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Generations and Game Localization: An Interview with Alexander O. Smith, Steven Anderson and Matthew Alt

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The interplay between the Japanese and Western game industries has been one of the most fruitful mass cultural exchanges of the past few decades. The circulation of gaming products between the two contexts has seen both brilliant successes and dismal failures, but also more than a few unlikely felicities. Shigeru Miyamoto, in his search for an English appellation for Mario's disgruntled simian antagonist, hit upon the now iconic Donkey Kong. Many gamers will remember wondering how they could set up a match against Shen Long, trembling at the stark realisation that "Someone set us up the bomb," and taking comfort in Barry Burton's affirmation of Jill Valentine's prowess in *Resident Evil* (Capcom 1997): "Jill, here's a lockpick. It might be handy if you, the master of unlocking, take it with you."

Though his syntactical choices may lead one to certain uncharitable conclusions about Barry, his foresight and canny allocation of limited team resources was in fact indispensable to his colleague's survival into the game's sequels. By the time of the GameCube remake (Capcom 2002), Barry had improved his communication skills considerably. While diegetically this may be attributed to robust training policy reform at the Racoon City Police Department, in an extra-diegetic sense can be seen as indicative of broader trends in localisation standards. Both Japanese gaming products and Western fans' appreciation thereof have become more sophisticated across gaming's generations. Although they retain in many instances the distinctively awkward idioms found in early games, contemporary titles tend to aspire to the quality of dialogue expected from cinema, television and literature. Lockpicks are hardly the most exotic items whose purpose has had to be made evident to Western players through effective localisation, and the intricate plots of games like JRPGs require the disciplined rendering of extended networks of signs. These networks and the methods of working with them provide fascinating insights into the nature – and nurture – of videogames both as texts with unique structural properties and as global commodities. Studying localisation also offers the possibility of insights into workflows and procedures used by Japanese developers and publishers that might otherwise be opaque to Western researchers.

One significant milestone in the history of localisation was Squaresoft's *Vagrant Story* (2000), whose English script trod a tremendously self-assured golden mean between evocative medievalism and soulful brevity. With the aforementioned issues in mind I contacted Alexander O. Smith, the translator of *Vagrant Story*, in order to acquire some material for a projected article on the history of game translation. Smith recommended the input of Steven Anderson and Matthew Alt, who generously offered their time and expertise with due heed paid to contractual and professional obligations such as NDAs. As the email interview progressed it became apparent that the original comments of the translators would be of far higher potential value to

scholars than a version compressed and paraphrased into the format of a journal article.

Matthew Alt, a native of Washington, D.C., has been working as a professional translator and freelance writer since the early 1990s. His translation experience includes four years as an in-house technical Japanese translator for the United States Patent and Trademark Office. His work as a writer and specialist in Japanese pop-cultural phenomena has appeared in the magazines *ToyFare*, *Anime Invasion*, *Super 7*, *InQuest Gamer*, and the *Playboy* website, among many others. He is also the co-author of Super #1 Robot, published in 2005 by Chronicle Books.

Steven Anderson got his start in the localization industry working as a freelance translator back in 2000, and went on to join a localization agency that specialized in video games in 2003. After moving around to several other localization companies, he returned to freelance translation in 2008. Some titles he has worked on are *Suikoden V* and *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney* (editor).

Alexander O. Smith is founder of Kajiya Productions. He has been translating video games, novels, manga, and lyrics from Japanese to English professionally since graduating from Harvard University with a M.A. in classical Japanese literature in 1998. After working at Square Enix's Tokyo offices for four years, he went freelance and is now based in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom and Tokyo's Kichijoji area. Games he has localized include: *Vagrant Story*, *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*, *Final Fantasy XII*, and most recently, *Madworld*.

