that is expected to carry an ESRB rating, and should be replaced by a game's rating once it has been assigned.

NOTE: Rating Category assignments can also be based upon a game or app's minimum age requirement.

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Figure 21: The ESRB Ratings

(Source: ESRB.com)

For compliance, video game producers must hand in a complete description of their game's most graphic and/or questionable content, so that ESRB can apply a rating for a target age group (Entertainment Software Ratings Board 2011). This is the same kind of measure that NoA used to apply to its own games. However, in this case, content control or evaluation is no longer within the hands of NoA, but rather in the

institution of the ESRB, to which it willingly submits (McCullough 2012). The ESRB thus plays a very important

role in games distribution. Indeed, some stores and companies will even refuse to sell games with certain rat-

ings (ESRB FAQ). Japan also has its own ratings board, the Computer Entertainment Ratings Organization

(CERO) (Figure 22) (XLOC 2016). When comparing both these ratings boards, we clearly see different composi-

tions of age groups, as well as the different arguments put forth for attributing specific ratings (IGN 2013). This

discrepancy is a perfect illustration of how certain games will be rated higher in one market but not another – a

point for consideration in localization as well, when targeting other markets beyond the location of the origi-

nally created game. It is also a perfect reference point for assessing whether or not a game might get censored.

Figure 22: CERO ratings

(Source : Cero.gr.jp)

4.5 Social censorship

The kinds of censorship we see in the context of video games rating boards and their interpretation by

the gaming communities suggest the need for a new definition of censorship, here proposed as *social*

censorship. While conventional definitions of censorship in translation studies have been applied to contexts involving power struggles in relation to norm-applying official authorities and institutions, including subversion of these norms, they do not take into account the socialized roles of active players in the gaming world within a globalizing digital video game cultural context. Introducing a notion of social censorship implies a more subtle Bourdieusian "structured, structuring structure" approach. Unlike other historical periods, such as that of the Lord Chamberlain and in the field of comics, different factors are at play in the contemporary field of video games. On one hand, content is subject to control by the industries themselves, in order to conform to societal norms, which are concretely transcribed by ratings boards. They operate as a "structuring, structured structure" that allocates ratings according to content. The dynamic by which rating boards codify society's norms into concrete elements in order to rate games seems to exemplify the notion of a Bourdieusian field well. The social space of the field is constituted by various actors/entities interacting with one another, of which the industry rating boards are a defining part.

When discussing censorship, "Bourdieu argues that to understand fully how censorship operates, one needs to take into consideration its relationship with the habitus of the field in which it circulates (Billiani 2007, 6). In this regard, the digital configuration of the video game world is critical. The unique specificity of the digital context, combined with the digital world social practices that configure society today condition, guide, and structure the field. In both the video game and game localization spheres, habitus and field are intrinsically digitally mediated. Games produced prior to and after localization subsequently integrate into a digital field replete with interaction and impact. Digital products and players interact with one another through digitally mediated platforms. The repercussions of digital social media and Web 2.0 on users and the video game industry at large is an essential factor to take into account. The controversial release of the space exploration game *No Man's Sky* in August 2016 is a recent example of the close relationship between gamers and the digital Web 2.0 and social media platforms. According to many gamers, the game did not contain all the elements promised by its trailers, which made the game's reception a disappointing, even deceptive one (Polygon 2016). This led to an onslaught of negative reactions on social media directed at the studio, Hello Games (Kuchera 2016). The

connectivity offered by Web 2.0 resulted in intensive scrutinizing by users of Japanese games localized into

English. Moreover, the Web now offers users opportunities to see and analyze the differences that exist be-

tween the game's original version and the translated/localized versions. For example, during the peak of the

NES late eighties and early nineties, it was extremely difficult to obtain the original version of a Japanese game

released in the United States. One of the main reasons for this was because the games were region-locked,

meaning the game's copy contained an encryption that could only be decoded by consoles that were made for

that specific region (Eisenbeis 2014). The proposed notion of "social censorship" therefore implies a sociologi-

cal and socio-cultural analytical perspective (social field, habitus, and capital) of a context of social relations

that are digitally mediated (in a digital society), with relationships of social practice intertwined with material

technologies and software (social media, Web 2.0 and internet). While it could better exemplify the notion of

censorship in this context, it would nonetheless require re-adapting Bourdieu's conceptual framework for the

contemporary global, digital field and its consequent impact on localization practices, particularly in the age of

social media. Finally, as shown by Xiaochun Zhang in his discussion on censorship and digital games localization

in China, the public censorship system and the practice of self-censorship in the Chinese context illustrate the

different ways that censorship can play out (2012), yielding a distinct specificity to censorship and video game

localization in this region. (See also Dong and Mangiron 2018)

