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## **The Localisation of *Final Fantasy VII*:**

### **A Descriptive Analysis**

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## **Abstract**

The contemporary society has perceived the development of the industry of video games in a short period of time. Factually, video games have evolved over the last decades with such strength that they have indeed been integrated in everyday life (Bernal-Merino, 2011: 16). More immersive than a book, more demanding than a film, video games are appealing to the five senses because of its selected music and animated scenes, specifics that play a crucial part in their growing popularity. In fact, their expansion is far from being over. Enterprises from all over the world perceive the economic potential video games possess and, as such, they attempt to expand their business worldwide.

Extending the frontiers that video games are able to span entails new challenges, such as fitting for a culture entirely divergent from their original one. Thus, from a linguistic perspective, a new branch related to audiovisual translation (AVT) required to be born. Translation from a source language to a target language was no longer enough to satisfy the needs of a new culture.

This dissertation attempts to shed some light on the existing clash between cultures and how linguistics expands its limits while researching the best direction to follow so the great majority of consumers see their own needs fulfilled. Once the essential background knowledge is settled, the principal characteristics observed are applied by means of analysing the characters' speech from the game *Final Fantasy VII* (Square Soft, 1997), taking real examples from Japanese, English and Spanish to compare in an attempt to illustrate the adaptations suffered each game version from the original script and analyse the possible reasons why loss of meaning occurs.

**Keywords:** game localisation, language transfer, transcreation, transliteration, video game.

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## 1. Introduction

*Final Fantasy VII* (Square Soft, 1997) is a game developed by the company currently known as Square Enix. Especially renowned by contemporary consumers of video games in general, and by fanatics of the whole *Final Fantasy* saga, the game experienced an enormous acceptance all over the world from the date it was released until this point in time. The huge success transformed *Final Fantasy VII* to an iconic game, the representative of its enterprise. The fact that *Final Fantasy VII* was converted into a representative that symbolises the enterprise where it was born is connected to the scope of foreign countries the game was released. *Final Fantasy VII* was worldwide renown as the first title from the saga in being sold in the Europe continent, introducing its particular game system to a completely new client whose profile highly differed from the Japanese customer the company was accustomed to. To achieve a better acceptance and hence reaching a greater economic conclusion, Japanese native staff was entrusted the responsibility of translating the game from a source language, English; to a target language, Spanish.

The game was a huge success: the innovative battle system, the charismatic characters and the deep story addressed were crucial for its victory, which engaged the new public into the game without any further issues. Nonetheless, as well as *Final Fantasy VII* is widely known for its continuous growing popularity, it was also focus of controversy due to the particular localisation it went through.

By the time the game was under development, game localisation was –and still is– expanding simultaneously to the game industry. In the ninetens, the game industry was starting to be exported into Europe and it is by the year 2000 when the movement could be seen as globalised (Bernal-Merino, 2011: 16). There is no wonder why Square Soft wagered to expand their industry further from Japan and the United States: the more customers, the more benefit it would obtain. Nonetheless, as it was their first attempt to localise their game for the purpose of delighting the needs of a whole new culture, the game suffered from various cultural crashes that were included in the game and became as famous as the game itself.

Game localisation resulted in an intricate issue. Translating from a source language (SL) to a target language (TL) was not sufficient: holding a general background knowledge about the target culture was crucial. *Final Fantasy VII* develops its story through the dialogue of characters and written text; no voices were recorded or included for any

language available. The background music was accompanied with special sounds according to what was happening in a concrete situation which make easier for the player to follow the main argument. The fact that the game bases its story on words would seem to be easier to be transferred to a different culture. Further from reality, game localisation is more complex (Bartelt-Krantz, 2011: 86). By the time Square Soft decided to enlarge its public, they lacked from previous experiences to know that their decision would lead to a collision between cultures.

Due to the fact that Square Soft chose Japanese native staff to perform the localisation of *Final Fantasy VII*, if compared particular in-game situations bearing in mind the three languages with which the video game was released, Japanese as the original one, American English and Spanish; it is to be expected that differences among the three versions will be evidenced taking the form of linguistic issues through the dialogue exchange. Subsequently, a close examination of various examples taken from the game can be analysed in order to show the dissimilarities found between the three cultures.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

Game localisation was born in a particular circumstance to meet the increasing needs of a rather fresh business: the game industry. Companies worldwide scrutinise the most efficient method to see the maximum economic benefits reducing costs to the minimum. Still under development, game localisation has facilitated the expansion of video games extensively, proving meanwhile to be a challenge which has not been completely solved yet.

### **2. 1. What is a “video game”?**

A video game contains two terms implicit: video, which presupposes the presence of a monitor to display a succession of elements that composes the game; and game, a product which aim is to entertain a certain target customers. In other words, video games “are, therefore, interactive multimedia and multimodal products with a strong audio-visual component, based on complex systems of rules, and designed with the primary function of entertaining, albeit not exclusively limited to that function” (Mangiron, 2013: 2).

