



INSTITUTIONSNAMN

A WORLD OF RICE AND GODS: WHERE WHITE GRAINS SYMBOLIZE WEALTH

A study of Japanese game localization and cross-cultural translation

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Abstract

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Studies of Japanese translation are a common topic, and with good reason. There is extensive material to work with, and the vast differences between Japanese and many other languages creates translation challenges of considerable complexity as such. In the case of such translation, video games are a major component given how prolific and numerous the works put out by the Japanese side of the industry are as a whole. In other words, video games from Japan are frequently translated, and such translations are of sufficient quality to foster sizable international fanbases despite the vastly differing cultural spheres the product and the consumer exist in.

However, this begs the question: how can translators approach projects of this kind? Furthermore, how are successful and unsuccessful instances of video game translation, often called localization, created?

In order to answer such questions, this thesis aims to conduct a case study of the video game *Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin*, a 2020 title where rice as a Japanese cultural concept plays center stage. Using the famous translation techniques established by Vinay and Darbelnet, applied to a Japanese translation context by Hasegawa, it explores the existence of culturally bound terms (CBTs) and how these can undergo contextual transition. Another important piece of the theoretical framework is the notion of ethical and responsible game localization as presented by Mandiberg et al. in their 2015 dissertation.

This is accomplished through examining how terminology related to rice has been realized within the English edition of the game, comparing the texts with one another to see which translation techniques have been used, and where.

The results show that *Sakuna* is, by Mandiberg et al.'s standards, an overall ethical and responsible localization where much of the Japanese semantics remain consistent. In some cases, information is changed or omitted for the sake of fluency, but it is usually done in an effort to render the elements present in the source text in a way that English-speakers will find more easily understandable. There is, at the end of the day, no doubt that the game is ripe with inspiration from Japanese mythology and culture. This comes across in the English localization, which renders it ethical and responsible based on Mandiberg et al.'s definitions.

Foreword

I would like to express my thanks to my supervisor, my fellow students, and those who have helped review this thesis. The ideas and feedback contributed by them have been invaluable.

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1. Introduction

Translation is a difficult task. Making such a statement is likely to be viewed as redundant, and with good reasoning as to why. Of course taking something created within the framework of one language and successfully placing it within another is difficult. It is almost as much of a given as the fact that we feel water as being wet against our skin. That said, understanding that a task is difficult does not mean one understands exactly how it is difficult, nor does it equal understanding of how said task can be approached.

Allow me to revise the previous statement to better reflect my meaning: translation is a difficult task because it involves conveying the meaning of a source text with different tools at one's disposal. The highly prolific and somewhat controversial translation theorist Lawrence Venuti has gone so far as to state that translation is an inherently violent act in which a source text is destroyed and rebuilt. While perhaps a little dramatic, there is some truth to be found within those statements. A translation is not the original text, but an interpretation of it filtered through the translator's perception. In other words, a translator takes the semantic meaning of the source text and reimagines it in the target language, an act which may be viewed as breaking down a text to its fundamentals in order to rebuild it.

Part of the difficulty comes when the language and cultural context our source text is written in lacks a clear equivalent in the target language. After all, different cultures have different ideas.

For instance, the word for cooked rice in Japanese, ご飯/御飯 (*gohan*) is synonymous with meals in a general sense, regardless of what is being served. This showcases how integral rice is to the concept of a meal in Japanese culture, something which is far from simple to convey in a different language. Here and now, I am writing this text in English, and I am certain that anyone reading it is well aware of how "rice" is not synonymous with "meal." Indeed, there may not even be a staple food in western English-speaking cultures which is important enough to play as heavy and central a semantic role as rice does in Japanese to begin with. In fact, I would like to encourage readers who do not have Japanese as their first language to take a moment and consider if there is any kind of staple food or ingredient within the culture they know that could be considered to encapsulate the meaning of a meal as such.

Perhaps there is, or perhaps there is not. My acknowledgment of the possible absence of any linguistic phenomenon along those lines is of course not meant to make light of language or culture, but rather to illustrate how concepts can be perceived differently across cultures. If the first language of the person currently reading this text does have a staple food which is synonymous (or close to it) with the meal itself, it could very well be something far removed from rice.

The point I wish to convey is that concepts which are central to a culture may exist within its linguistic landscape in ways that are difficult or even impossible to fully convey in a different language. Thus, it seems inevitable that some aspects of a source text will always be doomed to end up lost in translation, as it were.

If we assume that to be true, how can translators taking on a project heavily rooted in its source culture and language approach their work? How can culturally and semantically context-sensitive media shift to a different context without compromising too much of its identity?

This study aims to provide answers to such questions by examining how the 2020 video game *Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin* (*Tensui no Sakuna-hime*), a piece of media with heavy basis in Japanese culture and history along with mythology, that was not only translated into English, but well-received.

2. Problem, aim, and research questions

As previously stated, *Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin* is a game which presents a narrative and style with a heavy focus on concepts that are distinctly Japanese, many of which lack clear equivalents in English and are not necessarily common knowledge among a Western audience. The importance placed upon rice as a vehicle for gameplay, character development, and the greater scope story being told is on the difficult side to fully convey to an audience within a different cultural sphere. Even so, *Sakuna* has so far enjoyed generally positive reception, maintaining a 9/10 consumer rating on the extremely popular gaming platform and online store Steam as of the 20th of May 2021. There is clearly enough skillful translation work at play here to carry a narrative across the language barrier and make consumers want to explore this world of rice.

The aim of this study is to examine how the translation team behind *Sakuna* have approached the sets of challenges presented by translating a culturally contextual narrative such as this. Furthermore, this thesis will try to examine how translating a video game is inherently different from translating a book or a film, and how this can create unique challenges which go beyond word meaning due to the more multimodal nature of this media form.

The following research questions will provide the framework for this dissertation:

- How are Japanese culturally specific terms and concepts relating to rice translated in *Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin*?
- Which specific translation techniques can be identified in the text?
- Does the translation appear to favor a domesticating or foreignizing approach?

3. Background

This part of the thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter gives an overview of Venuti's translation theories relevant to this essay: namely, their general criticism of what constitutes a 'good' translation and how this perception affects the culturally or linguistically unique aspects found within a foreign text. It also includes a brief acknowledgment of some of the more well-known critiques of Venuti's theories as I am of the opinion that other researcher's stances on Venuti's work are necessary to formulate a perspective with nuance.

The second chapter discusses various methods and approaches for translating cultural concepts which lack a clear equivalent in the target language. The third chapter ties into this, providing an outline of various translation techniques which can be employed during work on Japanese texts by Hasegawa.

Chapter four discusses how and why video game translation is often referred to as localization instead, outlining some ways that translating video games (Japanese games in particular) differs from literary translation.

Finally, the fifth chapter gives a summary of previous research focusing on the translation of Japanese media.

3.1 Destruction and restoration: Venuti's translation theories

There are perhaps few names within translation theory more widely known than Venuti's, just as there are likely many current and former students who become acquainted with *The Translator's Invisibility* at some point. Within, Venuti presents an analysis of the notion of 'good' translation along with the translator's own place within their work. A point of focus in the text are the concepts of domestication and foreignization within the context of translation work, terms which describe the act of downplaying or emphasizing instances of foreignness, respectively.