Chapter 5: Putting it all Together: The Curious Case of Nintendo

5.1 Nintendo's long history of localization

Nintendo is one of the most recognized names in the video game industry worldwide. As described in the previous chapters, the company has a long history of content control. In fact, controlling the content was a key strength and card in their favour when they released the first NES consoles in the eighties. Control over content is not limited to which games are released; it also encompasses the extent to which the game's content is manipulated. Localization of a game's content falls squarely in this category. Policies on how localization goals are handled can be complicit with broader, global objectives. They also have an impact on localization procedures and decisions, for example on whether or not to outsource work to localization agencies.

As noted earlier, Nintendo released its first console, the *FamiCom*, in Japan before revamping it as the NES for the Western market. This means that even before Nintendo's near total dominance of the console market, there was a backlog of games released only in Japanese. Many of these games were never released in Western markets, even after the release of the NES. However, some of the games that did get released in the West went through localization in a very odd way. The most well-known story is that of *Super Mario Bros 2*. The original sequel to *Super Mario Bros* was released in Japan on June 3, 1986. It was a direct sequel to the first *Super Mario Bros*, and had a reputation of being much more difficult to finish than the first. At the same time, Nintendo of America was gaining traction in the United States, and was seeking to release the sequel (McLaughlin 2010). However, the version that was released in the West ended up being a completely different game. Nintendo of America assumed that the original *Super Mario Bros 2* game was going to be too hard for Western players, and with the 1983 Crash still fresh in the public's mind, Nintendo of America wanted to avoid players getting disenchanted with a game too difficult to beat (Kohler 2011). As a result, the company made a conscious decision to take another game they had published in Japan in 1987 called *Yume Kōjō: Doki Doki Panic,* and swapped its characters with *Mario* characters, releasing it as *Super Mario Bros 2* in the United States the following year (Figure 23) (Margolin 2016). Nonetheless, the game was very successful in the United States. In 1993, the original Japanese version of *Super Mario Bros 2* was released in the compilation game *Super Mario*

All Stars, but was re-labeled *Super Mario: The Lost Levels*. The Western version was released in Japan as *Super*

Mario USA in 1992.
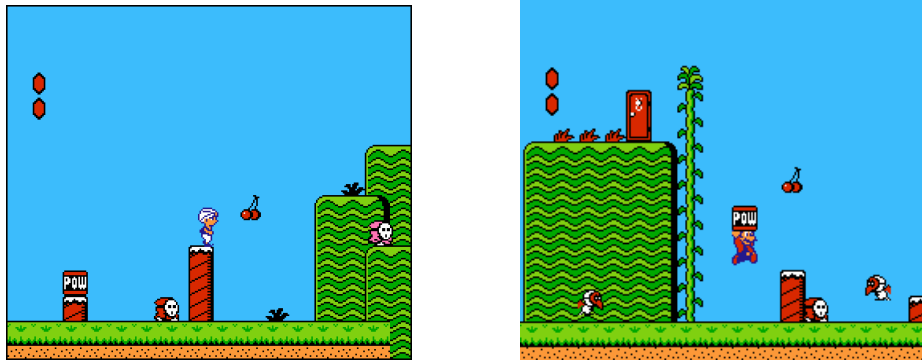
Figure 23: The original character (left) switched with *Mario* (right)

(Source: IGN.com)

One aspect modified by Nintendo concerned the actual gameplay. In fact, Nintendo created an entirely differ-

ent game from the original. Nintendo was also very concerned about presenting any inappropriate content in

their games. After the ESRB was put in place, the company was very keen on maintaining a family-friendly im-

age. In the 1994 book *The Parents' Guide to Video Games,* Steven and Janet Schwartz present the entire list

that Nintendo of America had pledged to follow (see Appendix 3). In his blog *Legends of Localization*, experi-

enced localizer Clyde Mandelin (2018) gives some examples corresponding to each of these ten rules, in order

to show the extent to which Nintendo took the rules seriously (Figure 24).