Developed by a team, video games remain in the boundary between a piece of art and an industrial product which purpose is to generate as much economic profit as possible, similar to the film industry. As such, the company expands its products worldwide. To

succeed, the game must be adapted to the future market (Bernal-Merino, 2006: 27). At this point, localisation plays a fundamental role.

## **2. 2. What is “game localisation”?**

The term localisation is coined when a software product is translated to a TL from a SL. A more exhaustive definition is provided by Bernal-Merino when this author describes any product localisation as “the process of ‘internationalisation’, (...) Once the product has been ‘internationalised’, it can be adapted legally, technically, and culturally to each of the receiving countries, i.e. it can be ‘localised’” (Bernal-Merino, 2006: 31).

In fact, depicting localisation as simply a translation is not enough to get the appropriate idea of what the term implies. Games are a complex product: they narrate a story through a specific framework accompanied by environmental music that varies depending on the circumstances, sound effects and sometimes even voices. Bernal-Merino (2006: 27) enumerates a series of attributes that can be found in a video game:

Computers are so versatile that video games can combine within one creation techniques that were developed for very different disciplines:

- a- Literature and linguistics: narration, dialogue.
- b- Architecture and sculpture: 3D modelling to recreate realistic scenery.
- c- Music and special effects: dynamic atmospheric music and sounds adjust to player actions.
- d- Maths and physics: environment simulation allows graphics to react to players’ movements.
- e- Cinema and camera work: positioning the camera to enhance drama in the story.
- f- Telecommunication: fans playing together the same multiplayer games from home.
- g- Voice recognition technology: the game responds to verbal instructions.

These characteristics –a video game does not need to encompass every single point, however– altogether immerse the player into the video game as a required component to maintain the course of the action in progress. The requisite for the game to be played by an active user makes it essential to become appealing to the potential customer.

## **2. 3. The importance of culture**

Each individual is influenced by the particular culture where he/she is born. The habit the brain functions and how reality is perceived, traditions and the common background knowledge is defined by the society that surrounds the individual. While for Japanese native it comes natural to specify their position while talking about siblings (they use specific words in order to refer to their own older or younger brother, while both terms will change if they are referred to the brother of a hypothetical second person hearer),

and expects the hearer to offer the same data, for a European native, that same information feels excessive or uninteresting. When a culture contacts with a divergent one, misunderstandings occur due to the contrast existent in between.

Video games need to be adapted to the target culture to prevent mistakes and confusion from happening. Thus, video games are localised to gain customers. The translation from a SL to a TL receives the name of transliteration. “This proved to be a more than welcomed improvement because now non-English speakers were less dependent on manuals (they had to check constantly while playing), and they could also follow the story more closely and stay immerse in the game” (Bernal-Merino, 2011: 15).

Localisation, thus, confronts further targets, as the adaptation of language is one of the many aspects that can be taken into account when involved in a target culture. For instance, it is common to reconstruct the name of characters to ordinary names from the TL. If a video game that contains a story based on Japanese divinities was released in Japan, it would probably become a huge success as the elements the game comprehends are part of the general background knowledge Japanese society shares; whereas an approach to the Roman Pantheon would be a better shot if the game was released in a European context. The creative process that converts a product into a second article to fit a specific customer profile without losing its main characteristics is known as transcreation, less common than transliteration as it supposes a higher economic investment (Bartelt-Krantz, 2011: 87).

Consequently, culture not only shapes how an individual perceives reality, but it also establishes the concerns of a particular society in a determined place and time. The conceptualization of the world, given to each individual by a specific culture, is reflected on the language, acquired at critical points in life. Dutch speakers are said to be good hearers, as the structure the language follows provides the main information – the verb– at the end of an utterance. Thus, in a provided situation, the listener lacks from the information necessary to overlap, and so there is no other option but to wait until the speaker has finished his/her turn. In Japanese utterances, the chronological order in which action occurs is reflected in every spoken interaction. However, verbs do not change its form accordingly to the time the situational context is happening, but they take different forms accordingly to the response a speaker expects from the hearer and indirectly acknowledging the social status existing. Any Asian speaker would have problems in learning abstract concepts such as the subjunctive present in the Spanish

language –a mood that denotes a hypothetical situation in an unsure time– but, at the same time, would feel that interaction with Spanish native speakers is too direct.

### **3. Methodology**

A definite number of instances taken directly from the game *Final Fantasy VII* presenting a dialogue among characters are provided in order to be analysed according to the data collected. It will be presented in chronological order as it follows in the game. A research question raises after having a first glance to the importance of culture, the clashes that occur when two diverse cultural ideas are put together, and the linguistic form resulting, in the field of game localisation: will the original message lose meaning once adapted from the SL to the TL in the process of localisation? Which linguistic features will be lost behind the target text (TT) in comparison with the source text (ST)? According to the theoretical framework observed, it is expected to detect missing information attributable to the time in which the game was developed, and assuming that it was the first attempt Square Soft localised one of its products. Besides, the three languages and their dissonant cultures point to the same direction, as adapting a video game into a foreign culture is far more intricate than translating word per word, and so forth, a crucial loss in meaning is to be expected.

