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Problematic particles

A translation analysis of sentence-final particles used in *Tales of Vesperia*

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Abstract

This thesis will inquire into translation issues surrounding Japanese gender-specific sentence-final particles used by the main character of the role-playing game *Tales of Vesperia*. The

focal point of the study is the investigation regarding how the translators of the English game converted certain pieces of language tied to gender from Japanese to English in order to adjust the text to the Western audience. Recently, video games have started to move away from prejudice commonly associated with the term, which in turn has led to an increasing acknowledge of them by society as their own form of art. In correspondence to this, research surrounding language frequently encountered within them, among other things, becomes increasingly important, especially considering that studies surrounding translation issues in video games have hitherto been rather scarce.

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1. Introduction

This text will attempt to analyze the translation made from the original Japanese text to the English language in the video game *Tales of Vesperia*. More precisely, it will specifically focus on the role-language used by the main character of the game's story, in terms of how the creators of the game dictated his habits regarding Japanese sentence-final particles with ties to gender-roles.

The reason as to why this research is necessary can be emphasized by how little of it has been done previously. The underlying factor for this most likely lies in that video games have since long been a hobby or a term commonly associated with much negative criticism and prejudice, and only recently have they started to move past this stigma into becoming more socially acceptable as their own form of art. With this new shift where video games are perceived with a broader perspective, this thesis means to bring further attention to problems persisting with trying to convey a message from a certain game across the very wide cultural line that separates Japan from the West on top of what research has already been done on the matter.

Japanese and English are two extremely different languages backed by equally different cultures. Because of these dissimilarities, difficulties with translation often arise at times when words or certain ways of expressing oneself are encountered within one of the two idioms that are missing a clear counterpart in the other. To exemplify this, one key point that will be looked upon while using the title *Tales of Vesperia* as a subject of this research is how much the language used in its localized version differs from the image of the original game, so that the game could adapt to its new audience.

Furthermore, modern popular culture (pop-culture for short) is one of many sub-cultures growing in Japan that differs greatly from its equivalents in the Western world, and games are a huge part of this group. As a result of these differences, audiences of games translated from Japanese to English run a so-called risk of receiving a converted image of certain characters or themes because they would not translate well across the cultural line. In the case of *Tales of Vesperia*, this thesis will also analyze how the translators of the game confronted these issues when they adapted its role-language to those who do not understand Japanese, in order to discuss if alternate methods would have been preferable.

1.1 Previous research

This thesis will mainly refer to the research done by Satoshi Kinsui[1] when it comes to defining language tied to gender-roles within Japanese. Furthermore, in order to establish the ties between certain parts of the Japanese language and gender-roles, the works of researchers including Akira Matsumura[2] or Naomi Hanaoka McGloin[3] will be denoted. More specifically, their studies of common patterns regarding usage of gender-specific sentence-final particles are valuable assets to this study.

Considering that the research done on translation analysis of video games has not really been performed to an optimal extent, and the fact that the contents of this analysis have to remain rather limited, direct comparisons regarding translation matters between *Tales of Vesperia* and other video games will not be performed.

2. Aim

The goal of this thesis is to see what means the translators of *Tales of Vesperia* used to describe personality traits of the game's main character when they reconstructed the language used in the original source text to fit an audience on the other side of a wide cultural line. The prime focus will lie in particles specifically tied to gender-roles in the Japanese version of the game.

When translating a text from one language to another that differs greatly in both grammatical structure and cultural ties, is it possible to conserve the message in the process and convey it in a way that keeps it faithful to the original source? Since the answer to that question remains subjective, this thesis will attempt to discuss the two following points during the analysis:

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[1] Kinsui, Satoshi. *Yakuwarigo kenkyuu no chihei.* Tokyo: Kuroshio Shuppan, 2007.
[2] Matsumura, Akira. *Kotengo/Gendaigo Joshi Jodooshi Shoosetsu.* Tokyo: Gakutoosha, 1969.

- Does the localized version of the game succeed in translating the sentence-final particles tied to gender-roles of the source text in such a way that the English audience generally receives the same image of the main character as the Japanese one when playing through the introduction of the game?
- Are there any instances in the game where the translators arguably could have made a better attempt at trying to convey the message set by certain sentence-final particles tied to gender-roles when translating the game to English?

2.1 Question

This study will specifically focus on the following question:

- How well was the personality of the main character of *Tales of Vesperia* preserved in the localized version of the game, regarding the usage of sentence-final particles tied to gender-roles?

