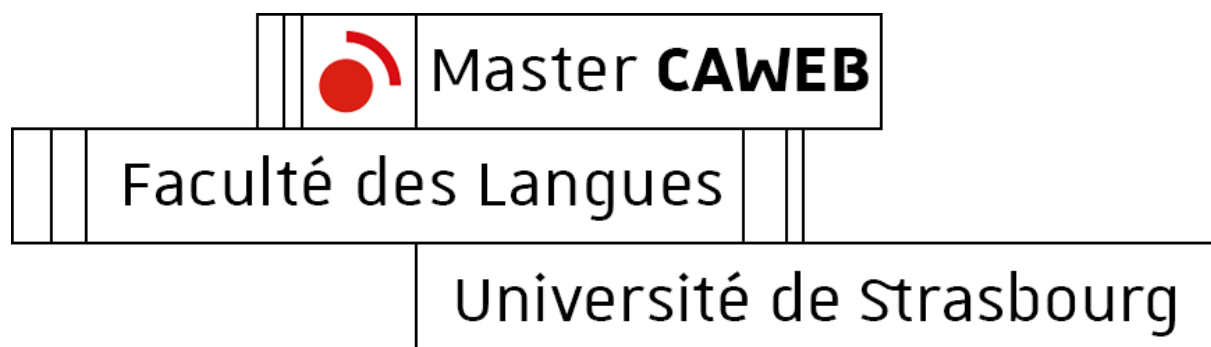


ACADEMIC YEAR 2021-2022



**UNIVERSITY THESIS :**  
**HOW THE LOCALIZATION OF A VIDEO GAME CAN OFFER**  
**THE PLAYER A DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE AND WHY**  
**ADAPTATION CHANGES THE PERCEPTION OF A GAME**

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## Thesis introduction

The history of games goes back to ancient Egypt, where one of the first board games appeared<sup>1</sup>. Video games are, in my opinion, the logical continuation of this process of sharing and transmitting hobbies. Games like civilizations are evolving, and just as “Shogi was the earliest chess-related historical game”<sup>2</sup>, video games are transmitted worldwide and adapted. I chose this subject because I am passionate about video games and their preservation. but also, because I particularly enjoyed the course on video game localization during my second year of the CAWEB Master’s degree. Video games are a constantly evolving modern medium. Taking a critical look at how this medium can be transformed and adapted to different cultures seems to me to be an excellent subject of research. Video game localization is a fascinating topic. Indeed, when a video game is adapted to an international audience, a few changes are inevitably made so that the product can be sold and can appeal to the target audience.

These modifications can be minimal or much more consequential, so I ask the following question:

How can the localization of a video game offer the player a different experience, and why does adaptation change the perception of a game?

Although French is my native language, this thesis is entirely written in English. I see this as an opportunity to test my linguistic skills acquired during my university years.

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<sup>1</sup> “In Search of the Meaning of Senet”, by Peter A. Piccione (Archive, 1980) : [web.archive.org/web/20080918080211/http://www.gamesmuseum.uwaterloo.ca/Archives/Piccione/index.html](http://www.gamesmuseum.uwaterloo.ca/Archives/Piccione/index.html)

<sup>2</sup> Source : [www.chessvariants.com/shogi.html](http://www.chessvariants.com/shogi.html)

## I. Adapting the gameplay, the essence of a game

Gameplay is the most important element of a video game. It can be defined as follows, "Gameplay is the specific way in which players interact with a game"<sup>3</sup>. This interaction, defined by pre-established game rules, makes a video game interactive which makes it unique compared to other media. We will see together how during the localization process, a game can see its nature slightly modified, for example, by changing certain rules specific to the game. To support this analysis, we will look specifically at the *Fire Emblem*<sup>4</sup> license, a Tactical RPG from *Intelligent Systems*<sup>5</sup>, a game development company owned by Nintendo, which presents many interesting localization choices<sup>6</sup> that will illustrate our analysis.