To summarize, the core of Venuti's arguments can be put as such: translation is an inherently violent act towards a written work (2018, p. 14). In other words, to translate a text, one must first break it down in order to reassemble it. This reassembly happens entirely through the translator's point of view, meaning that the translated version of a text is ultimately an interpretation created and influenced by the translator themselves, meaning the idea of a good translation involves the translator having as little presence as possible. Thus, we have the translator's lack of visibility. Venuti directs heavy criticism towards the notion that a skillful translation should read as if it is not a translation, creating the illusion that the act of translating never took place. These beliefs by default make domestication come across as the de facto technique for translation, at least within a British and American English-speaking sphere, if we follow Venuti's accompanying examples of praise and criticism directed at various translated works (2018, pp. 1-3).

What can consistently be seen in the examples provided by Venuti (2018, pp. 2-4) is that many of the positive descriptors used by the respective writers are "fluent," "natural," "seamless," and variations thereof. On the other hand, terms such as "clunky," "wooden," and similar terms are used to criticize translations in which the translator themselves has not been rendered sufficiently invisible (2018, pp. 2-4). The translator's visibility is thus treated as harmful to the flow of the text.

Additionally, the terms 'translationese' and 'translatorese' along with other variations are employed to express the writer's dissatisfaction with the translator's work, further stressing that the root of the problem lies in the failure to create the illusion of no translation ever taking place (2018, p. 4).

As such, Venuti's arguments may just become fairly reasonable to the reader. If domestication is seen as a universally 'good' translation technique while all others are inferior, we run the risk of creating a mindset lacking in nuance. Furthermore, aiming to remove all hints of anything 'foreign' in a work is rife with problematic implications relating to xenophobia and cultural imperialism.

Of course, it should be acknowledged that if one follows Venuti's more famous principles to the letter, there comes a risk of falling into some black and white thinking: foreignization is always the superior choice of translation technique whereas all instances of domestication are an act of violence towards the foreign culture present in a text. This may seem a natural reading of the arguments Venuti directs towards the established notions of what is considered good, skillful translation, but I believe it does a disservice to treat Venuti's text as without nuance. While it does not appear to be as well known as the foreignization versus domestication debate Venuti pushes to establish, I believe it is important to also acknowledge that Venuti does at least somewhat address the topic in a later chapter.

In chapter 3 of *The Translator's Invisibility*, Venuti does, in fact, carry on a discussion of how keeping the foreign aspects present in a translated text does not always come with the intention of conveying as much of the original work as possible (2018, pp. 83-84). Rather, an emphasis being placed on foreign concepts and ideas in a work can just as well serve a nationalist agenda, nurturing the formation of an us versus them sort of narrative.

Essentially, Venuti stresses how translation can be used as a tool of cultural dominance and how what is perceived as a "good" translation might blindly play into culturally imperialist mindsets if not seen through a sufficiently critical lens.

However, all of this is not to imply there is no room for criticism of Venuti's stance and their attempts to address its weak points. Pym (1996) means that for all of Venuti's caution against perceiving one translation technique as 'good' at the expense of all others, Venuti's own arguments are too vague to answer their established questions (pp. 2-3). Furthermore, Pym calls into question whether the image Venuti paints of translation in contemporary Anglo-American culture is reasonably based in reality to begin with, citing that Pym themselves have not personally witnessed the image Venuti paints (1996, p. 2).

What Pym ultimately argues is that Venuti ascribes an amount of political significance to the act of and attitudes surrounding English translation which goes unrealized in the text. While the questions of how the domestication versus foreignization debate might hold some manner of political influence might serve as groundwork for a discussion, these questions are, in Pym's opinion, never answered (1996, p. 2). It is this apparent lack of answers which appears to primarily frustrate Pym and hurt Venuti's convincing case.

These points of criticism are also brought up by Myskja (2013) in their overview of Venuti's critics, citing Venuti's lack of a neutral narrative as a source of questioning their aims (p. 5). As I mentioned previously, it is easy to come away from Venuti's writings feeling that foreignization is an inherently more positive practice than domestication, especially if one does not know to seek out the bits where they show some acknowledgment of this fact. In actuality, it is more apt to consider foreignization and domestication as what they fundamentally are: two translation practices which are suited to different contexts. Venuti especially pushes the idea that foreignization is inherently more positive, resisting ethnocentrism in the mindset of an audience through its usage, but Myskja argues that one cannot say with certainty what effect a translation method will have since no text can ever be limited to only one type of audience (2013, pp. 20-21). In other words, we cannot assume that a text translated through a domesticating or foreignizing lens will always have a certain effect on its audience since the audience is never set in stone.

Either style can be employed with problematic intentions, and it is fully dependent on the translator's intentions as to whether this is the case or not.

3.2 Japanese translation techniques

As has been established so far, translation of any kind is a difficult task. It stands to reason, then, that a translation project involving languages with vastly different structures and writing systems would have an even higher degree of difficulty for the translator to overcome. Japanese, as is relevant to this essay, is in possession of a sentence structure and high degrees of shared semantic context which are not seen in English.

Take the following sentence as an example: *Watashi wa onigiri wo tabemashita*, which would literally translate to “I am rice ball ate.” Furthermore, *watashi wa* (As for me) can be removed without any effect on the meaning of this sentence, as the context is enough to make it clear that the speaker is referring to a course of action they themselves have taken. In other words, ‘*onigiri wo tabemashita*’ will retain the same meaning despite missing a clear subject. This cannot be replicated in English or any other kind of language characterized by a low degree of shared linguistic context (such as other Germanic ones) without creating an incorrect utterance. Additionally, knowledge and understanding of characteristics like this are necessary to navigate the source text to begin with.

How, then, can translators approach Japanese material? To provide an idea of some techniques which can be employed, we shall turn to Hasegawa’s book *The Routledge Course in Japanese Translation*, to chapter six titled *Translation Techniques* (2012, pp. 168-191), to be specific. These essentially act as a paraphrasing of techniques established by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995).

Let us now go through the seven provided techniques one by one.

The first technique Hasegawa brings up is borrowing or “loan words” (借用, *shakuryou*), which is one of the simplest techniques for dealing with words lacking any kind of recognized equivalent in the TL (target language) (2012, p. 168). For specific examples taken from Japanese, Hasegawa lists *karaoke*, *manga*, *zen*, etc. The opposite is true as well, with Japanese containing many English loan words such as charity (チャリティー) or shower (シャワー) among many others (Hasegawa, 2012, p. 169).

However, Hasegawa goes on to state that this technique is generally ill-suited for Japanese to English translation as many Japanese words would be incomprehensible to a majority of English speakers, and one way to circumvent this problem is to add a short explanatory word (i.e. “*shiitake mushroom*”) for clarity (2012, pp. 169-170.). Doing so can help carry terms which are culturally specific across while it keeps them understandable for those less familiar with the source language. Though it is, according to Hasegawa, to watch out for so-called “false friends” when using this method (2012, p. 170.). This is a special type of problem which can appear when working with loan words in particular since despite it having many words borrowed from English, the Japanese meaning of them has become different from the original, sometimes drastically so (Hasegawa, 2012, p. 171).

The second technique is referred to as “calque” (翻訳借用 *honyaku shakuyou*), i.e. a loan translation. It describes the practice of translating elements of a term in a literal sense: compare 牛丼 (*gyuudon*) with “beef bowl,” for instance (Hasegawa, 2012, pp. 171-172).