> *Let's begin by exploring some of the differences involved in translating videogames as opposed to other media you may have worked in. In the case of a completed film, for example, there is a linear structure in which various elements are arranged. This is not necessarily the case with a game - there may be many different relations between various elements, and the elements themselves might be mutable. How does this ludic character affect your work?*

> **Alexander Smith:** I can think of two flavors of the phenomenon to which you refer. One is the 'multiple choice story line,' where player decisions can alter the flow of the game narrative. The other is something like *Animal Crossing*, where the game text is actually generated fresh according to various rules.
>
> In the first example and indeed, in any game where textual elements are being used in different combinations and situations, the challenge to the localizer is more procedural than conceptual. In the case of multiple story lines, all the possibilities have to be considered so that, for example, conclusion C works in a storyline that goes A-B-C as well as one that goes A-D-C. QA often spends a great deal of time working through each permutation to make sure everything works.

For more involved, generative systems, the localizer has to work closely with either the dev team, or capable coders to create a system that accomplishes what the original does, often using very different techniques.

I've thought of a third example: text that is displayed differently depending on player progression. This was the case with the 'Al Bhed' language in *Final Fantasy X*. The language, which appears on the screen as gibberish at first, was slowly revealed by discovering miniature rosetta stone-type artifacts. In Japanese, each kana had an Al Bhed equivalent kana (like the kind of cypher you might find in a cereal box.) As you learned the language, the Al Bhed kana would be replaced with the appropriate Japanese kana. In order to effect this same system in English, I wrote a simple replacement cypher for the alphabet. The trick was to find substitutes that a) made Al Bhed look foreign, and b) were still pronounceable, as the original Al Bhed lines were often read by voice actors. To do this, I mapped common phonemes in English to common phonemes in Welsh (which gave me an extra 'vowel' to play with : w)

When pronouncing the resulting Al Bhed, preference was given to welsh pronunciations wherever the letters lined up correctly, and where they didn't, I kept notes on how the new dipthongs were to be pronounced in order to maintain consistency.

Steven Anderson: The text to be translated is generally organized in a logical way, with dialog and various UI-related text grouped together. That said, there are times when the dialog jumps backwards and forwards on the timeline as you proceed through a file, due to the branching nature of the script. This makes it necessary to use other cues such as message codes to determine the context. Most files also contain developer notes listing information such as where the dialog will jump to when a certain action is taken, and these can also be of help.

Another potential issue is when repeated text is omitted when dialog for a particular NPC changes after an action is performed in the game. When only the changed lines of the text are shown for a section, it can be hard to identify the context. Again, this makes other reference points necessary depending on the complexity of the game.

My feeling is that Japanese developers are becoming more and more aware of the need to present their translatables in a coherent manner in order to get the best localization results, so I think these issues will present less and less of a challenge in the future.

Matthew Alt: As a game translator you have to be prepared to deal with materials in a non-linear fashion. Sometimes this is due to certain parts of the game being completed faster than others.

Other times, it is due to the grouping of text strings by type (such as all dialog in one place in the file, all in-game text in another, etc.) Or the way the file is arranged. Or because certain text needs to be finished quicker because of development concerns. In our experience this just comes with the territory and is one of the reasons we prefer to submit all text at once, in a finished/checked state, rather than in chunks -- quite often we come across something later that changes the way we translated something earlier.

What sort of material are you presented with when embarking on a localisation project? Can you explain a little about your initial approach and methods? What does a game script look like?

Alexander Smith: For a large-scale project that includes voice, I will ideally begin with:

- a playable version of the game in its current state

- vidcaps of gameplay and in-game cutscenes (ideally for the entire game)

- all the soundfiles from the Japanese recording

- voice recording scripts

- text files for in-game text and dialogue

I begin by playing however much of the game I can to get a feel for its tone and setting. If there are any background materials, I'll skim them all. If there's a main storyline, I'll skim that, too, and sometimes do a quick and dirty translation.

Often, a client will request place names and character names to be translated first for P.R. purposes, and because they like to use the English names in the Japanese game. Maps are usually graphics, which take longer to make than system-generated text since an artist does the lettering, so they tend to do those first. This works well, since you can use the place names to establish the English game world, and start to ask the bigger questions, like, do people speak with accents? Is the world large and multicultural like in *Final Fantasy XII*, thus requiring several different regional variations in naming schemes and spoken language? Or is it smaller and monocultural, like in *Vagrant Story* or *Parasite Eve*?