Samples are taken directly from the game and presented in a chronological order. After specifying the context when the specific situation occurs, three language variations are compared: Japanese, English and Spanish. A succession of linguistic obstacles related to the contrast between cultures will arise. *Final Fantasy VII* was originally designed for a Japanese audience at first, launched and adapted for American costumers and, eventually, the Spanish script was based on the English approach. Thus, Japanese (ST) and English (TT); English (ST) and Spanish (TT) utterances are contrasted to see the meaning –implicit or explicit– that has been lost or, in opposition, how it has been linguistically conveyed to accompany the target society to whom it is directed. A back translation –a literal translation from a language different to English– for the Japanese and Spanish versions is provided so as to highlight the process of transliteration that occurs. Data will be analysed and contrasted in order to explain the transformation suffered from the SL to the TL and how it is linguistically shown. Taking into account the analysis, the results acquired will be counted. By maintaining the account of the frequency meaning is properly conveyed or lost, the creation of a visual graphic helps to draw a wider idea in reply to the research questions –how much meaning has been lost

in the localisation process. A final observation directed to the importance and complexity of localisation due to the clashes that occur when cultures are mixed as it is reflected in the collected and analysed data closes the discussion.

This dissertation restricts the content that can be gathered together under strict rules, and given the length of it, a complete analysis from *Final Fantasy VII* cannot be expected. The quantity of data that can be extracted from the video game exceeds the spatial limitations of this brief study by far. It can be considered as a preface to a more detailed one. Two different paths could be derived from this research paper.

On the one hand, a further development including the elements that could not be added would be the most straightforward succession. Moving a bit forward, a future branch of study not related to *Final Fantasy VII* or video games, but game localisation in general could also be continued from this study. It also anticipates the difficulty that a new business sector such as the video games has to go through to see profits “[b]y the end of the nineties revenues had doubled in the games industry (...), and although there was some internal growth more than half of it came from the efforts put into localisation” (Bernal-Merino, 2011: 16). A further study focused on the main elements that need to be improved so as to achieve a better result in the final product and the impact it causes when exported to a specific society would also be possible, even if making a perfect localisation is considered to be impossible,

On the other hand, this dissertation also keeps the idea of intercultural misunderstandings, how the different conceptualisations are given by the time an individual is born, the problems a second language learner can find when dealing with a complete divergent culture that structures the world completely different, or how multilingual people manage to bypass those obstacles.

#### **4. Data analysis and discussion**

Summing up the ideas gathered so far, localising video games cannot be considered an easy task:

An added challenge to the truthful translation of the text in its broader context is the fact that the translator will likely only see the text in script form (Word or Excel) rather than as part of a playable build of the game that would communicate the environment and feel. As the game experience is more than the total of its parts, this can have an impact on the appropriateness of a translation to the game’s context — close collaboration between the localization and development teams is therefore crucial (Bartelt-Krantz, 2011: 86).

The fact that translators do not have the option to experience the game first-handed supports the theory that when analysing the data taken from *Final Fantasy VII*, the original intended meaning will be lost. Translators work directly in the file they are provided without any external help but the team (Mangiron, 2013: 7-8). It is of significant importance to take into account that the localisation of *Final Fantasy VII* was carried by Japanese native staff, which does not ease the situation.

#### 4. 1. Data analysis

The data presented directly taken from the game is organised in a chronological succession, as it progresses through the game. Utterances are divided into sections which names are related to the events that happen. A general context is provided due to the important role it plays on a game localisation process: *Final Fantasy VII* narrates the story of Cloud, a young mercenary who presents himself as a past member of an organisation called SOLDIER, widely known because of the enormous strength their disciplines share and because they work under the orders of Shinra, an enterprise that consumes the vitality the earth and life possess to produce energy at low cost. Cloud joins a terrorist group known as AVALANCHE whose purpose is to stop Shinra and the eventual death of the world they live in. Barret –AVALANCHE’s leader–, Tifa – Cloud’s childhood friend– and Cloud visit each Sector to destroy Mako’s reactor, sometimes confronting the TURKS, an organisation that secretly works for Shinra.

##### 4. 1. 1. Sector 1 - The No. 1 Reactor

Example 1:

Context	The first boss battle encountered in the game. Difficult to deal with, Cloud points out a useful tip to Barret in order to help not losing the battle against Escorpion.
Japanese	「バレット、気をつけろ」 [Baretto, be careful] 「しっぽをあげている間に攻撃するとレーザーで反撃してくるぞ」 [If you attack while the tail is rising, it will fight back with the laser]
English	“Barret, be careful!” “Attack when it’s tail’s up” “It’s gonna counter with its laser!”
Spanish	“Barret, ¡ve con cuidado!” [Barret, go carefully!] “No ataques mientras la cola esté arriba!” [Don’t attack while the tail is up!] “Va a contraatacar con el láser” [It’s going to counterattack with the laser]

All the three versions have in common the fact that Cloud addresses Barret persistently so as to warn him about what he should expect from the battle from that moment on.