The third technique is referred to by Hasegawa as “literal translation” (2012, p. 171). This describes a style which translates word for word, typically at clause level as it is considered calque if occurring at word level (Hasegawa, 2012, p. 171). It sees more use in translation between languages sharing roots than in other cases, but can, as Hasegawa states, be useful for those studying the source language (SL) (2012, p. 171).

The fourth technique is called transposition, and it refers to the act of rendering an element in the SL using TL elements to create semantic accuracy even if there may not be any true equivalency present

(Hasegawa, 2012, p. 171). This strategy is especially useful when applied to any translation between English and Japanese, Hasegawa states, citing inherent construction differences in the two languages (2012, p. 172). Japanese has a tendency to favor verbal construction (where two or more verb phrases or verbs stack within a single clause) whereas English often favors nominal construction (where two or more noun phrases stack within a single clause) instead, hence why the retention of semantics in a translation cannot always be achieved by keeping the form identical (Hasegawa, 2012, p. 172). Take “**love** is patient” and “people who **love** are patient” (Hasegawa, 2012, p. 172). In the former example, “love” becomes an abstract noun, while in the second example, it is a verb instead. Hasegawa states that abstract nouns are a word class Japanese is generally incompatible with, hence why translation of such a statement into Japanese would likely take the form of the second example sentence (2012, p. 172).

The fifth technique, modulation, involves creating variation of the form of a specific message through changing its point of view. An example would be 起こさないでください (*okosanaide kudasai*, lit. Please do not wake me up) becoming ‘Do not disturb’ in English, Hasegawa states (2012, pp. 172-175).

The sixth technique is referred to as equivalence, a strategy which attempts to create equivalent texts through different structure or style in the TL (Hasegawa, 2012, p. 176). For instance, greetings in the SL such as ‘How have you been?’ can be replaced with an equivalent expression in the TL like お元気ですか。 (*ogenki desu ka*, lit. Are you well?) to create a new text that is semantically similar to the original text even if the exact phrasing differs (Hasegawa, 2012, p. 176). The end result is a translation which achieves the kind of fluidity that Venuti previously described as desirable within the English translation sphere.

The seventh and final technique, adaptation, is used when the source text consists of a situation which is completely unknown within the TL’s culture, creating the necessity for the translator to recreate this situation within the confines of the TL culture (Hasegawa, 2012, p. 176). Essentially, this strategy can be seen as creating cultural substitution so as to avoid reader confusion or frustration with something they feel is unnatural within the linguistic context they know.

It should be noted that Hasegawa also includes omission as a drastic option for translation techniques, though with the caveat that it should be used with care as omission can be useful in cases where the ST may have an overly repetitious character or convey information which is not vital to, or could confuse, the reader (Hasegawa, 2012, p. 179).

3.3 Translation of culture-specific concepts

As mentioned by Hasegawa above, it is possible for translators to come across situations and concepts which lack a defined equivalent in the TL (2012, p. 179). Let us now move on to examine techniques for how one can approach translation of culture itself.

Braçaj (2015, pp. 477-478) lists the following techniques paraphrased from Graedler (2000, p.3):

1. Making up a new word to communicate the concept.
2. Explaining the concept instead of translating it.
3. Keeping the SL term as it is.
4. Using a word in the TL which is similar (i.e. Hasegawa’s equivalence technique).

The fourth technique is home to the greatest degree of complexity as equivalence can, naturally, take a different form depending on the context. Braçaj provides descriptions of four variants on this strategy: functional, formal, transcription (i.e. borrowing or transliterating the term), and descriptive translation which aims to be self-explanatory (Braçaj, 2015, p. 478).

Furthermore, Braçaj (2015, p. 478) paraphrases additional techniques from Newmark (1988a, 1988b):

- Transference, essentially transliteration.
- Naturalization, which “adapts the SL word first to the normal pronunciation, then to the normal morphology of the TL,” (Braçaj, 2015, p. 478).
- Cultural equivalence (i.e. Hasegawa’s equivalence technique) and its variations.
- Componential analysis, comparing an SL word to a TL word which has similar meaning but is not a clear equivalent.
- Synonymy, in which a similar, but not equivalent TL term is used.
- Through-translation, essentially calque.
- Transposition, changing grammatical aspects of SL to better work in TL (such as clarifying plural).
- Modulation, which is recreating the SL contents in accordance with current TL norms.
- Compensation, attempting to make up for when meaning is lost in translation.
- Paraphrasing: explaining the meaning of the SL term.
- Couplets: describes when a translator combines several techniques.

So far, we have discussed culturally bound terms (CBTs) at length and how it impacts translation, but what is it that actually constitutes cultural words in the first place? What types of words are counted as cultural across different languages and ethnicities?

While there is no definitive list, it is commonly agreed upon that words which fall under these groups tend to exist as culturally bound terms: descriptions and names for environment as well as aspects of a culture. We can thus sort them into four broader descriptive categories: environment, cultural heritage, social culture, and linguistic culture (Fernández Guerra, 2012, p. 3.).

To put it simply, and perhaps a little redundantly, CBTs comprise terms which are intrinsic to culture itself. In turn, culture is tied to the geographic circumstances under which it develops, hence why the categories of words CBTs tend to belong to describe one’s surroundings in more than one sense.

3.4 Localization versus translation

Thus far, discussion has mostly focused on literary translation. Most translation typically involves text, of course, and literary translation is one of the longest living practices within this sphere. It is as such a natural development that much research and theory would focus strictly on translation of books, plays, comics, and so on. However, there is a considerably younger form of media which presents its unique sets of challenges through a more multimodal form of translation: video- and computer games.

According to Mandiberg et al. (2015, pp.12-16), usage of “localization” as a term has often been seen as problematic within difference disciplines for fear of cultural imperialism. The term is considered to have unfortunate connotations in this regard, which is why many scholars of translation studies or any related fields understandably shy away from using it (Mandiberg et al, 2015, p.15). However, meaning of the term ‘localization’ becomes very different when put within the context of bringing video games into foreign markets, as the term is used in a “functional business sense” according to Mandiberg et al. (2015, p. 16). In other words, localization when referring to the translation of video games essentially carries the meaning of making a product more palatable to a foreign market. A famous example is how the Japanese video game series *Kirby* (星のカービィ, *hoshi no kaabii*) has its depiction of the titular character differ in the cover art for different games across markets: in the Japanese cover art, Kirby is generally depicted as happy and energetic. However, in several cases, the Western cover art for the *Kirby* games depicts the character with stereotypical cartoony angry eyebrows added or has the art’s composition changed to look more action centric.

Mandiberg et al's (2015, pp. 16-17) dissertation provides insight that can explain why such seemingly pointless changes are made: game localization must create a product that is not just semantically but also culturally appropriate for the target market to facilitate sales. Another famous example of game localization which Mandiberg et al. actually mention (2015, p. 223) is how the game series *Gyakuten Saiban* (roughly 'Turnabout Courtroom/Trial'), a mostly text-based series in which both the Japanese justice system and Japanese culture in general are often central, became *Ace Attorney* for Western markets.

A specific example Mandiberg et al. focus on is the sprite artwork used for a specific character in one of the installments of the series. This character is suffering from a cold and wears a face mask to keep from sneezing on others, which is standard practice in Japan. However, in the North American cultural context at the time of the game's release, this was an unfamiliar practice, and the character's depiction in this manner confused consumers (Mandiberg et al. 2015, p. 224). Why, then, was this artwork left intact for the localization?