### A. The case of Fire Emblem Radiant Dawn

Fire Emblem Radiant Dawn is the tenth instalment of the Fire Emblem series released in 2009 for the Nintendo Wii console. It is still considered one of the best tactical role-playing games on the Wii. At the time of its arrival in the West, the game has undergone some gameplay changes. Notably, a modification of the forging system made easier in the PAL<sup>7</sup> (Phase Alternate Line) version of the game<sup>8</sup>. The playable units can also evolve to their final forms (final classes) simply by levelling up. At the same time, in the Japanese version, a particular item is necessary for each class change. This item still exists in the international versions of the game but in a reduced number to compensate for the addition of this new game mechanic where EXP

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<sup>3</sup> Narration, Game Play, and Alternative Time Structures for Virtual Environments, 2004

<sup>4</sup> Fire Emblem official website: [www.nintendo.co.jp/fe/index.html](http://www.nintendo.co.jp/fe/index.html)

<sup>5</sup> Intelligent Systems official website: [intsys.co.jp/english/](http://intsys.co.jp/english/)

<sup>6</sup> List of changes: <https://serenesforest.net/general/localisation-changes/gameplay/>

<sup>7</sup> « The PAL region is a television publication territory that covers most of Europe and Africa, alongside parts of Asia, South America and Oceania. It is so named because of the PAL (Phase Alternating Line) television standard traditionally used in some of those regions, as opposed to the NTSC standard traditionally used in Japan and most of North America. » - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PAL\\_region](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PAL_region)

<sup>8</sup> List of changes made to the different versions of the game: [https://fireemblemwiki.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_version\\_differences/Fire\\_Emblem:\\_Radiant\\_Dawn#Gameplay\\_changes](https://fireemblemwiki.org/wiki/List_of_version_differences/Fire_Emblem:_Radiant_Dawn#Gameplay_changes)

(Experience Points) are all you need to class change a unit. Furthermore, they added the ability to play the game in widescreen mode and save during battle on easy and normal modes.

All these changes made people consider the localized version the most pleasant one to play because it made it easier to build your dream team, even if you missed some hidden items.

One change I have not talked about yet is how three characters were buffed<sup>9</sup> from the Japanese version. Radiant Dawn is a game where you play three different armies, each with its exclusive units. These factions become one at the end of the game, and you can build your squad with your favourite units. Some of these units give you an easier time dealing with the game because they are easy to train or already have good stats when they join your roster of playable units. It gives players a choice to train their favourite or rely on the most robust units to do most of the job, making them even stronger by gaining EXP. The game balances this by giving weaker unit better chances to gain better statistics when levelling up (each units have growth rates, a % of gaining +1 Health Point, Attack, Defense, Speed, Magic Resistance etc. The % is different for each character<sup>10</sup>). By introducing a Base EXP mechanic where the better you play (Fewer turn counts, secondary objectives, ...). the more Base EXP you earn. Thus, you will be able to give to the units of your choice before the next chapter, allowing some units to catch up on the EXP they missed.

The characters used in the first part of the game are considered some of the weakest of the game because they came with low base stats and their growth rates are not that impressive. Usually, when the three parties become one big army in the Endgame, Part 1 Units will not be used as much because they are usually outclassed by better units which came later in the game. To try and make the Dawn Brigade<sup>11</sup> more appealing, they gave the characters Edward, Leonard, and Nolan a unique weapon each, *Caladbolg* for Edward,

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<sup>9</sup> Definition: "In video games, when the makers increase the power of something, it is sometimes referred to as a *buff*. If they decrease the power of something, it is called a *nerf* or a *de-buff*. This also applies to player abilities to temporarily increase or decrease their power." [english.stackexchange.com](http://english.stackexchange.com)

<sup>10</sup> List of the different %: [www.tanasmanor.net/games/fe10/characters/growths.php](http://www.tanasmanor.net/games/fe10/characters/growths.php)

<sup>11</sup> Name of the first army played in Radiant Dawn

*Tarvos* for Nolan, and *Lughnasadh* for Leonardo. Basically, these are weapons with the might of a Silver Weapon (the best non-unique weapons the player can buy) and an additional stat boost (example: +8 Luck for *Caladbolg*). These weapons can only be used by these characters and do not need a specific weapon level<sup>12</sup> to be used. Additionally, Edward and Leonardo had their base stats increased in the non-Japanese versions. For Leonardo, it did not make a huge difference since he is an archer, which is a pretty weak and hard-to-train type of unit, so people still consider him to be one of the worst units. Nevertheless, for Edward, this change made the non-Japanese players see him as a more than decent unit, going as far as calling him one of the best units of Part 1<sup>13</sup>.