3. Theoretical framework

Satoshi Kinsui laid ground for the research of a new area within the Japanese language which he himself termed *yakuwarigo*, or role-language in English, in the year 2003. Whenever the need to clearly define the term arises during the analysis of role-language within *Tales of Vesperia*, Kinsui's research will be mainly referred to. Thus, Kinsui's definition of *yakuwarigo* is what will serve as the theoretical framework of this thesis.

4. Method

In order to answer the questions stated above, a portion of *Tales of Vesperia* will be played through in both Japanese and English. For the sake of not losing the context of key messages

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[3] Hanaoka McGloin, Naomi. *Sex Difference and Sentence-final Particles*. USA: Routledge, 2005.

in the text, I have opted for playing the games instead of simply reading off printed or digital manuscripts. Comparisons between the original Japanese game and the English version will be made and key points of usage of the Japanese sentence-final particles *wa*, *ze* and *zo* will be brought up and analyzed.

Means of analysis will be performed in various ways. In addition to performing my own translations of certain pieces of dialogue, very brief comparisons will be made between the main character of *Tales of Vesperia* and the protagonists of a select other games in the same series, in order to explore the possibility of a common pattern being used for translation throughout the entire series as a whole.

Due to writing and researching both within a limited timeframe and about a subject that is very narrowed down, even within the subject of translation, only the introductory stages of *Tales of Vesperia* will be analyzed and brought up for discussion. This includes the short amount of gameplay hours where Yuri is presented to the player and they get to familiarize with him.

4.1 The *Tales* series

The *Tales* series is a franchise of role-playing video games for several TV-consoles, all of them taking place in a fantasy setting. The style used in both art and language bears a striking resemblance to anime (popular Japanese animated shows), and each game acts as its own stand-alone entry, meaning that there is no chronological order in the series and that one can play the games in any desired order. The tale of every game in the series follows a common pattern, where the player takes control of a young male protagonist who travels the world for personal reasons, only to meet several characters throughout the story that forms a group which, towards the end of the journey, is tasked with saving the entire planet.

The game brought in for research in this specific report is *Tales of Vesperia*. Vesperia is the tenth entry in the series out of fourteen (as of current date of writing) and was the first Tales game to debut in the HDTV-gaming generation. Both the Japanese and the English versions

of the game were released on the Xbox 360 in 2008, whereupon it was later ported to the PlayStation 3 a year later in Japan only.

While the *Tales* series have never had a huge fan base outside of Japan, *Tales of Vesperia* was critically acclaimed and well received in both its home country and in the West. It caused the Xbox 360 to sell out for the first time since its release in Japan, and was during the year of its release the second best-selling game on the console in the country. In the West, critics generally gave the game a high score, and it was nominated for several prizes of the year of its release.

5. Analysis

As was mentioned in the introduction, the character I am going to bring attention to in this analysis is the main character of the cast of *Tales of Vesperia*, named Yuri Lowell. Yuri is a young man who acts as a sort of self-proclaimed bodyguard for the people in the lower quarters of the capital city Zaphia, which is otherwise neglected by the Royal Knights. He is described as a big brother kind of person; someone who often displays a carefree and sarcastic attitude towards others yet cannot turn his back on anyone who is in need of help[4].

5.1 The Japanese sentence-final particle *wa*

In the opening sequence of the game, an automated well in the lower quarters malfunctions and threatens to flood the entire town. As Yuri is on his way to help stop the torrents, he chats briefly with his dog, Repede. Written below is the first sentence Yuri declares in the conversation, listed in four different formats. The first one is the source text (ST), an exact copy of the script from the Japanese game. The Romanized text (RT) presents the ST using Hepburn Romanization. The target text (TT) reproduces the English translation from the localized game, and it is followed by the author's translation (AT) which is my own translation of the original ST. The aim of the AT is to depict the general tone and feeling of the ST rather than making a literal translation of it.

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[4] Bandai Namco Games Inc. *Tales of Vesperia Software Manual*, p. 3. 2008-2009.

