

# Japanese Video Game Localization

**A Case Study of Sony's *Siren* Series**

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Throughout this thesis, I will make constant use of the revised Hepburn system for the romanization of Japanese terms. Names of persons are given in the Japanese style (family name first, followed by the given name). Exceptions to this are cases where I refer to English-language publications by Japanese authors. For these, I follow the romanization and stating of the name as they are given in the original publications.

# 1 Introduction

Japanese video games are immensely popular all over the world, and localization is the primary tool which makes these games accessible to players outside of Japan. While parts of this thesis will deal in particular with what constitutes localization in detail, it shall suffice for now to tentatively describe localization as the process of altering a product in order to make it accessible for users outside the original domestic market it was developed for in the first place. Such a process may involve a multitude of people and work stages, which definitely holds true in the case of video games. Present-day console games often contain hours of video footage, as well as thousands of displayed and uttered lines of text, which help to transform a set of rules into an emotional experience.

Games, regardless of their form, are media of entertainment. Foreign audiences may have different expectations on how they wish to be entertained. They most certainly have their own canon of cultural references which they will put into relation to any content of the game. Ultimately, it is also the audience that decides whether a game is fun or not. Localization has to take all this into account, and subsequently the localization process can involve the adding, removal or replacement of elements of the product. While aiming to preserve the same functions and content of the original, the inevitable consequence is that a localized product is a product of its own.

## 1.1 Personal Background and Motivation

My first exposure to the world of video game localization happened in late 2002, when I had just begun my year-long Working Holiday stay in Tōkyō. In search of a job, I happened to come upon a job advertisement of the Yokohama-based video game company Koei. The company was looking for native speakers of major European languages, including German. The job offered was that of *gêmusofto no monitâ*.<sup>1</sup> The position could be briefly described as that of a linguistic tester. Games that had already been published in Japan (and often in the US as well) were being prepared for release in European markets. The German translation of game texts was provided by professional

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<sup>1</sup> "Gamesoft monitor" (ゲームソフトのモニター).

translators from Germany and inserted into the game code at the Yokohama office by Koei's programmers. Once burned onto a DVD, I would play the game and make sure that there were no typos, punctuation errors and unsuitable expressions to be seen on the screen, or undistinguishable language heard through the speakers. I reported all errors to my superior, who in turn assigned them to the respective staff responsible for fixing the problem. Later on, as I gained some experience, I started checking the translated texts before they were inserted into the game code, thus avoiding errors before they could enter the program. I also listened to recorded voiceover files and gave feedback about their quality, which sometimes led to a re-recording of certain lines. I remember a particular instant in which I worked together with a sound engineer. We were editing a particular recorded line of German dialogue that sounded fine in the beginning and the end, but the middle part was awkward somehow. Our solution was to remove the problematic part altogether, and to cut up and rearrange the rest of the sentence. While not understanding a single word of German, the Japanese sound engineer would listen to the instructions that I gave in Japanese, edit the sound file, and play it back to me. The result made sense and was grammatically correct, although it was not the same sentence anymore the voice actor had originally recorded in the studio. We edited the line until we found that it sounded well enough, and went on to the next one.

While I had always had an interest in translation, this glimpse into the world of the localization industry also sparked my curiosity of the greater dynamics at work in the field of global cultural production. During my studies at the University of Helsinki, I wrote a short paper and did a presentation on video game localization in an undergraduate course on Japanese popular culture. During that time, I first got to know some theories of global dissemination by such scholars as Koichi Iwabuchi (2002) and Arjun Appadurai (1996). While these publications do not specifically make mention of localization as such, they made me ponder the wider implications of distributing products that carry within them signs of cultural production, sometimes even values or moral assumptions. I also attended a course entitled "Localization Basics" at the multilingual communication programme (MonaKo) at the Department of General Linguistics of the University of Helsinki. Here, the approach to localization was almost purely technical and practical, as students were taught such things as replacing the English text strings of a music player software with Finnish language strings. Realizing

that there was no real research of the interdependencies of the technical and the cultural to be found yet, I sensed the potential for future academic endeavors.

Meanwhile, I was preparing to write my bachelor's thesis, which focused on the relationship of fictional and ludic (i.e. play) elements within the video game *Shenmû Isshō Yokosuka* (シエンムー 一章 横須賀), published by Sega in 1999 for the Dreamcast console. Through writing this thesis, I gained an understanding of the complexity and the multitude of the factors that make up such works as *Shenmû*. I mainly utilized the *cybertext* theory formulated by Espen Aarseth (1997), a framework for the study of texts that, by nature of their medium, require methods of traversing texts that differ quite significantly from traditional reading. In addition, I applied Jesper Juul's *classic game model* in order to discuss video games according to the elements they are comprised of (Juul 2005). I still find both theories to be extremely useful for the research of certain elements and dimensions of video games, and hence will introduce the theories more thoroughly in the upcoming chapters.

Having gained a deeper insight of what constitutes a video game both as a *medium* and as a *game*, I felt that I could return to the idea of conducting a game localization study. In my seminar paper, I conducted a case study of the Japanese Playstation2 video game *Sairen 2* and its localized version *Forbidden Siren 2* as published for the territories of Australia and New Zealand (both developed by Sony Computer Entertainment in 2006).<sup>2</sup> *Siren 2* is a game that draws heavily on elements of Japanese popular culture, especially in its fictional dimension such as its setting or its characters. The fiction of game worlds is inseparably linked to the rules of the game, which sometimes blurs the border between the two. Localization, in this regard, has to preserve both purposes, which can often be as difficult for the localizer to figure out as it is thought-inspiring for the researcher.

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<sup>2</sup> A slightly different version of this paper will be published in 2010 as a book chapter (Szurawitzki 2010, forthcoming).

## 1.2 About this Thesis

For this master's thesis, I will continue in the same manner and conduct a study of all the three games that have been published so far in the *Sairen* series, along with specific localized versions for each of the games. The games in question thus are:

- *Sairen* (サイレン) and *Forbidden Siren* (version as sold in Scandinavia), Playstation2
- *Sairen 2* (サイレン2) and *Forbidden Siren 2* (version as sold in Australia and New Zealand), Playstation2
- *Sairen Nyûtoransurêshon* (サイレン ニュートランスレーション) and *Siren Blood Curse* (version as sold in Scandinavia), Playstation3

The games will be introduced in detail in chapter 2. I shall only briefly state here that it is the game world setting of the series, portraying a dark, rural Japan with mysteries deep-rooted in the past, that distinctly characterize the *Sairen* games as something appealing to Japanese players in particular. Studying all three games is a reasonable limitation for this master's thesis, because it leaves sufficient room for analyzing not only the games themselves, but also their relation to each other as part of the trilogy. There is a certain evolution not only in the playable game content, but also in the way the player is positioned through the language output and display, which is different in each of the localized versions of the *Sairen* games. This again may or may not be linked to the way in which the games are globally distributed. Worthy points of discussion are thus plenty.

The main focus of the research will be on what can be seen on the screen, heard through the speakers, and experienced by the player. In this thesis, I will often compare instances of the original Japanese version with instances of the localized version. In order to analyze these empirical observations further, I will mainly utilize Anthony Pym's theories as expressed in his publication *The Moving Text. Localization, Translation, and Distribution* (Pym 2004). While Pym developed his theories with software applications in mind that serve quite different purposes than entertainment, his ideas are indeed suitable for exploring video games from a localization angle, because they put different agents of the localization process into relation. I also had the privilege

to meet and interview selected video game professionals in Tōkyō and Ōsaka during September and October 2009. Their insight contributed greatly to my knowledge, which I hope to reflect through the discussions in this thesis.

### **1.2.1 Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this master's thesis shall be to explore and describe both textual and non-textual elements of video game localization of Japanese video games that draw much of their inspiration from Japanese popular culture, history and society, and therefore pose various challenges when being adapted for non-Japanese players. The games of the *Sairen* series serve as the particular objects of the study. I regard the phenomenon of video game localization as a holistic entity from the very start, and set out to discuss certain parts of this system in detail. Applying qualitative research methods, the thesis shall in the end constitute an in-depth study of the *Sairen* series that discusses issues that are peculiar especially to video games, i.e. issues that cannot be found as such in any other medium.

The research questions that will form the core of my study are the following:

- How do the games' rules influence localization?

Rules are essential for all kinds of games. In the *Sairen* games, rules are often presented as part of the game world, such as when characters explain rules to the player. I shall analyze the role of localization in the context of this double-layered function. Further, I will investigate some technical aspects of the games, such as menu screens and selecting a language output mode. Although these are not rules in the sense that they have to be followed to overcome the challenges in the game, they regulate important features of the game that shape the player's perception of the game world, and hence are well worth being discussed.

- How do the games' fictional elements influence localization?

The *Sairen* games are situated in a particular world setting, in which there are characters, geographical boundaries, as well as a sense of both immediate time and a broader historical context. Amongst other means, this game world is being constructed through the use of texts (written and spoken), cut scenes (i.e. video

clips) and of course the interactive environment. These may be perceived quite differently among Japanese players and players outside of Japan, thus making them a worthy subject of discussion. The *Sairen* games also have the quite peculiar trademark of referencing existing websites that cannot be accessed straight from the games themselves, but require the player to use the internet. I shall elaborate on the resulting reception situations from a localization angle.

### 1.3 Prior Research

Video game studies in general, or digital games studies as some prefer to call it, is still a rather new field of academic research.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it can already claim a canon of dedicated academic journals, and many book-length publications about video game-related subjects are available. Frans Mäyrä, Professor of Hypermedia at the Department of Information Studies and Interactive Media of the University of Tampere, gives a good overview of the available resources a student of game studies can utilize (Mäyrä 2008, 5-10), some of which I found useful myself in earlier studies, such as *Game Studies, The International Journal of Computer Game Research* ([www.gamestudies.org](http://www.gamestudies.org)). Books about video games range from general presentations of the medium (Newman 2004) to studies about very particular aspects of games. An example of the latter is *Video Game Spaces. Image, Play, and Structure in 3D Worlds* by Michael Nitsche (2008), in which the author elaborates on how the player interprets the game worlds he engages in.

It should be stated here that games have been studied long before the dawn of video games, and much of this research remains valuable today. To just give one example, *Homo Ludens: Vom Ursprung der Kultur im Spiel*, a classic book of game studies written by Johan Huizinga and first published in 1939, is commonly referred to by both Mäyrä (2008, 1) and Juul (2005, 30).

As for studies of localization in general, there are some scientific publications available. The most prominent publishing house in this respect seems to be the John Benjamins Publishing Company, based in Amsterdam and Philadelphia. I found much useful

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<sup>3</sup> I will introduce definitions and appropriations of the terms *video game* and *digital game* in the following chapters.

information in certain chapters of *Perspectives on Localization* (Dunne 2006), a book published as part of the American Translators Association Scholarly Monograph Series, and in *Computers and Translation. A Translator's Guide* (Somers 2003). These publications introduce localization mainly through accounts of localization industry professionals, who naturally focus much on the technical and economic aspects of the phenomenon. Other researchers, such as Michael Cronin, ponder the role of translation in the present age of information technology and rapid changes, mentioning localization in this context (Cronin 2003). Further, there are some publications written by and aimed at localization industry professionals. Since they often define and explain important terms, these publications often give good points of entry for researchers as well, and hence are well-worth studying. An example of this is *The Globalization Industry Primer* (Ray 2007), published by LISA, the Localization Industry Standards Association ([www.lisa.org](http://www.lisa.org)).

A few scientific articles have been published on video game localization, and some scholars, most notably Dr. Minako O'Hagan of Dublin City University and Miguel Bernal Merrino of Roehampton University, can be considered specialists of the domain (I will refer to their publications in more detail later on). Video game localization is also briefly mentioned in *The Routledge Companion to Translation Studies* (Chiaro 153f., in Munday 2008), which proves that there is a rising awareness of the subject within the realm of translation studies. However, to my knowledge there is no academic publication that discusses video game localization beyond the length of approximately twenty pages. It is my wish that this thesis succeeds in enlarging the canon of video game localization studies by presenting inspiring examples and discussions of phenomena yet to be uncovered from the *Sairen* series. Further, taking into account the global popularity of Japanese video games, they have been studied astoundingly little in the context of Japanese studies. I also hope that this thesis can stand out as one example as to how Japanese popular culture studies can be expanded to another generation of researchers- one that does not remember any time without video games.

#### **1.4 Delimitations and Self-reflection**

Having stated what this thesis can achieve within the limits of the chosen subject, I also shall present some thoughts on what my research cannot do, or simply is not. Given the fact that this paper is a case study of a particular franchise of games, the detailed findings may not be applicable for every video game ever made. This, however, I do not consider a weak point, but accept as a reality of the video game phenomenon. There is an innumerable amount of video games available for consumers and researchers alike, all of which can be studied if only the correct angle is found. In showing how to approach the games in a way that is suitable for the research at hand is arguably one of the most valuable things a thesis like this can achieve. Game research is a very complex craft, which is exactly why it holds so much fascination for me. I hope to convey some of my enthusiasm to my readers through my writing.

I enjoy playing games, and I consider this a precondition for conducting proper research of games. As I will explain later, playing games for research purposes can be a tedious task that has little to do with entertainment anymore. This hands-on approach holds its own fascination for me, however. Researching both original and localized versions puts me in a position few people naturally find themselves in, which is why I think this thesis can bring forth new insights for everyone interested in Japanese popular culture studies, game studies, and localization studies alike.

## 2 Material

In this chapter, I will present in detail the primary and some of the secondary source material that I will use in this study. Needless to say, the *Sairen* games constitute the main objects of attention in this respect. The release dates and distribution territories are presented first, followed by a brief summarization of the game content and a short discussion of applicable genre classifications for the games. Additionally, there is an explanation of how the player actually inputs commands to control the events on the screen, which readers not all that familiar with video games in general may find helpful. Further, I will present some books and websites that facilitate the research of the *Sairen* games. Among them are so-called walkthrough guides (完全攻略, *kanzen kôryaku*) that show in concise form how a game can be cleared, and, more importantly, ‘analysis books’ (解析本, *kaisekihon*). Latter contain much detailed information on the design process of the game, which make them valuable tools for understanding some of the more refined nuances of the game world better. Further, there is an overview of the interviewing process that I used to gather first-hand information from selected game localization professionals, together with an explanation of how these findings will be used in this thesis.

Since these objects of study and sources of information all contribute to this thesis in their own particular way, they will each be presented in separate sections of this chapter. In this way, the importance and purpose of each category of material is highlighted. The distinct ways in which the individual materials were obtained further lay proof to the fact that video game research is a fascinating domain, and Japanese games in particular bear much ground for further research activities. Without further elaborating on this, it is now time to introduce the *Sairen* games, and to get started with the research.

## 2.1 The *Sairen* Games

### 2.1.1 Release Dates and Distribution

The table below shows an overview of the games that have so far been released in the *Sairen* series in Japan and the territories of Australia/New Zealand, Europe and North America, stating the release dates as they are shown on the regional Playstation.com websites of the respective territories.<sup>4</sup> The games used in this study are shown in bold letters.