JAPANESE STATS			
		Stats	Growth Rates
Myrmidon		Max HP	17
Level	1	Strength	6
Affinity	★	Magic	0
Constitution	7	Skill	10
		Movement	6
		Speed	11
		Luck	7
		Defense	4
		Resistance	0
		Weight	7

Figure 2: Edward stats in the original version of *Radiant Dawn*

LOCALIZED STATS			
		Stats	Growth Rates
Myrmidon		Max HP	19
Level	4	Strength	7
Affinity	★	Magic	0
Constitution	7	Skill	11
		Movement	6
		Speed	12
		Luck	8
		Defense	5
		Resistance	0
		Weight	7

Figure 1: Edward stats in the localized version of *Radiant Dawn*

This example shows us that the gameplay experience of one player to another can shift depending on which version they played. Indeed, a Japanese player will consider Edward to be a mediocre unit. In contrast a Western player will consider him to be pretty good with workable base stats and a unique personal weapon. So, in a way, localization can improve a game by fixing bugs and adjusting the gameplay. Nowadays, game patches

<sup>12</sup> "Weapon Level is a singular stat associated with almost all weapons and as a collective of stats for each individual unit; weapon levels denote a unit's proficiency in each weapon type, and the level associated with an individual weapon denotes the minimum weapon level in the matching weapon type required to use the weapon in question." [fireemblemwiki.org/wiki/Weapon\\_level](http://fireemblemwiki.org/wiki/Weapon_level)

<sup>13</sup> Players discussing the strengths and weaknesses of Edward in *Radiant Dawn* on Reddit: [https://www.reddit.com/r/fireemblem/comments/1pkkzj/radiant\\_dawn\\_is\\_edward\\_a\\_character\\_worth\\_using/](https://www.reddit.com/r/fireemblem/comments/1pkkzj/radiant_dawn_is_edward_a_character_worth_using/)

can fix issues and adjust gameplay through an online software update<sup>14</sup> on your game console or computer. However, at the time, localization was also an opportunity to address some of the issues of the games (just like *EarthBound Beginning*, known as *Mother* in Japan, an RPG on the NES / Famicom, which added a run button making the game more quick-paced).

## B. Cut content in Fire Emblem games

When bringing a game overseas, sometimes content can be cut during the localization, and it happened multiple times in the Fire Emblem franchise.

The most famous case of content being cut in Fire Emblem is the disappearance of the Face Touching minigame. Similar to Pokémon X&Y's Pokémon-Amie mode, in Fire Emblem Fates<sup>15</sup> (named Fire Emblem If in Japan), this feature was included in the original Japanese version of the game. A controversial choice that was probably made to avoid making the players feel weird to play with their playable characters as if they were pets. As a result of this minigame being cut, the green background that appears when petting an ally goes unused in the international versions. Because Fire Emblem Awakening was such a big success, they wanted to include more romance elements just like in Awakening, which brought an all-new audience to play the game. However, the localization team probably felt that they went overboard with such minigames. Another peculiar instance of cut-content is the removal of the true ending of the seventh opus of Fire Emblem. Fire Emblem Rekka no Ken, simply called Fire Emblem in the west since it was the first Fire Emblem Game ever to be exported from Japan. They cut off a scene where we see our protagonists a few years after the end of the last chapter talking about the future events taking place in Fire Emblem: Fūin no Tsurugi (The sixth game), Fire Emblem Rekka no Ken is a prequel to Fūin no Tsurugi and the localization team probably thought that since the player will not be able to play the Japan-only Fire Emblem 6, then they probably did not need to see that cliff-hanger ending<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Example: Fire Emblem 3 Houses had bug fixing and gameplay adjustment: [fireemblemwiki.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_version\\_differences/Fire\\_Emblem:\\_Three\\_Houses](https://fireemblemwiki.org/wiki/List_of_version_differences/Fire_Emblem:_Three_Houses)