The first step in approaching the script is a procedural one, that is, converting text lists into Excel documents, so that both the Japanese and English can be displayed on the same page, side-by-side. In the case of a voice script, a massive amount of reformatting is almost always necessary to achieve a record-ready format for ADR recording. Excel shines for this, as well.

A final script for a voice recording will have line numbers on the left, start times and end times for each line, linking it to a particular timecode on the video, the character name, and the line itself, with special notation to indicate pauses and 'cheats' where words are to be fudged around lip movements that don't precisely match what is being said.

Steven Anderson: This varies wildly depending on the developer, the type of game, and its development status when localization begins. We can usually expect to at least have access to an overview of the title, design documents, screenshots, and perhaps video, but I have worked on projects where all I have received was the text itself. In an ideal situation we are supplied with working copies of the game and/or previous titles in the series, glossaries, and asset lists, along with time assigned for familiarization with the materials.

Familiarization is an important first step in localization, although for J to E projects it is rare to actually be given the time and resources to play through a title in its entirety before beginning work on the translation. After becoming sufficiently familiar with the title and its major gameplay elements, I usually put together a schedule for translation and self-editing passes. After that, if a file priority hasn't already been assigned, I begin by translating the UI and item text. There are often strict character limits for UI elements in the English translation, so diving straight into dialog and narrative text can be dangerous when you eventually realize none of the UI terms you want to use there will actually fit.

Game scripts are generally converted to Excel format for localization. This makes text much easier to work with, allowing the use of macros and other time-saving devices. It also makes it possible to store multiple languages in a single file while still making it easy to convert the assets back into a format for implementation in the game code. I have also seen game scripts in txt format, but these are usually from smaller developers without much localization experience, and translation agencies will usually convert to Excel for the actual translation anyway.

Matthew Alt: This varies wildly depending on how ambitious/dedicated the developer is to localizing a title. Some developers just want English text, damn the torpedoes, just get it up there and forget about it. In those cases we often get the text dropped in our lap with a tight deadline and little if any interaction with the development team.

In the ideal scenario, we are presented with a ROM of the game (usually with a debugging mode activated so that we can skip ahead to sections that we are working on); familiarization time (so we can play through and understand game context) is scheduled/budgeted; storyboard/character illustrations and descriptions are provided, and of course the game text itself (usually in an XLS file, but occasionally integrated into a translation memory tool of some kind) is given to us with a reasonable amount of time to translate it.

Ideally, we also want to have a direct line of communication with the development staff so that questions about the text and storyline can be quickly and directly resolved. That kind of back-and-forth with the team that made the game is critical to achieving a truly good translation.

Which particular titles have caused you the most difficulties and why? Were any particularly straightforward?

Alexander Smith: Every title poses some challenge, though the nature of that challenge varies widely. The most dreaded challenge (and also the most avoidable) is that of insufficient source material, or source material that is presented in a confusing way. Procedurally speaking, something like *Phoenix Wright* was actually very straightforward in that the files were well organized and story flow was very clear. Though it has little to do with the content of the game itself, mechanical differences like these can do much to affect the quality of a localization. Later *Phoenix Wright* material I received also had screen caps attached to the text, greatly reducing the need to replay sections of the game. Likewise, for *FF12*, I asked for and received video for most of the gameplay & all

of the cut scenes. The time savings alone from this kind of preparation is a huge boon to quality. (I hope all you developers out there are listening!)

As for content, I find the better written a game is in the original, the easier it is to translate. Even if you have to jump through many of the same hoops to get a text into English, the flow of a well-written text will guide and nurture the translation to the point that it can seem to spring fully-formed onto the page & screen. Conversely, a poorly-written or poorly-imagined game will leave the translator grasping at phrases to patch up a leaky ship. As long as the writing quality is there in the original, the main difference between titles is one of complexity.