ST:「昨日は昨日で騎士団とのもめ事に借り出されるわ、今日は今日で、アクエブラスティアが壊れるときたか」

RT: "Kinoo wa kinoo de kishidan to no momegoto ni karidasareru wa, kyoo wa kyoo de, akueburasutia ga kowareru to kita ka"

TT: "First, the trouble with the Knights yesterday. Now the aque blastia breaks…"

AT: "Yesterday, there was the trouble with the Knights and today, the aque blastia ends up breaking, huh…"

Despite the serious situation, Yuri is displayed as being very calm in his manner of speaking. In the original game the tone of his voice acting is cool and composed, but another indicator that is noticeable through the written script alone is his usage of the sentence-final particle *wa*. In Japanese, *wa* is said to be used in order to add emotion to the sentence it follows, and that it has a softening effect on the words[5]. Because of this, it is considered a female particle and usage of it is mostly expected from women. While gender-specific language is not necessarily restricted to Japanese alone[6], a big difference between Japanese and English is that the former goes as far as to clearly tie certain words or particles to a certain sex, as is exemplified by *wa*. As a result, these very parts of Japanese become relatively difficult to translate.

According to Matsumura in the case of a male person using *wa* in their sentence, they do so to express surprise or emotion[7]. Furthermore, Hanaoka McGloin claims that the usage of the particle by men is most common with older people should it occur[8]. Something to note here, however, is that the creators of *Tales of Vesperia* preferred *wa* over other, more gender-neutral particles for Yuri to use, despite the fact that he is a young male. This effectively contradicts both of the aforementioned researchers' theories. On the one hand, this could indicate that the writers did seek the emotional effect and the touch of surprise which *wa* adds to a remark regardless, rather than using a particle more commonly affiliated with young

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[5] Matsumura, Akira. *Kotengo/Gendaigo Joshi Jodooshi Shoosetsu*, p. 676-677. Tokyo: Gakutoosha, 1969.
[6] Lakoff, Robin Tolmach. *Language and a woman's place*. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.
[7] Matsumura, Akira. *Kotengo/Gendaigo Joshi Jodooshi Shoosetsu*, p. 677. Tokyo: Gakutoosha, 1969.

male characters to clearly convey a certain feeling. On the other hand, if one was to keep the description of Yuri's characteristics in mind, the particle *wa* could also be linked to his sarcastic nature, making it seem as if he is not as concerned with the incident as he should be. An expression as short yet effective as this, however, is very difficult to portray in English through text alone, no matter which image you are aiming for.

In the localized version of the game, the translators opted for describing Yuri's passivity mainly through phonetics. While it is true that one gets a similar impression of Yuri's casual character if they were to listen to the voice acting accompanying the ST and the TT respectively, the wording of the English translation makes it resemble a formless statement rather than a rhetorical speech. In other words, by only looking at the manuscript of the English version, it would be hard to assume what Yuri felt at the time he made the claim. Furthermore, no form of exclamatory expression was included in the English sentence. Adding a simple "eh", "huh" or some other similar form of sentence-final rhetorical inquiry at the end would certainly aid in carrying the tone of the message even further, whereas instead the translators of the English game left the statement in question unexpanded upon and instead relied on voice acting as well as the rest of the conversation to set the tone. Voice acting has been a clever method of letting certain characters convey emotions ever since technology evolved to the point where having a full voiced narrative in a game has been a possibility. The essence of voice acting is to effectively let real actors create a voiceover for given characters in a text, and to have these actors tailor the tone of the dialogue and the way these characters express themselves based on their set personalities and the context of their current situation. In the case of Yuri, his given voice in both the Japanese as well as the localized game is laid back and perceivably lacking in interest, fitting the image of the original written ST.

Regarding how setting the tone through not only one sentence alone, but rather the entire dialogue, this was done by having Yuri admitting to himself in a later part of the same conversation that complaining about these frequent unfortunate occurrences in the lower quarters is useless. While this is okay in instances where there is room for enough dialogue to take place, it is still debatable how much effort should go into making sure that all the passively displayed characterizations from the original source get presented. The other side of

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[8] Hanaoka McGloin, Naomi. *Sex Difference and Sentence-final Particles,* p. 230. USA: Routledge, 2005.

the argument, however, may state that leaving the touch of a character's role-language out in a translated representation of a text diminishes the risk of presenting a faulty persona deviating from the original version, which is also subject for consideration.

The suggestion made with regards to a sentence-final inquiry at the end of the English sentence is what was opted for in the AT. While it remains true that such a small alteration might not carry the same amount of depth which was argued for in the case of the particle *wa*, it sets a somewhat laxer flavor to the sentence rather than leaving it in the emotionless state which the TT presented. Moreover, with the help of voice acting the inquiry's tone is further strengthened.