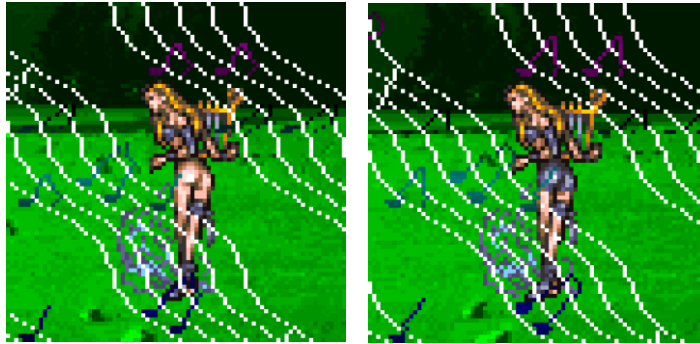**Figure 24: The Japanese (left) and the American (right) versions of the character Siren in *Final Fantasy VI.* The American version does away with the partial nudity seen in the Japanese version, as per one of NoA's rules**

(Source: LegendsOfLocalization.com)

During the nineties, it was still very difficult for gamers to have access to original versions of translated/localized games. It not only required users to have an actual game cartridge, but also to have a whole different console due to the fact that Japanese versions of a game were region-locked and could only be played with a console released in that region. As different games and consoles became more readily available all over the world, and as video game journalism rapidly developed, the differences between games became more and more visible, and in some cases even sparked controversies.

5.2 *Fire Emblem Fates*: Social Censorship?

The *Fire Emblem* franchise has a very long publishing history in Japan from 1990 to today, and has been popular in the West for a long time as well. However, not every single chapter of the game is available in the United States. The games are developed by the Japanese studio Intelligent Systems and published by Nintendo. Their first game published in 1990 was called *Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon and the Blade of Light*. As of today, there are sixteen games in the entire series, including thirteen unique games, and three remakes of previous titles (Minotti 2015). The first six titles were only released for use on Nintendo's original consoles in Japan. The 2003 eponymous *Fire Emblem* game was the first game to be published in the United States at the same time as the Japanese version. The older titles were localized and released in the virtual Nintendo store in the late

2000s, and to this day, every single *Fire Emblem* game is available to play in English. The following chart (Figure 25) shows the release dates for the games of the series in both the United States and Japan.

Game Title	Japanese Release Date	American release date	Original Console
Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon and the Blade of Light	April 20, 1990	N/A	Famicom
Fire Emblem: Gaiden	March 14, 1992	N/A	Famicom
Fire Emblem: Mystery of the Emblem	January 21, 1994	N/A	Super Famicom
Fire Emblem: Geneology of the Holy War	May 14, 1996	N/A	Super Famicom
Fire Emblem: Thracia 776	September 1, 1999	N/A	Super Famicom
Fire Emblem: The Binding Blade	March 29, 2002	N/A	Game Boy Advance
Fire Emblem	April 25, 2003	November 3, 2003	Game Boy Advance
The Sacred Stones	October 7, 2004	May 23, 2005	Game Boy Advance
Fire |Emblem: Path of Ra-diance	April 20, 2005	October 17, 2005	GameCube
Fire Emblem: Radiant Dawn	February 22, 2007	November 11, 2007	Wii
Fire Emblem Awakening	April 19, 2012	February 4, 2013	Nintendo 3DS
Fire Emblem Fates	June 25, 2015	February 19, 2016	Nintendo 3DS
Fire Emblem: Three Houses	July 26, 2019	July 26, 2019	

Figure 25: A list of all unique Fire Emblem games. This list does not include remakes of earlier titles

(Source : NintendoLife.com)

The game series takes place in fictional, fantastical kingdoms visually and stylistically close to the Medieval or Renaissance periods. The games usually feature a very intricate story line. The combat in the game takes place on a grid, across which characters have to move strategically in order to deal with obstacles and enemies (Figure 26). Two gameplay components have come to define the series. The first is the concept of "permanent death" (or *permadeath*): if a character in the game is defeated in battle, they are permanently

removed from that particular game. In the third entry in the series, *Fire Emblem: Mystery of the Emblem*, the developers gave players the choice of playing either with the "classic" rule of permadeath, or with more "casual" rules, where a fallen character can recover after a defeat. The second is the relationship dynamic between characters. Throughout the games, the player can create teams with a large cast of characters, and group them together into a single fighting unit. In so doing, the characters can benefit from accumulated stats in battle. Their personal bond grows, and the player can unlock "support conversations" between the characters, revealing their growing affection for each other. By unlocking those conversations, they increase their "relationship rank" (Figure 27). This rank works with letter grades: from *D*, the lowest rank, all the way through to *A*, but the ultimate rank is represented by the letter *S.* Once a male and female character's relationship rank reaches the *S* level, they can fall in love and have a child together, and that child inherits shared stats and can be played in a later part of the game (IGN 2018). The first game to adopt this mechanism was *Fire Emblem: Geneology of the Holy War* (East 2013).