The answer lies in creative limitations: according to the localization director, redrawing the sprite and changing all the animations associated with it was too daunting a task for the team when the detailed sprite artwork was already hand drawn to begin with (Mandiberg et al. 2015, pp. 224-225). The team decided to add some extra lines of dialogue justifying and explaining the mask's presence in the English release instead, hoping that it would be enough to make it seem more natural with the SARS outbreak a few years prior still on the minds of North American consumers (Mandiberg et al. 2015, p. 225). Unfortunately, this was not the case, resulting in that sense of confusion among consumers.

In the case of *Sakuna*, there were both technical and cultural challenges when bringing the game over to the Western market. Some examples of these are given in a blog post written by Wheeler (2020), who worked on the game's localization.

One of the many challenges faced by the localization team at XSEED Games was how to translate the different properties the player's rice harvest possesses. In Japanese, these are written as 量 (*ryou*), 味 (*aji*), 硬 (*kou*), 粘 (*neba*), 美 (*bi*), and 香 (*ka*), which are written in English by Wheeler (2020) as Yield, Taste, Hardness, Stickiness, Aesthetic and Aroma. The problem at hand arises when the number of characters needed to convey meaning are taken into account, as every word in English is considerably longer than the solitary character needed to communicate the same concept in Japanese.

Why, exactly, is this an issue? The answer to this lies within the game's user interface. Inserting too many characters into it will result in the font shrinking so as to accommodate them (Wheeler, 2020), reducing readability, general visibility, and giving the game's graphical design an inconsistent look. The localization team's solution was to use abbreviations of each attribute, rendering them in English as YLD (Yield), TST (Taste), HRD (Hardness), STK (Stickiness), AST (Aesthetic), and ARM (Aroma) instead (Wheeler, 2020).

The same issue arose regarding the game's world map where the player can view objectives for each area they gain access to, such as defeating a specific boss enemy during a certain time of day in-game or within a set time limit. In Japanese, the descriptors used for these enemies are rather elaborate, but in English, keeping their full titles intact while also including criteria such as the time of day or a time limit would yet again take up too many characters (Wheeler, 2020). The solution was, again, to keep the English text shorter. In this case, the localization team accomplished that by shortening the titles of these boss monsters to keep them simple. Compare 鹿鬼大将・玄影 ("Demon Deer General (Black Shadow)") with the final name chosen in the finished English version: "Black Shadow," (Wheeler, 2020.). It is far more bare bones, creating a sense of mystery for the player regarding the upcoming foe, which was naturally not the case in the original Japanese version.

While these examples from the localization of *Sakuna* both relate to the same technical issue of the character limit being too small to fit English words into, Wheeler also mentions the team's struggle

with item descriptions. As the setting of *Sakuna* is heavily based on feudal Japan, many items in the game are described with words and terms that are highly archaic and rarely seen in modern Japanese. An example provided in the blog post is “馬鈴薯 (*bareisho*)” referring to potatoes instead of the more common “じゃが芋 (*jagaimo*),” which is a nuance the team had no way to convey in English without the use of translator’s notes (Wheeler, 2020). While Wheeler unfortunately does not mention the process of how this specific instance was handled by the team, they provide a bit of general insight to the techniques employed by bringing up (2020) how the team changed “millet” to “foxtail millet” so as to differentiate it from “sanwa millet” for an English-speaking audience.

3.5 Previous research

Translation of Japanese in all kinds of contexts is an ever popular research topic as there is much that can be discussed regarding translation from a language which is often considered to stand alone within language typology. The previously mentioned dissertation by Mandiberg et al. involves case studies of how several games (including *Gyakuten Saiban* as was discussed in 3.4) with strong roots in Japanese culture were more or less successfully brought overseas, as well as how they were changed to work in a foreign market.

Mandiberg et al. states that video game localization as an idealized practice is impossible, citing ways it has failed, such as was the case with *Gyakuten Saiban*, however, Mandiberg et al. goes on to argue that video game localization can still act as a form of “ethical media translation,” a term which they dub “responsible localization” (2015, p. 297). By giving the multimodal nature of such translation work proper acknowledgment, such as the need to redraw and reanimate the artwork used in the game, it is not feasible to always take this approach due to the steep costs of both the amount of labor and money involved. Furthermore, within the context of a global practice, the localization of video games simply cannot aim at adapting every single release in full (Mandiberg et al. 2015, p. 297).

“Responsible localization” is defined by Mandiberg et al. as working together with the source text and its creators to create an ‘ethical’ localized version of the material (2015, p. 297). While this statement may seem vague at first glance, I believe what Mandiberg et al. wishes to communicate is that for the localized product to be ethical, it must be made in a way the original creator recognizes as conveying the spirit of their work. Which type of translation approach that best fulfills such criteria is, naturally, going to vary based on the situation at hand.

O’Hagan (2015) states that the existence of games as an entertainment product inherently makes the translation processes involved in localizing them align with a functionalist mindset where the focus is on its purpose (p. 252). It is this focus on the purpose of games as products (providing entertainment, selling well, etc.) which explains cases of radical differences between the source text and its translated version, O’Hagan argues, since translators are also bound to the vocabulary which exists within that specific game’s fictional world, adding further difficulty when said translators must consider how to bring any original terminology invented by the creators into a different language (2015, p. 252).

4. Method

This study will examine vocabulary relating to rice, its cultivation, and its processing used in *Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin*. As rice is the central element to the game, a reflection of its important place within Japanese culture as a whole, I believe that focusing on terminology related to rice will provide a clear picture of how its importance comes across in the English text. By electing to study individual terms rather than dialogue relating to rice, a larger sample size of text can be included in this thesis.

Firstly, I intend to use a save file that has most of the game completed so that I will have access to as much of its content as possible. Since the game's text and audio languages can be changed at any time, there is no need for multiple save files to access the Japanese and English text. By using one with most of the game's content cleared, I will have the best possible access to the many different functions that are unlocked over time.

Secondly, gathered words will be divided into four different categories: rice terminology, cultivation terminology, tool terminology, and rice as food terminology. Each category will also have its own sub chapter in the analysis for ease of reading and navigation. This is because of how different the types of terms that are to be examined are, as well as how strongly rooted in Japanese culture they are. For any readers who are not familiar with Japanese culture at length, this will help ensure there will not be an overwhelming amount of information presented all at once.

Thirdly, each word or term will be provided in both *kanji/kana* and *romaji* (rendering Japanese words based on their pronunciation in the roman alphabet) alongside its translation and a brief description of its meaning, such as what type of tool a word might refer to, for example.

As I discuss my results, I will attempt to identify which, if any, of the translation techniques presented by Hasegawa (which overlap with Braçaj and Fernández Guerra) have been employed.

Text from the game will be presented as such:

Japanese text	Definition and explanation	English text
This is the Japanese text used in the game.	This is an explanation of the term within the context of the game where it is relevant. An explanation of the way it is written in Japanese may be included if I believe it is of particular interest when taking the way it has been translated into consideration.	This is the English translated text used in the game.

I believe this way of presenting the results will ensure that terms I refer to as examples throughout the discussion and conclusion can be easily found by readers.