<sup>15</sup> List of regional changes in Fates between the Japanese and worldwide versions: [https://tcrf.net/Fire\\_Emblem\\_Fates/Regional\\_Differences](https://tcrf.net/Fire_Emblem_Fates/Regional_Differences)

<sup>16</sup> Link to the cutscene: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X929A2ETDOK>



*Figure 3 : Fire Emblem 7 Secret Ending showing the children of the protagonists*

Weirdly enough, this only applies to the European versions of the game. In the US, they kept this cutscene. After all, it does not bring down the scenario in any way, though to this day Fire Emblem Fūin no Tsurugi was never brought out of Japan. Nevertheless, European players at the time did not have access to this cutscene, nor could they have ever known it existed in the original version.

All this content is unfortunately lost in translation for many players. Nowadays, with games being distributed as one software with multiple languages, this kind of occurrence has become very rare.

Returning back to Radiant Dawn, the Japanese version had two different scripts for the game: one for the easier mode with less text and one for the harder mode containing a lot of details and information about the world of Tellius (the world where the game takes place) and characters. When translating the game, the localization team chose to make a mix of both scripts for all difficulties. Therefore approximately 5% of the script was not properly translated. Radiant Dawn being praise for being one of the games with the best story in the franchise. Fans were disappointed to learn about this information, but globally the translation of the text is still quality work and a good adaptation.

They also cut the original Japanese voices in Fire Emblem Fates and Fire Emblem Echoes, which led to controversy because, in Fire Emblem Awakening, they let the choice between the English Dub and the original Japanese voices. With the release of Fire Emblem Three Houses, they have learned from their mistakes and are giving back a choice to the players.



### C. Getting rid of a difficulty mode to add another

The predecessor to *Radiant Dawn*, *Fire Emblem Path of Radiance* on the Nintendo GameCube, had one of its game modes cut: the Maniac mode (harder than Hard mode), a mode so difficult that it would not be fit for non-Japanese players, or is it really the case? *Fire Emblem 9*'s Maniac mode was criticized even in Japan for being too brutal with non-stopping waves of enemies making the game not especially more challenging but more tedious. Your strongest units can deal with them, but it takes a lot of time to do so. In the end, the mode did not make you think more strategically and was far less enjoyable than the Hard mode. So, the localization team decided to cut it from the game's international version. After all, *Fire Emblem Path of Radiance* was the first home console release of a *Fire Emblem* game in the west, so they wanted to avoid players getting mad by confronting them with an unfair challenge. Instead, they wanted to lure in casual gamers who did not know much about tactical RPGs. That is why they made *Fire Emblem 9* Easy mode, a mode very similar to the Normal mode but with tips being shown to the player and with double EXP gains making it easier to train your units and progress through the game. The game was not a huge success sale-wise but was a critical success. It is now a rare and valuable game considered to be one of the best Tactical RPGs on the GameCube.

