At the Heart of the Mothercrystal: Final Fantasy XIV's Approach to Localization and Lore as a Virtual Contact Zone

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Abstract

Virtual worlds by nature of their persistence and ability to have multiple simultaneous users in the same space can act as contact zones, defined by Mary Louse Pratt as a "social space where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination," (1991, p. 34). One affordance of virtual worlds in constructing the contact zone is the ability for the developer to use localization to bridge language gaps between a user and the virtual world and, to some extent, between players who have a shared understanding of the virtual world. This understanding extends to the properties of objects and locations and any narrative lore or background in the world. However, localization can be a double-edged sword, with choices in translation and localization leading to confusion among virtual world users and conflict between users and developers.

Language impacts two aspects of the virtual contact zone. For one, players communicate using languages they are proficient in, using whatever affordances are available in the interface and paratextual platforms, such as the official forums and social media platforms like Reddit and Tumblr. For another, the world itself is awash in language. That text manifests itself in gameplay elements from user abilities and item names to more narrative elements such as character names, dialogue, and written story and worldbuilding elements. These textual and narrative components, called "lore," are essential in contextualizing virtual spaces. Lore helps build the virtual world beyond the actual mechanics and interactions within a virtual space. Lore gives users a sense of not just place but of geography, not just time, but of history, and not just context for players but their place within the story of the virtual world. Lore offers players motivation for playing in addition to traditional gameplay motivators such as exploration, achieving, socializing, and defeating enemies or other players (Yee, 2006; Bartle, 1996) to interact with the world.

This paper focuses on the case of *Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn* (FFXIV), an MMORPG initially released in 2013, its production, approaches to localization, and how it

contributes to building a "virtual contact zone." In looking at specific instances where controversies in translation and localization led to confusion and conflict among the participants and developers of the game, this case study illustrates the role of localization in games beyond translation and acculturation. Localization not only serves as the linguistic bridge among members of the contact zone but, in the case of online games where world-building and narrative are important aspects for immersion and play, creates shared experiences and understandings of that virtual world among all members of the virtual contact zone.

Author Keywords

Final Fantasy XIV, MMORPGs, contact zone, localization, virtual worlds, fan studies

The Contact Zone and its Application to Games and Virtual Worlds.

The concept of contact zones was coined by Pratt (1991) to describe social spaces "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today." (1991, p. 34). In particular, what distinguishes this conception of intercultural communication from others is the acknowledgment that the mixing of two or more cultures creates hybridized spaces of intercultural intelligibility. Rather than a flow from one culture to the other, such as in a networked model, the contact zone is a more contested and contestable space where these differences and the attempts to create shared understandings are played out in concrete, material, and often messy forms.

Pratt distinguishes contact zones from the notion of community by arguing that a community is a space of idealized unity, which suppresses those at the margins. Conversely, the contact zone represents the realities of contact between multiple cultures along differing levels of influence and power in the same shared space. It offers marginalized voices a space where they can be heard. In addition, Pratt also argues that the contact zones engender a contact 'perspective' among its inhabitants, emphasizing how subjects are constituted by their relations to one another. These relations are not necessarily treated along strict delineations of colonizers/colonized, travelers/inhabitants, or other dichotomies of separation but of copresence and interlocked understandings within the overarching environment of frequently asymmetrical power relations. Pratt argues that dismantling separation barriers allows for increased interaction among "subjects" and greater interplay between dominant and marginalized voices, allowing for the reshaping of both.

The usage of contact zones in disciplines such as English (Selfe & Selfe, 1994; Miller, 1994), Anthropology and Museum Studies (Schroch, 2013; Yeon & Willis, 2005; Clifford, 1997), new media studies (Farnsworth & Austrin, 2010), and education (Harris, 1995) suggest a