5. Material

5.1 A world of rice: introducing *Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin*

Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin is a 2020 hybrid action-roleplaying and farming simulation game developed by Edelweiss. Set in the land of Yanato, which is heavily inspired by feudal Japan, players take control of the goddess Princess Sakuna. Daughter of the war god Takeribi and the harvest goddess Toyohana, Sakuna is a wealthy, high-ranking goddess who lives a luxurious lifestyle with the vast fortune of fine white rice left behind by her parents. Sakuna's easy life in the Lofty Realm (頂の世, *itadaki no yo*) where the gods reside leaves her a highly spoiled, childish, and lazy person who has never had to work for anything.

On the day where each god and goddess presents an offering to the supreme ruler of the Lofty Realm, Lady Kamuhitsuki, Sakuna's drunken antics lead her down into the mortal-inhabited Lowly Realm (麓の世, *fumoto no yo*) by crossing a bridge that only materializes once every year. As she crosses the bridge between the two worlds, Sakuna meets a group of five starving mortals fleeing a murderous pursuer, but she shows them no sympathy. Though Sakuna dispatches the man attempting to kill the group, she only elects to do so after he insults her personally, not out of a sense of justice or kindness.

However, when Sakuna returns to the banquet, the mortals decide to follow her in search of food. By the time Sakuna realizes she led them to the banquet, the five mortals are already inside the storehouse of rice she intended to offer Lady Kamuhitsuki, eating raw grains off the floor in their desperation.

During the resulting confrontation, Sakuna knocks over an oil lantern in her anger which causes a fire that consumes the entire storehouse.

Sakuna is unwilling to take responsibility for her actions, attempting to shift all of the blame on to the mortals, and it is this immaturity which sees her being sentenced to exile by Lady Kamuhitsuki. Along with the five mortals, Sakuna will be sent off to Hinoe Island (the "Isle of Demons") where her parents once resided. There, they will have to learn to work together and revitalize the old farm until Sakuna has cleared the island of beasts and regrown every grain of rice she caused to burn.

5.2 Rice governs all: the gameplay of *Sakuna*

As mentioned above, *Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin* is a hybrid action-roleplaying and farming simulation game. Players take control of Sakuna and are tasked with guiding her through two primary phases of gameplay: managing the hamlet and exploring the hazardous island.

While at the farmhouse, the game is an in-depth rice farming simulator. The player has access to a rice paddy which must be carefully managed to grant rice of both high quantity and quality. Unlike most of the traditional action-roleplaying games on the market, the character Sakuna does not become stronger through combat or exploration, but instead gains increased statistics in conjunction with each harvest of rice. At the beginning of the game, the player does not have access to detailed information about the paddy or their rice seedlings but must instead see their first harvest to its conclusion through their own intuition and advice from Sakuna's companions.

At the start of each year in game, the field must first be tilled with fertilizer to soften the soil and rid it of stone. Then, the player must decide how thoroughly they wish to sort their rice seedlings to avoid a

potential outbreak of disease in their plants, with various methods to sort afflicted seedlings out being made available as Sakuna gains more experience in-character. Being more thorough will result in less seedlings to plant overall, which can make the final harvest smaller in turn, but eliminate risk of losing plants to said diseases. The player is then free to plant their seedlings anywhere they wish inside their paddy, but ultimately must consider the effect proximity or distance will have on their plants. Once the rice has been planted, the paddy must be filled with water. The paddy's water levels will affect things such as the rice's health, the growth rate of weeds, the soil temperature, and the water's temperature. The weather in the game will affect not only these temperatures, but also the rate at which the water evaporates or rises, meaning the player must account for the daily weather when adding or draining water. Later on, players can learn more advanced techniques for using water levels to cultivate better harvests based on which season their rice ripens in.

In the latter half of the year, the rice will become ready for harvest, and it must be hung up to dry once it has been gathered. Processing of the fully grown stalks of rice is done step by step, with each part of the process starting out as being done either by hand or with minimal tool usage. Over time, tools that simplify the process become available as Sakuna becomes a more experienced rice farmer. Of note is that the player can choose how much to grind the rice and remove the husks, creating brown, mixed, or white rice. Brown and mixed rice give more temporary bonuses when used in cooking (explained further below), whereas white rice will give greater permanent boosts to Sakuna's statistics. Rice also doubles as the player's currency when trading for items that cannot be found on the island, and white rice is the most valuable kind.

Once a rice harvest is finished, the player will be given a detailed report on the results. Here, they can view the various rice statistics (Yield, Taste, Hardness, Stickiness, Aesthetic and Aroma), how much each statistic improved by over the year, the final health status of the field, and more. Improvements to the rice's statistics will be applied to Sakuna's own and will carry over to the next set of seedlings the player can plant the following year in-game. Thus, each year's harvest will have better statistics than the last as long as the player does not neglect their rice or field.

Outside of the farming hamlet, gameplay focuses on action as Sakuna fights her way through different areas of the island, gathering supplies as she goes. These can then be given to the other characters for processing, upgrading Sakuna's equipment, expanding the hamlet, or to be used in cooking. At the end of each in-game day, the player can speak with Myrthe, one of Sakuna's companions, to decide on the menu for dinner that night based on which ingredients are in storage. Mealtime plays a major part due to that different ingredients and dishes will provide bonuses for Sakuna's stats and abilities on the next day, encouraging the player to put together menus accordingly. Furthermore, the characters will carry on conversations throughout meals which serve to advance the story, deepen their relationships, or just tell the player more about the background and personality of a person in the group.

Essentially, both rice and meals in general are central themes to the gameplay and narrative alike.

6. Results

6.1 Rice terminology

This category contains terms that describe the attributes, health, and growth stage of the rice.

Japanese text	Definition and explanation	English text
量 (<i>ryou</i>)	Quantity; amount; volume. Measures how much rice the player has managed to harvest in total.	YLD (Yield)
味 (<i>aji</i>)	Taste; flavor. Measures how well the player has raised their rice.	TST (Taste)
硬 (<i>kou</i>)	Hardness. Measures how well the player has raised their rice.	HRD (Hardness)
粘 (<i>neba</i>)	Stickiness; gumminess. Measures how well the player has raised their rice.	STK (Stickiness)
美 (<i>bi</i>)	Beauty. Measures how well the player has raised their rice.	AST (Aesthetic)
香 (<i>ka</i>)	Scent; fragrance; aroma; smell. Measures how well the player has raised their rice.	ARM (Aroma)
苗期 (<i>naeki</i>)	Seedling stage. Describes which growth stage the player's rice is in.	Seedlings
一次分けつ (<i>ichiji bunketsu</i>)	The first offshoots. Describes which growth stage the player's rice is in.	1st offshoots
二次分けつ (<i>niji bunketsu</i>)	The second offshoots. Describes which growth stage the player's rice is in.	2nd offshoots
三次分けつ (<i>sanji bunketsu</i>)	The third offshoots. Describes which growth stage the player's rice is in.	3rd offshoots
出穂期 (<i>shussuiki</i>)	Sprouting stage. Describes which growth stage the player's rice is in.	Sprouting
登熟期 (<i>toujukuki</i>)	Ripened rice ready for harvest. Describes which growth stage the player's rice is in.	Ripe
収穫 (<i>shuukaku</i>)	Rice that is fully grown and being harvested. Describes which growth stage the player's rice is in.	Harvesting
玄米 (<i>genmai</i>)	Unhulled rice; brown rice.	Brown rice
白米 (<i>hakumai</i>)	Polished rice; white rice.	White rice
分搗米 (<i>buntoumai</i>)	Partially hulled rice.	Mixed rice