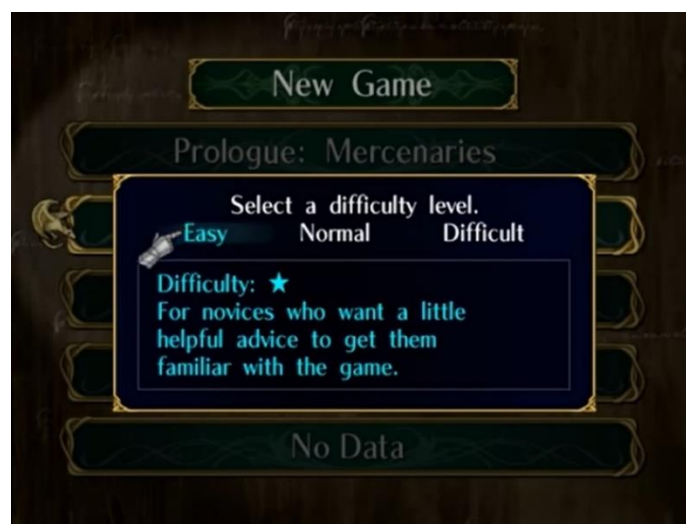


Figure 4 : *Fire Emblem 9* Easy mode, an entry point for novices

Funnily enough, the Devil May Cry saga did the exact opposite. They removed the Japanese easy mode to add a very hard mode, making Devil May Cry 3 more difficult for American audiences<sup>17</sup>. The Easy mode corresponding to the Japanese Normal mode, Normal mode corresponding to the Japanese Hard mode and finally, Hard mode, a more brutal mode the Japanese version didn't have. What displeased players was the suppression of one game mode for another. Capcom understood this well because when re-releasing the game, they added every difficulty mode for every version, calling the American Hard mode "Super Hard". The localization team probably thought that a more challenging game would please the most hard-core players, which are the sales targets of the Devil May Cry series out of Japan.

These elements give us food for thought. Could we say that a European player can have the same gaming experience as a Japanese player when some elements of the game are cut and cannot be accessed? Let us dig deeper by analysing another aspect of localization.

## II. Changing the context and scenario of a game to accommodate a new audience, a deliberate choice to change

Adaptation choices are sometimes necessary for marketing reasons and to make games more accessible. Let us take a look at some examples to get a better understanding of these choices and their impact on consumers.

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<sup>17</sup> Article on Why Devil May Cry 3 was harder in America by Platinum Paragon: <https://platinumparagon.wordpress.com/2018/03/12/why-devil-may-cry-3-was-harder-in-america/>

## A. A hedgehog with an attitude, cute vs cool

Sonic the Hedgehog is an icon who redefined the gaming world as a whole. He is remembered as a role model for the teens in the early 90s, rebelling against the system (very much like Bart Simpsons at the time). Yet if we remember Sonic as this “cool but almost arrogant” character, it is primarily because of how the American branch of SEGA reworked the character. Because Sonic is not that much of a cocky character in Japan; SEGA’s branch in Japan created Sonic as a humbler hero with a bit of a cute side. However, when Sonic came to America, there was no more time to be cute with a slightly tweaked design. Now his spines are a mohawk. “He’s no Mario that’s for sure”; this is the message SEGA of America wanted to deliver, all coinciding with their Genesis Does marketing campaign<sup>18</sup>. They wanted you to know SEGA was the real deal, going as far as creating a whole new origin story for Sonic. Originally Sonic was simply a speedy hedgehog born on Christmas Island, travelling the world, and saving animals trapped in machines. American Sonic, however, lives on planet Mobius and fights the evil Doctor Robotnik (Originally Dr Eggman in Japanese) with his friends, the freedom fighters, to stop his plans of world domination.

Ultimately this depiction of Sonic really changed how the character was perceived worldwide. Future Sonic games and TV shows (such as the Japanese Anime: Sonic X) will depict Sonic with a bit of a cocky attitude.

This is one of the best examples of how localization choices can influence a brand for years to come and change the perception of a game for the player.



Figure 5 : SEGA "Genesis does" ad campaign

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<sup>18</sup> Genesis Does, one of the most famous ad campaign in the video game industry: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7nsBoqJ6s8>



Figure 6 : Sonic the hedgehog Japanese Mega Drive box art with a colourful and positive depiction



Figure 7 : Sonic the hedgehog US Genesis box art with an edgier tone

This is not the only time American marketing teams tried to make Japanese heroes look cool rather than cute. When releasing Kirby games to America, they would usually change the box art to make Kirby look tougher with frowning eyes.



Figure 8 : Kirby's Air Ride Japanese Box Art



Figure 9 : Kirby Air Ride US Box Art

Even though we mainly gave examples of how Japanese games are adapted to a Western audience, these changes go both ways. The video game series Crash Bandicoot created by the American studio, Naughty Dog, was made cuter to appeal to the Japanese. Even going as far as changing the game's title, for example, the game "Crash Bash" was renamed "Crash Bandicoot Carnival"<sup>19</sup> in Japan to make it more appealing to a young audience.



Figure 11: Crash Bandicoot 2 original US Box Art



Figure 10 : Crash Bandicoot Japanese Box Art

## B. The risk of taking too many liberties

Sometimes making choices when localizing comes with its own risk because some games will likely have sequels and another opus. The localization team needs to make sure that the in-game universe stays coherent and that they understand the identity of the game.

