

YOUR INVENTORY AS A VIDEO GAME LOCALIZER

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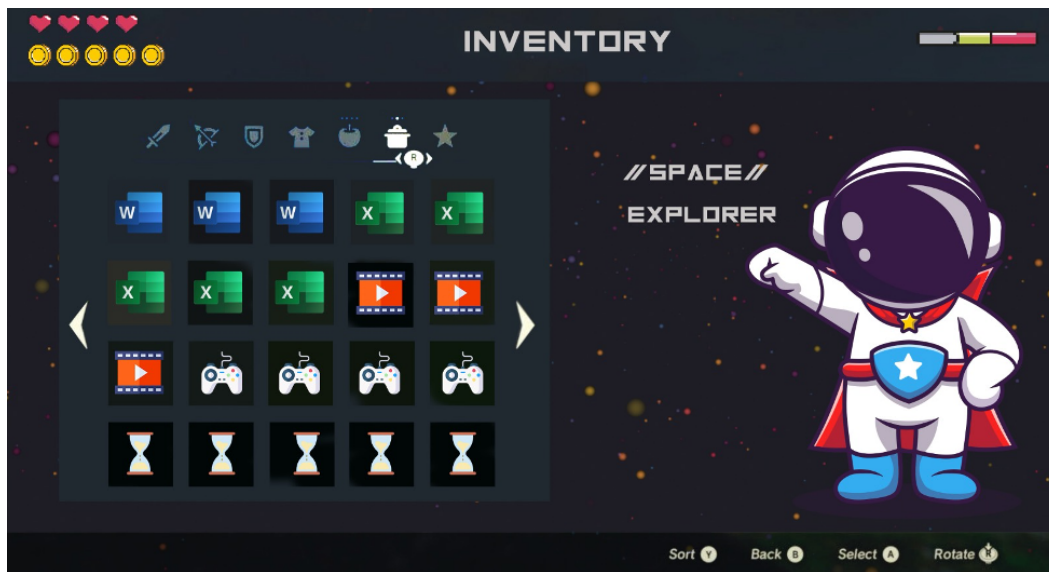
As a video game localizer, you face many challenges – lack of context probably being the “ultimate boss” you have to fight. In order to overcome the challenges and be able to provide an appropriate translation, you can make use of the project assets, your inventory, which are essential materials to advance in your quest.

Below I will outline some of the most common translation assets the video game localizer might work with.

(which is used by developers and could tell you where the segment is in the game), the context (which can give you more information about where that text is used, for example, if a character says it and which character is saying it, etc.). The additional columns can provide essential information about the context and should be closely followed by the localizer.

The Map: **Game Design Documents**

A game design document (GDD) is a software design document that serves as a blueprint for the video game. It helps define the scope of the game and sets the general direction for the project. For example, this document might include information such as the game concept, the genre, the target audience, the game’s mechanics, etc. If you are fortunate enough to receive this document, make sure you study it closely.



The Hylian Cipher: TranslatableFile (design by the author)

The file to be translated might vary in format, but whether or not you are working with a translation software, the most universally used format in the gaming industry tends to be Excel. Usually, the file includes several columns with important information. You will typically have a source column, where the original text is, and a target column, where the translation should be placed. Additionally, it could include other columns such as if there are character limits (indicating the maximum number of characters that a line or segment can have), the string ID

It will help tremendously to keep it top of mind when translating the game.

The Shield: **Style Guide**

A style guide is a document that describes the stylistic specifications of the game or franchise and includes information about the audience and target markets. It also provides the localization team with references, samples, rules, and stylistic preferences that should be taken into consideration for the project.

A style guide typically includes information about the target audience, tone and voice, punctuation and capitalization considerations, how numbers should be treated in the translation, and specific instructions for each language.

To summarize, the style guide protects the game's branding across all languages, and it protects you from making decisions that do not align with what the developers or publishers want.

The Master Sword: **Glossary**

Glossaries will become one of the greatest assets in your arsenal. The glossary will usually include terminology specific to the different video game platforms, as well as other key terms of the game. It is important to note that all platforms have very specific and distinctive terminology, for example, the term "joystick" might be translated differently if you are doing it for PlayStation, Xbox, or Nintendo Switch.

