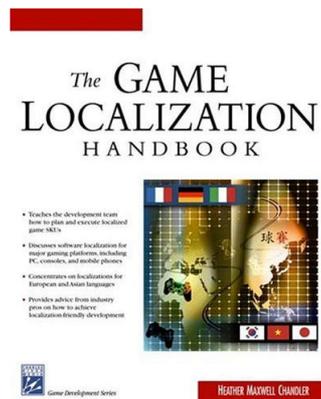
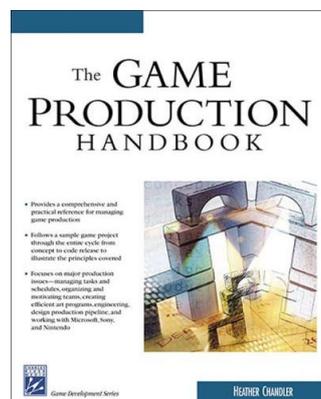




## Learning from the Best

An interview with Heather Chandler, founder and President of [Media Sunshine, Inc.](http://MediaSunshine.com) and author of *The Game Localization Handbook* and *The Game Production Handbook*.



**CCAPS:** You have worked in the game industry since 1996. How much of your past and recent work is directly related to G-localization (a.k.a. the GILT industry)?

**CHANDLER:** When I worked as a producer, localization was just one of my responsibilities. For each game I worked on, I organized all the assets for translation, managed the translation process, integrated localized assets and coordinated the testing. This required planning during pre-production so there were no surprises during the actual localization phase. I also worked with the production team to make sure localization issues were accounted for during game development. Oftentimes, localization is the last thing on a game developer's mind, because they are so focused on finishing the primary version of the game (usually for the US market). If localization is left until the end of the project, you run the risk of having a localization pipeline that is difficult and time-consuming to work with. For example, the game text may be hard-coded, which means the text that needs to be translated is located within programming files that should only be manipulated by a programmer. You may also find that graphic files contain embedded text, instead of having the text on a separate layer, making it very time consuming to alter the graphic for other languages. You may also find that the product you are working on is so specific to a single country that it is hard to modify it for other countries. For example, a game about Monster Trucks would not appeal to many people outside the United States.



**CCAPS:** *Now that you are working as a consultant and have your own company, how would you say that your present activity differ from the times you worked for companies like Ubisoft, Electronic Arts, Activision and New Line Cinema?*

**CHANDLER:** For me, the main difference between working for a company and being a consultant is that, as a consultant, I can work on several different projects. For instance, I can spend my time teaching, writing or working with others — and these activities are not all directly related to game development. I also have the freedom to pick and choose which projects I work on. It is nice being your own boss and focusing on what you enjoy doing and are good at. Because my main expertise is production management, I also have a wide variety of services I can offer. For example, I can manage a voiceover shoot from start to finish, work with a developer on defining a localization-friendly production pipeline, teach game development classes, help small technology businesses grow, create game pitches or any other number of production-related services. While I did enjoy working as a Producer at various companies, I could only work on one project at a time. Oftentimes, these projects lasted one year or more.

**CCAPS:** *To date, you have worked on more than 30 games, including Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter, Ghost Recon 2, Civilization: Call to Power, Heavy Gear, Apocalypse, Vigilante 8, Shanghai: Second Dynasty, and Zork: Grand Inquisitor. Which was more fun to develop? And the most complicated?*

**CHANDLER:** Of the games listed above, *Shanghai: Second Dynasty (S2D)* was the most fun for me. *Shanghai* is a tile-matching game where the player must match up tile pairs in order to clear them from the board. This game is also known as *Mah Jong* to some people. S2D had several game variations on the tile matching, as well as 4-player Mah Jong. It was fun because I learned so much about game production while working on it. The producer-director, Tom Sloper, had several years of game development and design experience and really knew the process of creating a game from the inside out. He was one of my first mentors and taught me about writing design documents, managing internal and external teams, play-testing, marketing and project management. I had a range of different responsibilities with the game, including creating the installer, approving art assets, working with the composer and creating the gold master candidates. Localization of *Shanghai* was also a learning experience. Not only did I have to coordinate the translations, I also had to integrate the translated assets, manage the testing, etc. — all for three different languages (including Japanese). One of the most complicated games I worked, at least from a localization standpoint, was *Civilization: Call to Power*. This was a very text heavy PC game, and the plan was to release all the languages at the same time as the English version. This was my first experience working on simultaneous shipment localization. The development team worked very hard to get the game finished and localized into five different languages. We had to put together special tools for the translators to make the process easier — they had over 50,000 words to translate for each language.