Figure 26: The grid system in *Fire Emblem Awakening*

(Source: PCMag.com)

Figure 27: Figure: A relationship from *Fire Emblem Awakening*

(Source: Pastemagazine.com)

The *Fire Emblem* games are very successful in the United States and in Japan. However, they too have been subject to some recent controversies involving the localization process. The main issue concerns the 2015 game *Fire Emblem Fates*. The first version of the game was released in Japan on June 25, 2015; the American version was released eight months later on February 19, 2016. On June 23, 2015, Nintendo told video game website *Polygon* that the *Fates* game would feature same-sex marriage as a relationship option for the first time in its history (McWhertor 2015). However, in July 2015, an article on the gaming website *Kotaku* reported that certain other outlets were criticizing a particular storyline from the upcoming game. Some Japanese screenshots made their way to the image sharing website Tumblr, with the community translations leading some to believe that the game had some questionable content (Ashcraft 2015). One of the relationship "paths" open to players is that with a side character called Soleil. In the game the main character is called Kamui by default, and the player can choose if Kamui is male or female. Soleil mentions to the male Kamui that she is attracted to women, but she tends to faint around attractive ones. In order to help her get over this issue, the male Kamui reveals to Soleil that he has put a drug in her drink without her knowledge. The effect of that drug is to make others see you as their gender opposite. Therefore, Soleil would see the male Kamui as a female. They use this "potion" a few times over the course of the game in order to help, but ultimately the male Kamui and Soleil fall in love. Many have identified this awkward turn of events as a form of gay conversion therapy (Skipper 2015). In January of 2016, Nintendo announced that this content was to be removed from the

American and European releases of the game (Walton 2016). In the final English version, all references to drug-

ging were removed, and the content was instead changed so that Kamui blindfolded Soleil, and asked her to

pretend that he was a girl.

Another controversy came to light before the release of the American version. In January 2016, Nathan

Grayson wrote an article on *Kotaku* called "The Other Ways Nintendo is Changing the English Version of *Fire*

Emblem Fates," in which he detailed another change in the American game: the relationship dynamic had

been modified to include a mini game where the characters could use the Nintendo 3DS' stylus and caress the

face of the character (Frank and Robinson 2016). These features brought out a completely new kind of interac-

tion not only for the characters, but also for the players themselves. In the American versions, the mini-game

was taken out entirely, and replaced by a simple animation (Frank and Robinson 2016). While the end result

was still the same, the players no longer had the opportunity to play the mini-game. In the Kotaku article, Nin-

tendo justified this kind of change: "Making changes is not unusual when we localize games, and we have in-

deed made changes in these games. When we localize a game, we do so in order to make it appropriate for

that particular territory. All our choices were made from that point of view." (Grayson 2016). This modification

was decried as censorship by many gamers. A petition was even started on the website Change.org in order to

revert the changes. This petition is now closed, but it gathered 8 224 signatures (Change.org). Nintendo did not

bring any further change to their decision, and the game that was released in February 2016 contains all the

changes mentioned above. These changes gave localization the kind of mainstream attention it does not nor-

mally receive. Many articles were published in different news outlets discussing these modifications, and dis-

cussions exploring different themes like cultural relativity and localization were prevalent.

At the same time, it is interesting to note the ratings that each game had in their respective markets.

The Japanese version was released first and received a C rating from CERO. This means that the game is in-

tended for an audience that is at least fifteen years old. It is the highest rating of the *Fire Emblem* franchise. In

the United States, the ESRB does not have a comparable rating: The "T" rating (for "teens") means a game is

intended for players older than thirteen, but the next rating, "M" (for "mature"), is intended for players

seventeen years of age or more. The game already had a higher than average age rating in Japan. It would not be surprising to learn that Nintendo would have made the changes to the game in order to retain a more favourable rating, especially given its past history of changing content in order to make its games as family-friendly and inoffensive as possible. A look at the descriptions of the age ratings shows that the "T" rating mentions "suggestive themes" and "minimal" violent or disturbing content; on the other hand, the "M" rating describes "intense" violence, sexual content, and strong language. The difference is very pronounced, and Nintendo surely would not have wanted to give the impression that *Fire Emblem Fates* was fundamentally different from the rest of the franchise. The actions and rules of the ratings board are one tangible example of "structuring and structured structure" mechanisms at work. Video game companies like Nintendo abide by them in order to avoid any controversy.