Japan	Australia/New Zealand	Europe	North America
<b><i>Sairen</i></b> (サイレン) November 6, 2003 (re-released November, 3 2004 & November 2, 2005)	<b><i>Forbidden Siren</i></b> March 10, 2004	<b><i>Forbidden Siren</i></b> March 12, 2004	<i>Siren</i> April 2004
<b><i>Sairen 2</i></b> (サイレン 2) February 9, 2006 (re-released April 26, 2007)	<b><i>Forbidden Siren 2</i></b> June 28, 2006	<b><i>Forbidden Siren 2</i></b> June 23, 2006	No release
<b><i>Sairen Nyūtoransurêshon</i></b> (サイレン ニュートランスレーション) July 24, 2008 ( <b>Blu-ray disc version</b> ) December 11, 2008 (downloadable version) July 9, 2009 (re-release)	<i>Siren Blood Curse</i> October 29, 2008 (Blu-ray disc version) downloadable version available, release date not specified	<b><i>Siren Blood Curse</i></b> October 29, 2008 ( <b>Blu-ray disc version</b> ) downloadable version available, release date not specified	<i>Siren Blood Curse</i> July 2008 downloadable version only

As for the localized versions in use, *Forbidden Siren* and *Siren Blood Curse* are the official versions as sold in Scandinavia. Packaging and manual for these versions contain Swedish, Danish, Finnish and Norwegian text. All on-screen text and audio is either in Japanese or English (a more detailed discussion of this will follow in the analysis chapter). Other European versions exist for other European countries, the

<sup>4</sup> Playstation.com (Australia) a-c, Playstation.com (Japan) a-h, Playstation.com (UK) a-c, Playstation.com (US) a-b. There are some localized versions Asian versions of the *Sairen* games, but these fall out of the bounds of this study.

release date being the same for all. *Forbidden Siren 2*, while being the official version for Australia and New Zealand, can be played on European Playstation2 consoles without technical restrictions (which it cannot in North America). While the content of the European and Australia/New Zealand versions is the same except for the packaging and manual, retail sales of these versions are restricted to the respective regions. However, the copy used in this study was purchased through online auction reseller Ebay, which is a perfectly normal way of obtaining such a game. European players thus can play games published in Australia/New Zealand without technical restrictions, and vice versa.

The original games are developed by *project Siren*, a development studio of Sony Computer Entertainment Japan (SCEJ), and published in Japan by its parent-company Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. (SCEI). In the North American territories, the games are published by Sony Computer Entertainment America (SCEA), while publishing in Australia/New Zealand and Europe is handled by Sony Computer Entertainment Europe (SCEE) (Ibid.).

*Sairen* and *Sairen 2* are Playstation2 games, while *Sairen Nyûtoransurêshon* is a Playstation3 game. Playstation2 games are sold as DVDs, Playstation3 games are sold either as Blu-ray discs, downloadable versions from the Playstation Store, or both (latter being the case for *Sairen Nyûtoransurêshon*).<sup>5</sup> The content is the same for both purchasing methods.

### **2.1.2 Game Content**

The purpose of this section is to generally introduce the games *Sairen*, *Sairen 2* and *Sairen Nyûtoransurêshon* by summarizing the game events in context. It is not necessary to distinguish between original and localized versions here, because the general content is the same for both, and special cases of interest are being analyzed later on. Ironically, the following accounts could perfectly resemble summaries of stories, since nothing in them hints at the fact that there are strict rules that need to be followed in order to make these events unfold. This circumstance already shows with what degree of complexity this thesis will have to deal with in the analysis. It also

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<sup>5</sup> The Playstation Store is an online store from which users can purchase and download games or game content straight onto their Playstation3 console. The download is saved onto the console's own hard disk.

emphasizes the need to define the terms ‘game’ and ‘video game’ better before a serious analysis can be undertaken. In respect to the rules, I will briefly explain how the player controls the characters on the screen and otherwise interacts with the game. Since these are very similar in all of the *Sairen* games, they do not have to be discussed separately for each game here. Particular instances worth of special attention are being dealt with in the analysis chapter.

### ***Sairen***

Set in the remote Japanese village of Hanyûdamura (羽生蛇村) around the year 2003, *Sairen* shows villagers performing human sacrifices in honor of a deity called Datatsushi (墮辰子), a practice that has been performed for hundreds of years. When an outsider to the village interrupts the ritual, a chaotic struggle for survival involving both villagers and outsiders ensues. People start turning into the zombie-like *Shibito* (死人) once they touch the mysterious red water of the river that runs through the village. The sound of the siren that lends its name to the title is Datatsushi’s call to the villagers to seek the water. Over the course of three days, the mysteries of the village are being uncovered. All this takes place in Hanyûdamura as well as some kind of ‘spirit world’ (異界, *ikai*), an eerily distorted version of the village. Eventually, it turns out that the village has been cursed ever since the villagers ate a deity during times of famine in the year 684. In the end, Datatsushi is being defeated by one of the outsiders (a high school student) who has acquired a magic weapon.

### ***Sairen 2***

Situated on the remote Japanese island of Yamijima (夜見島), two chains of events occurring in intersecting timelines (1976 and 2005) form the backdrop of the setting. Due to some mysterious incident involving a total blackout, the island lost all its inhabitants in 1976. 29 years later, several people return to or accidentally end up on the island for different reasons. While uncovering the mystery of the island, they have to fight off undead incarnations of former villagers. In the course of events, a water deity called Botai (母胎, translated in *Forbidden Siren 2* as ‘Mother’) imprisoned on the island is released and eventually defeated.

### *Sairen Nyûtoransurêshon*

In 2007, an American television crew visits the deserted Japanese village of Hanyûdamura to shoot an episode for a popular science series, since there have been rumors of paranormal activity in the area. They coincidentally witness a ritual of human sacrifice, which is being interrupted by an American high school student living in Japan, who had been lured to the village by a stranger. All this comes to great surprise to the Americans, because there haven't been any inhabitants in the village since much of it was buried in a landslide in 1976. Against the backdrop of parallel worlds and timelines, the mystery of the village slowly unfolds. It turns out that the events are all part of a scheme to make a loop of time repeat itself over and over again. Eventually, the high school student manages to defeat a deity called Kaiko (蚕子), after which he succeeds to break out from the loop.

Although the overview of the events given here is very brief, the similarities in which all three games are framed into a narrative are quite obvious. There is a dark ritual deep-rooted in the past; there are outsiders who disturb this sacred ritual, and therefore evoke a deity's anger. There is an ensuing struggle between good and evil, during which good prevails in the end. Although the ending scenes in the games hint at evil things to come, or even show some people trapped in a spirit world, the challenges posed by the game are overcome. While the player succeeds and thus experiences something positive, the portrayed fiction is still somewhat menacing. This in turn evokes a sense of tension and suspense, adding to the emotional intensity of the experience.

The *Sairen* games can all be characterized as '3D action adventure games', a term that is widely in use in the video game industry, related media publications and among players. Although such a genre classification is somewhat arbitrary, it still is useful to describe the games in simple terms. Wolf has pointed out that games should be classified based on the nature of their interactivity rather than their iconography (Wolf 2001, as cited by Mäyrä 2008, 70). Following this notion, the *Sairen* games all consist of a combination of combat, strategic evasion and puzzle solving, hence rendering the 'action adventure' description suitable. The '3D' refers to the graphical representation of the game world and the possible movement within it. The default camera view in all the *Sairen* games shows the controllable character with its back turned to the camera,

and horizontal movement in all directions is possible within the set spatial boundaries. However, games like *Sairen* can be, and in fact often are, labeled ‘survival horror games’ or even more specifically ‘Japanese survival horror games’. While ‘survival’ hints at the fact that a good part of the challenges in the game may involve things as hiding and escaping, ‘horror’ denotes the importance of the fictional content. It is not only in games that the term ‘Japanese horror’ is used, however. In fact, it is prominently brought up in discussions of horror movies such *Ringu* (Balmain 2006). For Balmain, ‘Japanese’ denotes a set of characteristics that are identified as defining features of creating fear. These include despair, isolation, a sense of emptiness and a menacing architecture or landscape. Some of these can be found in the *Sairen* games as well, which makes the ‘Japanese horror’ classification plausible.

### **2.1.3 Game Controls**

In this section I will explain how the player interacts with the action on the screen. While in the analysis chapter more will be said about why the player runs, opens doors, engages in battle, or switches the subtitles on or off, it should be of some help to explain how the player actually executes such seemingly complex actions.

In general, actions on the Playstation consoles are being input via the so-called DualShock 2 controller (Playstation2) and the DualShock 3 controller (Playstation3), the default accessories for controlling the hardware. They are both very similar in their nature, and an analysis of their differences is not relevant for this study. There are two sticks on the controller, one used for movement of the character (which is on foot except for a few special cases), the other one for camera movement. Moving the camera angle can help the player to spot something without having to move. Since the playable landscapes in the games often contain slopes, stairs, bridges and the like, carefully looking into all directions is constantly necessary. The controllers are further equipped with a multitude of buttons. It is with these buttons that the player can give such diverse commands as listed above. Some of these commands are always accessible, such as switching the flashlight on or off, or crouching. Others become only available in specific situations. For example, when approaching a door, an icon on the screen indicates that pressing a particular button will open the door. Certain actions, such as the use of a sniper rifle, require the use of both sticks and buttons- the former for

zooming in on the target, the latter for shooting. The same is true for one of the trademark features of the *Sairen* games, the so-called *shikaijaku* (視界ジャック, translated in the English versions as 'Sightjack'). The player has the ability to view through the eyes of other characters, friend and foe alike. In doing so, one is for example able to tell behind which corner an enemy lurks, or where a companion is hiding.

Some buttons can be used to bring up a map or screens with other relevant information, such as a display of the items the player is carrying at the moment. Screens like these are generally referred to as in-game menus. Opening such as menu screen actually pauses the game. Not only actions concerning the immediate challenge at hand can be performed here, but also such things as quitting the game or restarting the level. Thus, there is no significant difference in which the player controls in-game actions or actions relating to the real-world context of the player- both are being executed by stick movement and button pressing.

## 2.2 Analysis Books and Walkthrough Guides

As mentioned in the introductory part of this chapter, so-called analysis books (*kaisekihon*, 解析本) and walkthrough guides (完全攻略, *kanzen kôryaku*) will be used for this study. Before introducing the publications in particular, the difference between the two types of publications should be pointed out, which in turn will clarify the reason of their utilization for this study.

Analysis books are aimed at fans of a game who have already cleared the game and wish to indulge themselves further in the game experience by reading more about the game characters, the story in the game, or the inspirations the creators used for designing the particular game world. The books may also feature some interviews with the creators, pictures of both staff and game assets taken during the development process, and sometimes even *manga* or short stories that are related to the game in some way. Walkthrough guides, on the other hand, contain information that is relevant for players who are still actively playing the game. Offering step-by-step instructions, walkthrough guides help players to quickly overcome difficulties in the game. When being unable to overcome certain challenges in games, the player might be frustrated after a while and

seek help. This is what walkthrough guides are meant for in the main. Additionally, they often give information on how to obtain all available items or how to unlock some hidden secrets of the game. These clues are valuable for players who wish to discover everything the designers put into the game. Walkthrough guides usually do not put this information in relation to anything else but the immediate game progress. Hence, while analysis books enrich and enlarge the fictional elements of the game experience, walkthrough guides are instructions on how to beat (and sometimes bend) the rules of a game.

The analysis books used in this study are *Sairen Maniakkusu Sairen Kôshiki Kanzen Kaisekihon* (サイレンマニアックス サイレン公式完全解析本, Akiyama and Kobayashi 2004) and *Sairen 2 Maniakkusu Sairen 2 Kôshiki Kanzen Kaisekihon* (サイレン2マニアックス サイレン2公式完全解析本, Akiyama and Kobayashi 2007), for *Sairen* and *Sairen 2*, respectively.<sup>6</sup> Both resemble each other very much, introducing all playable and non-playable characters of the game, the locations of the game world, so-called archive items that appear throughout the game (more on these later in the analysis chapter), staff interviews and *manga* especially created by the famous artist Itô Junji (伊藤潤二), best known for his *Tomie* (富江) books (Itô 1987). The analysis books are very helpful for this thesis because they present a lot of useful information about the fictional background of the game. For example, there are some instances in the game that are actually parodies of existing TV shows or magazines. The analysis books give additional information about the original objects of parody.

Walkthrough guides are useful for this study as well, but in a quite different way than the analysis books are. One cannot extract much meaning from the information found in walkthrough guides beyond that of their immediate purpose- instruction. However, at times this is exactly what is needed when playing a game for research purposes. To access certain areas of the game, the game has to be *played*, i.e. challenges have to be overcome and conditions have to be met.<sup>7</sup> Walkthrough guides help to achieve the objective at hand in the fastest possible way. Printed walkthrough guides used in this study are *Siren Official Strategy Guide* (Androvich 2004), *Sairen Kôshiki Pâfekuto*

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<sup>6</sup> There is no analysis book publication for *Sairen Nyûtoransurêshon*.

<sup>7</sup> I will further elaborate on playing games for research purposes in chapter 3.

*Gaidobukku* (サイレン 公式パーフェクトガイドブック, Hamamura 2004) and *Sairen Nyûtoransurêshon Kôshiki Gaidobukku* (サイレン ニュートランスレション 公式ガイドブック, Hamamura 2008). Further, Internet walkthrough guides written by fans of the *Sairen* series also useful means for getting the needed help. To mention one example, the gaming website Gamefaqs.com has a walkthrough for *Siren: Blood Curse* (Gamefaqs.com 2009). In this study, there will hardly be any need in citing the information written in these walkthrough guides. Neither are they are of much importance from a localization perspective. Nevertheless, they are important materials that facilitate a smooth research process, and thus they deserve to be introduced here, not least because the purpose of such guides might not be known to readers who usually do not play games.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.3 Research Interviews

Interviews are extremely valuable research tools, both in quantitative and qualitative studies. They offer the chance to record the experiences and opinions of individuals that are at the core of the research subject at hand, and thus may shed new light on the matter. I was awarded a travel grant by the Institute of Asian and African Studies of the University of Helsinki in order to conduct interviews for this thesis, and thus was able to meet a number of game localization professionals in Tôkyô and Ôsaka during September and October 2009. In this section, I will briefly describe the process of setting up the interviews, the conditions under which the interviews were conducted, and how the findings were recorded. Use of the findings will be made throughout the later chapters in sections where it seems appropriate to do so.

#### 2.3.1 Arranging the Interviews

While I was contemplating which companies or individuals to contact for the interviews, I had not yet decided the exact direction I would like to choose in my master's thesis. Knowing that it would be in the realm of video game localization, I decided that my

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<sup>8</sup> On an interesting note, walkthrough guides appear to be a business significant enough to be mentioned in the 2009 CESA Games White Paper, an annual publication by the Computer Entertainment Supplier's Association ( 社団法人コンピュータエンターテインメント協会, Shadanhôjin Konpyûta Entâteinmento Kyôkai, Wada 2009, 195). The paper lists figures on a wide range of topics related to the Japanese video game industry. The publication shows the top ten selling walkthrough guides of 2008. No exact sales figures are given here, however.

interview partners could be anyone associated with this kind of work, regardless of job position or specialization. From my previous work as a linguistic game tester, I knew two people I could get in touch with, and eventually succeeded in meeting one of them. I also conducted a thorough Internet search for video game localization companies based in Japan, and contacted six of them by email (see Appendix A for the text of this contact mail). While I never received an answer to three of the mails, and one of the contacted declined to be interviewed, two people agreed to meet me. One contact even helped me arrange an additional interview when I was already in Japan. Unfortunately, one scheduled interview had to be cancelled because of unforeseeable changes in the interviewee's work schedule. However, the person in question was kind enough to answer a couple of my questions by email. Altogether, I conducted three face-to-face interviews (one including two people) and one email interview.