In the original Japanese script, Cloud points out that Escorpion will counterattack when it keeps its tail elevated as it is equipped with a laser whose purpose is to attack. The utilisation of a conditional relates the main events as cause and effect, if Escorpion is attacked at that precise moment, its laser will be shot. Indirectly, Cloud asks Barret not to attack, expressing the directive as a petition rather than a direct order, which would sound too impolite for a Japanese player.

The English version losses completely the initial meaning, not only because the utterance gives the opposite advice that is supposed to be transmitted, but it also lacks grammar coherence. The indirect petition from the Japanese version is transformed into an imperative as for the American society the direct language helps to get immerse in the action. However, dividing the original conditional into two separate sentences results misleading. Instead of warning Barret about the dangerous laser, Cloud seems to encourage Barret to finish their job as soon as possible since the battle seems to get harder. As a result, the initial conveyed message is completely lost.

In the Spanish version, the conveyed meaning is slightly different. Presented as two utterances that are not really connected as it can be visible in the English script, Cloud advises Barret not to attack while Escorpion’s tail is up, recovering the initial warning without losing the directness that the use of imperatives convey. However, as connectors are missing, the following utterance is not understood as cause and effect, but as two facts that will happen at the same time. Thus, what it is understood is that while Barret and Cloud decide not to produce more pain to their common enemy, Escorpion achieves its revenge by attacking them, similar to the message conveyed in the English version.

Example 2:

Context	After performing an attack against Shinra and losing contact with Cloud, Barret and his companions board a train back home. Suddenly, Cloud breaks in. Barret and Cloud argue about the egocentric behaviour Cloud shows. Barret gets so angry due to the lack of concern the young man dedicates to that matter that he threatens Cloud asserting that he will not be paid even if he delivered his valuable help.
Japanese	「なにっ！！」 [What!!] 「チツ..... 遅刻のぶんは報酬からひくからな」 [Chs... Being late isn't compensated]
English	“Wha!?” “I’m takin’ it outta your money, hot stuff!”
Spanish	“¡Qué!” [What!] “Voy a sacar tu dinero, ¡está caliente!” [I’m going to take your money out, it’s hot!]

In the original version, Barret suggest that he is tremendously furious and that Cloud is to blame for that in an indirect speech, by making use of collocations meaning that being late does not deserve any kind of remuneration. The annoyance Barret is feeling is highlighted by the exclamatory pronoun previously used and the onomatopoeia *chs* that denotes irritation.

In English the dialogue is adapted to convey a more ferocious message against Cloud by making explicit that Barret will keep Cloud’s money if necessary, a direct threat that loses the indirectness from the Japanese utterance but that suits better to the American consumers. He even mocks Cloud by calling him *hot stuff*, a sarcastic description used to negatively point out his behaviour. Barret’s utterances are charged with typographic mistakes, a resource commonly used in localisation to imitate the slang used by a determined character that connotes ferocity to his speech. Neither in Japanese nor in Spanish this touch of fierceness is conveyed, even taking into account that in Japanese Barret is the most direct character.

Yet, the Spanish adaptation failed to apply this new idea to the meaning of the utterance. The speech pronounced by Barret seems to be taken out of the blue because it lacks coherence, as it is unrelated with both the topic they were discussing and the way the dialogue continues. Thus, the original meaning is completely lost behind a transliteration.

#### 4. 1. 2. Sector 4 - The No. 5 Reactor

Example 3:

Context	Barret and his group called AVALANCHE are found to be travelling by train without authorisation. Each carriage is closed and inspected, one per one, in order to find who the intruders are. They run as fast as they can to avoid being detected until they reach an open carriage from where they can jump to the outside. Barret leaves the situation to two of his companions before jumping.
Japanese	「じゃな！」 [Well!] 「あとしまつはたのんだっ！」 [I ask you to clean!]
English	“Later! You take care of the rest”
Spanish	“¡Más tarde! ¡Tú te encargas del resto!” [After! You are in charge of the rest]

In the ST, Barret asks his friends to *clean up* the remaining matters that could be left after their disappearance. His expression is exceptionally direct, feature that Japanese players understand as his hierarchical position. As Barret is the leader from AVALANCHE, he can address subordinates without regarding politeness.

The English TT adapts this meaning in a proper manner by bidding farewell to two of his partners and asking them to recover a normal situation within the train. He uses direct speech and adds the idea that he expects seeing his comrades in a near future, empathising with his friends as equals and maintaining the feeling of unity, transforming Barret in a more American character.

The Spanish utterance follows the English version in a literal way. Nevertheless, a literal translation makes no sense to Spanish speakers, as the first utterance can only be understood as further in time and not as a proper expression to say good-bye. The second utterance, even if meaningful, fails to convey Barret’s message to both of his companions. In English, the second personal pronoun *you* [you] cannot be distinguished as singular or plural since the same form is maintained. In contrast, in Spanish the distinction is necessary as it exists a second singular personal pronoun, *tú* [you]; and a second plural personal pronoun, *vosotros* [you]. This mistake can be also related to the highly dependency of Japanese speakers to know the context of situation in every moment. Japanese is a language that possess very little sounds and many of their words share a common pronunciation and can only be distinguished by the topic of the conversation. In fact, the subject in a Japanese text is commonly elliptic, while in English it is obligatory to mention it and in Spanish is always signalled. Thus, while a Japanese player would feel the addition of a subject redundant, both English and Spanish players would feel that the most important information is missing.