Take three well-written games I've worked on in order of increasing complexity: *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney, Vagrant Story, and Final Fantasy XII.*

Phoenix Wright:Ace Attorney, was very straightforward in story and characters. Play for a few minutes and you know what makes the game tick: the slapstick dynamism of its characters, and its delight in the absurd. Once you know why the game works, you know what you must achieve in the translation (or, at least what you shouldn't mess with). Actually getting the characters to do what they need to do in another language can be a real balancing act, but it's usually an enjoyable process. What I find helps the most is a good co-translator or editor, and usually both. Ideally, you want to create a dynamic where one person gets to play fast-and-loose with the text, pushing it to the borderline and frequently beyond. On *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*, I would often write several versions of each joke, each version increasingly bizarre, and Steve Anderson, the editor, would choose where to draw the line, or sometimes grab two jokes and weave them together, in addition to the usual tweaking an editor performs.

Vagrant Story was an unusual title in that it had a very deep backstory, but the actual narrative within the game was succinct. In other words, the text had tremendous information density, requiring an entirely different approach from the shotgun translation of a lighter, faster-paced title. What worked for me and the editor, Rich Amtower, on *Vagrant Story* was an iterative approach to the text. Practically every line in the game was subject to several rounds of back and forth between translator and editor, and a second editor, Brian Bell, who also reviewed parts of the text.

A sample exchange:

ASHLEY

Don't move, Sydney!

I've got a bowgun aimed at your heart!

brian: the thing looked more like a crossbow or hand crossbow. i say this only because gun is a modern word that probably wouldn't appear in this setting.

alex: again, we've got several modern words and concepts showing up in this medieval setting. That thing he's holding is definitely a hand crossbow, but I think bowgun might be acceptable in the quasi-medieval context of VS...At least, that's what I thought at the time. Any strong feelings about this?

rich sez: I was okay with bowgun, given the context. bolt-thrower? boltgun? that's a little "warhammer 40k," though... bowgun is fine...

brian: bowgun it is!

As for *FF12,* some parts (NPC dialogue) were standard RPG-fare, posing few real challenges other than tweaking to fit Western expectations of world-immersion (a topic for another time, perhaps). Other parts were just as dense as the densest parts of *Vagrant Story,* requiring a considerable amount of back-and-forth between me and my translation partner, Joseph Reeder. To illustrate the difference in difficulty, we spent 9 months of time working on the voice script for the game, which represented 7% of the text for the game, and 6 months on the remaining 93%. Voice scripts pose an additional challenge in the form of timings, and sometimes, matching an actor's take on a character. A single line can take hours of work to get right. Ultimately, practically every line in the *FF12* voice script reflects the work of the original writer and editor, one translator's initial take on the line, another translator's crosscheck, the editor's check, the voice director's opinion, and the actor's interpretation – all within the strange confines of lip movements animated to match the Japanese, not the English.

Steven Anderson: The most difficult projects I have worked on have been titles that involved non-standard formats and localization processes, such as the juggling of double-space English fonts, translations with horrendously tight character limits, and frequent file updates without adequate change tracking. Conversely, the most straightforward projects were those for which the developer went out of their way to prepare the text in a way that made localization easy. In my experience, the difficulty of a project is rarely related to the content of the game text itself.

Matthew Alt: One of the biggest hurdles we faced was in translating the magic system in *Dragon Quest VIII* (Square-Enix, 2004). It is based on a series of obscure onomatopoetic puns in Japanese, and the team we were part of submitted all sorts of potential ways around it that were essentially total rewrites. In the end, the localization director made the decision to go with a system he had devised himself. It was really a case of there being no single "correct" way to handle it and so after many weeks of all of us trying variations, it came down to a judgement call on the part of the LD.

What is the corporate side of localization like? Are you given relatively free reign over the process or is your work closely monitored?