### **2.3.2 Conducting the Interviews and Use of Data**

I met the interviewees either at their company premises or at restaurants. Having worked at game and IT companies in the past, I anticipated that some companies might have strict visitor policies in place that make it impossible for outsiders to enter their offices. Therefore, already in the initial contact mail I had offered the interviewees to meet them either at their offices or at any other place of their choosing. Some found the latter option more appealing, at least one explicitly for the reason stated above.

For designing the interviews, I found lots of useful advice in the book *Qualitative Interviewing. The Art of Hearing Data*, written by Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin of Northern Illinois University (Rubin and Rubin 1995). I designed nineteen mostly open-ended questions to engage my interview partners in a discussion about video game localization (see Appendix B for a list of these questions). The interviews were designed to last sixty minutes. I mostly refrained from asking about particular games, but rather tried to keep the focus on a more general level to uncover aspects of game localization that are applicable on a broader scale. My interview partners often illustrated their views with examples of games that they had worked on. I took written notes during the interviews, and will make use of the findings both in the Theory & Methods as well as the Analysis chapter. Although I do not have any need to mention

the interviewees' names or that of their companies in this thesis, they all gave me their permission to do so.

In addition to the use of these primary sources, I will make use of certain theories that will give me a point of entry for this study, as well as subsequent guidance to complete it. These theories are at the core of the next chapter.

### 3 Methods and Theories

In this chapter, I will introduce the methods and theories that serve as the base for the analysis of the *Sairen* games in the next chapter. The most important ideas for this study are taken from the book *The Moving Text. Localization, Translation, and Distribution* by Anthony Pym, Professor titular at Universitat Rovira I Virgili in Tarragona, Spain (Pym 2004). While his theories were not originally developed with video games in mind, but rather with software that falls out of the realm of entertainment, they still can be appropriated for a study such as this in a very beneficial way. Their greatest merit is that they provide a framework to study localization issues from an angle that includes the final user of the software, and more specifically the perception situation this user is exposed to. As a researcher, I can use this framework to comparatively analyze instances in the *Sairen* games and their localized versions, and then interpret the findings in a context that juxtaposes end user, content, developer and distributor. Further, I can potentially expand some of Pym's ideas to adapt them particularly to the research of video games.

Before embarking onto this journey, the meaning of the term 'video game' for this study must be discussed first. This is necessary because, from a localization perspective, video games possess unique features that make them a very complex entity both in terms of development and research. In order to facilitate an appropriation of the term, I will introduce the ideas formulated by MIT researcher Jesper Juul in his book *Half-real. Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds* (Juul 2005), as well as those of Espen Aarseth, currently Associate Professor at the Center for Computer Game Research at the IT University of Copenhagen, as presented in his book *Cybertext. Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (Aarseth 1997). The former discusses the relation of rules and fiction in video games, and thus is also useful for discussing issues of rule and fiction in localization. The latter explains how different sequences in games, both interactive and non-interactive, are connected, and thus highlights the particularity of video games as a medium. In this context, I will start with an appropriation of the term 'video game', and also introduce the method of playing video games for research

purposes. At the end of this chapter, I will further discuss some of the research that focuses specifically on video game localization.

### 3.1 Espen Aarseth's *Cybertext* Theory and the Method of Playing Games

An often-cited definition for the term 'video game' is that by Gonzalo Frasca, which includes "any forms of computer-based entertainment software, either textual or image-based, using any electronic platforms such as personal computers or consoles and involving one or multiple players in a physical or networked environment" (Frasca 2001, 4). Mäyrä uses the term 'digital games' in a similar manner, but explicitly includes more devices, such as mobile phones, into his definition (Mäyrä 2008, 12). Both definitions are intentionally broad, and thus applicable in many different contexts. As the previous chapter already introduced the necessary hardware and software to play the game on a purely technical level, the aforementioned definitions do not produce much new information about the nature of the *Sairen* games at this point anymore. Since I have chosen a specific set of games for this case study, I consider it necessary for this study to explain what building blocks make up the game experience, i.e. what medium I am dealing with in particular. What I will state in the following paragraphs does by no means apply to every video game that could be included in Frasca's or Mäyrä's definitions, but it does not have to, either. The purpose is to familiarize the reader with the degree of complexity video game analysis can reach, and further to describe the process of playing games for research purposes.

Espen Aarseth introduced the term 'ergodic' literature to describe categories of text that require the reader to exert more than trivial effort- such as turning pages- to traverse a text (Aarseth 1997, 1).<sup>9</sup> Such literature has existed for a long time. For example, Aarseth mentions the *I Ching*, also known as *The Book of Changes*, as one work that fits into this category (Ibid., 9-10, Wilhelm 1989).<sup>10</sup> Probably the most defining feature of ergodic literature is the fact that the medium itself regulates what can be read, and more, importantly, what cannot be read. While the reader has choices what to read next, this also implies that there is no way back once this choice has been taken. An ergodic text

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<sup>9</sup> The term 'ergodic' incorporates the Greek words 'ergon' (work) and 'hodos' (path) (Ibid.).

<sup>10</sup> The *I Ching* is a text from around the time of the Western Chou dynasty (1122-770 BC). Underlying a random principle, different text passages are combined to give an answer to a priorly formulated question.

is a path that renders previously available sections inaccessible as the reader traverses it. This, as Aarseth puts it, does not imply ambiguity, but an absence of possibility (Aarseth 1997, 3). Since the reader has the freedom of choice, and thus the power to construct the unfolding narrative, it can be argued that the reader is not a reader at all (Ibid., 4). Readers are usually limited to interpretation, but in ergodic texts, intervention is possible and even necessary. This in turn empowers the reader to construct a narrative by building sections that are connected in larger sequences, which makes reading part of a communicative process. A reader of an ergodic text can therefore be more accurately described as a user, or in a video game context, a player. Aarseth coins the term 'cybertext' to describe the wide range of possible textualities where the functional differences among the mechanical parts play a defining role in determining the aesthetic process (Ibid., 22).<sup>11</sup> The video games of the *Sairen* series can very well be included into this category, because video games contain a multitude of instances where the medium regulates what happens and what does not. To give an example, I will now give a brief and general description of how the *Sairen* games can be cleared from start to end, and how information necessary for the analysis can be extracted later on.

All the *Sairen* games are split up into many single playable episodes. In each episode, the player controls one character (in some rare cases, two). The characters are predetermined for each episode, as are the locations and the main objectives. Once the player reaches the main objective, the game is saved and the player can try to clear the next episode. The saved game is what allows the player to return to the game later, but it only permits the returning player to begin the available episodes from their starting point, never from within an episode. For this thesis, this means that even after having cleared all episodes at least once, I cannot directly access all the information from within these episodes. In practice, I have to load a saved game, play the particular episode, and take notes and transcripts while I am playing. There are instances of automatic saving called 'checkpoints' in most episodes, but these appear only *within* the episode itself, and thus cannot be loaded from the start. Further, in order for them to appear, they require me to progress to a certain point in the episode in the first place.

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<sup>11</sup> 'Aesthetic process' here denotes the order of events that make up the unfolding narrative. Each event gives the reader a limited number of possibilities to progress through the text, and each chosen path also makes other routes inaccessible to the reader.

Once a new checkpoint replaces an older one, I cannot go back to the state of affairs as it was before I reached the checkpoint. If I want to go back, the only choice I have is to start the episode from the very beginning again. The method is the same in both original and localized versions.

There is one major reason that makes the *Sairen* games a very suitable object of study for the research presented here. While giving the player the illusion that it is possible to influence the series of events, eventually the outcome is predetermined. When starting an episode, the initial conditions are always the same for each player, regardless of *how* the preceding episode was cleared. What is decisive is *that* it was cleared. For example, one player might prefer open combat with enemies, while another might choose evasion to get around them. In the end, when the players reach the main objective, the next episode is the same for both. When playing the games for this thesis, it is thus rather easy to reproduce the same outcomes in original and localized versions without paying too much attention to additional conditions that may change as the game progresses. In other types of games, such as role-playing games, where a player can control many playable game characters at the same time, a study such as this might have to be conducted in a very different way. The same can be said for games that involve more than one player. In this sense, locating and extracting data from the *Sairen* game for this study might not have much to do with *playing* at all. It is a matter of purposefully structuring one large entity into smaller ones that can be accessed quickly when the need arises.

The concept of ergodic texts is very helpful in understanding the connection of sequences that must be passed in order to progress through a video game. The *Sairen* games, much like almost every other video game these days, have a lot of additional content on top of this as well. The function may vary for each category of content. There may be for example mini-games (short and simple games that can be accessed from inside or outside the main game), or the game soundtrack may become available for listening in the main menu. Video games thus consist of many different building blocks. In order to better understand their significance, I shall discuss now what a game is in the first place. Only then it will become fully possible to appropriate the term ‘video game’ for this study.

### 3.2 Jesper Juul's Classic Game Model

In his book *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*, Jesper Juul proposes a definition for the term 'game' that shall be applicable to every game regardless of its medium (Juul 2005, 23). This definition takes into account the system set up by the rules of the game, the relation between the game and its player, and the relation between playing the game and the rest of the world (Ibid., 28). The definition builds on prior research conducted by Huizinga (1939/1950), Caillois (1961), Avedon and Sutton-Smith (1971) and Salen and Zimmermann (2004), amongst others, all of which have formulated their own definition of what constitutes a game. Juul concludes that there are six defining features, namely that

“[a] game is a rule based system (1) with a variable and quantifiable outcome (2), where different outcomes are assigned different values (3), the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome (4), the player feels emotionally attached to the outcome (5), and the consequences of the activity are negotiable (6)” (Juul 2005, 23, numbers added by me).

Applying this definition to the *Sairen* games, the following information is gained:

(1) There are lots of rules in the games. Some are explicitly stated on screen or in the manual (e.g. which functions are assigned to each button), others are embedded in the game world (e.g. each location has clear boundaries that cannot be crossed).

(2) & (3) The outcome for each episode is either purely positive (main objective reached) or purely negative (death or capture). While this is 'variable', it is so in the most minimal sense the word can be applied in.

(4) The player must exert effort to reach the main objective. This effort is either guided through explicit statements (e.g. the main objective for the episode is stated) or through more subtle suggestions (e.g. every object that can be picked up comes in useful at a later point in the game).

(5) The player must naturally be motivated to progress through the events. The motivation is provided through challenges. These are in turn part of a certain context in the game world. An example of a challenge could be to sneak past a sniper without

being seen. In terms of rules, this might sound as simple as pressing the crouching button, then steering the character over a narrow stretch of territory that falls out the field of vision of the sniper. Only expressed like that, it does not sound very motivating.

(6) The amount of possible consequences is innumerable. It might be as little as getting rid of the *Sairen* games forever after a few minutes of frustrated playing, or as much as writing a thesis like this. It is the experience gained from the game that now influences something that the player might do in the real world, i.e. after he is not a player anymore.

It is not surprising that we can locate all the features mentioned by Juul in the *Sairen* games. After all, this is what he set out to do in the first place- to present a definition for games regardless of their medium. What is striking, however, is how strongly linked to fictional elements many of the features seem to be. Explicit rules are sometimes necessary, but they are not fun. They are only to be understood and applied for something that is fun, and much of what is fun in *Sairen* is the fictional world itself. In the introductory chapter, I made a clear separation of the research questions. How do the games' rules influence localization, I asked, and how do the games' fictional elements influence it? It should be clear now to the reader that these two questions are rather overlapping than clear-cut. Nevertheless, they still apply, because of this very reason. Very few video games today come without fictional elements, so it is fair to say that fiction has become an integral part of games.

As to the use of the term 'video game' in this study, I shall therefore also include many elements into it that are not mentioned in the classic game model. This is necessary, because the medium is crucial to the unique offerings of a video game. These generally include all interactive and non-interactive features of a game, and explicitly every kind of fictional content that may signify anything within the game world or beyond it.

Having said that, it is now necessary to discuss and appropriate the term 'localization' and some related concepts in the context of video games. I will do so in the following section.

### 3.3 Anthony Pym: Localization

#### 3.3.1 Localization and Locale

In the introduction, I presented a tentative definition of localization. I described it as the process of altering a product in order to make it accessible for users outside the original domestic market it was developed for in the first place. This, however, is a rather drastic simplification of the phenomenon, as there are many dimensions to it, which I shall consider in the following discussion. First, let me point out here that the term ‘localization’ is often mentioned in connection with the term ‘globalization’. *The Globalization Industry Primer*, published by the Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA) follows this pattern (Ray 2007). So did the preceding publication four years earlier, which was then titled *The Localization Industry Primer* (Lommel 2003). The interchangeability of terms produces a kind of vagueness that calls for clarification if these terms are to be used in a study such as this. ‘Globalization’ has grown to signify such a wide range of concepts that I conceive it best to disregard it for the rest of this thesis, as it bears the danger of confusing the reader more than to generate meaningful discourse. As for ‘localization’, I shall now discuss the term, building mainly on the work of Anthony Pym.

As Bert Esselink explains in his book *A Practical Guide to Localization*, the term ‘localization’ is derived from the word ‘locale’ (Esselink 2000, 1). ‘Locale’ originally refers to a small area or vicinity, but nowadays the term is applied mainly in a technical context. Here, ‘locale’ denotes the set of parameters that defines the language and a number of settings that are displayed in the user interface of a software application. A simple example of such a setting is the way in which the time is displayed on a screen. ‘16:00’ in the Finnish locale could correspond to ‘4:00 pm’ in the American locale. In Esselink’s terms, ‘localization’, is “the translation and adaptation of a software or web product, which includes the software application itself and all related product documentation” (Ibid.). This definition reflects the specific needs of the software industry, and it is applicable within these limits. The definition given in the *Globalization Primer* is broader and very similar to the tentative one I proposed earlier, as it defines localization as “the process of modifying products or services to account

for differences in distinct markets” (Ray 2007, 11). Many more lines of work can be included into this definition, such as dubbing a movie into another language. What is peculiar about these definitions is of how little importance the user of the localized product seems to be. Researching localization from this angle would mean focusing on everything that is done before the product reaches the end-user. Is analyzing localized products then, as to be conducted for this thesis, the study of localization anymore, or is it something else that must be pinpointed first?

As with all definitions, it is a matter of wording. Anthony Pym describes localization as “the adaptation of a text (like a software program) to suit a particular reception situation” (Pym 2004, 1). The inclusion of the reception situation into the definition makes the end-user de facto part of the system, because without receiver, there is no reception. Pym adapts the term ‘locale’ for this reception situation (Ibid., 2). One of the defining features of the locale is that it influences localization before it even takes place. The anticipated purchasing power and size of the locale reflect directly onto the effort put into localization. ‘Locale’, as defined by Pym, is a very useful term to discuss the implication of reception situations, because as a result of an applied process, a locale has a specific receiver. It can do without such problematic terms such as ‘culture’ and ‘language’, which often prove to be either too broad or too narrow categories to discuss the impact of localization. For this thesis, the term ‘locale’ in Pym’s sense is as important as the term ‘localization’, because I am dealing mostly with the localized products, less with the actual processes applied in the localization of the game. Nevertheless, there is no locale without localization. In this context, the classification of this particular research in the realm of localization studies is still applicable.

Pym’s notion that a software program is a text is a rather insufficient description of the medium. Most software programs display text, but as such text is only one of many elements that make up a software program. This is especially true for video games, which are after all software programs as well. However, text is an important element of video games, and usually there is a lot of text translation as part of localization. In this sense, translation is subordinate to localization as texts are to software programs. As Pym writes, the localization industry tends to reduce the significance of translation to “perhaps the least interesting aspect of localization” (Ibid., 51). Someone in need of

only a translation needs the help of a translator, not that of a localizer. When asking my interview partners to define ‘localization’ in their own words, some began by stating that is “not just translation”, and then went on to explain the finer nuances of their work. What exactly is translation then in the localization context?