These are examples of *social censorship*, but ones which have had very little impact on the final product. In the first case, concerns over inappropriate content were brought forward before the English version was released. It is difficult to prove if Nintendo had already planned to change that content before media outlets brought these issues to light, but pointing it out did bring localization into the discussion. The content was not entirely removed, but rather was modified in order to make it more appropriate for American audiences. The original content was at the core of the controversy, and not its localization. However, in the second issue, a playable element of the game was removed, thereby affecting the gameplay. Many fans of the series considered this unfair, preferring to play the game in its original format. However, closer analysis of the final product shows that this change is ultimately superficial. Relationships between characters are part of the core gameplay of *Fire Emblem,* and Nintendo decided not to remove it or even change it a bit: instead, they removed a feature that only became accessible to players once they reach the *S* rank in a relationship. All the benefits from the shared stats remained intact. In that aspect, the minigame is but a part of the outer shell of the game. As for the first case, the relationship path with Soleil remained intact, and the player could still benefit from reaching *S* rank with Soleil. In the context of video game localization, Minako O'Hagan stresses that the *skopos* of localizing video games is to create a product that is equally as enjoyable in the target culture as it is in the

original culture (2009, 148) and principally one of "putting pleasure first" (2010). Despite the changes and the

controversies that ensued in this case, the game does remain enjoyable. Nintendo reported in 2017 that the

games went on to sell 1.1 million units overseas, that is in America, Europe, and Australia (Nintendo 2017).

Conclusion

In this work, and by bridging the domains of game studies and translation studies, I set out to explore the adaptation of cultural elements in video game localization and how it relates to notions of censorship. Within translation studies, much of the focus on censorship has examined translation production in the literary and audiovisual (subtitling) spheres. It has been studied much less in localization and video game localization. The state of video game localization research is vibrant, with much promise for the future. As examined by Mangiron (2017; 2018), it positions itself in relation not only to traditional translation studies, but also to the sector of audiovisual translation, accessibility studies (e.g. visual or aural-impaired), reception (or user-centered) studies, the areas of quality, technology, and training, and more recently, collaborative and crowdsourced translation practices. The boundaries between localization practices in the industry and perceptions by users of localized games, including notions of censorship, have begun to be examined through the lens of translation theory also (Mandiberg 2017).

While much of the earlier writing on localization was descriptive and focused, somewhat prescriptively, on the technical aspects that accompanied linguistic and cultural adaptation of content, the very recent and more expanded scope of culture and diverse cultural practices provides a valuable bridge between video game studies research and video game localization research in translation studies. The approach in this thesis has sought to envision video game localization through a complex cultural whole. In other words, cultural adaptation entails translating language and culture in accordance with linguistic, cultural regions of the world, which connects implicitly with the global video game culture heavily mediated through digital media technologies, social media, and the growing importance of video game journalism. Within this broader, global, cultural sphere, there are both similarities and differences between gamers and gaming practices, influenced by their own respective social practices and cultural traditions. The GamerGate incident has served as a source of inspiration and means by which to explore notions of censorship in video game localization and video games more generally. My perceived gap of an adequate term to deal with certain types of censorship in the current video

game localization research led to my proposing one of *social censorship*, with potential links to the sociological

approaches in translation studies inspired by the social theorist Pierre Bourdieu.