Alexander Smith: Once again, this is something that varies by project, especially as a freelancer, where you are working with (and sometimes against) wildly different corporate cultures. Checks and balances can come from several directions. Where they come from is largely a factor of the client's structure and attitude toward localization. For example, some companies with robust localization departments will have strict guidelines that all translators (internal and outsourced) must follow, enforced by coordinators and managers within localization. Where localization is less developed, a development team might try to oversee localization. This can be great, where there's mutual trust between

team and translator, or a disaster, in cases where the development team doesn't trust the translator and tries to dictate too much of the process without knowing much about localization (or English, for that matter).

In companies that have a robust U.S or European branch, often a QA department will thoroughly review and critique a localization, squashing bugs and offering suggestions. There are some things, like voice scripts, that QA has little say in, however, as recording schedules rarely allow for retakes based on QA feedback. If the development company is working with a US/European based publisher, sometimes the QA feedback will come from them. It can be quite a juggling act trying to please all sides in these situations, and often hard to tell what input is coming from where. Learning where to fight your battles and where to compromise is an essential skill for the localizer, especially when you're freelance.

Steven Anderson: This entirely depends on the developer and their localization flow. When I work through an agency as a freelancer, I obviously have less influence on how the game is going to turn out, although for new titles with no existing glossary I at least have the first crack at coming up with English terms for the game. For some titles the developer has little involvement in the final translation, but generally they will have internal localization staff that make the final call on what approach should be taken and what actually goes in the game.

Matthew Alt: I'm not sure what you mean by "corporate side" – can you be more specific? I work for a company but even freelancers are in this as a business, as a way to make a living. There is always some degree of monitoring of the translated text – it is the "face" the game presents to foreign gamers. But it is better for the text to be monitored; for one thing, the more eyes, the fewer mistakes make it through, and for another, the translator does not generally "own" the text – that is the role of the localization director, who is usually someone employed by the company developing the game (or the company that is releasing it abroad, if different).

How do you go about dealing with cultural specificity? Have you had to adapt material that might (for example) make sense to a Japanese audience so that it would make an impression on Western gamers?

Alexander Smith: I think that if you're doing your job right, and the cultural specificity is in the text, not in graphics or some other part of the game outside the translator's jurisdiction, then culture clashes should be a non-issue. If you are properly re-imagining the characters as English-speaking equivalents, and staying true to the localized version of your game scenario, then you can avoid those awkward moments that can come from Japanese material transposed into an English script. The biggest challenge, then, is that initial re-imagining of your characters. You want something that works in your English context, but doesn't throw away what makes the character effective in the original. Another danger is the creation of a Frankenstein character that is neither Japanese nor English – such as a squeaky-voiced anime girl in a serious setting. While anime fans might appreciate fidelity to the original character, and are used to the classic anime character types, you'll lose a whole segment of your audience that can't correlate

what they're seeing with what they expect. If, when directly translated, your character doesn't ring true in your target cultural setting, you need to reassess, and consider altering the character's attitude slightly to work in a more Western setting.

Steven Anderson: This comes up quite often, and usually involves the replacement of the original game element with a culturally appropriate equivalent. The challenge is when no equivalent exists, or when art assets that can't be changed are involved. There is usually a creative way to write around it, however.

Matthew Alt: This sort of thing happens a lot less than it used to. There is a much firmer awareness of Japanese culture (and particularly subculture) abroad now than there was in the '90s, and games that have a lot of Japanese-specific cultural references tend to use them as a selling point. I can't even recall the last time we made a major change because of cultural specificity; in fact, many of the games we work on now revel in their Japanese-ness and use it for flavor.

You are uniquely placed to comment on the development of the relationship between Asian, European and American gaming. How do you see these industries changing in the near future?

Alexander Smith: You only have to look at games like Capcom's *Lost Planet* or Square-Enix's *Final Fantasy 12* to see where things are headed: convergence. Lost Planet feels more like a Western FPS than a Japanese game, and *Final Fantasy 12* plays more like an MMO than a *Final Fantasy*. More and more Western developers are working in Japanese game companies, and not just in localization. At the same time, as the U.S. game industry matures, Japanese game developers are increasingly looking to Western games as models for their own creations. I would be frightened that we'd be seeing more cookie-cutter games in a decreasing number of genres, but in an industry where a very small number of people can make a revolutionary game, I think there will always be room for innovation, and I hope that increased ties between developers in Japan and the West mean that Japanese developers will remain part of this innovation.