稲熱病 (<i>imochibyou</i>)	Rice blight, a bacterial disease which leads to complete loss of infected plants.	Rice blight
塩害 (<i>engai</i>)	Salt damage, caused by excessive toxicity from overuse of salt as a pesticide.	Salt damage
胴割米 (<i>douwaremai</i>)	Rice grains that grow fragile and crack during the hulling process.	Cracked Rice
過剰生育 (<i>kajou seiiku</i>)	Rice plants which have grown too large, leading to malnutrition.	Overgrown
高温障害 (<i>kouon shougai</i>)	Rice which has been damaged by water or soil temperatures becoming too high.	Heat damage
縞葉枯病 (<i>shima hagarebyou</i>)	A virus infection caused by planthoppers. Causes pale stripes on the plant and potential necrosis.	Rice stripe virus
坪枯れ (<i>tsubogare</i>)	A disease caused by insects. It causes the rice to dry out.	Rice Ragged Stunt Virus
徒長 (<i>tochou</i>)	Rice stalks which have grown frail and unstable due to a lack of nutrients and sunlight.	Spindly
出すくみ (<i>dasukumi</i>)	Rice which has not been given enough nutrients, causing it to not fully develop.	Underdeveloped
馬鹿苗病 (<i>bakanaebyou</i>)	A fungal rice disease which causes hypertrophy. The name quite literally means “foolish seedling disease.”	Bakanae disease
倒伏 (<i>toufuku</i>)	Rice stalks which have grown fragile and collapsed in on themselves.	Collapsed
しらた米 (<i>shiratamai</i>)	Milky white grain. A disease which causes rice grains to look cloudy instead of white due to malnutrition.	Cloudy rice
煤病 (<i>susubyou</i>)	A disease which causes black mold spots on the surface of a plant, affecting photosynthesis.	Sooty mold
斑点米 (<i>hantenmai</i>)	A disease which causes the rice kernels to become spotted from damage. Caused by insects that feed on the rice.	Pecky Rice Disease

6.2 Cultivation and processing terminology

This category contains terms which describe the acts of cultivation of the players’s rice paddy and the processing of their ripe crops.

Japanese text	Definition and explanation	English text
田起こし (<i>taokoshi</i>)	Rice paddy plowing; tilling a rice field. 田 (<i>ta</i>) specifically means rice field or paddy.	Tilling
種籾選別 (<i>tanemomi senbetsu</i>)	Sorting healthy rice from diseased rice using water diluted with either mud or salt. The more mud or salt is added, the more unhealthy grains can be spotted and removed at the cost of a smaller harvest.	Sorting
育苗 (<i>ikubyou</i>)	Raising seedlings. The <i>kanji</i> used mean to raise and plant seedlings, respectively.	Raising seedlings
田植え (<i>taue</i>)	Rice planting. 田 (<i>ta</i>) means rice field or paddy and 植え (<i>ue</i>) means to plant.	Planting
密植 (<i>misshoku</i>)	Dense planting. Refers to how much space the player puts between seedlings.	Too close
密植ぎみ (<i>misshoku gimi</i>)	Slightly dense planting. Refers to how much space the player puts between seedlings.	A little close
標準 (<i>hyoujun</i>)	Standard; norm; level. Refers to how much space the player puts between seedlings.	Balanced
疎植 (<i>so shoku</i>)	疎 (<i>so</i>) means sparse or distant, 植 (<i>shoku</i>) plant. Refers to how much space the player puts between seedlings.	Too far apart
やや疎植 (<i>yaya so shoku</i>)	Slightly spare planting. Refers to how much space the player puts between seedlings.	A little far apart
稲架掛け (<i>hasagake</i>)	稲架 (<i>hasa</i>) means to hang up rice to dry, specifically. 掛け (<i>kake</i>) in this context simply denotes that the drying is in progress.	Laying, Drying (rendered as two separate terms in English)
脱穀 (<i>dakkoku</i>)	Threshing, which is the process of removing the rice grains from the stalks.	Threshing
籾摺り (<i>momisuri</i>)	<i>Momisuri</i> specifically refers to hulling rice grains. 籾 (<i>momi</i>) means unhulled rice.	Hulling

6.3 Tool terminology

This category is for tools which are used to process rice. Words for general farming tools such as a hoe are not included as they are not unique to working with rice.

Japanese text	Description and explanation	English text
こき箸 (<i>kokibashi</i>)	A simple tool for threshing rice. It is a split piece of bamboo which resembles chopsticks. 箸 (<i>hashi</i>) literally means chopsticks.	Kokibashi
千歯こき (<i>senbakoki</i>)	A tool for threshing rice. It consists of a wooden frame with protruding teeth, causing it to resemble a large comb with a basket for catching the grains attached. 千歯 (<i>senba</i>) literally translates to “a thousand teeth,” describing the tool’s appearance.	Hand thresher
足踏み式脱穀機 (<i>ashibumishiki dakkokuki</i>)	A machine for threshing rice. It uses protruding teeth like the <i>senbakoki</i> attached to a wheel that can be spun with the use of a pedal. 足踏み式脱穀機 (<i>ashibumishiki dakkokuki</i>) can be roughly translated to ‘stepping style threshing machine’.	Threshing machine
杵 (<i>kine</i>), 臼 (<i>une</i>)	A pestle and mortar for pounding rice to hull it, typically made of wood.	Pestle and mortar
踏臼 (<i>toukyuu</i>)	A simple machine made to automate the process of pounding rice. It uses a pedal to operate a wooden pestle with a mortar attached. Its Japanese name roughly translates to ‘stepping mortar’.	Rice pounder
水車 (<i>suisha</i>)	An automated machine made to hull rice. It is operated by a water wheel.	Water mill

6.4 Rice as food terminology

This category is for foods and ingredients which use rice as a basis.

Japanese text	Definition and explanation	English text
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甘酒 (<i>amazake</i>)	A sweet drink made through converting rice into sugar. It does not contain alcohol, despite its name directly translating to “sweet alcohol”.	Amazake
濁酒 (<i>doburoku</i>)	An unfiltered, cloudy Japanese sake. The 濁 (<i>dobu</i>) part means muddy or impure.	Doburoku
口嚼酒 (<i>kuchikami sake</i>)	Japanese sake, made from chewed rice which has been fermented with human saliva. It is known for its intense odor. 口 (<i>kuchi</i>) means mouth and 嚼 (<i>kami</i>) means teeth.	Kuchikami sake
清酒 (<i>seishu</i>)	Japanese refined sake. While the word “sake” in English is synonymous with Japanese sake, “sake” in Japanese simply means “alcohol” in a broader sense.	Refined Sake
吟釀 (<i>ginjou</i>)	Premium Japanese sake which uses rice that has been 40% polished or more.	Ginjo sake
大吟釀 (<i>daiginjou</i>)	Super premium Japanese sake which uses rice that has been 50% polished or more.	Daiginjo sake
薬酒 (<i>yakushu</i>)	An alcoholic beverage made for medicinal purposes, in this case Japanese sake.	Medicinal sake
糠 (<i>nuka</i>)	Leftovers from the rice hulling process. Includes, shells, stalks, and sprouts.	Rice bran
炙餅 (<i>aburimochi</i>)	Balls of mochi (Japanese rice cake/paste) which are grilled on sticks.	Aburi mochi
酢 (<i>su</i>)	Seasoning made by fermenting malted rice.	Vinegar
玄米飯 (<i>genmaihan</i>)	Steamed brown (unhulled) rice.	Cooked brown rice
白飯 (<i>hakuhan</i>)	Steamed white rice.	Cooked white rice
分搗飯 (<i>buntouhan</i>)	Steamed mixed (partially hulled) rice.	Mixed grain rice
強飯 (<i>kowameshi</i>)	Steamed glutinous rice.	Steamed Rice
山菜強飯 (<i>sansai kowameshi</i>)	Glutinous rice steamed with various mountain vegetables.	Sansai Rice
银杏強飯 (<i>ichou kowameshi</i>)	Glutinous rice steamed with Japanese sake and mixed with ginkgo nuts.	Ginkgo Rice
焼飯 (<i>yakimeshi</i>)	Fried steamed rice. 焼 (<i>yaki</i>) means to fry or grill and 飯 (<i>meshi</i>) technically just means food, but it is synonymous with	Fried rice