During my assessment of the video game localization landscape, it became important to look more

carefully at the growth of the video game industry from its very beginnings, in order to understand the shifts in

power that have occurred since the eighties. Even though initially video games were quite restricted to the

sphere of American university research, the production and distribution of video games quickly grew into a

multi-million-dollar industry. While the industry crash in 1983 led many to believe that video games were noth-

ing but a passing fad, the critical role played by Nintendo revitalized the U.S. markets with the influx of its prod-

ucts. The control over the market in subsequent years by Japanese companies had many ramifications, not only

for video game localization but also for users-consumers of localized video games; to this day Nintendo still

holds a large percentage of the market. These market dynamics have influenced the way video game localiza-

tion emerged in practice; indeed, localization became a central element for the success of a game. It became

clear to me that video game localization could not be investigated solely in terms of its linguistic, cultural, and

technical adaptation. Beyond this basic level of adaptation, video game cultural content had to be approached

as well from a perspective of gameplay. This structure of rules at the heart of any video game is something that

is rooted within the culture that developed it, and is something that can be extracted, analyzed, and even ma-

nipulated or modified and transferred. Games are likened to performance, one that stems from a specific cul-

ture, with its own attributes.

Finally, the contribution of video game journalism also seemed critical to include, not only when seek-

ing to understand practices and policies of censorship, but also when observing the power dynamics that occur

among video game developers, promoters, localizers, and gamers. Since the expansion of video games into the

realm of the general public and into our everyday lives, a number of specialized publications have grown to

cover the video game industry. The spectrum of coverage has grown considerably, starting off as industry in-

sider advice, to tips on how to beat opponents in a game, to regular news coverage on the development and

emergence of new games. With the advent of Web 2.0, the barriers between developers, the media that cover

stories and other issues, and users have increasingly blurred, integrating and blending into the contemporary

participatory culture at large. The rise of esports is a testament to these phenomena. The video game playing

public also commands a great deal of influence over a game's content. It is within these news outlets that sto-

ries and information about localization emerge. Since the beginning, localization was neither a topic heavily

explored in mainstream media nor often discussed even within the video game industry. Localization issues

have now gained the interest of the video game public. During news coverage on video game development,

stories emerge about how a specific Japanese game will be adapted, for example in the United States, and a

part of the public will oppose, even reject, certain localization decisions, calling them out as censorship. What it

often fails to realize is that video game content is not modified on a whim. Several factors intervene to have

influence over what is deemed appropriate. The ratings systems constitute one of these factors. A video game

ratings board manifests as part of a "structuring and structured structure" whereby the content gets reviewed

and modified according to need. These kinds of structuring mechanisms intersect with the objective of transla-

tional *skopos*: the purpose of adapting a game by localization so that it is as much fun to play as the original

version. (O'Hagan and Mangiron 2014) If the core gameplay of a video game is valid both for the original lan-

guage gamer and for the gamer of a localized game, then its localization will have been a success. In other

words, it can exist as "global" and "local" at the same time. The case of Nintendo, one of the oldest video game

companies around, was presented as a way to depict some of the points made. Nintendo has the benefit of

being a video game developer as well as a console manufacturer. Since their emergence in the eighties, they

have been through many different phases of technological advancement. Understanding how they conduct

content control and localization is insightful. Controversy as to localization choices now seems to be a part of

the video game user landscape, exemplified by Nintendo's adaptation of the game *Fire Emblem Fates*. At first

glance, while it would seem that the company was engaged in censorship, and decried by many fans as such,

upon inspection very little from the core gameplay was actually changed. This case seems to show elements of

social censorship, where perception of censorship by members of the gamer public is structured and

structuring, increasingly enabled and facilitated through social media technologies in a socialized sphere that is culturally and historically rooted.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Code of the Comics Association of America, inc.

CODE OF THE COMICS MAGAZINE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA, INC.

Adopted October 26, 1954

PREAMBLE

The comic-book medium, having come of age on the American cultural scene, must measure up to its responsibilities.

Constantly improving techniques and higher standards go hand in hand with these responsibilities.

To make a positive contribution to contemporary life, the industry must seek new areas for developing sound, wholesome entertainment. The people responsible for writing, drawing, printing, publishing, and selling comic books have done a commendable job in the past, and have been striving toward this goal.

Their record of progress and continuing improvement compares favorably with other media in the communications industry. An outstanding example is the development of comic books as a unique and effective tool for instruction and education. Comic books have also made their contribution in the field of letters and criticism of contemporary life.

In keeping with the American tradition, the members of this industry will and must continue to work together in the future.

In the same tradition, members of the industry must see to it that gains made in this medium are not lost and that violations of standards of good taste, which might tend toward corruption of the comic book as an instructive and wholesome form of entertainment, will be eliminated.

Therefore, the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc. has adopted this code, and placed strong powers of enforcement in the hands of an independent code authority.

Further, members of the association have endorsed the purpose and spirit of this code as a vital instrument to the growth of the industry.