Steven Anderson: I don't really have much insight on this, as I don't have much direct contact with development teams these days, but I will say that I think there is still a lot of room for growth in each of these markets. As development costs keep rising there will inevitably be less titles for cutting-edge consoles, but with downloadable content also catching on this is the perfect time for smaller indie developers to make a name for themselves. I'm hoping to see more creative indie titles coming from Japan as well, which still has quite a rigid development environment at the moment.

Does humor often present a problem?

Alexander Smith: The answer to this is really the answer to the above question about cultural specificity. When a direct translation of humor fails, as it often does, you have to ask your newly minted characters to step up and bring the funny in a way that makes sense within the new, English-speaking context of the game. Sometimes this involves jumping through many hoops so that the humor works with what you're seeing on screen as well. I encourage those who are interested to check out the ending credit sequence to *Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney*, the fourth installment in the *Phoenix Wright* series. None of the highly culturally specific and highly humorous graphics were changed – only the text was changed so that what you are seeing would make sense in a Western context and (hopefully) still be funny. The process is a bit like what Woody Allen must have gone through writing the farcical subtitles for *What's Up, Tiger Lilly?* where the text is forced to play accompaniment to the visuals.

Steven Anderson: Yes, as what makes something funny in one culture does not always translate to others. Whenever possible we try to adapt humor to suit the target language, but in some cases, such as when we are not given the creative license to deviate from the source text, the humor is inevitably lost. On the other hand, we are often able to add context-appropriate humor to dialog that was not necessarily intended to be funny in the original.

Matthew Alt: Particularly if it is linguistically based. (And that includes so-called "*dajare*" and "*oyaji gags*," which are basically really "base" humor that is often based on entendre or wordplay.)

Do you feel there is more latitude for stylistic and formal innovation than in the past? Vagrant Story, for example, clearly had a very strong aesthetic to its translation. Localization is often viewed as a craft, but do you feel there is a creative element that is maybe underappreciated?

Alexander Smith: There is certainly more awareness of the craft of localization now than there used to be, so I don't feel that the creativity found in good localization isn't getting its due. I do feel that, even in the more knowledgeable forums, there are a lot of misconceptions about what localization entails. I have seen people argue the merits and demerits of a localization without taking into account any of the realities that come with the work, such as schedules, creative compromises, and lip synch. One thing I hope to be able to do more of now that I am based in the States is go to game conferences, meet with other localizers, and the gaming audience to both find out what they expect from a localization, and to shed some light on the black box that is the localization process.

Steven Anderson: I do think that more importance is being placed on the quality of writing, and this can only be a good thing for localization. Localization can be as creative as the developer allows it to be, so the more emphasis that is put on natural, polished text the better.

Matthew Alt: I don't know if there's more latitude. But there is definitely more attention being paid to localization as compared to a decade-plus ago, when we first started working in the industry. Developers take it seriously now, and plan for it in their budgets and schedules (or at least consider it more than they once did).

The fact is, it isn't the translator's job to take a lot of artistic license with a translation unless that is something specifically requested by the development team. In a situation where the dev team says "we want you to rewrite this" for whatever reason, translators get vast amounts of latitude. But in other situations, the translators are there to provide a direct translation that is eventually re-written by editors or writers inside the company. In those cases, their job is to stick to the text as it appears in Japanese. It really depends on the specific situation.

Japanese sexual mores are markedly different from Western ones. Has it ever been necessary to work around or suppress issues of adult sexuality when localising a title?

Alexander Smith: Yes. Depictions of adult sexuality, particularly homosexuality, (sometimes controversial) and sexual deviance such as pedophilia (always controversial) pose two questions merely by existing in a title. 1. Is sexuality depicted in a way that will unintentionally offend a significant segment of the gaming population? 2. Is the sexuality depicted in a way that will affect the rating of the game?