#### 4. 1. 3. Sector 5 – Aeris

Example 4:

Context	While looking for Tifa, Cloud needs to get a dress made for him. Aeris and he go to the Clothes Shop where the shop assistant asks them for help, promising that they will get their dress made if they succeed in making her father to come back to the shop he owns. He is found at the bar. To confirm his identity, Aeris asks the man if he is the father of the girl they were talking to before.
Japanese	「確かに服屋だがあなたの親父ではないぞ」 [Certainly it is my clothes shop but I’m not your father]
English	“I own the Clothes Shop... but I ain’t your father”
Spanish	“Soy el dueño de la Tienda de modas... pero no soy su padre” [I am the Clothes Shop’s owner... But I’m not her father]

In the original version, the man confirms that he possesses, without a doubt, the Clothes Shop, but he denies being the father of Aeris by addressing her directly, misunderstanding himself the words Aeris used. The owner of the shop fails to

understand Aeris due to the ambivalence the usual lack of personal pronouns produces in Japanese. In fact, it is considered very impolite to address directly to someone by using pronouns instead of proper names in Japan. In this sample, the owner of the shop answers discourteously to Aeris, probably due to the fact that he is older or because he is drunk and does not control his speech.

The English version conveys practically the same information. The only difference that can be observed is that in the English language, the fact that he is the owner is more powerfully marked thanks to the verb *to own*, while the disrespectful tone implicit in the Japanese script is lost. However, the misleading message the owner of the shop understands should not occur in English, as in English the use of pronouns makes the object they refer clear. Yet, as he is found in a bar, it can be understood that he did not listen completely to Aeris.

The Spanish TT tries to follow the same principles as the English translation, however, a contradiction that is not supposed to happen occurs. The utterance works just well when he admits being the owner of the shop –in the Spanish version the name of the shop is inconveniently mixing clothes with fashion, thus, resulting in an poorly convincing shop naming that can be understood nonetheless– but the coherence is broken once he denies being her father. The most immediate referent is the shop assistant, so a Spanish speaker understands that the girl from the shop lied to them. This mistake can be understood by taking into account politeness. In this language, there are two ways of referring to a second person singular, *tú* [you] and *usted* [you]. The most courteous one –*usted* [you]– shares its verbal form with the third person singular pronoun. Thus, the utterance is well written and should convey the right message, as *su padre* [your father] can be referring to Aeris, taking the most polite utilisation rather than *tu padre* [your father]. However, this is not the case, as the referent becomes blurred. Besides, through the dialogue between the shop owner and Aeris there is a constant changing in register, from informal to formal and vice versa, making it impossible for a Spanish speaker to make a solid direction towards the pretended meaning. The discontinuity of register can be explained by taking a look at Japanese culture, where speakers are conscious of their hierarchical position and adapt their speech consequently. Thus, while in Spanish it is common not to change the register when conversation occurs, in Japanese each individual adapts their own speech according to the hearer and it is never reciprocal.

Example 5:

Context	Cloud escorts Aeris until they reach her house. She agrees to depart once the sun has risen after spending the night in a comfortable bed. At midnight, Cloud stealthily abandons the house and searches on his own for the right path towards Sector 7. Eventually, he gets lost until he realises that Aeris is waiting for him in a particular point, leaving him wandering around before Cloud feels her presence.
Japanese	「言いたいことはそれだけ？」 [Is that all you want to say?]
English	“Are you done?”
Spanish	“¿Estás acabado?” [Are you finished?]

In the original Japanese utterance, Aeris, once she is found, reproaches the inappropriate response received from Cloud who does not bother to give an explanation why he did not wait until dawn. A bit disappointedly, Aeris asks if he does not want to say something else, something that she feels it is missing. Aeris highlights the lack of courtesy expected from a guest in a given society where politeness is essential.

In the English version, Aeris does not maintain this vulnerable image of herself. In fact, she seems to enjoy the situation in which Cloud is lost and teases him, implying that, even if he thought he succeeded in eluding her, Cloud indeed needs her help to find a way out. Aeris, thus, is portrayed as a differing character, more appropriate for the American public.

The Spanish adaptation fails to convey the original meaning according to the context by pretending to imitate the English version in a too literal translation. Spanish speakers do not understand the utterance as a question to know if he is already tired of trying to go back home and being unsuccessful. The meaning that is conveyed to Spanish players is quite more extreme: as if she was superior to Cloud, Aeris reprimands Cloud and highlights his failure that came after a series of missteps he continues to take. Thus, her question is pronounced without mercy, painting Cloud as a good-for-nothing man that needs her to continue, and she will not help him until he feels desperate and without options to go on.