Pym lists some of the underlying assumptions that (industrial) localization practice has about translation. Apart from the aforementioned notion that translation is inferior in significance to other parts of localization, it is the following two points that I wish to discuss here (Ibid., 54):

- “Translation operates on the basis of equivalence (whereas the adaptive aspects of localization need not)”.
- “Internationalization has as one of its prime tasks the efficient assurance of equivalence in translation”.

To understand what is said here, the terms ‘equivalence’ and ‘internationalization’ must be introduced first. ‘Internationalization’ is a software development practice that takes into account that localization of the software will take place at some later point. Thus, the idea is to technically prepare the software in such way that the workload for localization is minimized (Ray 2007, 17). A practical example of such a practice is designing text boxes large enough in advance to hold additional text, because the translated text of the target language might require more space to be displayed than the text of the source language. Pym has a more critical notion of this concept, describing it as the process that “minimally covers the processes whereby the culture-specific features are taken out of a text in order to minimize the problems of later distributing that text into a series of locales” (Pym 2004, 31). Internationalization is thus a form of standardization at the expense of cultural references, which paves the ground for equivalence, i.e. the replacement of a text string with another text string, both devoid of any connotation beyond their immediate instructional purpose.

Equivalence, however, is a complicated term. Pym points out that as a result of new technologies, texts have become much less static, which eventually led to the passing of structuralism in translation theory, in which equivalence was a major concept (Ibid., 54). As the term implies, equivalence puts two elements on equal grounds. While this sounds

reasonable for technical terms, more ambiguous texts might not respond as easily to the same notion. A literal translation may actually become something that is less of an ‘equivalent’ of the original, but rather a text of its own. What about the texts of the *Sairen* games? Can or should equivalence be expected here, and how does internationalization fit into the picture?

First of all, there are many different text categories in the *Sairen* games, some of which can be loosely classified as technical, others as fictional. Text messages for saving or loading games are of the type that fit best into the pattern for internationalization, since they are full of technical jargon. On the other hand, item descriptions as found in the game do not differ much from those found in literary works. The most interesting cases are naturally the ones in which the division becomes blurry. In these texts, a certain meaning must respond exactly to the original meaning (e.g. the explanation of a rule), while other parts of the text may be transformed more freely (e.g. the terminology used to explain the rule). There is some kind of equivalence required here, but this has not necessarily anything to do with internationalization. In regard to the variety of texts that can be found in games, translation in game localization might not be so uninteresting and unimportant after all. For the upcoming analysis this means that when analyzing text translation, the function of the text must be determined first, and only then be seen in relation to its content.

### **3.3.2 Distribution and Resistance**

As mentioned before, internationalization is directly linked to distribution. In industry terms, distribution can be described as the controlled effort to make products available in markets where they are expected to sell well. This requires knowledge of the prevailing consumer preferences in these markets, which in turn might require an altering, i.e. a localization of the product. Pym, still referring to texts, sees distribution as “where the text goes, and only then the words in the text” (Ibid., 12). In other words, distribution specifically concerns the whole product being shipped to the consumer, and not the smaller parts that constitute it. Thus, localization (and translation) are a series of responses to things that have been distributed or are to be distributed (Ibid., 14-15). Distribution is therefore a precondition for localization. Locales are also defined through distribution, because they “do not exist until they show themselves by resisting

some process of distribution. (...) (T)he limits of a locale can be defined *as the points where texts have been (intralingually or interlingually) localized*. That is, if a text can adequately be moved without localization, there is no new locale” (Ibid., 22, italics by Pym).

Further, Pym proposes two complementary approaches of examining the relation between distribution and localization. The first is a textual one (localization as representation- *what* came from where and why), the second is concerned with extra-textual issues (localization as response- where, why and *to whom* the localization is going). They are complementary in the sense that the findings of the extra-textual approach can potentially subvert the findings of the textual approach, because they can put the observations of the textual approach into a larger framework that also considers the motivations behind the text production (Ibid., 23).

When considering the *Sairen* games in this context, it must again be pointed out here that they are not texts, but that texts are a part of them. Using Pym’s pattern, distribution can then mean “where the games go, and only then the contents of the game”. In the previous chapter, I included a table into which territories the games have been distributed. At that point, this was a mere introduction of the objects of study, but now I would like to discuss a peculiarity of this factual data.

No localized version of *Sairen 2* was ever released in North America, the largest video game market in the world. There have been English language versions for Europe and Australia/New Zealand, however. The reason for not releasing a version in North America is most likely that *Siren*, the localized version of the first *Sairen* game, did not sell well in the US. There has been criticism of the poor quality of the localization of the game. Edge, one of the most influential video game magazines in Europe, not only mentions the badly executed voice acting as a flaw in the localization, but also points out a very different factor: “(I)f a game is going to rely on the faces of actual Japanese actors, and is staged in a believably authentic Japanese village, even the most Oscar-worthy English dialogue track is going to suffer from culture clash” (Edge, April 2008, 100). Audiences have normative expectations that are formed through their usual habits of playing, viewing, reading, listening etc. A Japanese actor performing badly in English is disturbing, but obviously the Oscar-worthy performance would seem as

estranging to some. Whether one likes to feed on the old cliché of the Japanese with their bad English and thick accents, or whether one chooses to take a more sophisticated approach- someone in the audience will always be unsatisfied. The audience judges the original through the filter of localization.

This case is an example of how Pym's textual and extra-textual approaches to localization in relation to distribution complement each other. Localized content is moving content, and the moving of content happens for a reason. While moving, the content may encounter obstacles. Localization is the practice that attempts to anticipate and avoid anything that blocks the path of distribution in order to produce a smooth reception situation. This implies that things do not always go as anticipated. Indeed, it is resistance that best shows the extent of localization.

When I asked my interview partners how they can tell whether a localization they performed on a game was received well, one made an interesting point: "If people only talk about how good or bad the *game* is, and do not mention localization at all, then the game seems natural", meaning that any specific mention of localization is usually made only when there are instances that are problematic. Resistance to localization becomes easily apparent. The aforementioned example of the Edge article illustrated this point, but is this a general phenomenon, or something that has to be discussed on a case-by-case basis? Where does resistance start?

Pym introduces his notions of resistance in the context of distribution by stating that "some texts are felt to belong more in some cultural locations than others", and localization intentionally or unintentionally propagates central cultural values into locales (Pym 2004, 111-112). Texts that seem to be tied to a particular cultural setting because of their content therefore resist a smooth distribution. Again, this idea need not be restricted to texts alone, but can be extended to include all kinds of different forms of audiovisual representation that are being distributed, games being one of them. But, more importantly, the whole idea of resistance touches on a more fundamental aspect of localization, namely it calls into question that it is a positive practice to begin with. Contents may make smooth distribution difficult, but what does this actually mean for the receivers, being at the very end of the distribution chain? Do they actually desire

what localization offers them? To answer this, I shall discuss how localization and distribution treat the receiver.

Mangiron and O'Hagan state that the localizer's responsibility is to "produce a version that will allow the players to experience the game as if it were originally developed in their own language and provide enjoyment equivalent to that felt by the players of the original version" (Mangiron and O'Hagan 2006). One of my interview partners stated that many people that play localized games do not know that these games are originally developed in Japan, which shows that Mangiron's and O'Hagan's view seems to be shared by many localizers in the game industry. It also underlines a point made by Pym: localization often separates the receiver from the language in which the product is developed, and therefore positions the receiver (Pym 2004, 47). Localization cultivates difference, and more important, it creates a certain asymmetry between the original and the localized product. Users are not being treated in the same way. This does not necessarily mean that these users are being served according to their own wishes, though. The receiver reacts to what is being offered, and the more 'complete' the localization, i.e. the more devoid of foreign cultural connotations it is, the less consternation this is likely to cause for the receiver.

This aspect is very interesting for the *Sairen* games. Much of the fascination of the games centers on the fact that they are set in a (fictitious) Japan. This puts restraints on localization from the start. Like the example cited from Edge magazine shows, treating the receiver of the localized version in a very different way than the one of the original version can produce estranging locales. Locales thus directly influence the negotiable consequences described by Juul. As such, locales can also be understood as being part of games.

### **3.4 Video Game Localization Articles**

As already mentioned in the introductory chapter, only a few academic articles on video game localization have been written so far. Nevertheless, they contain information that is of use for this thesis and the wider research context as well. As secondary sources, they can help me to focus my own research even better, because they discuss the suitability of certain research approaches for studies others than their own. Examples of

this can be found in the work of Dr. Minako O'Hagan of Dublin City University, whose work I just referred to. She lists digital textology and ludology perspectives, international game design issues as well as fandom as possible points of entry for game localization research (O'Hagan 2005, 7-8). My own approach for this thesis could well be characterized as belonging to the digital textology/ludology category, because I study localization in respect to fictional and ludic elements of video games. In another article, O'Hagan ponders on how video games could be researched in the context of translation studies (O'Hagan 2007). In my earlier research, I have used Lawrence Venuti's literary translation theories of domestication and foreignization for discussing certain issues of video game localization as well, although I cannot overemphasize enough how important it is to distinguish between such terms as 'localization' and 'translation' (Szurawitzki 2010 forthcoming, Venuti 1995).<sup>12</sup> Together with Carmen Mangiron, another researcher from Dublin City University, O'Hagan coins the term 'transcreation' to describe the freedom localizers seem to have in adapting, modifying or deleting culture-specific content in games (Mangiron and O'Hagan 2006). A study such as mine can provide evidence to support or challenge such notions, and I will return to some of O'Hagan's ideas in the analysis chapter.

Miguel Bernal-Merino, a lecturer at Roehampton University, expresses a somewhat skeptical opinion about the applicability of the terms 'transcreation' and 'game localization' in the domain of translation studies (Bernal-Merino 2006). Arguing that such terms lack clear definitions, they do not add anything tangible to translation studies. Bernal-Merino still regards the term 'translation' to be the most suitable to describe any type of language transfer, and the term 'localization' should always be preceded by the words 'linguistic' or 'cultural' to point out whether the work effort involves translational or non-translational activities. I agree that such terms do not necessarily add much to translation studies, but I also question the entire notion that they should do so in the first place. I rather regard the knowledge gained from translation studies (and any other field of research) instrumental in conducting new studies such as this thesis. Categorizing this study as solely belonging to either the domain of translation studies or game studies does not serve any purpose. In this respect, translation studies are subordinate to localization studies and games studies in my thesis, instead of all-

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<sup>12</sup> I will make use of Venuti's theories in the analysis chapter as well.

encompassing. Bernal-Merino has further laid a solid foundation for other researchers in introducing the basic elements that have to be considered in the video game localization process (Bernal-Merino 2007). For the study of the *Sairen* games, I can build on this work and expand it by analyzing some peculiar instances unique to the series.

Apart from such specialized researchers such as the ones introduced here, there are some articles written by industry professionals that are very helpful to introduce some of the actual work tasks game localization involves. A good example of this is Eric Heimburg's account of working with text string tables and the problems that might arise when employing the same technique in different languages (Heimburg 2006, 140-150). Another useful source of information is *The Game Localization Handbook* (Chandler 2005), a publication aimed at game localization industry professionals. It provides insight into some of the standard work practices of localization professionals, game developers and game publishers, which is useful knowledge when contrasted with the findings of final localized products.

### **3.5 Concluding Remarks**

This concludes the discussion of general theoretical assumptions that are the base for the following chapter, which is an in-depth analysis of features relating to the *Sairen* games and their localized versions. The concept of the locale as a reception situation provides an excellent point of entry for the study, because upon determining the state of affairs for a certain feature in both original and localized version, a comparative analysis can generate a meaningful discussion. Deducting from the differences or similarities found in both versions, the ideas concerning distribution and resistance can be applied, which in turn help to understand the locale as part of a larger context. Localization is a planned effort, and the anticipated locales are thus not a random outcome. The framework presented here has the potential to generate discourse on the question of where cultural production is shifting the consumer, and how the consumer reacts to this.

While this section introduced the main theories that are to guide the following study, I may introduce further theoretical assumptions as the analysis progresses. Some general information about localization practices may prove helpful to discuss the content of the games. Further, the introduction of additional theories may become necessary because

of the complex structure of video games. Ludic elements cannot be discussed in the same way as fictional, non-interactive features, since their functions for the underlying context may be very different. However, as stated before, in many instances they also cannot be neatly separated from each other in the way that they are being presented to the player. Accepting this ambiguity from the very start, it is now time to delve deep into the world of the *Sairen* games.

## 4 Analysis

In this analysis, I am dealing with six different games altogether- three original versions and three localized versions. In many instances, I will compare elements as found in one of the original versions with those as found in its respective localized counterpart. For certain instances, I will discuss one particular game as part of the trilogy, or single it out for some other particular reason. I will also examine the evolution of particular elements throughout the whole trilogy from a localization angle. While each single one of the original games, along with a localized version, could be discussed in such detail that they would require a thesis of their own, I am of the opinion that examining all games of the trilogy opens up more significant routes for research. Entertainment software evolves significantly in technical terms over short periods of times. There is more to it, however, than merely improved graphics and larger available memory. Games deliver experiences, and they use a lot of fictional content to do so. This, in turn, may or may not influence the player in his perception of real life aspects. Studying more than one game creates a broader perspective to examine if or how the fictional content has changed over time, and how localization is linked to this.

I have already stated that rules and fiction in games are sometimes overlapping. I also accept the fact that rules are ultimately more important for games than fiction, because rules define a game much more than fiction does. Additionally, I would like to include game settings such as the language output into the realm of rules. While they do not restrict the player as much as the core game rules, they still regulate the on-screen events to a significant extent, and thus influence the player's behavior and perception. Just as according to the rules, the player behaves according to the game settings. There is also a very different set of rules that influences the distribution and localization of a game- laws and regulations. For example, anticipated age ratings may have an effect on what content is being included (or excluded) for the different distribution territories. While these kinds of rules have little to do with how the player progresses through the game, they still can belong to the dimension of factors that shapes locales.

There is no shortage of discussion points for this paper, and while I have separated the research questions along the lines of rules of fiction in localization, I shall opt to keep the analysis as one entity instead of dividing it into two distinct parts. Through the introduction of elements of interest, I shall discuss them appropriately, considering both rules and fiction as important factors. Further, parts of what will be written in this chapter will constitute a familiarization of the reader with small details of the games. This is necessary, due to the sheer complexity of the *Sairen* games in terms of changing modes of interactivity and non-interactivity. While I shall take a loose direction from more general points of interest to smaller details, this is only to be understood as a path that is guiding the reader through my particular research. The multi-faceted medium of the video game allows for many different approaches. To start off the discussion, I would like to begin with contemplating which version the player gets the game in the first place, or more precisely, which version he is supposed to get.

#### **4.1 Distribution Mechanisms for the *Sairen* Games**

The 2009 CESA Games White Paper gives a simplified overview of the common distribution system for household games (Wada 2009, 108). First, there is a production commitment between the software manufacturer and the hardware manufacturer. Once the software manufacturer has completed the development, the master software is turned over to the hardware manufacturer for mass production. The product is then distributed through wholesalers, who sell to retailers (e.g. department stores, game stores). Retailers sell straight to the consumers. In recent years, the online purchasing and downloading of game software has also become a standard practice. This method eliminates the need for the mass production of disks and packages. The hardware manufacturers upload the game onto servers, from which the consumers can download it straight onto their consoles or computers (Ibid., 109). This method is most likely to replace the sales of disks over the coming years. Wada Yôichi, speaking in an interview with games business website MCV in November 2009, states that hardware and software manufacturers are already shifting towards a time in which the physical

console will disappear as well (MCVUK.com, 2010).<sup>13</sup> The table in chapter 2 showed into which territories the *Sairen* games have been distributed, and I already discussed the peculiarity that there has been no localized version for North America for *Sairen 2*. So far, no thought was given to what it actually means for localization that there are different territories in the first place. What are the differences between the territories anyway, when e.g. North America and Australia/New Zealand both have English as their main language?