Sometimes, starting from a good intention, some choices can backfire. This happened with the localization of the game Phoenix Wright Ace Attorney (called Gyakuten Saiban in Japan). In this game, you are a defense attorney solving cases for your clients, unravelling mysteries surrounding murders. In the original game, the story takes place in Japan, but because the first game has a more universal message, they decided to adapt the story of the game to take place in America.

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<sup>19</sup> Japanese Intro: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QvYu6VpRF54> ; US Intro: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WbL-g8p4as>



Of course, they changed characters' names to replicate name puns like in the original, the first witness of the first case being Mr Sahwit "Saw it". All was well and good, but the localization team did not expect what would happen in the sequels of that game. In the second opus of Ace Attorney, a lot of references to spiritualism and Japanese culture were introduced. It became hard to justify characters wearing traditional Japanese outfits or living in Japanese-style homes. In the fifth opus, a whole case references Japanese folklore, with the suspect of a murder being a *Tengu*, a type of *Yokai*, a legendary Japanese creature<sup>20</sup>. These elements made the fan joke about the story of Ace Attorney taking place in a fictional state called Japanifornia with how much Japanese influence there is<sup>21</sup>. Clearly, only replacing ramen soup with a hamburger would not cut it, so Capcom of America decided to add a new story element in the Ace Attorney games. They simply explained that some parts of the cities where Ace Attorney took place were heavily influenced by Japanese culture because of massive Japanese immigration, and most of the characters are descendants of Japanese people and inherited their culture.



Figure 12: Tenma Taro (on the left) and Nine-Tails (on the right), fictional creatures in the Ace Attorney universe referencing Tengus @CAPCOM

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<sup>20</sup> As Ashkenazi Michael described in 2011 in his book: Handbook of Japanese mythology

<sup>21</sup> Los Angeles / Japanifornia in Ace Attorney:  
[https://aceattorney.fandom.com/wiki/Los\\_Angeles](https://aceattorney.fandom.com/wiki/Los_Angeles)

Because the localization team knew the players liked the Japanese cultural elements of Ace Attorney, they decided to embrace it while still being coherent with the adaptations made during the translation of the first game. With Japanese culture becoming more and more popular, we see fewer and fewer changes in games referencing Japanese culture. This is the case for the Yakuza, series which was entirely dubbed in English for the PS2 release of the first game but ultimately stuck with the Japanese voice acting for the other games of the series, which made more sense since the story takes place in Japan and is a typically Japanese storyline.



Figure 13 : Yakuza 0 (2015), a game taking place in Japan in the 80's during the Japanese asset price bubble, an era in which real estate and stock market prices were greatly inflated.

Therefore, taking too many liberties with the source material can be controversial. As a recent example, in the newest release of Fire Emblem Warriors: Three Hopes for the Nintendo Switch, the French localization team made a reference to an Asterix movie quote as a joke<sup>22</sup>, despite the original dialogue not being on the humorous side, this is a common occurrence<sup>23</sup> and whether or not it is an appropriate translation is up to debate and depends heavily on context.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/FXzKAqxUcAAI5f9?format=jpg&name=900x900>

<sup>23</sup> Memes and references in video game translations: <https://legendsoflocalization.com/memes-and-references-in-video-game-translations/>

Localization also goes through marketing because you need to adapt how you will sell the game, what the commercials will be about, and how to catch a large audience.

When bringing the game Mother 2 to the west (renaming it EarthBound in the US), the marketing team carried out an advertising campaign that could be described as inappropriate. For some context, EarthBound is an RPG parodying the Anglo-Saxon culture with a lot of humour and spreading a universal message about love and inner peace. Some of the enemies encountered during your adventure may surprise you: hippies, aliens, walking trees; etc. EarthBound is not afraid of breaking the codes of classic RPGs.

For their marketing campaign in the US, they chose to go along with the trend of gross toys of the 90s, probably in reference to one moment of the game where you have to go in the sewers. They tried to sell the game as gross and smelly, with a lot of crude jokes, one catchphrase in particular, stayed in people's minds: **"We're warning you, this game stinks"**.