#### 4. 1. 4. Sector 6 - Wall Market

Example 6:

Context	Tifa is driven to the mansion of Don Corneo, a businessman that hunts young women in order to find his future bride. Aeris and Cloud resolve to infiltrate the mansion without raising suspicions. As soon as they make their way into the enormous housing, they get to talk to Tifa. As Tifa shows herself reluctant to talk in front of Aeris, Aeris accepts her silent petition and provides privacy to their chat.
Japanese	「オホン！ わたし、耳、ふさいでるね」 [Ohon! I, my ears, are blocked]
English	“Ahem!! I’ll just plug my ears”
Spanish	“¡¡Ejem!! Sólo escucharé” [Ahem!! I’ll just listen]

In the ST, Aeris calls their attention and compromises to keep distance from their conversation by assuring that her ears would be obstructed, which can be understood as covering her ears. She is being considerate towards Tifa because they do not know each other enough to maintain a friendly conversation.

That is, in fact, the meaning conveyed in the English TT. Aeris downplays the importance of the situation and assures in a more direct speech that she will not participate in order to prime courage into Tifa.

The Spanish version misses to convey this same meaning through the utterance. Factually, Aeris’s speech contradicts her own behaviour, non-negating the verb, and so, meaning that she is going to listen the conversation but that she would not participate within the dialogue, functioning as an obliged spectator. This misleading message is consequence of a too literal translation mapped from the English version that does not work from a Spanish point of view.

#### 4. 1. 5. Sector 7 - Fall of the Pillar

Example 7:

Context	Barret, Tifa and Cloud watch powerless how Sector 7 is destroyed without mercy. They are shocked after realising that several lives are lost. Tifa questions her own acts, wondering if she is responsible for the recent events.
Japanese	「ちがう.....わからないのは自分の.....気持ち」 [No... I don’t understand my... feelings]
English	“It’s not that. I’m not sure about... me. My feelings”
Spanish	“No es eso. No estoy seguro de... mí. De lo que siento” [It’s not that. I’m not sure about... me. About what I feel]

In the original version, Tifa considers her own condition and progressively explains she does not understand her inner sentiments. The utilisation of ellipsis conveys the feeling that Tifa finds it difficult to explain herself and slows down the speed of the conversation.

In the English version the idea is perfectly conveyed by respecting the utilisation of ellipsis and by adding verbs that imply doubt in their meaning and the proper pronouns to identify to whom Tifa refers.

The English adaptation is mapped into the Spanish version. However, even if the meaning is not lost and a Spanish speaker understands Tifa’s utterance in the same way an English speaker does, there is a concordance problem that would be impossible to find in the previously discussed languages. While both Japanese and English do not vary their adjectives with regard to the number of people and the gender they are referring to, the Spanish text does. Thus, Tifa’s utterance becomes confusing as she is using the wrong adjective form: *seguro* [sure], singular masculine. As she is a girl, a Spanish player would expect to find *segura* [sure], singular feminine.

#### 4. 1. 6. Sector 5 - Aeris’s Story

Example 8:

Context	So as to know better about the circumstances that surround Aeris, the game shows a flashback to the player when she was little. It is explained that from the time she was born, she inherited special knowledge about issues normal people are not aware of. For this reason, an organisation which works under Shinra’s orders attempts to capture her to use her inner abilities for their own concerns.
Japanese	「エアリス、君は大切な子供なんだ。君は特別な血をひいている」 [Earisu, you are an important child. You have a special blood]
English	“Aeris, you’re a very special child. You are of special blood”
Spanish	“Aeris, eres una niño muy especial. Tu sangre es especial” [Aeris, you’re a very special boy. Your blood is special]

Tseng directly addresses Aeris, a fact that is respected through the three different versions. In the original script, he acknowledges Aeris as a precious child who owns a really special kind of blood, however, as she is a child, there is not politeness implicit, a line that Tseng draws to demonstrate some degree of control towards her. The English and Spanish scripts convey the very same meaning by noticing that her uniqueness runs through her veins. Yet, the Spanish version shows an irregularity that creates confusion between Spanish players.

Neither Japanese nor English vary their nouns depending on the entity it refers to –with the exception of personal pronouns in English that distinguishes between male and female by using *he, his* or *she, her*. However, Spanish takes into account gender and number, and so, the word *child* cannot be translated as *niño* [boy] in this context because Aeris is a girl and so, it has to correspond to it. What makes this utterance even more hilarious for Spanish users is that the indefinite article preceding the noun has been correctly declined, thus, the combination is absurd and stands out for Spanish natives. To correct the mistake, the term *niña* [girl] should have been used. This mistake demonstrates a very thick line that separates Spanish culture from the rest being analysed. Spanish speakers conceptualise reality in a particular manner: if the human mind had containers to save information, each concept would be accompanied by two containers that a Spanish native expects to be filled with information regarding gender and number, and so, *una niño* [a boy] would be impossible to store as both terms are contradictory. Neither English, nor Japanese nouns would be accompanied by those containers as they generally do not expect that kind of information to be provided.

Example 9:

Context	Aeris is kidnapped by the group organisation named the Turks. Cloud was unable to go after her in a first time because his own life and those attached to Sector 7 were on the line. Once Barret, Tifa and Cloud are recovered from the initial shock, Cloud determines to search for Aeris. Tifa notices his resolution before Cloud leaves on his own.
Japanese	「エアリスのところへ行くのね」 [You are going to Earisu’s place, huh]
English	“You are going after Aeris, right?”
Spanish	“Tú vas después de Aeris, ¿de acuerdo?” [You go afterwards Aeris, ok?]