The first largely falls to the translator to make sure the sexual content in the game's script is presented in a way that works in the target cultural context. This is no different than anything else in the game, just much more highly charged. Japanese games are notable for featuring far more openly gay/lesbian/transvestite characters than you'd find in similarly-themed Western games, and my sense is that many of these are stereotyped characters playing to the heterosexual crowd, without considering the gay/lesbian/transvestite audience's reaction.

The second question falls to the publishing branch of the company to decide, as it's ultimately a marketing question. Here the localizer's role is to point out potential problems early so that those decisions can be made in an informed manner.

In both situations, the localizer must be the arbiter between the intent of the original game and the demands of its new audience. Occasionally, the localizer will find themselves in that odd negotiation role that comes with trying to explain differing mores to a Japanese development team that is loathe to part with an aspect of a character that proves problematic for release in Western markets. Without naming any titles, I recall one project where a joke in the English version of the game involving a misunderstanding over the word "nude" was nixed by the dev team for being too racy, while in another scene, a grown man is obsessing over the panties of a clearly underaged female. It took no small amount of effort on my part to explain why the first example was mostly harmless while the latter example was shocking to a Western audience. How these situations are dealt with is largely a matter of compromise and damage control, but such are the restrictions of the rating system. And for every few projects where you have to tread the line, there's a *Madworld*.

Steven Anderson: There have been a few cases where I've had to tone down the content, such as changing a complement about a female character's

cleavage to a more general comment about her appearance. I have only done this either at the client's request or after confirming with them first, as in most cases I believe it's best to stay faithful to the original whenever it fits the context. There are definitely different taboos between the cultures, though, and some things that might sound completely innocent in Japanese can sound extremely inappropriate in English.

Is there an industry standard for the way the voice scripts appear or does it vary by game? Can you give some idea what this looks like?

Alexander Smith: I've created a mockup of an ADR script based on the actual script used for a scene in *Final Fantasy XII*, so it would be conceivable that you could have written it based on playing the game. The only differences with the real script are that I've put dummies in place of the actual start and end timecodes for each line, and I've omitted a column on the far right indicating to the studio how they should label each sound file once recording is complete.

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21 VOSSLER 01:00:00:00   [MNS] So this is Reks's brother.
            01:00:00:00


22 VAAN    01:00:00:00   [SWORD GRABBED FROM HANDS REAX]
            01:00:00:00


23 VOSSLER 01:00:00:00   [ON/OFF] Your words may convince a child
            01:00:00:00   such as this, but they weigh far too
                          lightly on [OFF] the scales for my
                          taste.


24 VOSSLER 01:00:00:00   [MNS] Our paths will remain separate.
            01:00:00:00


25 BASCH   01:00:00:00   [HIT "worth"] Do you not think Amalia
            01:00:00:00   worth saving?


26 VOSSLER 01:00:00:00   [SHARPLY INHALES]
            01:00:00:00


27 VOSSLER 01:00:00:00   [ON/MNS] I hold men's lives [MNS] in my
            01:00:00:00   hands. I must see foes in every shadow.
                          The night we moved against Vayne, he
                          knew. I will not bide such disadvantage
                          again.
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28 VOSSLER 01:00:00:00   [MNS/ON] I must treat you as I would
          01:00:00:00   [ON] Ondore ^ as I would treat any
                         abettor of the Empire.

29 BASCH 01:00:00:00   Then what will you do? Hold me here in
          01:00:00:00   chains?

30 VOSSLER 01:00:00:00   [TOSS SWORD EXERTS]
          01:00:00:00

31 BASCH 01:00:00:00   Some things never change. Do they.
          01:00:00:00

32 VOSSLER 01:00:00:00   [ENDS OFF] Listen to me, Basch. Your
          01:00:00:00   cage may have no bars, but it is a cage.
                         The eyes of the resistance watch
                         unblinking.

33 BASCH 01:00:00:00   Let them watch. I know something of
          01:00:00:00   cages.