**CCAPS:** *You also have a lot of hands-on experience with game localization, correct? What was the localization process like for Shanghai: Second Dynasty?*

**CHANDLER:** The localization process for *Shanghai: Second Dynasty* was pretty straightforward. The game was released in German, French and Japanese. First, all of the in-game text was centrally located in easy to access text files. I simply had to get these files and send them off for translation. When the translations were completed, I replaced the text files with the appropriate localized files. For the voiceovers, the script was sent off to be translated and then a voiceover recording session was planned for each language. Once the recordings were finished, the localized VO files were sent to me so they could be added to the game. Once all the assets were added, we began testing. There are two types of testing — functionality testing and linguistic testing. Functionality testing is where you check the game for any crash bugs or game play issues. Linguistic testing involves the verification of all the game's language assets. The testers looked for text truncations, grammatical errors, missing text, untranslated text, etc. I can't remember the exact word counts, but I do remember it took about eight weeks to localize the game into three languages. The languages were determined by projecting how many copies of the game would sell against the cost of making the localized builds. These types of decisions are handled by the sales, marketing and finance departments, and sometimes they decide to localize a title into 10 languages, while other titles only get localized into two languages.

**CCAPS:** *In The Game Localization Handbook, you dedicate an entire chapter to "Localization Production Pitfalls." What are these pitfalls and what would be the ways to avoid them?*

**CHANDLER:** The major production pitfalls discussed in the book are:

**Poor Planning** – if localizations are left until the last minute, it is likely that the game code will not be localization-friendly. This makes it difficult to create international versions in a timely fashion. If planned for in advance, localizations do not need to be a burden on the development team. When planning for localizations, have a good idea of how many assets need to be translated, their format, how they will be organized for translation and how quickly the translations can be integrated into the assets.

**Achieving Simultaneous Release** – Simship of numerous languages is possible, but only if planned for. If the team is thinking about localizations well in advance, they are more likely to achieve simship.

**Linguistic and Functionality Testing** – Testing is a very time-consuming aspect of localization. In many cases, the testing is not planned or well organized, which only adds to the time needed. If you are testing five languages, you need to determine a standardized way for the translators to report linguistic bugs and then find a reliable way to track these fixes in the game.

**Quality of Translations** – Some translators will do a straight translation of text and will not adapt it to fit within the game universe. For example, if a humorous game has very dry translations, a lot of the humor is lost in the localized versions. This can be remedied if the translators have a chance to play a version of the game (even an English one), so they fully understand how to convey its entertaining qualities.



**CCAPS:** *Speaking of pitfalls, did your team manage to avoid these when localizing the games above or did you gather the information for the book by learning from your own mistakes and those of your colleagues?*

**CHANDLER:** That's a great question! I honestly have to say that I have experienced most of these pitfalls. However, when talking with my colleagues, I find that most of them have experienced these same pitfalls as well.

**CCAPS:** *What countries are the most important players in the entertainment software industry? And where are the best markets located?*

**CHANDLER:** Germany and France have always been big game markets. Italy and Spain have also had a presence, but not as large. Asia is also becoming a very large market — in particular Korea and Japan. Other emerging markets are Eastern Europe and the Netherlands.

**CCAPS:** *Finally, what would be your advice for those who want to enter the entertainment software localization industry?*

**CHANDLER:** I think it is important that you play the games and have an understanding of how the interactive medium is structured. In my experience, translators who understand and play games are more effective in this area of localization. They have a better understanding of what needs to be adapted in order to keep the tone of the game consistent with the English version.

*Heather Maxwell Chandler graduated with honors from Vanderbilt University and received an M.A. from the USC School of Cinema-Television. Prior to the creation of MSI, a company that provides consulting services for game developers, publishers and vendors, she served in various production positions at Ubisoft, Electronic Arts, Activision and New Line Cinema. She agreed to give us this interview in between diapers and safety pins, busy with her son Jack, born last December.*