	rice.	
栗強飯 (<i>kuri kowameshi</i>)	Glutinous rice steamed (optionally with sake) and mixed with chestnuts.	Chestnut Rice
赤飯 (<i>sekihan</i>)	Glutinous rice with red beans (azuki) and mochi. It is typically served on festive occasions.	Sekihan
干飯 (<i>hoshi ii</i>)	Cooked rice that has been dried for preservation and then rehydrated.	Dried boiled rice
[Blank] 粥 ([Blank] <i>kayu</i>)	A type of Japanese style rice porridge. The blank space is used as a placeholder for specifying the type of grains used to make it.	[Blank] Rice porridge
七草粥 (<i>nanakusagayu</i>)	Rice porridge made with seven types of herbs. Traditionally believed to grant longevity, good health, and ward off evil.	Seven herb porridge
[Blank] の 増水 ([Blank] <i>no zousui</i>)	A Japanese rice soup which may contain vegetables, meat, or eggs. The blank space is a placeholder for text that denotes which main ingredients it was made with. Notably, it is written here with non-standard <i>kanji</i> usage.	[Blank] Zosui
[Blank] 茶漬 ([Blank] <i>chazuke</i>)	Steamed rice topped with tea and optionally soy sauce. The blank space is a placeholder for text denoting which, if any, toppings are used or which type of grains it was made with.	[Blank] Chazuke
天井 (<i>tendon</i>)	A bowl of rice topped with tempura. 天 (<i>ten</i>) refers to the tempura and 井 (<i>don</i>) is short for 丼物 (<i>donburi</i>), meaning rice bowl.	Ten-don
鰻井 (<i>unagi don</i>)	A rice bowl (<i>donburi</i>) which is topped with eel cooked in a soy-glaze.	Eel steamed rice
[Blank] 丼 ([Blank] <i>don</i>)	A rice bowl (<i>donburi</i>) topped with some kind of meat or seafood. The [Blank] is a placeholder for what type of topping was used.	[Blank] Bowl
煎餅 (<i>senbei</i>)	A rice cracker which can be either savory or sweet.	Senbei
糰 (<i>shitogi</i>)	The original, older variety of mochi (Japanese rice cakes/rice paste).	Rice cake

団子 (<i>dango</i>)	A bite-sized Japanese-style dumpling made from mochi.	Dumpling
蓬団子 (<i>yomogi dango</i>)	Dumplings (made from mochi) made with mugwort, giving them a distinctive green color.	Mugwort dumpling
胡麻団子 (<i>goma dango</i>)	Dumplings covered in sesame seeds.	Sesame dumpling
饅頭 (<i>manjuu</i>)	A yeast dumpling made with rice powder and flour.	Manju
卷餅 (<i>kenpin</i>)	Oblong pieces of mochi (Japanese rice cake), which may be served on sticks.	Kenpin

7. Discussion and analysis

Something which remains consistent throughout the localization of *Sakuna* is that many terms which in Japanese refer specifically to an activity concerning rice are not translated as such, for example, 粃摺り (*momisuri*) being translated as “hulling” when in the SL this is more specialized vocabulary. We can link this back to Hasegawa’s omission technique, referring to when a translator omits information which would be confusing, lacking in meaning to TL consumers, or impossible to convey without the use of a translator’s note, which would violate the established norms (as was presented by Venuti) of “good” translation. An additional aspect to consider within the context of video games as a medium is that keeping the player immersed in the game’s world and story are goals most developers will strive to accomplish. The sudden presence of a translator’s note would be actively detrimental to the sense of immersion, reminding the player that the game’s world is fundamentally a construct, and jeopardizing the emotional investment they have developed.

The reason I mention immersion here is that according to Wheeler, Edelweiss, the developers of the game, were closely involved with its localization process and offered feedback or help with difficult parts of the text (Valentine, 2020). Wheeler (2020) thus implies that many of the textual choices are the result of direct communication with the developers, who likely wished to keep players immersed within the world they crafted, given that Edelweiss wished to develop a game with a more involved story and world as the result of previous feedback (Valentine, 2020).

However, I believe there is also more than enough ground to argue that translation changes such as the previously mentioned *momisuri* (hulling rice) becoming “hulling” in English counts as transposition as it still communicates the action that is being performed, even if not all the specifics can be recreated in an English linguistic context while preserving flow. Since they are written with *kanji*, Japanese words can carry additional meanings beyond what words written with the roman alphabet can, hence why we cannot always convey 100% of the SL meaning.

In the cases with words such as *ginjou*, we can clearly see the loan word translation technique at play, with “sake” being added in the English text to serve as clarification while keeping the borrowed term intact. Hence, it becomes “ginjo sake” in English. This is necessary as “ginjo” is, on its own, without meaning to English speakers who do not possess knowledge of Japanese alcohol. The flavor text used in the game will then in turn clarify that “ginjo” denotes a type of premium sake (a term which is seen as synonymous with Japanese rice-based alcohol in English). This generally remains consistent across much of the selection of food-related terms (see: “zosui,” “senbei,” “ten-don,” “chazuke,” etc.) where the words are just Romanized as they are, leaving the flavor text to communicate most of the meaning to players who are unfamiliar with Japanese cuisine. If we look back to chapter 3.3 where CBTs were explained as terms which are fundamentally bound to a culture and cannot be easily translated, we can understand why this is the case. Food is a part of culture, and since culture cannot always be expressed in full outside of its linguistic context, parts of cuisine cannot be rendered in the TL. Hence, the terms are used as loan words (consider ‘kimchi,’ for instance).

There is also quite a bit of literal translation (i.e. calque) to be found: consider how “*yomogi dango*” is rendered as “mugwort dumpling” in English, for instance. This is a literal, word for word translation of the text as it is in the SL. Further examples include some terms such as “*yakimeshi*” (“fried rice”), “*hakumai*” (“white rice”), and so on. In cases where translation becomes so straightforward, there is little reason to create a more complex process. One example I feel stands out as both loan word and literal translation combined in one term is how “*bakanaebyou*” was translated as “bakanae disease,” a case where one part of the word, “*bakanae*” (lit. foolish seedling), was left untranslated while the latter half “*byou*” (illness, disease, sickness) was translated literally into a clear TL equivalent. “*Susubyou*” (lit. soot disease) being translated as “sooty mold” could also be argued as being literal translation, but it has some traits of additional clarification being added in the TL as the SL term does not specify that it is a mold disease.