In addition to the case presented above, the usage of the sentence-final particle *wa* in Yuri's case is not limited to a single time, which points towards that the creators of the game are inclined on using *wa* as a firm medium to convey a certain side of his specified character. The second occurrence of Yuri finishing a statement with *wa* happens only minutes of gameplay after the first. In this scenario, Yuri has reached the broken well and holds a conversation with the father-figure of the lower quarters, a man called Hanks. After inquiring about the malfunction, Yuri begins to suspect that someone in the upper city has deliberately sabotaged the well and decides to head there in order to investigate further, although he is trying to keep his intentions hidden.

> ST: 「……悪い、じいさん。用事思い出したんで行くわ」

> RT: "……Warui, jiisan. Yooji omoidashita nde iku wa"

> TT: "…Sorry Hanks, I just remembered an errand I've gotta run."

> AT: "…Sorry, gramps. I just remembered an errand of mine, so I'm going."

Similarly to the case preceding this one regarding sentence-final particles, the writers of the Japanese game preferred *wa* over more gender-neutral ones which may achieve the same kind of soft touch as before. In order for him to appear unconcerned with the situation, the text allows for Yuri to simply give away softness rather than determination through his words. Also resembling the previous case, the English localization decided once more on letting Yuri

express himself through phonetics, as the sentence in question carries no tone without the voice acting. Again, relying on phonetics could be considered fine if the result fits the current situation, and if the image which the voice actors bestow on the character in question matches what the original creators had in mind for them. Despite this, yet another problem appears when it is taken into consideration that Japanese sentence-final particles can often be interpreted in several different ways, as was demonstrated earlier when comparing Yuri to the stereotypes put up by Matsumura[9] and Hanaoka McGloin[10]. Phonetics, on the other hand, only allow for a certain kind of feeling at a given time, forcing the emotion that the translators picked themselves on the audience.

However, what is perceivable here is also a case where relying on phonetics may occasionally present itself as one of the more convenient methods of conveying messages in the process of localization. Barring the sentence-final particle *wa* and the fact that the translators chose not to translate the word "jiisan" (lit. "old man" or "gramps") and instead replaced it with the addressed man's name ("Hanks") in the TT, they managed to create an almost perfect literal translation of the dialogue. Nevertheless, the fact that they did this yet still have the sentence struggling with conveying the emotion which *wa* adds in the Japanese game through text alone might be seen as a testament to how problematic the translation of Japanese role-language can actually be. Taking this into consideration, conveying emotion through sound is a solid solution. The AT alters the wording of the sentence to a certain degree for the sake of making Yuri sound a little less pressed for time and thus more casual, as well as changing the name "Hanks" to "gramps" in order to stay faithful to his original way of addressing the elder, though it would still get most of its help conveying the emotion of *wa* in English through voice acting, similar to the case with the TT.

5.2 The Japanese sentence-final particle *ze*

Before attempting to analyze the usage of *wa* in Yuri's statements even further, what needs to be emphasized is that on several occasions throughout *Tales of Vesperia*, the writers do actually apply the kind of role-language which Kinsui refers to as *wakamonokotoba*[11] (lit. 'Youth Language') to Yuri's speech as well. *Wakamonokotoba* in this case denotes masculine

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[9] Matsumura, 1969.
[10] Hanaoka McGloin, 2005.

speech, which is enforced in several ways in the Japanese language. One is through the use of certain sentence-final particles, very much like the case of how the thus far discussed *wa* is perceived as a female one. Another example includes using a first person pronoun other than the standard Japanese *watashi* to display a rougher image of oneself, and so on. Between *wa* and usual masculine particles, audiences who comprehend Japanese would most likely expect Yuri to make frequent use of the latter. However, even though the text eventually takes advantage of masculine speech in his words, Yuri is caught exploiting *wa* twice in the game's introductory stages while traces of male *wakamonokotoba* remain very scarce. This gives players a very unusual first impression of the main character of a game in the Tales series, compared to a number of other figures in past entries who relied on *wakamonokotoba* commonly tied to men to describe them[12]. Note that this claim only focuses on the language used in the games' early stages, when players are still familiarizing themselves with the characters and are introduced to the main cast.

The point of the paragraph above is to help argue for the assumption that the intention of the writers of the Japanese game was to use *wa* in order to allow Yuri to express an ironic façade and untroubled attitude towards others in the lower quarters, as opposed to a determined exclamation which both Matsumura[13] and Hanaoka McGloin[14] claim is more usual in the case of men. This is because that is the way the creators intended for his character to work, according to the game's own software manual[15]. In turn, the point of proving this theory is to define one of Yuri's very important characteristics which the English game might struggle to convey, in order to relate the case to issues regarding translation in the first place.