The main point here is that each territory has its own publisher. Although the *Sairen* games are developed by *project Siren* in Tôkyô, an in-house development team of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. (*Siren 2* manual, 33), and are thus exclusively developed for Sony's Playstation2 and Playstation3 consoles, this does not automatically mean that the games will be evenly distributed all over the world. To be approved for distribution in a certain territory, each localized title must be submitted separately to the respective publisher responsible for the region, e.g. Sony Computer Entertainment America- SCEA, or Sony Computer Entertainment Europe- SCEE.<sup>14</sup> The regional publishers operate independently and do not receive or rely on input from the publishers of the other territories. Part of the approval process is Sony's Technical Requirements Checklist (TRC). Games are tested against this checklist, and nonconformance to requirements might lead to rejection of a game. Since the regional publishers operate as separate entities, it is possible that a game is approved for publication in a certain territory, but rejected in another (Chandler 2005, 106-107).

In addition to this, the publishers have to submit the games to regulatory boards for age ratings in each country they want the game to be published. Each of the boards has its own regulations (Ibid., 27). In extreme cases, the boards can reject the distribution of a game into a country. While such a drastic measure is rarely taken, it is quite common for developers to trim regional versions of games in regard to their depiction of violent or sexual content to avoid problems with the rating boards. According to the Wikipedia article on *Siren Blood Curse*, a stabbing scene from the game's intro movie was

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<sup>13</sup> Wada Yôichi is the Chairman of CESA and chief editor of the 2009 CESA Games White Paper, which I referred to earlier. He is also the president and CEO of Square Enix, one of the most successful game development companies in Japan. In the cited interview, he represents Square Enix.

<sup>14</sup> SCEE is also in charge of operations for Oceania (Wikipedia "Sony Computer Entertainment").

censored through applying visual filters for the US version (Wikipedia ‘Siren: Blood Curse’, 2010). The *Siren* games used for this study vary in their age rating classifications between 15 & over and 18 & over. The exact ratings are not all that important here, but it is relevant to point out that censorship can actually be part of localization practice. While one can champion or condemn localization and its effects, no one can deny the fact that localization is not always an innocent undertaking. People on regulations boards may have their very own idea of a suitable reception situation, thus giving their own input into the localization chain.<sup>15</sup> Publishers sometimes also have their requirements to have changes done, possibly to achieve a lower age rating which is closer to the intended target group of players. Some of my interview partners described instances where they changed alcoholic beverages that appear in a game to juice for a specific localized version, or the church buildings of another game had to be called ‘temples’ rather than churches in a localized version at the request of the publisher. When I will later analyze some resulting locales of the *Siren* games, I can only guess how many persons had their say in shaping the situation that I find myself in when playing the game.

Another interesting issue related to the distribution of video games is the so-called regional lockout, “the practice, code, chip or physical barrier used to prevent the playing of media designed for a device from the country where it is marketed on the version of the same device marketed in another country” (Wikipedia ‘Regional lockout’). For this particular study this means that the Japanese versions of *Siren* and *Siren 2* are not recognized on the Playstation2 console I bought in Finland, but only on the Playstation2 console that I bought in Japan. Vice versa, the Japanese console does not recognize the European or Australian versions (but, the Australian version plays fine on the Finnish console, since Oceania and Europe have the same region encoding).<sup>16</sup> The reasoning behind this system is mostly of economic nature. The publishers can set different sales prices for each region, and determine the release dates for each region at will. Further,

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<sup>15</sup> In Appendix C, there is a list with additional information on video game regulation boards for some countries, including Japan.

<sup>16</sup> For the Playstation3 console, there is no regional lockout for games on disc anymore. Hence, the Japanese disc of *Siren Nyūtoransurêshon* plays fine on my console that I purchased in Finland. The Playstation Store (the online system used for sales and direct-to-console downloads for the Playstation3) is divided into regions, however. Purchases from the Japanese Playstation Store, for example, can only be done with a credit card registered in Japan.

some of the localization and marketing work can be more evenly split up between regional specialists. In fact, regional lockout is probably a blessing for the localization industry in economic terms, because instead of having only one localized product per original version (containing all language versions for all target markets), there has to be at least one localized product *per region*.

Thus, the consumers in each region may be treated very differently through localization, depending on the demands of the regional publishers. This, however, does not mean that this is always the case. After booting the Australia/New Zealand version of *Forbidden Siren 2*, which is, as the label printed on the game's package claims, "licensed for sale in Australia and New Zealand only", the first thing the player has to do is to select his preferred language:

English/Français/Italiano/Deutsch/Español

It can be deducted that in order to reduce work efforts during localization, the DVD content for the Australia/New Zealand release was kept identical to the European FIGS release.<sup>17</sup> The resulting reception situation bears in itself a certain amount of oddity, because the player has to make his preferred language selection *every* time the game is booted. The visible localization effort appears somewhat feasible for the European release, but in Australia or New Zealand, the choice of additional available languages not spoken by most of the intended audience might either be perceived as a minor annoyance or as an unimportant, yet necessary step. The very first reception situation the player finds himself in is one that he could do without.

The Scandinavian versions in use for this thesis, *Forbidden Siren* and *Siren Blood Curse*, have their very own peculiarities. The text on the package as well as that of the manual comes in four different languages: Swedish, Danish, Finnish and Norwegian. The in-game texts, both written and spoken, are either completely in English (*Forbidden Siren*) or partially English and partially Japanese (*Siren Blood Curse*). The player can look up the game controls in Finnish, which will not be of much use, however, if he does not understand English, the in-game language. If Scandinavian

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<sup>17</sup> The acronym FIGS is commonly used throughout the localization industry to list the most important European language markets (excluding English)- French, Italian, German and Spanish. Often there is a FIGS version of the localized product, as well as other European market versions (e.g. Scandanavia).

players in the 16+ age range are trusted to be proficient enough in the English language to play the game, the inclusion of four different languages for packaging and manual almost seems as odd as the inclusion of some European languages in the Australia/New Zealand version. Recalling that I would consider distribution as “where the games go, and then only the content of the games”, it is easy to see now that a lot of content is moving that is actually never utilized by the user, because he simply does not need it. Much included material is moving to the wrong address, and thus remains mainly untouched. For digital formats, shipping more content can actually be cheaper, because removal of files and code lines requires specialist work (which translates into additional cost). Pym writes that “if a text can be adequately moved without localization, there is no new locale” (Pym 2004, 22). Presenting the players of New Zealand and Australia with a choice of European languages (or rather forcing them to choose one) calls this idea into question, or, the notion of what is ‘adequate’ has become something else than just being sufficient and reasonable.

## **4.2 Game Content**

In this section I will discuss the actual content of the *Sairen* games. By content I mean everything the player can access on the screen after booting the game disc. In this sense, the discussion of the FIGS language selection was already the discussion of content. From now on, the assumed language for the Australian version is English, and the other languages will not be discussed in detail.

Before examining specific elements of the games, it probably will be of great help to the reader to explain how the player has to interact with different modes of the game. Certain parts of the screen interaction have nothing to do with beating the challenges of the game, but they serve as a bridge between the player and the real world. The main menu is an example of this. It is the first screen that the player actually can interact with and from which a new game can be started. Other screens of the same category include menu screens for saving, loading or quitting a game. In interacting with the menu screens, the player is actually removed from the realm of the game world. Being so, the language used and the way in which the player is being addressed are also profoundly

different from the way this is handled inside the game world. Subsequently, this has to be taken into account during localization.

In the game world itself, there are also different kinds of modes the player is exposed to. There are various degrees of interaction and non-interactive behavior. In the *Sairen* games, the pattern of progressing through the game is always the same, regardless at what stage of the progression the player has advanced to. The player has to clear an episode by beating a predetermined challenge, after which he progresses to the next episode. While actually playing, there are frequent interruptions, in which so-called cut scenes (animated video clips) are shown. Their main function is to give the action on the screen coherence by putting the player's action in context. At other times, the player needs to access the in-game menu, which works technically in a very similar fashion as e.g. the main menu, but serves profoundly different purposes as well. For example, the player can look at a map of the level to determine his position and navigate his way around. The diagram below exemplifies the flow of a playable episode in the *Sairen* games:

(1) Player starts an episode → (2) introductory cut scene plays → (3) main objective shown → (4) actual playing (at certain points interrupted by cut scenes) → (5) player reaches main objective → (6) final cut scene plays → (7) player starts next episode

This pattern of constant change between interactive and non-interactive modes creates another layer of complexity for localization. While playing the game may absorb the player completely into the game world, cut scenes do the exact opposite by making the player passive. At other times, the playing may be interrupted by explanations about how to control the game. All instances use some form of language, written or spoken, sometimes both at the same time.

Now that the usual pattern of progression should be clear to the reader, I shall engage in a discussion of some of the building blocks that make up the pattern. Taking the natural order- from start to end- I shall begin with a comparison of the main menus as they appear in *Sairen* and *Forbidden Siren*.

#### 4.2.1 The Main Menu

The main menu is usually the first screen of a game that can actually be interacted with. (as seen in the example of *Forbidden Siren 2* and its language selection, there are exceptions to this). Main menu screens in games usually offer only a few general options for interaction. The *Sairen* games are no exceptions in this respect.

The table below shows the main menu texts for *Sairen* and *Forbidden Siren*. Notably, even in the Japanese version there is English text (this is actually the case for all three installments of the series).

<i>Sairen</i>	<i>Forbidden Siren</i>
Data Load/New Game/Option	Load game/New Game/Option

The use of English in the Japanese version is most likely an internationalization practice (having English in the original already eliminates the need for translation and localization of the screen graphics). However, the English text of the Japanese versions is not exactly the same as in the localized version. As can be seen, ‘Data Load’ of the Japanese version has become ‘Load Game’ in the European version. This is quite peculiar, since although ‘Data Load’ has a much more technical sound to it, in this context the term’s meaning can hardly be misunderstood. So what could be the reason for the replacement of the term?

In video games lingo, terminology can become convention either by way of common usage or through explicit publisher requirements, such as Sony’s Technical Requirements Checklist.<sup>18</sup> Such lists regulate the use of common terms to a certain extent. In Japanese, the term *dêtarôdo* (データロード) is actually commonly used to refer to the loading of saved data in video games. The term is an appropriation of the English terms ‘data’ and ‘load’ for use in the Japanese language. In English language

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<sup>18</sup> Sony’s TRC is only available to developers working directly with Sony, so I am unable to cite directly from the document. However, I have been working with the list in the past when I was employed at a game development studio in Helsinki in 2005-06. For certain instances, failures of complying with normative terminology can lead Sony to reject the game for publication. This then would require the developer to change the terminology before the game can be resubmitted for approval.

games, ‘Data Load’ is usually not used in games. ‘Load Game’, ‘Load Saved Game’ or ‘Load Saved Game Data’ are more common. It seems that the localizers wanted to stay within the widely accepted conventions for the appropriate terminology.

The replacement of an English term with another English term is no translation, but, as Pym says, if texts have been localized interlingually or intralingually, there is a new locale as a result (Pym 2004, 22). As stated already, the use of English in the Japanese version is presumably for internationalization reasons. Pym defines this as the practice of removing culture-specific features of a text in order to minimize the problems of later distributing that text into a series of locales (Ibid, 31). Moreover, one of the main tasks of internationalization is to ensure the efficient assurance of equivalence in translation (Ibid., 54). Now, it seems, there is internationalization without translation, but with localization, nevertheless (the text was adapted). The applied internationalization did thus not get rid of all the problems, but actually it created one of its own. What was acceptable terminology for one locale was unacceptable for the other one. Equivalence for the locales, if one dares to call it that, was achieved here through adding a distinction.

There are other examples of a similar kind in the *Sairen* games. In *Sairen 2* and *Forbidden Siren 2*, the issue described above is exactly the same for the main menu screen- two different kinds of English in two different locales. But there are also menu screens in the original versions that display both Japanese and English text, such as the option menu.

#### **4.2.2 The Option Menu**

From the main menu screen I just discussed, the player can select ‘Option’ to bring up the option menu screen. In the options menu, it is possible to change very general settings of the game, such as some button control configurations or sound outputs. Many players set their preferred options early when starting the game and then leave it untouched altogether. The option screen in *Sairen* is divided into three main categories (‘Screen’, ‘Controller’ and ‘Sound’), each of which lists two or three parameters that can be changed. All these texts are completely in English, just like in the main menu. However, once the player highlights one of the selectable parameters, an explanation of what can be done appears in Japanese. If, for example, the player highlights the option

‘Screen/Alert Effect’, the following Japanese text appears at the bottom of the screen (my literal translation added, which is of course not on the screen):

死人に発見された時に挿入される効果を選択します。	Selects the effect to be displayed when discovered by a Shibito (i.e. a zombie)
NONE: 警告をオフにします。	NONE: switches the warning off.
RED: 画面が一瞬赤くフラッシュします。	RED: screen flashes red for a moment
SIGHT JACK: 一瞬視界ジャック画面が挿入されます。	SIGHT JACK: Sight jack screen is displayed for a moment.

For my discussion, the textual content is of secondary importance here. Instead, I would like to discuss the fact that both Japanese and English are being used here, and in which relation the two languages appear. As I pointed out before, texts in video games have to be analyzed according to their function. So what function do the Japanese and English texts have here?

As in the main menu, the English texts (e.g. ‘Screen/Alert Effect’) are there because of internationalization. The English language terms found in the Japanese text (‘NONE’, ‘RED’, ‘SIGHTJACK’) are related to the game mechanics, and hence part of the same technical jargon deemed suitable for internationalization. Internationalization, however, seems to have its limits. Complex explanations as the ones above are best conveyed in the native language of the target audience. The composition of a Japanese text thus becomes necessary (as does subsequent translation of this text for localized versions).

What is most noteworthy here is the fact that technical language *as a text category* seems to be acceptable in English for the Japanese version. One obvious reason is that the used language is simple, and Japanese players are being trusted to understand it. Behind this reasoning is also the notion that the English language is acceptable, in other words the Japanese player likes to see it used, or at least is not disturbed by its use.

Technical language, as opposed to many other text categories, has seemingly little cultural connotations (although it is certainly not wholly devoid of it), and resistance to the distribution of such texts into locales can therefore be expected to be rather low. Since we have English technical text in the Japanese version, however, it is not feasible to talk about distribution here in the same sense as in the previous chapter. The English text in the Japanese version is an *original*, not an adaptation. It is the translation of the Japanese text that creates a new locale.

Regarding the menu texts discussed so far, one must remember that the player has had no choice in selecting the display language. *Sairen* and the *Forbidden Siren* do not offer any choice in this respect, and the player is thus positioned. The same circumstance also prevails for the other games of the series. However, there are available language output options for the spoken dialogue that appears mainly in the cut scenes (and to some extent during the playable sequences). The functions of these spoken texts differ according to the situation they are being presented in, and hence there are numerous instances worth discussing here. In the next section, I will proceed by first establishing the available language output modes for each game in this study, and discuss what this means for certain parts of the game in terms of localization. Cut scenes shall deserve special attention in this respect, because they are the element that is affected the most by choosing a language output option.