One interesting context relating to cuisine where the translation has a bit of a quirk to it is in the case of *unagi don* (an eel rice bowl) being translated as “eel steamed rice” while the other variants of rice bowls the player can cook are simply referred to as “[Meat/Seafood variety] bowl” instead. This may be due to *unagi don* being an actual Japanese rice bowl dish while the other instances of rice bowls in the game do not refer to specific real-life dishes. Instead, they are meant to be perceived as improvised cooking, I assume.

Yet, there is also some omission at play where it appears as if food-related information becomes lost in translation. Consider “*sansai kowameshi*” and its translation “sansai rice,” for example. *Kowameshi* is a variety of Japanese cuisine (more commonly known as *okowa*) in which glutinous rice is mixed with vegetables or meats. *Okowa* refers specifically to cooked glutinous rice with optional other ingredients mixed in, not cooked white rice, which is referred to by a different name altogether as was mentioned in the introduction (*gohan*). This information is not made apparent by the English name like it is in the Japanese source text, meaning English-speaking players would need to either read the flavor text or search outside the game to gain access to the same amount of information.

Of course, one can reasonably argue that such information is by no means necessary. Non-Japanese players may not even be familiar with what glutinous rice is in the first place, hence why specifying the variety of rice in the dish’s name could be confusing. Furthermore, ‘sansai glutinous rice’ does not flow as well in English as “sansai rice” does, which would be detrimental to the translator’s goal of achieving invisibility through fluency as stated by Venuti (2018).

A part of *Sakuna*’s localization I think is of particular note is the variety of various rice diseases. It has been stated by Wheeler, as paraphrasing of an anecdote told by their fellow localization team member Bushouse, in an interview (Valentine, 2020) that many of the rice diseases have very little information in English available online. This meant that the team often had to try and connect the dots in the cases where the peculiarities of a disease are not made apparent through its name, employing techniques like reverse searching aspects of these diseases to figure out a suitable translation based on what phrasing is used to describe them (Valentine, 2020). I encountered some similar challenges myself throughout work on this thesis in which I had to carefully consider the building blocks of these words in order to reliably pair the translated versions with their Japanese equivalents.

Yet another part of this localization I find interesting is how “*kokibashi*” is left as it is, using the loan word translation technique, but the “*senbakoki*” tool is referred to as a “hand thresher” in English. In my opinion, this is one of the very few instances where the localization can feel somewhat jarring as the first threshing tool being called “*kokibashi*” would imply that it, as well as its upgraded form (the “*senbakoki*”) by association, both exist within a cultural context which cannot be fully translated due to the lack of any similar tool terminology in English. The term “hand thresher” is, furthermore, not one I would say is entirely accurate for referring to this type of tool since it does not describe how it differs from the “*kokibashi*,” which is also operated by hand and functions similarly.

One additional part of the translation where the wording strikes me is how the descriptor text for when the game evaluates the amount of spacing the player has put between their rice plants has been written in English. The phrasing “too far apart,” for instance, carries a negative implication, communicating to the player that they have made a mistake. However, planting sparsely or densely are in fact techniques for more advanced cultivation which can be employed to raise specific rice attributes more than others.

While I myself am of course not a speaker of Japanese at the native level, I find this wording curious as it does not appear that the Japanese text is quite so filled with negative implication. Perhaps it may be due to sparse and dense planting being reserved for more advanced techniques, hence why newer players are meant to be discouraged from attempting them too early. At any rate, it can potentially be misleading if a player is not knowledgeable about the game’s systems and assumes they should try to avoid those planting patterns as a result.

This is, however, only some minor criticism, and it does not harm the overall translation quality very much. It is also important to once more stress that the game's developers (Edelweiss) had much input on the translation according to Wheeler (2020), and that the text in the finished product was thus most likely approved by the original creators. As such, we can reasonably assume that the English text is in accordance with their creative vision.

While all of Hasegawa's paraphrased example techniques cannot be linked to the terminology that I have examined by virtue of these being translations of singular terms, I believe that if one were to study different parts of *Sakuna's* translated text, techniques which have not been represented in this chapter would likely be present.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe it is fair to say that *Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin* favors a generally foreignizing style of translation. Many terms specific to Japanese culture are left untranslated to emphasize, where it is possible, that this is very much a story with a distinctly Japanese spirit while making it simple to understand for an English-speaking audience. Instances where terms are left intact, i.e. the loan word or calque method of translation are fairly common, for example “*doburoku*” or “*daiginjou*” being left intact in English with only miniscule romanization changes appearing here and there.

While it is not possible to carry across every bit of nuance present in the Japanese text, I would argue that it is not always necessary to do so as it may disrupt the flow if the translator added notes. Flavor text in the game is typically written in-character to make it seem as if Sakuna herself is either saying or thinking it, which creates speech patterns that are archaic in Japanese, a type of nuance which does not have a clear equivalent in English. As stated by Wheeler (2020), conveying such details in full to an audience using a different language could only be accomplished by use of a translator’s note. This would, naturally, break up the flow of the text and alert consumers to the fact that it is a translation, breaking the illusion of the translator’s invisibility.

Of course, it is of importance to stress that foreignization and domestication strategies are inherently neither ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ as it were. Both have their strengths and weaknesses, and both can be used to serve a problematic mindset. In the context of this thesis, I use these terms to denote whether aspects which may be unfamiliar to the target audience have their presence emphasized as a point of interest (foreignization) or are rendered in a way that aims to make them more familiar (domestication).

Linking back to Mandiberg et al. (2015) and O’Hagan’s (2015) statements on responsible and ethical localization, I believe that *Sakuna: Of Rice and Ruin* meets the criteria for being counted as such. The developers behind the game had a close involvement in translating their creative vision into English, enough so that Wheeler and the rest of the team even received direct assistance from the with parts of the text they found especially difficult. Due to this close developer involvement, I believe it is within reason to conclude that much of the work presented in the final product was given thorough approval by Edelweiss themselves. Thus, any compromising of meaning was carried out with their permission to do so, most likely.

This is important because it encapsulates the idea of an ethical translation in the sense that the creator does not feel their work has been improperly destroyed and rebuilt, as Venuti might express it. In the case with a game such as *Sakuna*, where both Japanese culture and history play such an important role in the design, I believe this is an example of an ethical localization success story. For any player, there is no doubt that the game displayed on the screen in front of them is a Japanese product. Furthermore, this is accomplished and presented in a way that an English-speaking audience not only comprehends, but is fascinated by, if the positive consumer reception is anything to go by.

As such, *Sakuna* is both a responsible and ethical localization.

I believe that additional and similar research could be conducted on other pieces of media which have strong roots in Japanese culture, particularly on ones which may have a different cultural cornerstone sitting at their center. Furthermore, while *Sakuna* is a work where the central theme (rice) is very overt and permeates both the narrative and systems involved, there are naturally works where the themes are more subtle, or even not entirely intentional. How such cultural values manifest and are subsequently translated could be a very interesting research topic.

There is a fruitful discussion to be had on both the conscious and unconscious realization of cultural values in the creative process, in my opinion.

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