As if life didn't stink enough already. Now you've got to be prepared for EarthBound™—the first Role-Playing Game with B.O. • Imagine the horror—in the aftermath of a terrible meteor strike (or was it an evil alien invasion?), burping, belching, gaseous monsters roam the streets of your home town. • Your only chance to survive and avoid their nasty smells is to learn the

**Because This Game Stinks.**

powers that can counteract their deadly forces. Luckily, every day that you manage to stay alive, your powers improve. As you venture into the neighboring towns, you make some friends, including a girl who has amazing psychic powers, a boy-genius capable of repairing anything broken, and a prince from an exotic eastern land. These friends help you take control of your

*The most brutal thing about this guy is his stench. Scratch it here, if you dare. Yuck! You'll find him in the Zombor camp, behind the waterfall. Hey, plug your nose before the fight!*

*Find one of the burger pants, scratch here, inside deep, and sniff some baby poop. It'll replenish your strength. Don't forget the salt.*

*newfound strengths. • And help you'll need. If you thought the dark, creepy dungeons and evil spells of other role-playing games were tough to overcome, just wait until you have to deal with the heinous stench of monsters roaming the countryside. • To make it easier to press the start button, a \$10 coupon is attached. When the game arrives, a free Player's Guide will be included to help you find your way around town. Inside the Guide are six Ident-A-Smell playing cards that give you a brutal whiff of some of the characters, as well as tips about everything from PSI Powers to Items. • But even with all the powers, friends, and tips in the world, it isn't gonna be easy. That's because you, Ness, a mere thirteen-year-old boy, are the only one who has a fighting chance of finding and defeating Gyggas, an interstellar warrior who is out to destroy the entire universe. • And to be perfectly honest, the odds are against you.*

*Scratch here and allow us. You might find something that'll help you, if you survive the smell.*

*Don't scratch here if you're hungry. Call for delivery whenever and whenever you're feeling stoned.*

*Just passing through? This 128-page Player's Guide, free with every game, will prove a strong ally as it helps you find your way around any town.*

**Nintendo**

Figure 14 : Nintendo magazine promoting the game with scratchable pages with bad smells



This marketing campaign by Nintendo of America was a colossal failure because no one wanted a stinky game. Unfortunately, the game did not sell well (around 140 000 copies sold in America<sup>24</sup>) despite being one of the best RPGs on the SNES at the time. Years later the game would become a classic, with a massive community of fans praising the game for its uniqueness.

Marketing and in-game text can heavily change the perception of a game. Therefore, taking too many liberties can lead to the players having a different feeling toward the game.

Pushed to the extreme a game can morph into another; this is the case of Contra. In Europe, the first Contra games are not even called Contra. They are called Probotector. To be more appealing to European kids and appear less violent, they chose to replace the soldiers with robots and guns with laser beams. They worked hard to replace the sprites<sup>25</sup> with new ones depicting robot characters. All of this was probably done to censor gun violence, which leads us to our next point.



*Figure 15 : Contra protagonist on the left, Probotector protagonist on the right*

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<sup>24</sup> "Atari to Zelda: Japan's Videogames in Global Contexts" by Mia Consalvo: [https://books.google.fr/books?id=tH3TCwAAQBAJ&pg=PA58&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.fr/books?id=tH3TCwAAQBAJ&pg=PA58&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>25</sup> "In computer graphics, a sprite is a two-dimensional bitmap that is integrated into a larger scene, most often in a 2D video game. Originally, the term sprite referred to fixed-sized objects composited together, by hardware, with a background." - Hague James. "Why Do Dedicated Game Consoles Exist?"

### III. Censorship, when change is a necessary constraint

Sometimes censorship is the only way for a game to be released internationally. Each country has its own culture, and its own laws and games must be adapted to be admissible in certain countries.

#### A. Censoring weapons, nudity, and religious themes

To avoid controversy and in a will to adapt games to a specific public, some elements of a game can be censored, it is sometimes the only option to be able to release a game in some countries with strict restrictions like China<sup>26</sup>.

We have seen with Probotector how gun violence can be censored. Nowadays with labels rating games (for kids, for teens, for adults), for example, the PEGI rating in Europe, warns the consumer when a game might be violent and/or inappropriate for kids.