The most important thing to keep in mind is that the glossary rules. The use of the glossary is mandatory and always takes precedence over the translation memory or other assets. Its use is so important because it helps maintain consistency in terminology throughout the game – which is essential for players to understand the gameplay and enjoy it. If you come across any errors or inconsistencies in the glossary those must be notified to the project manager or producer.

The Edge of Duality: **Translation Memory**

This might be a somewhat controversial opinion, but I believe the translation memory (TM) can be a double edge sword. Even though it does help you in many ways, including with consistency, it can also drag errors throughout time. My advice is to always be very careful with the translation memory; don't trust it blindly. Unless you know exactly where it comes from and who it was approved by, you cannot be certain of its accuracy.

Always check and keep an eye open for previous mistranslations or inconsistencies from the TM. If you find anything, make sure you report it!

The Adventure Log: **Query Sheet**

In most projects, you will have questions, especially when dealing with segments with not enough content. Generally, these queries are managed in a query sheet. A query sheet is usually a document that centralizes all questions from the linguistic teams with answers from the client. In the sheet, you will be able to insert questions and also see the questions that perhaps other colleagues have already asked and will serve as a source of reference for you.

While it is important to keep communication open, it is always advisable to do your research before you jump in the sheet to ask questions. First and foremost, you should check that the question has not been asked/answered in previous entries of the sheet or is not included in the style guide and other reference materials.

Additionally, make sure you research online for the answer you are looking for before asking your client. As video game localizers we have to know where to look and one of the most important sources we have are the players themselves. If the game has already been published or there were previous versions, there will almost definitely be information in discussion forums. Use these resources before you jump in the query sheet to ask a question to the client.

The Scroll: **Reference Material**

The reference material can include visual elements as well as descriptions. It's common to receive a list of images and depictions of the different characters, weapons, food, armor, and other items relevant to the game. Oftentimes you might receive videos showing certain aspects of the gameplay. All these reference materials provide essential context to the text you will translate – seeing a visual reference can make all the difference when you are trying to localize a term or phrase.

One of the important aspects we have to keep in mind in video game localization is that we are translating audiovisual content. The text we're translating, even if we are using a CAT tool and it seems out of context, can never be dissociated from what the players see and hear on the screen. We have to constantly check up on this. We cannot transcreate something that seems better fit with the target culture if the person is seeing something completely different on the screen. So, familiarizing yourself with the reference materials will help you immerse yourself in the aesthetics and characteristics of the game. If you are missing any key components to be able to deliver an appropriate translation, ask for the visual reference or context.

The Actual Game

Depending on where in the production line localization fits in with the client or project, you might be fortunate enough to have access to the actual game. It can be the published version in the source language or a demo version of a yet to be published game. This occurred numerous times throughout my career as a game localizer. Without a doubt, playing the game is the best way to familiarize yourself with the mechanics of the game and the game's universe. By being in the gamers' shoes you can truly connect with that experience and provide spot-on localizations for the target audience. Keep in mind that the main focus in video game localization is to entertain the users. Regardless of linguistic and cultural nuances and adaptations, the gamer should always come first.

With your complete inventory, as a video game localizer, you will have the right tools to provide an excellent localization. However, it should be mentioned that time tends to be a limited resource when it comes to video game localization; you will have to be efficient with the time you have. There will be times when you have to rush to deliver on time and others when you won't have as much time as you would like to investigate the issues in depth.

Whatever the situation, when you deliver your finished work, it is important to always leave everything resolved at least with a tentative translation. For example, if you are waiting for the answer to a question and do not receive the answer and it is time to deliver, make the delivery with the segment resolved in the best way possible and send a note with the delivery advising how you decided to resolve the segment and that you are waiting for a response. This way you help your teammates involved in the project.

In video game localization you are going to come across heaps of resources that will help you in your career as a specialist in video games, but also for many other specializations. It's a fast-moving industry and there will always be processes that are being optimized. It is important to remain open to continuous learning, to stay up to date and at the forefront of the video game industry, but also with technology and localization processes. I hope that you can make good use of everything in your inventory and be able to bring your A-game to any localization project you work on.

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She has worked as a translator, editor, and quality assurance specialist

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