The next significant piece of dialogue that hints towards Yuri's true character through his words appears in a conversation taking place between him and a couple of guards he has engaged in combat upon entering the royal quarters. This scene takes place after Yuri has departed from the lower quarters and the malfunctioning well in order to find the perpetrator who sabotaged it.

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[11] Kinsui, Satoshi. *Yakuwarigo kenkyuu no chihei*. Tokyo: Kuroshio Shuppan, 2007.

[12] See for example Bandai Namco Games Inc. *Tales of Symphonia (Lloyd),* 2003, or *Tales of the Abyss (Luke),* 2005.

[13] Matsumura, 1969.

[14] Hanaoka McGloin, 2005.

[15] Bandai Namco Games Inc. *Tales of Vesperia Software Manual*, p. 3. 2008-2009.

ST: 「ま、そっちが技で来るなら、こっちも行かせてもらうぜ」

RT: "Ma, socchi ga waza de kuru nara, kocchi mo ika se te morau ze"

TT: "If you can use strike artes here, then I can too!"

AT: "Well, if you're gonna come at me with strike artes, I'll go wild as well!"

While Yuri as he is depicted in the TT certainly manages to inform his foe that he will retaliate with more dangerous assaults, just as he does it in the ST, the translation of the original sentence remains rather stale. The proposal of the AT in this case is that in order to preserve the described rough and perhaps vulgar image of *ze*[16] in English, the text should opt for picking words which make Yuri sound more threatening.

Moreover, similarly to when Yuri mused about the broken well in the very beginning of the game, his voice is still free of worry during the battle despite the situation being quite hectic. In fact, both in the Japanese as well as in the English game, he almost sounds playful and teasing as he fights his enemies. This is where phonetics begins to cause an issue for the localized version. While expressing passivity through a calm voice is relatively simple, using the same sound in an attempt at setting a determined, threatening tone is very hard without words which may actually directly express the speaker's thoughts. In the ST this was done with the help of the sentence-final particle *ze*, but the TT made no attempt further than simply conveying the actual message of the ST, and the lack of an intimidating touch is what the AT tries to address here. The result of this piece of dialogue in the TT might thus be rather confusing with regards to what tone the game is trying to set for the situation, considering that what the players read on the screen and hear from the spoken conversation do not match Yuri's circumstances at all. The question regarding if the localized game could have handled the voice acting differently is sensitive as well, however, since the fact that outright switching from a playful tone to a more aggressive one in the translated game might deviate too much from the original source, and from what kind of character Yuri actually is.

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[16] Chino, Naoko. *All About Particles: A Handbook of Japanese Function Words,* p. 143. Europe: Kodansha, 1997.

5.3 Yuri's behavior in speech

Moving on from how well or not the localized game manages to convey Yuri's masculine role-language in English for the moment, what is very important to note here is that the writers finally preferred a masculine sentence-final particle over *wa* in the first place, namely *ze*. *Ze* is a sentence-final particle that gives off a very tough masculine feeling and adds force to a statement[17], and it is very commonly encountered among male protagonists in manga, anime and games[18]. However, even if the text finally utilized a sentence-final particle that is arguably more fitting for Yuri's character, his attitude during the battle is still very light-hearted and carefree. In other words, while his personality has not changed at all, the text lets Yuri express determination rather than hiding it through a simple alteration in his syntax, and it does so without forcing him to alter his personality. If when Yuri modifies his way of speaking depends on context and company, his choice of words in the game could be identified as socially aware.

To fully confirm that the text's usage of *wa* is for the sake of making Yuri put up a disregarding persona even though he actually cares for the people of the lower quarters, a thorough check of the entire opening sequence of *Tales of Vesperia* is required, in order to find a certain pattern behind the usage of the particle. This part of the game stretches from the very beginning regarding the sabotaged well, all the way until the player is eventually forced to leave the capital to chase the culprit behind the case. Events that transpire between these two points in the storyline include the player controlling Yuri as he travels to the upper capital first in order to find the perpetrator. From there, they follow him as he faces off against the Royal Knights upon arrival, gets captured and thrown into the castle's dungeons by them, only to then ultimately escape from there and the city altogether, still following the criminal's trail.