### **4.2.3 Cut Scenes**

Cut scenes are part of virtually every current video game. Depending on the nature of the game, cut scenes can be short and few in number, or as in the *Sairen* series, they can be a fundamental part for framing the game. Cut scenes can be instructional, or they can be used to create or release tension. One of the most important purposes of cut scenes is what Rune Klevjer calls the “pre-telling” of events, i.e. informing the player what to do next, from where to start and where to go to (Klevjer 2002, 200). Cut scenes are thus a method for giving coherence to the gameplay action by employing fictional means (cut scenes are in fact short movie clips that portray events). When a cut scene plays, the player is a passive viewer and listener. The only possible intervention is usually to skip the cut scene by pressing a button.

In the *Sairen* games, there are at least two cut scenes per episode, one at the beginning of each episode, and one at the end. Many episodes have additional cut scenes that appear when a minor objective has been completed. Usually, the cut scenes involve two or more characters engaged in conversation. Dialogue is hence the most prominent text category for cut scenes. Depending on the language output options of the game, the dialogue can also be displayed through subtitles in either Japanese or English. Before further the discussing the implications of this feature, a comparison of the language output options of each the *Sairen* games is in order. The table below lists all available language output options for each single game. Japanese versions are on the left, localized versions on the right.

<p><b><i>Sairen</i></b>            Audio: Japanese only            Subtitles: -</p>	<p><b><i>Forbidden Siren</i></b>            Audio: English only            Subtitles: -</p>
<p><b><i>Sairen 2</i></b>            Audio: Japanese only            Subtitles: Japanese or OFF</p>	<p><b><i>Forbidden Siren 2</i></b>            Audio: Japanese or English            Subtitles: English or OFF</p>
<p><b><i>Sairen Nyûtoransurêshon</i></b>            Audio: English only (there is some spoken Japanese dialogue in the game)            Subtitles: Japanese or OFF</p>	<p><b><i>Sairen Blood Curse</i></b>            Audio: English only (there is some spoken Japanese dialogue in the game, which is subtitled)            Subtitles: English or OFF ('Display minimal subtitles?' - only the Japanese dialogue is subtitled)</p>

As can be seen, there are significant differences as to which language output options are available in the original versions throughout the trilogy. The localized versions also offer different alternatives for each installment. *Sairen* and *Forbidden Siren* do not offer the player any option for selecting a language output. Positioning is again in place, just as in the menus. *Sairen 2* offers Japanese players the option to utilize Japanese subtitles as well. This option is quite common for video games. Since many of the uttered speech,

especially the one appearing during the gameplay action, is a direct clue to the player as to what to do next, the inclusion of subtitles in the same language serves a supportive function. The mere fact that subtitles (or any other written on-screen messages) appear at some point signals to the player that the conveyed information is important. Spoken dialogue may not always be understood the first time, but including a written message captures the player's attention to a much stronger extent.

The language options of *Forbidden Siren 2* are numerous. There is either Japanese or English as the audible language, and there are either English subtitles or no subtitles. To better understand the different modes in which the player is addressed here, I would like to discuss them in the pattern of domestication and foreignization, a theory on literary translation formulated by Lawrence Venuti in the book *The Translator's Invisibility. A History of Translation* (Venuti 1995).<sup>19</sup>

In his book, Venuti expresses his dissatisfaction that the majority of literary translations into English are done in a way that considers 'fluency' to be the measure for quality in translation. Fluency in translation makes the translated text seem "natural", i.e. the translation does not appear to be a translation at all. (Ibid., 1-5). The translator considerably intervenes by stripping the original text of elements that are presumably unknown to the readership of the target language, or by adapting these to make them seem more familiar. Values and meanings of the original text are thus distorted. The work of the translator becomes invisible, since the reader can comfortably encounter a text that has been adapted to such an extent that it can pass itself off as an original. The translated text gives little indication anymore that it is actually a translation (Ibid., 11-17).

Fluency turns translation into a method of so-called domestication. Venuti calls translation the "communication of a text", and, by going as far interpreting the text for the reader, domestication goes beyond simple communication (Ibid., 18). Thus, the text is manipulated extensively and brought closer to the reader, as opposed to drawing the reader closer to the original text ('foreignization'). While Venuti recognizes that a foreignized translation also interprets the text for the reader, the fact that this

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<sup>19</sup> Venuti is Professor of English at Temple University in Philadelphia. Amongst other fields of research, Venuti works in translation theory and history, as well as in literary translation (Temple.edu 2010).

interpretation is less concealed makes the translator more visible. This happens because the translator deliberately chooses *not* to adapt the text too rigorously. In order to successfully foreignize a translation, reference has still to be made to domestic cultural practices and signifiers of the target language (Ibid., 34-35).

The concept of fluency and domestication bears some resemblance to the idea of transcreation (as formulated by Mangiron and O'Hagan) mentioned earlier. The main difference, of course, is that Venuti refers to literary texts, while Mangiron and O'Hagan refer to games as a whole, including textual and non-textual elements.

Returning to the numerous language output modes of *Forbidden Siren 2* and the cut scene as conveyor of dialogues, Venuti's concept can help in categorizing the resulting combinations of spoken dialogue and subtitle display options, which then can be analyzed more subtly in terms of the resulting locale. Below is a list of all four possible language outputs and subtitle display options a player can select, together with an evaluation whether the resulting mode can be considered more domesticating or more foreignizing. I have added a number for each to make later reference to the list easier—they do not appear on any screen in *Forbidden Siren 2*.

Number	Voice output language	Subtitle language	Mode
(1)	Japanese	English	Foreignizing
(2)	Japanese	-	Foreignizing
(3)	English	English	Domesticating
(4)	English	-	Domesticating

A brief discussion of each mode follows.

(1) This mode can be initially regarded as a foreignizing technique, since the original spoken Japanese dialogue is kept intact. Information is thus relayed through the English subtitle text alone.

(2) In this combination, there is actually no translation at all for the cut scenes. The player has to understand Japanese in order to make sense of the situation. For Japanese in-game speech, English subtitles are shown. This is necessary, because in-game speech often explains rules that the player has to grasp instantly in order to proceed. Despite of this, this mode is the most foreignizing of all four.

(3) In this domesticating mode, the Japanese dialogue is completely discarded and replaced by English dubbing. English subtitles are added as well. The player can thus get the necessary information either through the audible dialogue or through reading the subtitles.

(4) Just as in (3), all dialogue is in English. This time, there are no subtitles, so the player has to rely solely on the audible information to make sense of the situation.

Now that this information is established, it is time to actually analyze a cut scene of *Forbidden Siren 2* and see how the modes influence the locales. The cut scene I have chosen is the opening cut scene of the episode entitled ‘Maze’ (迷道 in *Sairen 2*). It is a typical example of how the setting of the playable episode is established, featuring only the main characters engaged in conversation. In this cut scene, Itsuki Mamoru, a young editor for a pseudo-scientific magazine, meets Kishida Yuri, a young mysterious woman, at the island’s amusement park. The following conversation takes place:<sup>20</sup>

(Yuri sits inside an amusement park ride and addresses Mamoru.)

ここに来て	Come here...
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(Mamoru takes a seat next to Yuri. Yuri continues.)

ねえ見て	Look...
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(Yuri drops a bird-shaped piece of glass onto the table inside the ride. It shatters. She explains.)

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<sup>20</sup> The Japanese text is a transcription of the subtitles as shown in *Sairen 2*, and the English text is a transcription of the subtitles as shown in *Forbidden Siren 2*. In both cases, the subtitles match the audible dialogue exactly. This is not the case for all cut scenes in the games- sometimes there are mismatches between what is said and what is shown. These cases are unintended errors, and as such they may have negative influence on the player’s reception of the game. This would be an example of the localization effort becoming very apparent, and thus an example of badly executed localization.

<p>ここは姿を留めようとする世界 早くしないと、戻ってしまうの...逆戻り...虚無の混沌に</p>	<p>In this world, everything tries to stay the same...If we don't hurry, it'll all revert back to the way it was. Back into the chaos of nothing.</p>
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(The glass bird is suddenly whole again. Mamoru expresses disbelief and confusion.)

<p>...あっ</p>	<p>...Ah?</p>
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(Yuri leans onto Mamoru's chest. She continues to explain.)

<p>ねえ あなただけは、私を信じてくれるよね？ずっと待っていた 来てくれるの...</p>	<p>You, you believe me, don't you? I've been waiting for you so long...</p>
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Here the cut scene ends, and the player is presented with the main objective for the episode. Referring to the list of voice output and subtitle combinations, the four alternatives can now be reconsidered when applied to the actual 'Maze' cut scene.

(1) The information reaches the player through the English subtitles alone. The Japanese dialogue becomes an element of the setting. Subtitles and dialogue thus have distinct functions here. In the resulting locale, the player has no problems following the events on the screen.

(2) As stated earlier, this setting is actually completely in Japanese, and the resulting locale is therefore unsuitable for the regular player.

(3) Having English dialogue and English subtitles should usually pose no problem, because text and subtitles convey the same kind of information and should therefore be complementary. In this particular case, there is a mismatch in the timing between the uttering of the voices and the display of the subtitles. While their content is exactly the same, the time gap is cause for confusion and forces the player to either listen or read, because both at the same time has become impossible. The locale creates a feeling of discomfort.

(4) Similar to mode (1), there is only one layer that sends information, only this time it is the audible dialogue. The player can follow the events without problem. The locale is suitable.

Mode (1) and (4) succeed best in the unambiguous transmission of information. The reason is rather simple- the text fulfills its original function. Both domesticating and foreignizing modes can potentially be employed successfully for cut scenes, if the method is executed consequently. The discrepancy of mode (3) is a struggle between two layers for hierarchy. They both try to achieve the same, but they end up competing because of the badly implemented timing.

Before turning to the actual gameplay of the ‘Maze’ episode, I would like to single out another cut scene. The cut scene in question is the opening cut scene for episode 1, chapter 2 in *Sairen Nyûtotansurêshon* and *Siren Blood Curse*. Since almost all the characters in the game are American, most of the audible is in English, both in the Japanese and the localized version. There are some Japanese characters, however, who also have some lines of Japanese dialogue. These lines are subtitled in English for the localized version. In the cut scene, the American Howard Wright, a resident of Japan and high school student, is walking along a road when a police car approaches with great speed and crashes into a road barrier. A policeman with zombie-like features emerges from the car and utters the following into his radio:

「了解、査察します」 (literally, ‘Understood, will investigate.’)

Soon after, he opens fire on Howard. The cut scene ends, and the player’s objective is to escape the policeman. In the localized version, the line of dialogue is exactly the same as in the original version, but the subtitle conveys something very different to the player:

’10-4. Shoot to kill’<sup>21</sup>

This is not a translation, but an adaptation that completely distorts the meaning of the original. It further is evidence to the fact that at least some game localizers exercise

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<sup>21</sup> ‘10-4’ is a so-called ten-code or ten signal. Ten signals represent common phrases in voice communication for law enforcement and in CB radio transmission in America (Wikipedia “Ten-code”). ‘10-4’ is an affirmation of the sender’s message.

much of their freedom that they seem to enjoy to a questionable extent. A grave change such as this can hardly be called domesticating or fluent anymore, unless all players of the localized version are assumed to feel better suited with a more brutal language for enjoying the cut scene. Localization here is not only a means for adaptation, but for creation and production. The locale for the cut scene is created through a controlled effort of evoking an emotional response. Censorship is usually applied to limit the anticipated effect of potentially harmful depictions of events, but what happens here seems to go into a different direction. Localization goes beyond what is offered in the original, which proves that the method of transcreation as described by Mangiron and O'Hagan is indeed applied. However, this example also shows that there is another side to it they fail to mention. One of my interviewees described localization to me as "the creation of overseas versions while respecting the vision of the creator". Another called it "the sharing of cultural assets". The 'shoot to kill' example does not respect any vision, nor does it share anything with anyone. It imposes something onto the player.

#### **4.2.4 In-game action**

In-game action is the core of every game. The anticipated fun of overcoming the challenges is what draws most players to play the game in the first place. The *Sairen* games with their sinister settings and sometimes very high level of difficulty produce a very special kind of 'fun'. Clearing an episode does not produce a feeling of triumph, but one of relief. One has managed to stay alive despite the hopelessness of the situation, and, although more danger lurks ahead, there is a moment where the player can let go of the tension.

To evoke these emotions, the player is presented with challenges that are communicated to him in various ways. One way to do this is by employing language. Written or spoken texts guide the player by giving clues or explaining a new rule. Other ways of creating responses lie in the representational (i.e. fictional) dimension of the game world, including all graphics and sounds that appear in the game. Localization touches on some of these aspects, while it leaves others untouched. Both in the original and localized versions, the most important thing remains that the player never feels stuck because he does not know what to do next- this kind of helplessness interrupts the player's immersion into the game world and is cause for some real-world frustration.

In this section, I will analyze the ‘Maze’ episode, focusing mainly on the use of dialogue and/or subtitles that appear during gameplay. Unlike the dialogue in the cut scenes, the in-game dialogue presented here is a direct clue to solve some puzzles. Understanding the information immediately is therefore absolutely crucial for the player. The fact that these clues are disguised as lines of dialogue that do not address the player directly, but the *character* make this a point well-worth discussing. The game world dimension and the real world dimension overlap each other at times, and it is interesting to see what effect (if any) localization has here.

As soon as the opening cut scene is over, the main objective is disclosed to the player and the actual playing starts. The player gets to control Mamoru, and Yuri is also constantly present as a non-playable character. The main goal is to open the ‘Gate of Underworld’ (冥府の門). In order to achieve this, seven magical gates that are hidden in the amusement park have to be located and opened. At first, these gates are invisible. The player has to traverse the amusement park, and every time he is close to an invisible gate, Yuri starts to sing. The singing signals to the player that a gate is close by. Applying the supernatural ‘Sightjack’ technique, the player can make the gate visible. In order to open it, he must then unlock it by matching some symbols engraved into the gate. Yuri’s song gives clues as to which is the matching combination. Below is a transcription of Yuri’s lines that guide the player to open the first gate. Once the playing starts, Yuri says<sup>22</sup>:

お願い、私の歌の通りにして。	“Please...do as my song says.”
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After this, she starts walking. The player has to follow her. Eventually she comes to a halt and starts singing<sup>23</sup>:

舞え舞え 巫 (こうなぎ)	“Dance, maiden, dance...”
頭 (こうべ) の飾りを打ち振るい	“Wave the crown upon thy head...”

<sup>22</sup> Both Japanese and English texts are transcriptions of the subtitles as they appear in *Sairen 2* and *Forbidden Siren 2*. I have added the hiragana in parentheses.

<sup>23</sup> This piece of music is also the theme song for the whole *Sairen* series. It is known as the *Kônagihishôka* (巫秘抄歌). It contains seven stanzas, all of which are sung in the same eerie melody. The text was written by one of the game designers (Akiyama & Kobayashi 2007, 52).

焰（ほむら）見やっぴ踊りゃんせ	“Watch the flames and dance...”
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The player then has to match the pieces on the gate showing the crown and the flame, after which the first gate will open. The process for opening the rest of the gates is essentially the same, only the song lyrics and the gate symbols change.