In the original script, Tifa formulates the utterance as if she could read Cloud’s mind by asserting that he is departing to the place Aeris is in a playful and cute voice. The utilisation of politeness is not necessary as they are childhood friends.

In the English adaptation, this lively tone is lost, and the focus is transferred from Aeris to the fact that Cloud is leaving, as in American English the verb is considered the most important part from a sentence. Yet, Tifa’s words are full of self-concern and she calls Cloud’s attention once again letting him know that she is already aware of his plans.

The Spanish version, however, makes no sense used in the context given. The English adaptation is once again mapped into the Spanish script, losing the meaning in between. Two ideas are the responsible for the incoherent utterance to happen: on the one hand

the meaning that is kept from *after* in an incorrect selection is temporal; on the other hand, the feeling that Tifa knows for sure that she knows Cloud’s action beforehand conveyed in the last part of the utterance is completely transformed into a direct question towards a committed Cloud who is given the whole responsibility of the situation. In other words, Tifa seems to be forcing Cloud to go somewhere –there is no reference to know the place exactly– after Aeris does.

#### 4. 1. 7. The Shinra Building

Example 10:

Context	Barret, Tifa and Cloud infiltrate the principal Shinra’s building in an attempt to rescue Aeris. Luckily, they reach her and manage to escape for a while until all of them are captured and imprisoned. While locked up, Cloud overhears Barret who has been locked up in a cell next to him.
Japanese	「エアリスは古代種で古代種の本名の呼び名はセトラ」 [Earisu is an ancient species, the real name of the ancient species is Setora]
English	“Aeris is an Ancient and the real name of the Ancients is Cetra”
Spanish	“Aeris es una Ancianna y su nombre verdadero es Cetra” [Aeris is an Ancient and her real name is Cetra]

In the ST, Barret thinks aloud about all the new information the group has collected so far. In his utterance, Aeris is the focus of attention, and he explains that she forms part of an almost extinguished ancient species who were better known as Cetra. As he is giving factual information, there is no politeness or added feelings indirectly transmitted. The English TT feels repetitive but conveys the original meaning successfully though not in the most appropriate way. In the American culture it is preferable to make use of ellipsis, pronouns or any kind of substitution before repeating the same word twice in order to provide fluency to the conversation.

The Spanish script results misleading. The utterance makes use of a higher degree of ellipsis in a wrong choice. Without taking into account the typographic mistake found in *Ancianna*, the choice of this word, closely related to Ancient as used in the English adaptation, does not convey the same solemn impression, transforming the implicit meaning to a term a Spanish player will find weird or even hilarious, as if Barret was implying that Aeris, even if she looks like a young teenager, in reality she is an old woman. Besides, by omitting the referent in the second part of the utterance connected to the previous one by a coordinate conjunction, the fact that *the real name is Cetra* is directly applied to Aeris –the subject– and not to the Ancients. In Japanese, the presupposed context information that both hearer and speaker share is not mentioned, so

a Japanese speaker is not used to substitute part of information. It is directly not given. This explains why in English the resulting utterance feels too repetitive while in Spanish some referent is missing.

#### 4. 2. Data compilation

Bearing in mind the ten examples analysed, the data gathered regarding some features sheds some light on the following aspects: the implicit politeness resulting from conversation, the original feelings conveyed, the correctness of expression, the main focus of attention, the original meaning adapted to suit a different culture and the misunderstandings occurred in the localisation process; which are contrasted and quantified in the figure below:

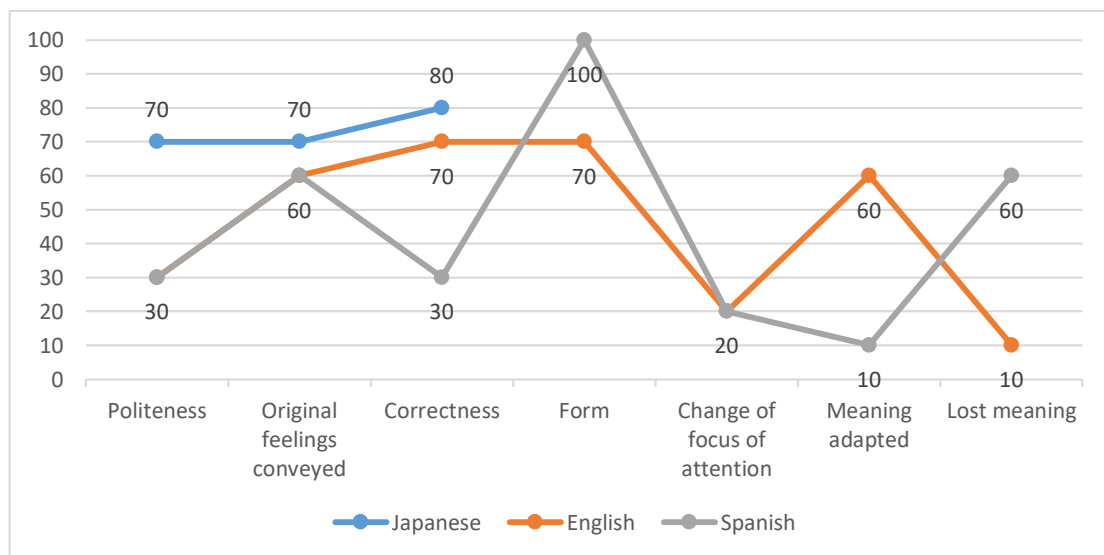


Figure 1: Original meaning conveyed: percentages.

