

## An Interview With Localization Editor, Jennifer Sherman

# INTERNATIONAL HITMAKER

Jennifer Sherman, interviewed by Kimberly Matsuno (Niigata)

Jennifer Sherman is the force behind ensuring best-selling manga in Japan become best-sellers in the United States as well. She has worked on many popular manga, such as *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba—Stories of Water and Flame* and *Dragon Quest: The Adventure of Dai*.

In her role as a localization editor, she works to make sure that manga and light novels from Japan are not only translated into English but are also adapted to be more easily understood by American audiences. I had the pleasure of interviewing Ms. Sherman about what exactly her role as a localization editor involves.

### What is the difference between localization and translation?

Hooboy, this could be a whole hour-long discussion itself!

Debating what “localization” is as opposed to “translation” can be a hot topic with wide-ranging opinions. And even if you want to follow the model of giving them separate meanings, there is no translation without localization.

“Literal” translations, or exactly recreating the “original” experience in another language, is functionally impossible. In my mind—as well as many others in the J-pop localization sphere—there really is no difference between “translation” and “localization.” And I’ve noticed a progression in more recent years favoring the term “localization” over “translation” among many in our community.

“Localization” better encompasses the full scope of the work we do because there are many other areas of consideration involved in transforming works from one language and culture into the language and culture somewhere else. There are so many more processes involved than some kind of mechanical word-for-word substitution, which is what some fans may imagine is all that’s involved in releasing a translated work. Part of the reason I like to use “localization” is because it suggests more of the complexity of the process.

**So, it sounds like, in the simplest terms, a literal translation would be writing something like *いただきます (Itadakimasu)* as “I humbly receive,” while localization is knowing that no one would actually say that, so it should be written as “Thank you for the food. Let’s eat.” Plus, on top of that, you have to explain pop culture references and other slang. It does seem like it would be impossible to define where translation ends and localization begins in that sense.**

## So what is the role of a localization editor in the whole localization process?

The title of localization editor can have different definitions depending on the company and what kind of work is being transformed between languages. I can only provide details from my own experience.

At many manga and light novel publishers in North America, the in-house editor is more of a project manager for a set of localization projects. I probably spend less of my time on actual editing than I do on all the other tasks I'm responsible for. I oversee a project from the point that it's licensed all the way until we ship it off to the printer.

As you might imagine, this involves various meetings, an endless string of emails, and working together with various teams to make sure each book comes together. I'm responsible for everything from hiring the freelancers (usually translators and letterers) to editing all the stages of the book to composing the back cover copy and making sure each team has the files they need at any given time.

In the Japanese-popular-culture world, there are some forms of localization editors for any localized work, whether it's anime, games (including visual novels), or books. Whether or not someone in the process will actually have the job title "localization editor" may be another story.

**So, not only are you editing translations and explaining what a kotatsu is to people who may never have seen one before, but you're also working as a project manager and helping to design covers. You sound busy!**

## Tell me about what your typical day looks like.

Each day, I need to evaluate all of my projects, check what stage they're at, and prioritize my tasks based on what's most urgent. Because weekly releases run on tight schedules, I might edit a script for one *Shonen Jump* series, edit lettered pages for another series, and move files for all of my projects around to the various places they need to go in the morning.

I like to get as many of the faster tasks out of the way as I can early in the day before settling into the bulkier, more time-consuming editing processes for graphic novel (manga) releases in the afternoon. Throughout the day, I send and respond to a variety of emails, solving problems and answering questions as they arise.

As for the actual editing process, I find light novels to be much more straightforward because it's just me and the words! Manga is much more multifaceted, and editors are responsible for making sure all of the visual aspects, including the art and speech balloons, look the way they should. You'd be surprised at how many ways things can go wrong!

## What projects have you worked on in the past?

Some of my manga for VIZ includes *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba—Stories of Water and Flame*, *Dragon Quest: The Adventure of Dai*, *Kubo Won't Let Me Be Invisible*, and an upcoming set of three *Demon Slayer* light novels.

My work for Kodansha Comics includes certain volumes of *Sweat and Soap*, *UQ Holder!*, and *Hitorijime My Hero*.

For J-Novel Club, I edited *A Lily Blooms in Another World* and the first volume of *She's the Cutest . . . But We're Just Friends!*, as well as completing many proofreading projects.

## Do localization editors need a high level of Japanese (N2 or N1)?

Opinions on this can vary greatly depending on your company. Some companies require a high level of Japanese fluency, while others require none.

Personally, for someone in the type of editing role I have with manga and light novels, I believe it's best for someone to have around N2 abilities or higher. There are so many things I notice while editing my projects that I would never be able to catch if I didn't have the Japanese abilities I do. That said, most companies wouldn't actually care whether you have a particular level of the JLPT as long as your actual abilities can accomplish what you need to do.

## Do you think your past experience living in Japan benefits your ability to be a good localization editor?

It goes without saying that the linguistic and cultural understanding I gained while living in Japan is invaluable to my work. However, I also utilized many soft skills while teaching on the JET Program that still come into play today.

ALTs have to think on their feet, quickly solve problems, and adapt so that class can move forward sometimes. Similarly, almost no project goes 100% smoothly, so there's a lot of responding and adapting to change under time constraints in what I do.

