

= Localization of Square Enix video games =

The Japanese video game developer and publisher Square Enix (formally two companies called Square and Enix prior to 2003) has been translating its games for North America and the PAL region since the late 1980s . It has not always released all of its games in all major regions , and continues to selectively release games even today depending on multiple factors such as the viability of platforms or the condition of the game itself . The process of localization has changed during that time from having a one @-@ person team with a short time and tight memory capacities to having a team of translators preparing simultaneous launches in multiple languages .

The companies ' first major projects were Dragon Quest and Final Fantasy , which each proved successful enough to launch video game franchises . Since then , the majority of the games produced by the companies have been localized for western audiences , although the process was not given a high priority at Square until the international success of Final Fantasy VII . Richard Honeywood was recruited to start a dedicated localization department at the company . Enix remained without a translation department until its merger with Square . In some cases , such as Alexander O. Smith , teams or individuals became attached to particular subseries . In recent years , the process of localization has undergone changes , mainly due to difficult experiences with various titles , and Square Enix has sometimes developed the titles in localized form first in order to appeal to the western market .

= = Staff = =

The localization staff at Square Enix works mainly from Japanese to English and the other way around , and from American English to British English , French , Italian , German , and Spanish . Prior to the merger of Square and Enix in 2003 , Enix did not initially have a localization department and outsourced its Western releases to translators who had no close contact with the original development teams . Square also did not initially have a localization department , though Kaoru Moriyama and Ted Woolsey worked with them regularly on a contractual basis . Following the massive international success of Final Fantasy VII , the company looked into improving the quality of its translated products ? the game was widely criticized for its rushed translation , which had been handled entirely by Michael Baskett , the company 's only in @-@ house translator at the time . To that end , Square tasked Richard Honeywood , originally a programmer , with creating a dedicated localization team . His first major project was Xenogears . While there were only two members at first , including Honeywood , the staff grew to include more than 40 employees by 2007 , four years after the merger between Square and Enix . By the late 2000s , for self @-@ contained series or games linked by story events or similar elements , Square Enix can use the same localization team , as in the case of titles set in the fictional world of Ivalice . The translator most associated with the Ivalice games is Alexander O. Smith . Another noted translator is Tom Slattery , who has worked the localizations of the Nintendo DS remake of Final Fantasy IV , the Game Boy Advance port of Final Fantasy VI , and Final Fantasy XIII and its sequels .

= = Approach = =

Before a translation is greenlit and translators are allocated , the localization , quality assurance (QA) and marketing staff play through a build of the game and sometimes do a focus group study . The localization team 's playthrough can sometimes take over 100 hours of gameplay . Once the company greenlights a localization project , a period of brainstorming starts in which glossary , style , naming schemes and fonts are chosen . During the translation phase , voiced sections are translated first . Text files are cross @-@ checked by multiple translators and editors . The text is then integrated along with any graphic and sound changes , and the game goes to quality assurance . During a period of several weeks to up to three months , Japanese QA teams look for bugs while Western QA teams check linguistic issues . The localization team often re @-@ plays the game during this phase , translates the manuals and help out on the guidebooks if these are

made . Finally , the game is sent to the hardware manufacturers to be approved .

Challenges for the localization teams include space limitation (due to data storage and / or on @-@ screen space) , achieving a natural dialogue flow despite multiple plot branches and script lines being stored out of order , and , when voiced footage is not re @-@ recorded for lip movement , dealing with file length and lip @-@ synch limitations . When the same team works on different games in a series such as Final Fantasy , they often need to adopt different writing styles depending on the setting of their games . Another point to consider is humorous elements that do not translate properly into English , and different cultural expectations about character interactions . The localization process depends on factors such as the development teams ' wishes , as well as budget and schedule . Translation usually starts late in development , although some titles , like Final Fantasy XI , are translated from Japanese to English during initial development , making the translators appear more like additional planners than actual translators . A few titles , like The Bouncer , have actually been developed in English first and only then translated to Japanese . The Last Remnant also adopted this approach , featuring motion @-@ capture and dialogue synched to English rather than Japanese actors . This was done due to the company 's wish to create a title for the international market .