Nudity can also be an issue and is often censored. This is the case in Castlevania III on the NES, where statues are dressed up to hide nudity.



Figure 17 : Castlevania III JP



Figure 16 : Castlevania III US

This change is not exclusive to video games because the Trading Card Game Yu-Gi-Oh! also censor the cards' illustrations in international releases to remove any nudity or reference to firearms. This change also applies to video game adaptations where some cards exclusive to Japan are playable in them. In the international releases of the games, these cards have their illustration censored as well<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> See: <https://gamerant.com/china-video-game-censorship-rules-depicting-body-types-play-limits-steam/>

<sup>27</sup> Examples: <https://www.thegamer.com/yugioh-card-censored-comparisons/>

Religious representations in video games are also heavily censored in some countries because it could lead to controversy or legal pursuit by these institutions. This is why Christian crosses in the game Duck Tales on the NES will be replaced by “RIP”, the boss Yellow Devil in Megaman on the NES was renamed Rock Monster to avoid religious association. Also, in The Legend of Zelda (also for the NES), the item Bible was renamed Magic Book<sup>28</sup>. In the Legend of Zelda Ocarina of Time for the Nintendo 64, they censored Islamic themes in the Fire Temple. These include removing a symbol resembling the Islamic symbol and the reciting included in the game music<sup>29</sup>.

In Japan, religious themes are not controversial because Japan is a country with no dominant religion<sup>30</sup>. However these representations can be seen as inappropriate overseas, especially in countries like the USA, where religions such as Christianity are part of their historical identity (“In god we trust” being printed on every dollar bill, in court they swear on the bible). Therefore, game companies often choose to simply remove any religious themes when releasing games internationally.



Figure 18 : Duck Tales on the NES with crosses on the coffins



Figure 19 : Duck Tales on the NES with RIP written on the coffins

<sup>28</sup> [denofgeek.com/games/nes-games-censored-history-details/](https://denofgeek.com/games/nes-games-censored-history-details/)

<sup>29</sup> The original soundtrack of the fire temple removed in later versions of the game: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZGnJFI0WU>

<sup>30</sup> As stated by the Cultural Atlas in Japanese Culture, Religion: <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/japanese-culture/japanese-culture-religion>

## B. Simply avoiding a lawsuit

Changes during localization can occur only to avoid a possible lawsuit. This situation happened for the releases of Street Fighter II internationally.

In the original Japanese release of Street Fighter II, a boxer named M. Bison (Mike Bison) was named after the famous boxing champion Mike Tyson. "Capcom changed the name for the US release due to fears of a lawsuit from Tyson given the similarities in the likeness of the character and a similar sounding name"<sup>31</sup>. So, they swapped the name with other characters' when bringing the game to the west.



Figure 20 : The change of names in Street Fighter II

This change was confusing for the players because, during world tournaments, Japanese and English-speaking participants would keep messing up the character's names, so the fighting game community decided to refer to them as Boxer, Claw, and Dictator.

We must therefore consider that censorship plays a role in the representation of games in the players' minds.

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<sup>31</sup> The weird confusing origins of Street Fighter's Balrog by Aloysius Low: <https://www.oneesports.gg/street-fighter/the-wierd-confusing-origins-of-street-fighters-balrog/>

## Conclusion

To give a definitive answer to our thesis, localization does create a different experience for the player by modifying many elements, including gameplay, contents, languages, game modes, characters' names, and stories. Moreover, because of how the game is marketed differently and possibly censored, the player will have a totally different vision of a game or a character. This is why the American Sonic is not exactly the same as the Japanese Sonic, and why Probotector isn't Contra. The gaming community also changes how the games are perceived worldwide by sharing their own experience. Therefore, a localized version of a game can influence how the game's series will develop over time. In the end, we could say that an English-speaking player did not play the same game as a Japanese player: in a sense, he did, but it was a different version of that game. Over time, regional differences between games became fewer and fewer. Nowadays, every software shares almost the same content, and the difference lies mainly in text and censorship. The most controversial choices are now choices of pure translation. Despite that players are still connecting through their liking for games regardless of which version they played.

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## Appreciation page

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