Something very interesting about Yuri's behavior is easily noticed as soon as he leaves the lower quarters behind heading for the upper city, and that is the fact that while his personality remains largely the same, his language changes drastically. This was discussed earlier in the analysis as well, but for reference, in the aforementioned introductory stages of the game Yuri can be heard using the sentence-final particle *wa* a total of three times. On the other

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[17] Chino, 1997.
[18] See for example Eiichiro, Oda. *One Piece.* Vol. 1. Shueisha, 1997.

hand, his usage of the sentence-final particles *ze* and *zo* can be counted up to a whole twenty-five occasions. Since *zo* largely fills the same purpose as the aforementioned *ze* in Japanese role-language[19], they have been grouped together for the sake of convenience in this analysis. With this discrepancy between the number of times where the text makes use of *wa* and *ze/zo* respectively, with the latter clearly ahead of the former by quite a large margin, one might find it easy to argue that it is indeed *wa* that is simply the odd one out and should not be thought too much upon, while *ze* and *zo* make up for expressing Yuri's true character. In a sense, this is going to be considered correct even in this analysis, but only to a degree speculating that the text's usage of *ze* and *zo* merely expresses parts of Yuri's character, and not the full image. The fact that *wa* is utilized at all by Yuri in the game should not be disregarded as it is definitely hinting towards an important part of his characteristics as well, even though usage of the particle itself might occur rarely. The reason for this lies in at what times the creators of the game actually opts for using *wa*, or perhaps more importantly, choose to not use *ze* or *zo* in order to express Yuri's character.

First, it is important to clearly distinguish why *wa* is used as a medium for Yuri to express himself in the first place, considering the fact that *ze* and *zo* are both the largely dominant ones otherwise. In short, during the beginning of the game, the creators only choose to use *wa* when Yuri speaks to someone from the lower quarters. Usage of the particle occurs twice before he leaves for the upper city, and then once more as he passes by the lower quarters in order to flee the capital. However, during the time while he explores the upper city as well as during his visit in the castle, he does not make use of *wa* even once.

In contrast, whenever Yuri finds himself in the lower quarters, all usage of *ze* and *zo* are terminated as the text relies on *wa* instead whenever he finishes a sentence with a particle, while making *ze* and *zo* represent him quite frequently when he is away from there instead. This alone should be enough to show a pattern in the social linguistics that is currently present, with the argument of this analysis being that Yuri's spoken language depends solely on who he is conversing with, and thus what persona the writers are seeking to present. To strengthen this argument still, another piece of dialogue from the game will be analyzed.

ST:「ま、こういう事情もあるから、しばらく、留守にするわ」

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[19] Chino, Naoko. *All About Particles: A Handbook of Japanese Function Words,* p. 143. Europe: Kodansha, 1997.

RT: "Ma, koo iu jijoo mo aru kara, shibaraku, rusu ni suru wa"

TT: "Well, that's our cue. Looks like I won't be coming back here for a while."

AT: "Well, then there is this little situation as well. It seems I won't be coming back for a while."

This conversation marks the third and final time where the creators make use of the sentence-final particle *wa* in the game's introduction, as Yuri holds a brief conversation with Hanks one more time in the lower quarters during his escape from the castle. The cue that he is speaking of in this section is the fact that the Royal Knights who have been chasing him all the way from the upper city are catching up to him, which obviously calls for Yuri to hurry up and flee. Despite this, since he is talking to Hanks, the elder of the lower quarter, he still puts up a façade of not letting it concern him when in reality one would be rather distraught in his situation. And once more, in the localized game Yuri's tone is as calm and composed as ever, with his voice acting filling the same role as *wa* does in the Japanese game. The aim of the AT in this dialogue is to belittle the situation even more than what the TT attempted.

As if the usage of *wa* in this context alone would not be able to make a case by itself, especially considering it fell completely out of use during Yuri's visit to the upper city, the argument regarding his habits concerning sentence-final particles are further enhanced by another piece of dialogue taking place almost immediately after his last conversation with Hanks. In this scenario, everyone who is living in the lower quarters fight to hold back the Royal Knights so that Yuri can make his escape undisturbed. As he leaves his home and everyone behind, Yuri briefly speaks out loud for himself when nobody from the lower quarters is around to hear him, determined in his chase after the culprit behind the sabotage as he leaves the city.

ST: 「しばらく留守にするぜ」

RT: "Shibaraku rusu ni suru ze"

TT: "Well, so long for now."

AT: "I'll be right back, guys."