Figure 1 collects characteristics that have been analysed from the examples taken from *Final Fantasy VII* and compares the three languages –mostly English and Spanish as they are the TT– to observe the contrast between languages by counting the examples whether each feature is present through the samples or not. English is compared to Japanese as its ST, while Spanish data correlates to English.

Japanese is the language that most focusses on politeness, as 70 out of 100 per cent of the examples illustrate utterances generated bearing in mind the interlocutor. Japanese society is indeed aware of the importance of social categorisation, reflected in the language by using indirect sentences and addressing the hearer according to the age, education and gender. English and Spanish scripts opted to a most direct approach which would help American and Spanish players to get immerse into the action narrated. Closely related to politeness, 70 out of 100 per cent of Japanese samples convey an

indirect feeling that the character emphasises by the utilisation of onomatopoeias, actions or exclamatory pronouns in order to avoid salience. Both English and Spanish respect those transmitted emotions in 60 out of 100 per cent of the samples, introducing a rather direct approach. Regarding the correctness both lexical and grammatical, in Japanese 80 out of 100 per cent of examples are well expressed, while the remaining two instances corresponds to utterances that come from Barret in an attempt to mirror speech as it occurs. Close to the Japanese, English typography mistakes are related to Barret's speech with the exception of the example number one, where localisation does not succeed and the result is ungrammatical. Similarly, the English transcription does not copy the form from the sentences taken from the Japanese script as they conceptualise the world in two opposite manners. However, in the Spanish script the form used in English is completely mapped, so every example taken show similarities to the English approach. Yet, numerous lexical and grammatical mistakes are found due to the literal translation from English that it is experienced, demonstrating that the European culture is not as similar as the American culture as it seems at a first glance. In opposition to the theory proposed at the beginning of the present dissertation, the majority of the examples are favourably adapted from the SL to the target culture, i. e. localisation can be said to have been successful. Most of the victorious adapted material are from English samples, localised from Japanese. The fact that the Spanish version resulted not as successful as the English one can be explained by regarding the history of the saga *Final Fantasy*. *Final Fantasy VII* was the first title that reached Europe, but its predecessors had already arrived in the USA, which means that Square Soft had already experienced how the American market operated. However, the amount of information lost that should be provided to the players for them to be able to follow the video game without confusion could result in a negative experience from the player as a complete immersion cannot be accomplished. Given the year *Final Fantasy VII* was released, the lack of previous experience and information from the European culture; the dissimilarities each language shows regarding conceptualisation, and the difficulties that perform a 'perfect' localisation implies, could be pointed as the causes that derived in the eventual loss of information.

## 5. Conclusion

*Final Fantasy VII* is a video game that owes its popularity not only to the innovative playing system for its time or the engaging plot that fosters fans to fall in love with its characters, but also its particular localisation displayed through the game as dialogue exchanges that occur amongst characters, producing a funny response from the player or conversely a profound feeling of confusion and despondency, is also a peculiarity that contributes to its reputation.

Taken as the subject of analysis, *Final Fantasy VII*, it can be considered as an exemplary sample that illustrates the difficulties game localisation confronts before the final product is released. Game localisers work under unfavourable conditions such as a limited time (they have to start producing before the original script is even finished), or an indirect access to the script without experimenting the game itself, a situation that can be concluded by losing a great quantity of the original intended message.

The amount of data collected, nonetheless, is a small portion of information compared to the complete scripts that conform *Final Fantasy VII* and this can be considered a limitation of this study. Nevertheless, this dissertation is the beginning of a possible in deep analysis that would shed light on intercultural misunderstandings and the linguistic forms that arise when the process of localisation occurs, as well as the possible tactics used by localisers to convey the original message in the best way or how it is adapted to suit a certain target culture to gain customers.

In fact, even if achieving a perfect localisation is considered to be a utopian dream, the knowledge of the target culture and a deeper experience in-game is necessary to adapt a video game into a foreign culture appropriately: respecting the original piece of work as much as possible whereas some viewpoints are polished to obtain a satisfactory product that manages to immerse the new customer profile into the experience of video games.

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## Additional Online Resources

Final Fantasy Complete Script:

<http://www.yinza.com/Fandom/Script.html>

*Final Fantasy VII* (Square Soft, 1997)

<http://na.square-enix.com/us/games/final-fantasy-vii>

FF7 完全セリフチャートインデックス:

<http://ajatt.com/finalfantasy/ff7p-index.htm>