To this end, they have pledged themselves to conscientiously adhere to its principles and to abide by all decisions based on the code made by the administrator.

They are confident that this positive and forthright statement will provide an effective bulwark for the protection and enhancement of the American reading public, and that it will become a landmark in the history of self-regulation for the entire communications industry.

CODE FOR EDITORIAL MATTER

General standards—Part A

(1) Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals.

(2) No comics shall explicitly present the unique details and methods of a crime.

(3) Policemen, judges, Government officials and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority.

(4) If crime is depicted it shall be as a sordid and unpleasant activity.

(5) Criminals shall not be presented so as to be rendered glamorous or to occupy a position which creates a desire for emulation.

(6) In every instance good shall triumph over evil and the criminal punished for his misdeeds.

(7) Scenes of excessive violence shall be prohibited. Scenes of brutal torture, excessive and unnecessary knife and gunplay, physical agony, gory and gruesome crime shall be eliminated.

(8) No unique or unusual methods of concealing weapons shall be shown.

(9) Instances of law-enforcement officers dying as a result of a criminal's activities should be discouraged.

(10) The crime of kidnapping shall never be portrayed in any detail, nor shall any profit accrue to the abductor or kidnaper. The criminal or the kidnaper must be punished in every case.

(11) The letters of the word "crime" on a comics-magazine cover shall never be appreciably greater in dimension than the other words contained in the title. The word "crime" shall never appear alone on a cover.

(12) Restraint in the use of the word "crime" in titles or subtitles shall be exercised.

General standards—Part B

(1) No comic magazine shall use the word horror or terror in its title.

(2) All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, masochism shall not be permitted.

(3) All lurid, unsavory, gruesome illustrations shall be eliminated.

(4) Inclusion of stories dealing with evil shall be used or shall be published only where the intent is to illustrate a moral issue and in no case shall evil be presented alluringly, nor so as to injure the sensibilities of the reader.

(5) Scenes dealing with, or instruments associated with walking dead, torture, vampires and vampirism, ghouls, cannibalism, and werewolfism are prohibited.

General standards—Part C

All elements or techniques not specifically mentioned herein, but which are contrary to the spirit and intent of the code, and are considered violations of good taste or decency, shall be prohibited.

Dialogue

(1) Profanity, obscenity, smut, vulgarity, or words or symbols which have acquired undesirable meanings are forbidden.

(2) Special precautions to avoid references to physical afflictions or deformities shall be taken.

(3) Although slang and colloquialisms are acceptable, excessive use should be discouraged and, wherever possible, good grammar shall be employed.

Religion

(1) Ridicule or attack on any religious or racial group is never permissible.

Costume

(1) Nudity in any form is prohibited, as is indecent or undue exposure.

(2) Suggestive and salacious illustration or suggestive posture is unacceptable.

(3) All characters shall be depicted in dress reasonably acceptable to society.

(4) Females shall be drawn realistically without exaggeration of any physical qualities.

NOTE.—It should be recognized that all prohibitions dealing with costume, dialog, or artwork applies as specifically to the cover of a comic magazine as they do to the contents.

Marriage and sex

(1) Divorce shall not be treated humorously nor represented as desirable.

(2) Illicit sex relations are neither to be hinted at nor portrayed. Violent love scenes as well as sexual abnormalities are unacceptable.

(3) Respect for parents, the moral code, and for honorable behavior shall be fostered. A sympathetic understanding of the problems of love is not a license for morbid distortion.

(4) The treatment of live-romance stories shall emphasize the value of the home and the sanctity of marriage.

(5) Passion or romantic interest shall never be treated in such a way as to stimulate the lower and baser emotions.

(6) Seduction and rape shall never be shown or suggested.

(7) Sex perversion or any inference to same is strictly forbidden.

CODE FOR ADVERTISING MATTER

These regulations are applicable to all magazines published by members of the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc. Good taste shall be the guiding principle in the acceptance of advertising.

(1) Liquor and tobacco advertising is not acceptable.

(2) Advertisement of sex or sex instruction books are unacceptable.

(3) The sale of picture postcards, "pinups," "art studies," or any other reproduction of nude or seminude figures is prohibited.

(4) Advertising for the sale of knives or realistic gun facsimiles is prohibited.

(5) Advertising for the sale of fireworks is prohibited.

(6) Advertising dealing with the sale of gambling equipment or printed matter dealing with gambling shall not be accepted.