This is a crucial piece of dialogue when analyzing Yuri's behavior in speech. The reason for this can be identified not only in the text's usage of *ze* in the Japanese sentence, but rather the entire spoken sentence as a whole, namely "shibaraku rusu ni suru". During his last conversation with Hanks in the Japanese version of the game, Yuri used the exact same words to convey the message "I won't be coming back for a while" as it was translated in the TT. At that time, however, he ended the Japanese dialogue with the sentence-final particle *wa*, whereas now that nobody from the lower quarters is around, the text opted for using *ze* in this last scene in its place instead. Something to note as well is that the situation has not changed at all between the conveying of the two almost identical sentences. In both scenarios, Yuri is pressed for time as he is being chased by the Royal Knights. The only difference can be found in his company, where he is speaking to Hanks the first time as he uses *wa*, and is only heard by a certain person who is his newfound party and has no relation to the lower quarters whatsoever when he uses *ze*. Taking all this into consideration, it is hard to dismiss the relation between Yuri's usage of w*a* and his sarcastic yet secretly caring character with regards to the lower quarters, rather than the sentence-final particle simply serving as a means to convey strong emotion on almost random occasions.

In the case of the ST, the fact that Yuri uses the same words now as he did when he spoke to Hanks moments earlier allows for a completely different tone to be set through the same spoken words which the players have already heard, putting determination on top of a nice touch of familiarity for the audience to pick up on. However, what the TT attempted here was to still portray Yuri's casual approach towards the people of the lower quarters, which is unnecessary and falls out of line with his method of conveying emotions in the ST. The AT argues that the way Yuri's quiet words of farewell are formulated in the TT carry no tone of stress or resolve whatsoever, and in turn tries to address this by reconstructing the English sentence in order to make him sound more resolute and caring. This is done by stressing the point that Yuri intends to return to the lower quarters as soon as possible, rather than the fact that he simply will not be around for a while.

5.4 The difficulty of localization

The difficulty of localization is the big issue surrounding the role-language which defines Yuri's personality that the English localization struggles with regarding translating the game. With a role-language as subtle yet effective as this, which allows a certain character to successfully express emotions through words without changing their personality, how would one proceed to convey the same character and their message using another, completely different idiom while still making the text flow naturally? In the case of English, doing so through a word-for-word translation would prove itself to be extremely challenging since English is lacking in the many layers of role-language that Japanese presents, which one of the dialogues looked upon within this analysis denoted.

In the case of Yuri in *Tales of Vesperia*, it has already been recognized in this thesis that, at least in the instances where Yuri makes use of *wa*, the translators of the game opted for voice acting to carry the tone of his messages. During all three occasions where the text preferred *wa* over *ze* or *zo*, nothing was attempted with regards to free translation or vocabulary in order to convey his established façade, which left the translated *wa*-related sentences flavorless without the accompanying voices. However, as was also argued previously in this analysis, Yuri's habits regarding *wa* only displays a specific part of his character, with *ze* and *zo* letting the character express completely different emotions while never changing his attitude or appearance. This becomes problematic from a phonetics point of view seeing as it is unnatural for agitated feelings or dialogue to be expressed through an unconcerned tone of voice in English.

So in the end, Yuri's character is displayed through two efficient means. The first one is the way he acts, and in the opening stages of the game, Yuri's personality is static. No matter if he is confronted by someone from the lower quarters or from the Royal Knights, he always remains seemingly carefree, sarcastic, and uninterested. The setting and situation do not seem to faze him either, as Yuri manages to keep his usual cool even while facing a flood or a battle against the Knights. Despite his seemingly irresponsible behavior, however, he still acts for the sake of the lower quarters when its people are in trouble because he actually cares for them, even though he refuses to openly show that to anyone. All of this is true concerning

Yuri in both the original game as well as its localized version, as they both manage to present his actions clearly.

The other and arguably more important method for Yuri to express himself is through his spoken language. Taking into the consideration the analysis which was just performed regarding Yuri's usage of sentence-final particles, the localized game faces an incredible challenge in trying to convey his character through text. The reason for this is that in the Japanese version of the game, players can be confronted by a cool and level-headed Yuri no matter what situation he is in and still pick up on the subtle hints pointing towards the way his persona works, thanks to the text's clever use of sentence-final particles. Thus, the image which the Japanese audience can receive is one where Yuri does not want to show anyone in the lower quarters his true, caring side, whereas he displays a much rougher and even threatening language towards other characters when no one from there is around, as is the case in his battle with his Knights. All this while always keeping to his level-headed and sarcastic self.