This example shows how the same text is narration and instruction at the same time. Yuri talks to Mamoru, but more importantly, a game designer makes use of Yuri to explain the rules to the player. The instructions take the form of a Japanese folk song that evoke the image of a strange and sinister cult. The challenge in translating the song lies less in the content itself but rather in the keeping (or replacing) the form without irritating the player. Mode (1) works very well here, because subtitling leaves the original song intact. Mode (2) is exactly the same as mode (1), because unlike in the cut scenes, subtitles are shown for in-game speech, even if the subtitle setting is set to OFF. Mode (3) and (4) offer a song sung in English, the former with and the latter without subtitles. The melody is the same as in the original. While this is a working solution, the singing in English is considerably more off-rhythm than in Japanese. The amount of syllables in the translation differs from that of the original text, and eventually the singing does not fully match the original melody. However, on a whole the singing works satisfyingly in English as well.

In this instance, all four modes succeed in conveying the rules to the player, regardless of their foreignizing or domesticating nature. While the style might suffer somewhat in the English song, the communication of the hints to solve the puzzles is paramount. In this example, arguably one of the most challenging forms of game text translation becomes apparent. Texts or signifiers disguised as or drawing reference to cultural practices (such as songs) have to fulfill the exact same function in the localized version as well. The ideological momentum of foreignization and domestication becomes much weaker in this case, because they both take second place behind the informational value of the text. Further, they work somewhat differently here than envisaged by Venuti. The domesticating approach does not hide the translator, in fact it forces him out into the open much more than the foreignizing approach. The English text sung in the original melody exemplifies this.

While this might show up the limits of the applicability of the foreignization/domestication approach for this study, it still points out an interesting aspect of how different media forms need to be treated in their own special way. Pym states that “some texts are felt to belong more in some cultural locations than others” (Pym 2004, 111). It does not stop there. For video games, most texts definitely belong into a specific category of functionality. When the two mix, functionality overrides the cultural domain. Resistance also has its limits.

#### 4.2.5 Archive Items

I have briefly mentioned archive items before. They are items that help to create a sense of a world beyond what can be seen or interacted with on the screen. They usually consist of 2D screen graphics with explanatory text, and they are accessible from a dedicated menu. Some items are videos or sound recordings that can be played back. With very few exceptions, archive items do not contain any information that is necessary for progressing through the game. They are thus almost exclusively part of the fictional realm of the game world. Being so, the texts that accompany archive items are not part of the same layer that is simultaneously instruction and representation. They are much closer to traditional literary texts, and they are also free of the restrictions that instructional texts are subject to. Thus, they are often more richer texts in the sense that can utilize many more forms of textual expression, and evoke kinds of emotions that are not being evoked through the playable parts of the game, such as humor. Moreover, many of the items are embedded into an explicit Japanese cultural context, meaning that the format of the item is well known to Japanese players of the game, but most likely not to non-Japanese players. Examples of this are parodies of (formerly) existing TV shows or magazines. For localization, this is a challenge, because one can most certainly expect that many nuances will be lost unless they are being explained somehow. In this section, I will examine a few archive items to uncover how these cases have been dealt with.

Examples of the parodied magazines include *Bang* (both written as ‘Bang’ and バンバン, ‘ban’ in *Sairen*), a humoristic take on the lifestyle magazine *Bomb* published by Gakushū Kenkyūsha (学習研究社, Akiyama and Kobayashi 2004, 117), and *Da Gama*

(ダ・ガマ), based on the magazine *Da Vinci* (ダ・ヴィンチ), published by Mediafakutorî (メディアファクトリー, Akiyama and Kobayashi 2007, 127). Both magazines feature interviews with a character that appears in the game. The actual archive items show photographs of the magazines' front pages and articles. A few lines of accompanying text summarize the content of the interview. Archive items based on actual TV shows include *Aftanûn Ôji* (アフタヌーン王子, 'Afternoon Prince'), modeled after the Tokyo Broadcasting System talk show *Ôsama no buranchi* (王様のブランチ, 'The King's Brunch', *ibid.*) as well as a program based on the famous music show *Za Besutoten* (ザ・ベストテン, 'The Best Ten', *ibid.*, 111).

In the localized versions, the magazines and TV shows appear graphically unaltered, and the accompanying texts are English translations of the original texts. The flashy layout of the Japanese magazines and the sources for the parody may be unfamiliar to the non-Japanese player, but as part of the setting they fit into the overall context even if part of the humor is lost. The same is in principle true for the TV shows, but there is a factor that here that complicates the matter. Japanese TV shows frequently make use of subtitles that not only reflect, but often emphasize the spoken language. Sometimes they even comment on the events on the screen. Big and colorful fonts may be applied for these subtitles. This is the case in *Aftanûn Ôji*. The archive item clip consists of about approximately a minute of footage that is the introduction to an upcoming interview with Mikami Shû, a novelist (and playable character).<sup>24</sup> A female reporter stops two young women on the street and asks them about their opinion about Mikami Shû. The women express their love for Mikami's books, one stating that she cried when she read one of his novels. The essence of the women's dialogue is displayed in colorful subtitles as well, using clichés as parody. These subtitles are also translated in the localized versions, but they cannot make use of the colorful fonts and central placement of the original subtitles and are thus displayed in the regular white font, in the regular size, at the bottom of the screen. Even more of parodying sense is lost here than in the magazine example, because localization has to cope with multiple layers of subtitles here. The Japanese dialogue needs to be subtitled first, and this requires space on the screen. Subtitling another layer of subtitles is difficult not only in terms of space

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<sup>24</sup> The name 'Mikami Shû' is reminiscent of Murakami Ryû, a famous Japanese contemporary novelist.

restrictions, but it also poses a problem in terms of visualizing properly in which relation the subtitle layers are to each other. The colorful subtitling scheme is everyday routine in Japan. In European or Australian broadcasts, this technique is hardly ever applied, and thus it is challenging to convey this through localization. While in this example the intralingual subtitles in the Japanese original do not add much in terms of informational value, but are merely there to mimic the TV show format, in the localized versions the player has to cope with two layers of subtitles at the same time.

The music program clip adds another sphere of complexity- Japanese subtitles that have to be understood to make sense of the situation. In this archive clip, a singer is about to perform a song on live television. She has trouble understanding the show's hosts because of a badly functioning headset. The result is a chaotic situation in which both the excited hosts and the annoyed singer talk simultaneously without ever really communicating with each other. While this parodies a TV show without having any tangible connection to the game world of *Sairen 2* yet, there is an element that establishes this connection. A newsflash subtitle tells of the following:

本日、午後 6 時 10 分頃、四開地方夜見島沖でブライトウィン号乗客生存者を発見。(‘Today around 6:10 pm, a survivor of Bright Win was found off the coast of Yamijima.’)<sup>25</sup>

This substitutes the core information of the clip and reassigns the music show a different role. The localized clip has to fulfill the same function as well, and hence the newsflash subtitle information has to be conveyed to the player. There are several factors here that make this difficult. First of all, the translated subtitle cannot replace the original subtitle here. While in cut scenes the subtitles are layered onto the video, in the archive videos the subtitles are an actual part of the video and therefore cannot be removed. This means that the translated subtitle has to be displayed in a different place. Logically, it is being shown under the archive video, just as in the previous example. However, in this space, the subtitles for the dialogue are also shown (presuming that the player has enabled the subtitles in the language output options). In other words, two different kinds of subtitles with different functions are shown in the same place at the same time, which is cause

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<sup>25</sup> Bright Win is a ship that serves as a backdrop for some of the playable scenarios in *Sairen 2*. The English translation is cited here as it appears in *Forbidden Siren 2*.

for confusion. The chaotic conversation of singer and hosts also has the effect that the dialogue subtitles change at a very fast pace, which makes reading extremely difficult.

In the Japanese version, the discrepancy of audible and displayed text clearly separates their functions and establishes a hierarchy. This enables the player to grasp the importance of the Japanese subtitles. In the localized version, the same hierarchy can only be maintained when the English dialogue subtitles are *not* enabled. In this case, the only English subtitle to appear is the newsflash, and the spoken dialogue is in English. If the player chooses to enable the subtitles, however, two layers of subtitles with no clearly distinguishable difference are displayed, and their functions cannot be grasped as easily.

In terms of a suitable locale, the best working language output mode in this situation is mode (4), because the ‘less is more’ principle applies here. Audible dialogue and text are distinct in a similar manner as they are in the original version. As for the music program parody, the actual show is most likely unknown to most non-Japanese players, and part of the pun will escape them.<sup>26</sup> It is debatable whether in cases like this localization should go further to produce more humorous situations in the localized versions as well. Anyway, it seems that is already taking place. One interview partner explained to me how a localizer introduced jokes into a localized version that were not there in the original in the first place. Because the jokes worked, they were kept. Localization is not only response or representation, it is production as well. Locales thus can be not only the result of an adaptation, but also that of creation.

In the next section, I leave the game content behind and turn to some aspects that are related to the *Sairen* games, but not accessible by playing the games on the consoles. To be precise, I will be discussing websites.

### 4.3 Websites

Some of the archive items of the *Sairen* games mention websites that actually can be accessed in the real world. Just like the other archive items, these websites are a continuation of the game world, and while they may give the impression of being real

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<sup>26</sup> Arguably, young Japanese players may also be unfamiliar with the actual original show. However, they still will recognize many similarities to Japanese TV shows they know.

websites with embedded functionalities, eventually the player can do little more than look at photos and read texts. The table below shows the websites that are mentioned in each game, together with a brief explanation of the content:

<i>Sairen/ Forbidden Siren</i>	<i>Sairen 2/ Forbidden Siren 2</i>	<i>Sairen Nyûtoransurêshon/ Siren Blood Curse</i>
<p><a href="http://www.shibito.com">www.shibito.com</a> Amateur website dedicated to the incidents in Hanyûdamura</p> <p><a href="http://www.occultland.com">www.occultland.com</a> Amateur blog of a traveler who visited Hanyûdamura</p>	<p><a href="http://www.shu-mikami.com">www.shu-mikami.com</a> Website of the novelist Mikami Shû, one of the playable characters</p> <p><a href="http://www.shibito.com">www.shibito.com</a> Amateur website dedicated to the incidents in Hanyûdamura and Yamijima</p> <p><a href="http://www.yumemi-salon.com">www.yumemi-salon.com</a> Website for the Tarot reading salon of Kiyota Akiko, one of the playable characters</p>	<p><a href="http://hw-biker.blog-paradise.com">http://hw-biker.blog-paradise.com</a> Website of high school student and motorcycle aficionado Howard Wright, one of the playable characters</p>

The player does not have to access these websites to progress through the game. Their function is similar to that of the archive items- the spawning of a sense of a world beyond the restricted one the player actively engages in. All the websites listed above are hoax sites created by the *Sairen* developers. They give the impression of being real, but the persons, companies or incidents they refer to only exist in the fictional universe of the *Sairen* games. A person not aware of this fact might easily mistake the websites for real ones.

In the games, all website addresses appear in the same way in both original and localized versions. Both Japanese and non-Japanese players are thus prompted to type in the exact same address on their computer to access the websites. There are localized versions for each individual website, however. For the players of *Forbidden Siren* and *Forbidden Siren 2*, the computer automatically picks the language version. Surprisingly, when accessing the websites from my computer in Finland, the browser redirects

automatically to the French language version of the sites. For example, typing [www.shibito.com](http://www.shibito.com) into the browser results in ending up on [www.shibito.com/f/top\\_hp.html](http://www.shibito.com/f/top_hp.html), /f/ denoting the subdirectory for the French version here. While the exact technical reasons as to why this happens remain unknown to me, the resulting locale can only be described as an unsuitable one. The connection to the game world is severed, because the unexpected error creates a locale that was intended for French players only. The game appears here as a product, not as an experience.

*Sairen Nyûtoransurêshon* and *Siren Blood Curse* are different in this respect. Typing the address <http://hw-biker.blog-paradise.com> into the browser redirects to <http://hw-biker.blog-paradise.com/language.html>, a language selection screen that offers Japanese, English, French, Italian, German and Spanish as available choices. The aforementioned problem of incorrect positioning does not exist here, because all the language selections redirect to the correct sites. The language selection screen in itself is a not part of the game world, however, but an interruption of the same. Arguably this method was chosen to avoid the problematic instance of automatically assigning the wrong language version, which is a much more severe interruption. Interesting in terms of locales is the fact that the Japanese and English versions are absolutely identical in content. There still are two different locales, because there are two different audiences.

The website itself is Howard Wright's blog. Howard is one of the main characters in the game. He has been lured to Hanyûdamura through a mysterious email sent to him by Sam Monroe, another character that appears in the game. The blog chronicles Howard's life in Japan. Many of the entries reflect Howard's interest, such as movies, games and motorcycles. In between there is an account of Sam's email message, and the last blog entries tell of Howard's bike trip to Hanyûdamura. The player thus gets to know more about the reasons leading to Howard coming to Hanyûdamura, which is not explained in such great detail in the game itself. The blog entries are written both in Japanese and English. This functions as part of the game world, because Howard is an American who recently moved to Japan and keeps a bilingual blog to practice his Japanese. Since he is not overly proficient in Japanese yet, the Japanese entries are much shorter than English ones, only contain few kanji characters and occasionally some errors. Howard's friends sometimes even comment on this and correct his mistakes.

I will not go any further into the details of the blog's contents here. Rather I would like to discuss the website in terms of equality. Pym stated that "if a text can adequately be moved without localization, there is no new locale" (Pym 2004, 22). Further, locales do not exist until they show resistance to distribution. Howard's website was not localized at all- the content is the same in the Japanese and the English version. Yet, because the content is bilingual, there are two distinct locales here. Many Japanese players will have problems understanding all nuances of Howard's teenager vernacular, and most non-Japanese players certainly do not understand Japanese at all. Again, the foreign language becomes part of the setting, only this time also for the Japanese players. Resistance to distribution is weak here. This is because both languages belong to the fictional realm, and they are embedded into a context where both languages are *required*. They appear in a coherent relation, and the blog as the chosen representational form makes the whole thing somehow believable and acceptable for both Japanese and non-Japanese players. The equality found here is not based on the notion that everybody understands the same things, but on the idea that everyone only understands certain things, and nobody understands everything. Hence, everyone is treated in the same way.

As demonstrated with the use of the blog, *Sairen Nyûtoransurêshon* differs significantly from the preceding games in introducing American characters. While the rules and the flow of the game are a continuation of what already was offered in the earlier games, the overall feel is a different one. There are much less references to Japanese popular culture in the archive, for example. The style in which episodes are introduced is reminiscent of such American drama TV series as *Lost*, down to the way in which music is used.<sup>27</sup> There is a notion of a sense that the developers had specifically an American audience in mind when developing the game. It is after all the biggest market for games in the world, and there had been no localized version of *Sairen 2* in North America. In this light, the introduction of the Americans into the game series also means the reduction of resistance to distribution into the American market. On this note, I would like to turn to a point that was not so much inspired by the *Sairen* games, but by what my interview partners said- the future of localization.

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<sup>27</sup> *Lost* is an American TV drama show produced by ABC and has been airing since 2004. It centers around plane crash survivors on a mysterious island, and in that sense is similar to the setting of the *Sairen* games, where the protagonists are stuck in a village or on an island.