Many early localizations , like other RPGs both then and in more recent years , made heavy use of antiquated speech patterns and archaic nouns such as " thee " and " thou " . Square was not greatly focused on their localizations before the worldwide commercial success of Final Fantasy VII . In later years , the original translators were joined by editors to catch grammar and spelling errors . Prior to the development of Final Fantasy XIII @-@ 2 , the standard localization process for a title involved dual development between the company 's sound and localization departments , which meant that difficulties could arise because of constant changes to dialogue . For XIII @-@ 2 and future large @-@ scale titles , an in @-@ house development tool called Moomle was developed to ensure all parts of the process were properly synchronized and centralized . The development of Moomle was initialized due to the troubled localization of Final Fantasy XIII , and spearheaded by the game 's translator Slattery and his Japanese counterpart Teruaki Sugawara . In recent years , localization teams have tended to adopt two different approaches to translation and localization : either they remain quite faithful to the original Japanese , or they can make large changes as long as the story outline remains the same . The former method was adopted for Final Fantasy XIII and its sequels , although some alterations were made in order to make the English dialogue sound natural . In choosing voice actors , the company prefers to avoid well @-@ known film and television actors , citing Ellen Page 's casting in Beyond : Two Souls as a counterexample .

= = = Experiences = = =

Honeywood described Xenogears , his first translation project at Square and the first to be handled internally by the company , as " pure hell " . He stated that he started to change the company 's approach to localization after that game , moving booths to always work very closely with the original development teams , improving communication with them , and introducing full @-@ time editors . Woolsey also had a troublesome time while localizing Secret of Mana , which he said " nearly killed [him] " . The translation was completed within a month of the Japanese release as Square wanted to catch the 1993 holiday season . Final Fantasy XIII 's localization , handled by Slattery and Sugawara , was also quite chaotic . According to Slattery , the lack of deadlines , poor communication and synchronization between the various departments , and continuing changes to the script and to cutscenes led to a turbulent development . Due to the script changes , large sections of dialogue needed to be re @-@ translated by Slattery and re @-@ recorded by the English actors due to lack of necessary emotional drive for the scenes . In contrast , Smith had a good working relationship with Yasumi Matsuno during the localization of titles like Vagrant Story , Final Fantasy XII and the 2010 re @-@ release of Tactics Ogre : Let Us Cling Together . The two worked closely to ensure that the western versions were faithful to Matsuno 's vision . A challenging localization was Final Fantasy X , the first Final Fantasy title to feature voice acting . There , the team faced problems in both making the dialogue more compatible with an English @-@ speaking

audience and lip @-@ synching it roughly with in @-@ game characters , whose lip @-@ movement was still for the original Japanese dialogue .

= = Changes = =

When translating its video games , Square Enix tries to take into account the cultural differences between Japan and western territories . This sometimes involves rewriting dialogue or altering graphics , animations , and sounds . For instance , in Chocobo Racing , visual references to the Japanese folk heroes Momotar? and Kiji were changed to depict Hansel and Gretel , since the game was designed mainly for children , and Hansel and Gretel are better known in the west than Momotar? and Kiji . According to Honeywood , trying to explain to the original development teams why some changes are needed can range from " frustrating to downright hilarious " . Generally , older development teams trust the translators with making changes while newer teams can be more reluctant , though they usually build up trust gradually . The localization team for The World Ends with You chose to preserve the Japanese elements to ensure the game 's cultural aspect remained intact . While localizing Final Fantasy XII , Smith worked to preserve the original script 's meaning while using English dialects to reproduce the Japanese dialects found in the original version . He and translator Joseph Reeder also ended up using different accents to identify factions within the game .

Final Fantasy VII 's script was done by a small team , resulting in a rough script and inconsistencies . One of the more famous of these was the name of Aerith Gainsborough : the name was originally meant to be a merging of " Air " and " Earth " , but her name in the original game was translated as " Aeris " . During his localization of Secret of Mana , Woolsey was forced to trim down vast amounts of character dialogue due to an awkward fixed text font , later stating that he was satisfied with the result . Vagrant Story has been recognized as a high @-@ quality localization : whereas the original Japanese text was rather bland , the English version made use of archaic Medieval and Old English words and dialogue . With ports and remakes of older games , dialogue can be changed or added by the team , as in the case of Final Fantasy VI . The title can also be altered for various reasons . Final Fantasy IV and VI were released in western regions as Final Fantasy II and III . This was due to the fact that the original II and III had not received a western release . The Final Fantasy Legend was originally to be called The Great Warrior Saga , but changed it to its current title to tie in with the Final Fantasy series , which was well @-@ known and popular in the west . Dragon Quest , one of the earliest successful Japanese role @-@ playing games , had its title changed to Dragon Warrior so as not to confuse it with the similarly @-@ titled tabletop role @-@ playing game DragonQuest . The DragonQuest title was discontinued in 1987 , and Square Enix registered the Dragon Quest trademark for their use in 2003 . Also due to copyright issues , The World Ends with You could not be released under its original Japanese title It 's a Wonderful World .