(7) Nudity with meretricious purpose and salacious postures shall not be permitted in the advertising of any product; clothed figures shall never be presented in such a way as to be offensive or contrary to good taste or morals.

(8) To the best of his ability, each publisher shall ascertain that all statements made in advertisements conform to fact and avoid misrepresentation.

(9) Advertisement of medical, health, or toiletry products of questionable nature are to be rejected. Advertisements for medical, health, or toiletry products endorsed by the American Medical Association, or the American Dental Association, shall be deemed acceptable if they conform with all other conditions of the Advertising Code.

Source: Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency, Interim Report, 1955 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1955).

Appendix 2: Update on the Aesthetic Changes Coming With Y3S4

On November 2nd, we shared an article detailing the Aesthetic Changes coming with Operation Wind Bastion. Since then, our community and players have raised concerns.

We have spent the last week working on solutions and have decided that we will be reverting all aesthetic changes.

WHEN ARE THESE CHANGES BEING REVERTED IN THE INTERNATIONAL VERSION?

We will begin reverting these changes alongside the launch of Wind Bastion so no player is impacted; we ask you to be patient if some elements remain. We will carefully remove them all to the best of our ability considering the short timeframe and with the lowest impact on the season's launch date and our build stability.

IS THERE ANY IMPACT ON THE NEXT SEASON?

Our intentions are to keep any impact to a minimum, though such changes may lead to a season delay and/or some instability as our testing and debug times are shortened. We will monitor our tests closely and keep you updated on any new development on the matter via our Rainbow Six Twitter.

WHY ARE YOU CHANGING STRATEGY NOW?

We have been following the conversation with our community closely over the past couple of weeks, alongside regular discussions with our internal Ubisoft team, and we want to ensure that the experience for all our players, especially those that have been with us from the beginning, remains as true to the original artistic intent as possible.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT AS A CURRENT PLAYER BASED IN ASIA?

Current players in Asian territories can continue enjoying the same game as the other players.

We will be sure to keep you informed, as updates progress. In the meantime, we are excited to unveil Operation Wind Bastion on the Test Server later today, and cannot wait to introduce players to Kaid, Nomad, the new Fortress map and more in Year Three Season Four.

Source: https://rainbow6.ubisoft.com/siege/en-us/news/152-340339-16/update-on-the-aesthetic-changes-coming-with-y3s4

Appendix 3: Nintendo of America's Video Game Content Guidelines

Nintendo of America's priority is to deliver high quality video game entertainment for our customers. When those customers are children, parental involvement in their game playing is recommended. Nintendo is concerned that our products do not contain material that society as a whole deems unacceptable.

Consequently, since 1988 we have consistently tested the content of all games developed for Nintendo systems against our evolving game standards. As our business has matured, we have adapted our guidelines to meet the concerns of the members of our target age group and their parents. Although we realize that definitions of social, cultural and political views are highly subjective, we will continue to provide consumers with entertainment that reflects the acceptable norms of society.

The following Game Content Guidelines are presented for assistance in the development of authorized game paks (i.e., both Nintendo and licensee game paks) by defining the type of content and themes inconsistent with Nintendo's corporate and marketing philosophy. Although exceptions may be made to preserve the content of a game, Nintendo will not approve games for the NES, Game Boy or Super NES systems (i.e., audio-visual work, packaging, and instruction manuals) which:

• include sexually suggestive or explicit content including rape and/or nudity; [1]
• contain language or depiction which specifically denigrates members of either sex; [2]
• depict random, gratuitous, and/or excessive violence; [3]
• depict graphic illustration of death; [4]
• depict domestic violence and/or abuse; [5]
• depict excessive force in a sports game beyond what is inherent in actual contact sports; [6]
• reflect ethnic, religious, nationalistic, or sexual stereotypes of language; this includes symbols that are related to any type of racial, religious, nationalistic, or ethnic group, such as crosses, pentagrams, God, Gods (Roman mythological gods are acceptable), Satan, hell, Buddha; [7]
• use profanity or obscenity in any form or incorporate language or gestures that could be offensive by prevailing public standards and tastes; [8]
• incorporate or encourage the use of illegal drugs, smoking materials, and/or alcohol (Nintendo does not allow a beer or cigarette ad to be placed on an arena, stadium or playing field wall, or fence in a sports game); [9]
• include subliminal political messages or overt political statements [10]