#### 4.4 The Future of Localization

The birth and rise of the localization industry happened hand in hand with the rise of the software industry, and its expansion was greatly accelerated through the eve of the internet. While the localization industry has adapted to the technological needs of its customers and surely will continue to do so, the matters discussed in this thesis show that there is a side to localization that touches on things that are not primarily technical, but considers the human factor- for better or for worse. Video games are made to evoke emotions in the player. This is true for original and localized games alike. Localization can hardly make a boring game fun, but a grave localization error or insensitivity can easily spoil the player's immersion. The thesis has centered mainly on the situations players find themselves in. I have often observed how things are handled in the original and compared them to the localized version. The majority of regular players never does anything like this- there is hardly any need for them to do so. Even translators that translate game texts sometimes never get to play the original (one interview partner explained to me that even with the most skilled translator, about 30% of the translated text will have to be altered due to technical restrictions or context-sensitive issues). In this section, I would thus like to discuss possible paths the game localization industry may take in the near future, based on the opinions my interview partners expressed to me. My specific question was where they see localization in five years from now, the 'now' being October 2009 at the time.

Naturally, some of them first summarized the present state of the localization industry before drawing conclusions about the future. Tight schedules were one common lament mentioned for keeping the overall quality of localizations down. Another aspect was the lack of communication between developers and localizers. Many game companies outsource much of the localization work, and some developers do not seem to fully appreciate the importance and difficulty of the localization trade. There was also a notion of a general lack of understanding of the importance of localization among Japanese game publishers compared to European or North American companies. One interviewee described the Japanese games industry by using the term 'Galapagos effect/Galapagos syndrome' (ガラパゴス化, *Garapagosuka*), a term often used to describe the Japanese mobile phone market. Compared to the global development of the

market, Japan has a very sheltered position that makes it extremely difficult for overseas newcomers to enter the market as competitors. Further, the Japanese market offers significantly more in terms of niche products that cater to small and specific audiences, something that cannot be found on a comparable scale in any other major domestic market. Some Japanese developers, being so focused on the Japanese market, have failed to grasp some of the changes that take place on the global scale, and thus some Japanese game companies are not as successful outside of Japan as they used to be only a few years ago.

This, some concluded, requires Japanese localization companies to actively learn about and engage in the marketing of the localized product in the target market to a greater extent. While most were of the opinion that the demand for localization will further grow, there were also voices that there will be changes in the thinking of how big Japanese games companies will tap into foreign markets in the future. Video game culture has evolved to the point where different regions have distinct tastes and needs that have to be satisfied. The traditional pattern for developing for the domestic market firstly, and then localizing for foreign markets will not disappear, but it will most likely be supplemented with other methods for entering markets. One way is to buy up foreign companies that are already successful in other regions of the world. The reasoning is not only to get Japanese products to sell better overseas, but also to get these overseas products to sell better in Japan. In an interview In the January 2010 issue of *Edge*, Wada Yôichi explains that his company Square Enix will expand more aggressively into global markets, and at the same time utilize its experience to sell games made by overseas studios (and owned by Square Enix) in Japan (*Edge* January 2010, 80). He also identifies retailer bias as one of the main causes why non-Japanese games are hard to sell in Japan, while many players would actually embrace an influx of quality games.

From this angle, one must re-evaluate Pym's notion that some texts are felt to belong more to some cultures than to others. Video games evoke universal emotions, and while the same content might not always resonate with foreign audiences in the same way it does with the domestic one, it seems that some of the resistance distribution encounters is not caused by the content itself, but by the many stages of middlemen that have a say in what gets to reach the customer. Pym says that localization can be a response to

things that are to be distributed. If markets appear to be impenetrable, localization does not serve any purpose anymore. It hence should not come as a surprise that game companies explore other routes to access new markets than to localize games. Despite of this, it is safe to assume that localization practice as described in this thesis will continue to exist for many years to come.

## **5 Conclusions**

In the opening chapter for this thesis, I formulated two questions which were to guide the research. Firstly, I asked how the games' rules influence localization, and secondly, how do the games' fictional elements influence localization. I have also made clear that rules and fiction in games are often intertwined, and that in order to enjoy a game to the fullest, the player must first and foremost understand the rules. Fiction, however, gives the player's actions coherence, and often a reason to play the game in the first place. In the analysis of the *Sairen* games, I have deliberately chosen not to separate elements of rules and fiction too rigorously. Instead I have picked instances that are interesting from a localization angle. Some of the cases I have discussed are both in the domain of rules and fiction at the same time, and thus can be analyzed in the context of either research question.

Unlike in the analysis, in this section I will keep the conclusions for each of the two research questions separate. This, I think, will give the thesis a stronger sense of coherence. Once the two questions have been discussed, the findings can serve as the base for some closing remarks.

### **5.1 Rules and Localization**

In discussing the main menu and option menu screens as they can be found in *Sairen* and *Forbidden Siren*, I observed the fact that the original Japanese version contains English text. This English text is not the same English text that is used in the European version. A distinction was added to create a reception situation that, in the mind of the localizers, is a better equivalence to reflect the original situation. This also implies that there is a less suitable kind of equivalence. I argued that conventional terminology may have played a role in the decision, and that localization practice accepts certain text categories more willingly for internationalization than others. Being so, it is fair to say that the coining of terminology potentially has the power to construct an equivalence of its own that puts even language in second place. Japanese players are approached with

English terminology, and are thus positioned from the start. Pym says that localization positions the receiver of the localized version. In the case of *Sairen*, it seems that localization practice already positions the receiver of the original version as well.

I picked the language output options of *Forbidden Siren 2* for discussion, because they enable the player to approach part of the game in the language of his choice. Language in cut scenes can be transmitted either through spoken dialogue alone, or through subtitled dialogue. In applying Venuti's ideas concerning domestication and foreignization, I discovered that under the circumstances the most important aspect is that the texts fulfill their function, which works best when there is no struggle for hierarchy involved. The lines for a functional localization here are not drawn along the lines of domestication and foreignization, but along those of easy grasp and confusion. There are political and culture-specific aspects to localization, and dealing with these are part of the localizers' every day work. However, once the player plays the game, such considerations are of secondary importance to him if the game is enjoyable. Both domesticating and foreignizing modes can achieve this. On the other hand, the example of the cut scene in *Sairen Nyûtoransurêshon* and *Siren Blood Curse* shows that localization (or more specifically in this case, the translation of game texts) can obviously prompt some localizers to express their creativity in a rather questionable manner. Localization is not only adaptation, but also production sometimes.

The in-game action sequence I analyzed is a prime example of how rules and fiction in games are sometimes inseparable. The case also demonstrated how rules have to take precedence over fiction to suit the player. While this observation is nothing new, it showed the limits of the applicability of Venuti's ideas here. Video games require not only the translator to be rather visible at times, but communicating the rules even sometimes forces the game designer out into the open. Pym is correct when he states that some texts can be resistant to easy distribution because of their content. However, if the text has an instructional function on top of the fictional one, the fiction will take second place. Subsequently, resistance to distribution is stronger for fictional elements than for instructional ones. Games can produce very unique reception situations through their constantly changing modes of addressing the player. *Sairen 2* and *Forbidden Siren 2* make use of a lot of fictional means to produce such reception situations. For in-game

action, fiction is not decisive. Fun is what counts, and in this particular example enjoyment stems from the fact that the player solves a riddle. Localization can (and must) produce an equivalent of meaning, and can (and does) make use of diverse means to achieve this goal. However, this is where the long arm of localization ends. Whether the game is fun is still mostly up to the designers, no matter if there is little localization or lots of it.

## 5.2 Fiction and Localization

In presenting the archive items, I chose to discuss an element of the *Sairen* games that is almost purely fictional and does not serve any function related to rules. The archive items are there to be enjoyed by the player. They cannot be used to progress through the game. The fact that the items often parody real-life Japanese TV shows or magazines gives the archive items a special means of evoking emotion in the Japanese players, because they can be trusted to be familiar with the subjects of parody. Players of the localized versions most likely are not, and thus some of the humor of the original is lost in the localized versions. This is of course not surprising. What is more interesting is that the archive items copy the format of some TV shows to such an extent that they keep elements of presentation that might not only be unfamiliar to the non-Japanese player, but that they cause technical challenges for the localizers. There are multiple layers of subtitles already in the original here, all with different functions. The best-working solution in the localization is the one that displays only the most important content, and disregards the lesser important ones. Opting for this choice avoids the confusion that is present in the reception situations that display other subtitles as well. For conveying the meaning of the clip, a minimal localization is more suitable than one that covers all the elements. While these clips resist easy distribution into other locales because of their content, it is not only their culture-specific part that is difficult here, but the fact that localization is sometimes restricted in its means for achieving a more suitable reception situation. Resistance not only comes from original fictional content, but also from the real-life considerations of spending working hours on parts of the game that are not all that important on a grand scale. Although the archive items belong to the fictional domain of *Sairen 2*, the regulative language modes of the game ultimately influence the reception situation to a much greater extent.

Real and accessible websites are a peculiarity of the *Sairen* games. Although the player does not ever have to access them, their mentioning in the games arouses curiosity and many players are likely to visit the sites at least once. Both in original and localized version, the website addresses are the same, which means that their content should make sense to both Japanese and non-Japanese players alike. There is a surprising instance, however, when the Finnish player is automatically redirected to the French language version of the site. Due to some technical error, there is a very different kind of positioning in place than the one envisioned by the website programmers. The player is excluded from the game world, the reception situation is a real-life annoyance. There is a rather unusual localization flaw here. While more suitable content exists, it is not offered to the player. When regarding the websites as fictional content, it is fair to say that they are useless as such due to the technical error. Fiction not only influences localization, but localization also influences fiction here.

In the case of Howard Wright's blog, the same mistake was not repeated. The content offered to Japanese and non-Japanese players is exactly the same. The blog is bilingual, and thus it was not deemed necessary here to make any changes to the website. Basically one can say that there is no localization here, because there is no adaptation. The fiction of *Sairen Nyûtoransrêshon*, involving mainly American characters, significantly reduces the amount for localization for the game as a whole, and with it the potential resistance its content may produce for the distribution of the game into the US market. Here too, localization influences fiction, but in an absolutely anticipated way.

### **5.3 Final Remarks**

This thesis is mainly a study built on the analysis of instances as they appear in the *Sairen* games. Some of the knowledge presented here I gained from the first-hand accounts of localization professionals, which in turn put some of the analyzed cases into a new light. In the beginning, I wrote that I hoped to accomplish a video game localization case study that goes beyond the approximate length of twenty pages of the articles known to me, and that would inspire other academic researchers to take up related topics. Having finished my study now, I would like to present some possible avenues researchers could take in the future.

Considering game research, there is a myriad of possibilities to choose from. For me personally, the most intriguing is the online gaming phenomenon, because of its inclusion of the players in a fundamentally different way than one has become to know it from the traditional one-player game. Localization in this aspect may have a very different role, because players actually communicate with each other instead of being merely positioned. Japan has its own share of successful online games, and there are also increasingly Japanese social networking services that are blurring the boundaries between tools and entertainment, such as *Hatena World*. Further, virtual worlds such as *Second Life* attract users from around the globe and offer their users possibilities to engage in all sorts of behavior and commercial endeavors. One could research the role of localization in such a constantly evolving world.

While global economics are not my prime field of research, I found it necessary to include a section about the distribution mechanisms of the *Sairen* games. Localization is big business, so are games. The anticipated changes I recorded from my interviews hint at many research possibilities in this particular field as well. The notion that the traditional idea of localization will be supplemented through company mergers or buy-ups is further proof of the fact there is no shortage of research topics here. I started this thesis with a tentative definition of the term ‘localization’. Many other studies could start in the same way, only in these rapidly changing times, the definitions would most likely have to be phrased in different ways.

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*Shenmû Isshō Yokosuka* (シエンムー 一章 横須賀). 1999. Sega. Dreamcast.

## **Movies & TV Series**

*Lost*. 2004. American Broadcasting Company.

*Ringu*. 1997. Fuji Tebijiōn.

## 7 Appendix

### 7.1 Appendix A: Contact Email for Research Interviews

The email below resembles the initial contact email that was sent to companies and individuals in order to arrange an interview.

Dear people at (*company name*),

my name is Antti Szurawitzki. I am a master's degree student at the Institute of African and Asian Studies of the University of Helsinki, Finland. My major is Japanese studies, and I am writing my master's thesis on video game localization in a Japanese context.

I was granted a travel grant by the university to conduct research on the topic in Japan. For this, I would like to interview localization professionals working in Japan.

I was wondering whether it would be possible to conduct an interview with a game localization expert at your company? Generally, the focus of the questions would be mainly on the challenges of localizing content that is distinctly Japanese in some way, and how this might reflect on your work and the final consumers' perception. It will not involve any business-sensitive questioning, since I understand that you respect your clients' privacy.

Since your company specializes in this kind of work, I think your insight and knowledge could greatly contribute to my study. Ultimately, I hope the finished thesis can in turn contribute to the overall knowledge of game localization and that of your company.

Would it be possible to meet during the week between (*date*) and (*date*)? The interview could be arranged at the most convenient time for you during that period. For the interview, I could come to your company premises or any other location of your choice.

The interview will be designed to last about 60 minutes, but if you have less time to spare, I can adapt to that.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via (*email address*) or on my mobile phone (*phone number*).

Looking forward to hearing from you

Antti Szurawitzki

PS: Here are links to my personal LinkedIn profile and to the Institute of Asian and African Studies of the University of Helsinki, my place of study, in case you care to know a little more about myself.

(*hyperlink to LinkedIn profile page*)

(*hyperlink to page of Institute of Asian and African Studies*)

## 7.2 Appendix B: Interview Questions

- Define localization- compare to Pym: "adaptation and translation of a text (like a software program) to suit a particular reception situation"
- Is there such a thing as "perfect" localization (i.e. a perfect outcome)?
- When is localization impossible or undesirable (“resistance”)?
- Localizers seem to have great freedom in adapting features- but are there boundaries that should not be crossed?
- Which do you consider more favorable- adapting significantly to accommodate the player, or adapting little to stay true to the original?
- What external factors influence the localization process (e.g. deadlines, customer expectations, laws)?
- Are there examples of cultural aspects of localization that are potentially problematic (religion, politics, sexual content, censorship)? How are they being dealt with?
- What are indicators for a successful localization (e.g. independent testing)? How do you know whether the end-users liked it?
- Generally, are games prepared well for localization ("internationalization")? How does this influence your work?
- What are the most crucial points of localization when considering games a technical medium?
- How do you/your team prepare for localizing game content?
- What kind of content is generally hard to localize?
- What are the implications of localizing the geography of a game world?
- Can history be localized?

- How do you deal with local accents in voiceovers?
- How do you deal with localizing music?
- When fiction and rules are mixed up, how do you deal with that?
- Where do you see localization in five years from now?
- Anything you would like to add?

### 7.3 Appendix C: List of Video Games Regulations Boards

Region	Rating Board	Homepage
Japan	CERO (Computer Entertainment Rating Organization, 特定非営利活動法人コンピュータエンターテインメントレーティング機構, Tokutei Hieiri Katsudôhōjin Konpyutâ Entâteinmento Rêtingu Kikô)	<a href="http://www.cero.gr.jp">www.cero.gr.jp</a>
Europe (excluding some countries , e.g. Germany and UK)	PEGI (Pan European Game Information)	<a href="http://www.pegi.info">www.pegi.info</a>
Germany	USK (UnterhaltungssoftwareSelbstkontrolle)	<a href="http://www.usk.de">www.usk.de</a>
UK	BBFC (British Board of Film Classification) VSC (Video Standards Council)	<a href="http://www.bbfc.co.uk">www.bbfc.co.uk</a> <a href="http://www.videostandards.org.uk">www.videostandards.org.uk</a>
Australia	OFLC (Office for Film and Literature Classification)	<a href="http://www.oflc.gov.au">www.oflc.gov.au</a>
USA	ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board)	<a href="http://www.esrb.org">www.esrb.org</a>