Gameplay may be altered when it is felt that a game might be too easy or difficult for the Western audience . Some of the older Final Fantasy titles , such as Final Fantasy IV , were altered to be more easy to play in the West than in Japan , though their remakes and ports have generally restored the difficulty . Einhänder 's gameplay also received notable cuts for its North American release . On the other hand , Final Fantasy XII : Revenant Wings was made more difficult in localized versions because the Western market was judged " more familiar " with the real @-@ time strategy genre than the Japanese market . For the western release of Dissidia Final Fantasy , the game was changed to suit western players , including removing several RPG elements to make it more akin to an action game . Censorship can also affect the localized versions of the games and require obscuring mature themes , rewriting risque remarks or phrases , altering graphics or removing parts of some scenes . This was common in the NES and SNES eras but less drastic later on once video game content rating systems were established . Original western releases of early games in the Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest featured multiple occurrences of this form of censorship . Final Fantasy VIII also received some censorship for its European release , including the removal of a Nazi @-@ like uniform . Less commonly , this also goes the other way , for instance with Final Fantasy XII , in which a sequence involving violence against a female character

was censored in the Japanese version but restored in the American and European releases . References to religion can also be removed , as in Final Fantasy IV and VI . Such references in Xenogears caused Square to consider not releasing it in North America .

= = Releases = =

In 2008 , Square Enix expressed willingness to make worldwide " simultaneous releases the norm " . Concerning Final Fantasy XI , at the time of the original English @-@ only European release in 2004 , producer Hiromichi Tanaka had stated that while Japanese / North American / Australian simultaneous releases are possible due to translating only Japanese to English , it was not possible for European countries due to the difficulty of finding good Japanese @-@ to @-@ European @-@ languages translators , and the fact that second @-@ hand translations from the English would be akin to " Chinese whispers " . However , the team later integrated full @-@ fledged French and German localization teams , achieving simultaneous release from the Japanese for three different languages from 2007 on . Another example of synchronized localization is Final Fantasy XIII : the company started the localization process alongside the game 's development to lessen the delay between the local and international releases .

Final Fantasy XIV : A Realm Reborn was localized in @-@ house by Square Enix under supervision by Naoki Yoshida and Koji Fox . Compared to its predecessor , which featured English @-@ only voice @-@ overs , A Realm Reborn featured English , Japanese , German and French similar to Final Fantasy XI . The game featured voice work in a low number of cutscenes : this was explained by the fact that the team did not want new voice recording to dominate the creation of new content after the initial release . The western release of Lightning Returns : Final Fantasy XIII was delayed by over two months because of the large amount of dialogue , which changes due to the game 's time mechanic , that needed to be translated and recorded .

The viability of a game 's platform can also affect both the localization and the release , as in the case of the PlayStation Portable @-@ exclusive Final Fantasy Type @-@ 0 , which would eventually come west as a high definition port for PlayStation 4 and Xbox One , and Seiken Densetsu 3 , which was not localized due to undefined technical problems . The company has also recently started releasing Japanese voice tracks as downloadable content , as in the case of Lightning Returns : Final Fantasy XIII and one of the titles it has published , the Access Games @-@ developed Drakengard 3 . Another aspect of Square Enix 's policy concerning the western release of games was to make games that appealed to both western and Japanese audiences , but the worldwide success of the Japan @-@ aimed Bravely Default caused them to rethink their strategy .

= = Additional content = =

The localized versions sometimes expand on the original games . For example , when Honeywood found contradictions in the story of Chrono Cross , he worked with Masato Kato , the director and scenario writer of the game , to rewrite sections and add explanatory dialogue which was not in the original version . For Dragon Quest VIII : Journey of the Cursed King , voice @-@ overs and orchestral music were recorded for the Western releases , while the original Japanese version did not have them . Generally , gameplay content left out of the original game due to time constraints may be completed and added in the localized versions . Sometimes , the expanded localized versions of games from series like Kingdom Hearts and Final Fantasy are re @-@ released in Japan . The re @-@ releases are usually based on a direct port of the North American releases , with only text translated back in Japanese and Japanese subtitles to English dialogue . They can also include features and tweaks previously only available in the western version alongside other additions .

= = Reception = =

1UP.com 's Wesley Fenlon praised Square Enix for the high quality of its translations , especially as space allocated for text and dialogue had been expanded with new and re @-@ released versions of games . Jeremy Parish , writing for the same site , said that the quality of Square Enix 's localizations had " gone from laughable [...] to some of the best around . " Both praise and criticism has been given to individual games for the quality of their localizations . Xenogears , the company 's first game to feature voice acting , drew criticism in regard to its audio presentation , while The Bouncer received a fairly positive response . Final Fantasy X received praise , although poor lip @-@ synching and some aspects of the actors ' performances were criticized . The English release of X @-@ 2 ended up receiving the Seventh Annual Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences award in 2004 for Outstanding Achievement in Character Performance . Final Fantasy XII and Vagrant Story were both highly praised for the qualities of their localizations .