JETs are also known as cultural ambassadors, and providing a bridge between cultures through media is what's so exciting about localization to me!

## **You seem to really love what you do for work! What do you like most about your job?**

I love being able to connect people on different sides of the planet, people who have completely different cultural backgrounds, through the appreciation of impactful works of fiction. Opening people's eyes to worlds they previously knew little to nothing about is so exciting and fulfilling.

## **What has been the biggest challenge during your time as a localization editor?**

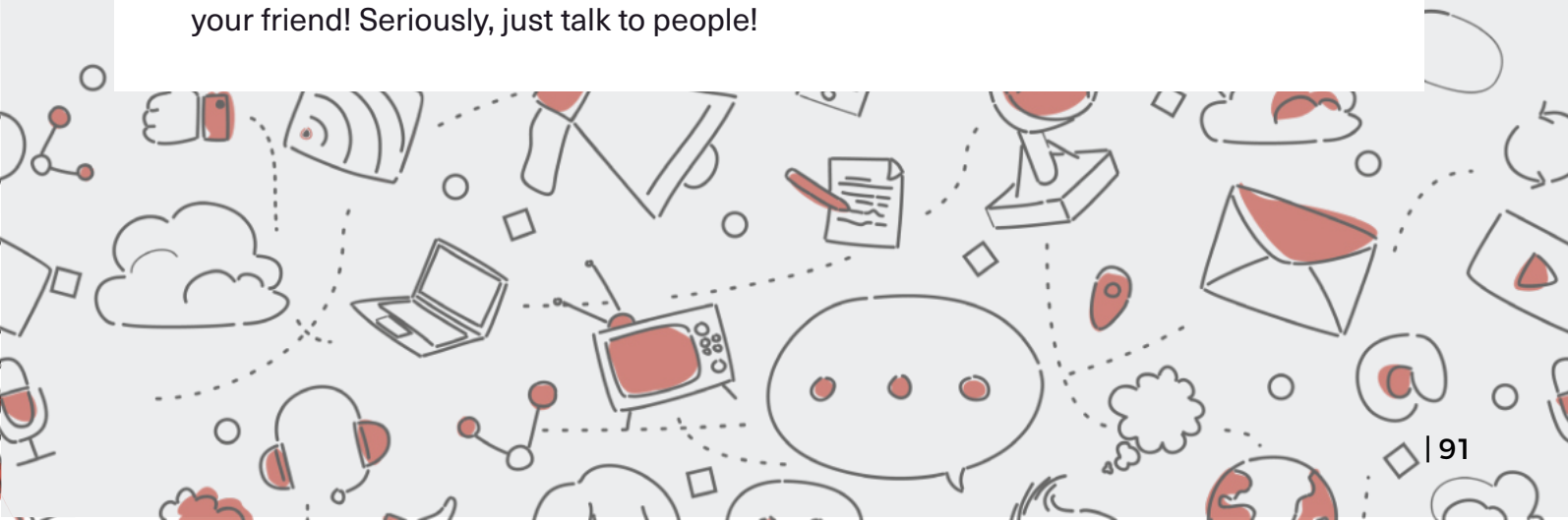
As someone who is purely word-oriented on a basic level, one challenge is finding a balance and rhythm in accomplishing all my various tasks while my biggest aptitude is for working with the words on the page. Growing in the leadership and project management aspects of my role has actually been one of the most rewarding and empowering aspects of working at VIZ this past year.

## **It's wonderful that you have found a career that fits your aptitudes so well, while simultaneously challenging you and providing you with opportunities to grow. What advice would you give job seekers looking to get into the world of manga and Japanese light novels?**

As with any writing or editing field, read and write as much as you can. But you already knew that, right?

Certain classes and certification programs can also help you build your skills. Also, study style guides like *The Chicago Manual of Style*. If you're confident in those linguistic abilities already, start networking with people in the industry on social media. I've found both Twitter and LinkedIn helpful. Also, try to get some articles posted online or do some editing practice on your own that you might even be able to show a prospective employer as a sample of your work.

Most importantly, don't sell yourself short! You can cold email potential employers from their jobs pages; in many cases, even if there are no listed openings. In this niche of the publishing world, you'll just have to pass an editing test, and that may be enough to get your foot in the door with some initial assignments. But again, networking is your friend! Seriously, just talk to people!



**Thank you so much for your time. I'm sure many of our readers find your job as fascinating as I do, so we truly appreciate you sharing your knowledge with us. I know many people are eagerly awaiting your next releases.**

If you are interested to hear more of what Jennifer Sherman has to say or would like to read some of her work, feel free to follow her on [LinkedIn](#) or [Twitter](#) and check out [VIZ](#) for a list of their latest releases.

*Jennifer Sherman worked as an anime journalist and freelance manga and light novel editor before joining VIZ Media as an editor. She was a JET in Mie Prefecture from 2012 to 2016. Her JET-induced wanderlust may lead her to relocate again, but she currently lives in her home state of Ohio.*

*Kimberly Matsuno is in her third year in Japan and has loved every minute of it. She enjoys hiking and exploring everything Japan has to offer. When not planning her next trip or trying to recreate that one thing she ate at that one restaurant, you can find her spending way too much money on stationery at her local LOFT.*