The English audience, however, can only go so far as to perceive a version of Yuri where the text keeps it unclear within the game itself what kind of person he actually is. This might make him appear bored and lacking in motivation in his actions altogether, or sarcastic and dismissing when it is not intended. Now, it is fairly obvious how Yuri's character is supposed to work even in the translated game, thanks to the settings and events in the story. However, from a strict language perspective regarding both voice and choice of words, Yuri comes off as someone who is simply uninterested and maybe even cold at times, and perhaps only does what he does for no particular reason or gain, while it also remains a mystery who or what he actually cares for. Furthermore, the way the translated version of the game presents him in dangerous situations could be considered subject for further clarification, as it can be hard to draw a clear line between what is seen on the screen and what is perceived through sound, which was also previously debated upon in this analysis. Cases where the text makes it obvious in his language that Yuri actually cares about the lower quarters in the localized game only appear when it is blatantly stated by Yuri himself that he actually does, if the conditions of the conversation allow for him to openly say it. Either that or the audience could also relate to his character easier if they had had it explained from a source outside of the game such as its software manual, but this might then perhaps indicate that the

presentation of Yuri's character had not been completely and successfully woven into the narrative of *Tales of Vesperia* in English, and that the image which the audience then receives of Yuri in the game differentiates from their already set expectations.

6. Summary and conclusion

Yuri is a prime example of a character that might seem easy to portray through translation but in practice has many more shades to him than what one might realize. Since Japanese has a rich role-language with many ties to the country's culture and society, it is easy to illustrate characters in media down to very small details without ever confusing the receiving audience. This, of course, includes sentence-final particles with ties to gender-roles as well. To carry the case even further, as mentioned earlier Japanese is quite unique in that role-language can take the form of its own words or particles at times as well. Conversely, English comes nowhere close to the level of detail of Japanese regarding role-language, and so translating texts over the wide culture line can be quite a challenging task. Whenever portrayal of a certain character happens, it usually requires different methods as a result, such as the case with Yuri and relying on voice acting in the English game, for example.

When analyzing *Tales of Vesperia*, it became clear that many of Yuri's characteristics which were not conveyed through text alone were portrayed through voice acting. However, whether the writers deliberately kept his language largely free of words with strong ties to certain emotions, or actually struggled to find what they thought of as proper translations of the Japanese ST, is of course hard if not impossible to confirm. Continuously, it definitely begs the interesting question of what means would have been used had *Tales of Vesperia* been localized and translated into English not in what was the present day and age back during the time of its release, but rather perhaps ten to fifteen years earlier than that when voice acting was rarely, if ever at all, present within video games. Considering this problem makes it evident that translators definitely have many more options available to them when localizing games today than what they used to back when a speech bubble containing sheer text was the only thing that could convey a spoken message on the screen.

What is also very curious about the language which Yuri uses is that if one pays close attention, they will realize that the sentence-final particles in the source text do not always tie in with what this thesis originally expected them to, namely stereotypical gender-roles. While it has been correctly claimed by this thesis on several occasions that the particles *wa*, *ze* and *zo* are in fact typical sentence-final particles with ties to gender-roles, the script of *Tales of Vesperia* occasionally uses these particles to convey completely different messages. The most noticeable example can be found in the case of *wa*, where instead of making Yuri use the particle in his speech to add a touch of femininity to his character, it is rather used to hide his true character and let him appear indifferent or perhaps cold towards certain events or characters. Analyzing how a certain piece of role-language may stray from its stereotypical image and instead be used to achieve a different goal within a sentence of the same idiom may not necessarily fall into the realm of translation studies, but it is certainly important to denote them when they become a problem during the localization of any given text.

However, as long as the basic meaning and essence of a certain message is translated properly from one language to another, the matter regarding what a translated text faithful to its original source actually is remains rather subjective. While this thesis has most certainly argued for that Yuri's personality in the English game could have been conveyed differently in order to perhaps match the original character's even more, the game itself is not translated faulty by any means. The dialogue of every character, as well as the narrative of the game's story, is presented in a way that allows the Western audience to receive largely the same experience as the Japanese one when playing through *Tales of Vesperia* in terms of story and narrative. How many layers of detail that proved too difficult to translate naturally surrounding the game's characters as well as its fictional world and setting is a hard question to answer, but if the end result is not something that reduces the quality of the game itself, it might be considered easy to overlook by many.

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