potential for applying these concepts to virtual world studies, particularly of online games as they often function as spaces of interplay between players from different cultural backgrounds, and are sites of power imbalances between players and developers. Selfe and Selfe (1994) note that, in describing online spaces for English education, "computers, like other complex technologies, are articulated in many ways with a range of existing cultural forces and with a variety of projects in our educational system, projects that run the gamut from liberatory to oppressive," (p. 482). Farnsworth and Austrin (2010) also propose the contact zone as a model for media anthropology, noting that the contact zone allows researchers interested in media ethnography to highlight how ethnographic practice has changed and continues to change in the wake of new media. They acknowledge that these media technologies and the sites, practices, and objects of study are constantly shifting and that the lines between academic and commercial domains of research within new media spaces are blurring, creating another shift in power dynamics. Similarly, Rees (2007) argues that thinking of the space of media anthropology as a contact zone changes the dynamic between fieldwork sites, practices, and objects and shifts perspectives as to what constitutes an ethnographic method. While the concept of virtual worlds has been applied for some time in game studies literature on communities online (Castronova, 2001; Taylor, 2006; Boellstorff, 2008; Peace, 2010; Yee, 2014), a technical definition of a virtual world offered by Nevelsteen (2018) defines a virtual world as a "simulated environment" where many agents (human or algorithmic) interact in a real-time shared "spatiotemporal nonpausable virtual environment" that constitutes a single unified persistent space or shard (Section 5.2).

These studies suggest that the contact zone applied to virtual worlds can help understand the relationships of users within the virtual world and their relationship with one another. However, as Rees notes, just as in the ethnographic study of other spaces, the role of the researcher as a participant and member of that space must also be taken into account, especially given the emphasis the contact zone places on understanding fundamental inequalities among members of the zone. Therefore the relationship between the object of study, the scope of the questions, and the role of the researcher as a participant in the virtual world must be considered. The contact zone provides a framework for the researcher to look at the relationships between individuals and communities within it and for the researcher to negotiate their place as a participant within that space.

Utilizing the contact zone as a framework for talking about communication and interaction in virtual worlds allows us to place the virtual world and its inhabitants within a broader social context, where users, even inside the space, are bound up in inherently heterogeneous collections of power relations, networks of social capital, and resources, all of which act upon one another, and are particularly visible when attempts at collaboration and incidents of conflict occur. This lens provides a broader perspective than other frameworks for virtual world behavior, serving not only as a compliment but as a contrast to Pearce's theorization of play communities (2010). Pearce defines a community of play as a community of individuals who come together around an activity that is seen as play and form a network of

relations that center around the act of play, sometimes to the extent that individuals are playing more for the social interaction and community than for the ludic aspects. Her stance on the role of play and social interaction is that the framework of play that grounds virtual worlds, such as those of *Uru* and the communities formed there, which created virtual diasporas on *Second Life* and *There.com*, allows for individuals to meet that would otherwise not, because of real-world social roles.

> Players befriend individuals they might not otherwise have occasion to interact with. Intimacies form around shared imagination and facets of identity that are foregrounded through play. Because play is ultimately a form of expression, whether experienced in a structured game world or an open-ended metaverse, it opens up avenues for personal and social development that provide alternatives to real-life roles (p. 22)

Pearce defines play broadly, drawing on anthropological definitions of play. She draws on Huizinga's (1949) definition of play as "a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it" (p. 13).

This definition encompasses a number of non-work activities, such as military reenactment, science fiction fandom, rituals, and play, as it occurs in more understood forms, particularly for users of virtual worlds such as MMOGs. Pearce also draws upon the work of Bernie DeKoven (1978) and the New Games movement in her formulation of communities of play to highlight both the importance of the social aspects of play and the importance of design on these social functions. Her focus on play as a space separated from regular life, and thus a space where alternative social formations and identities can be developed, is helpful in understanding play as a potentially productive act. By reducing geographic limitations from communication and by creating a sense of presence for those interacting with them, virtual worlds produce a very different environment for play activities and communities of play.

The lens of the contact zone brings with it an ability to see a more holistic relationship of communication within the virtual world. In particular, the contact zone model is fruitful for simultaneously examining spaces designed to be inhabited by individuals from various national and linguistic backgrounds. While Pratt uses the contact zone to describe spaces of colonial resistance and autoethnographic writing within the colonial space, this is but one of three spaces she uses in her work. Another space is the classroom, particularly the English Literature classroom at the University, in the wake of the diversification of both the classroom and the works beyond the 'Western canon.' The contact zone here is used to talk about the way that education shifts as students from their various backgrounds bring their history and interpretation of works, and teachers within the classroom "had to work on the knowledge that whatever one said was going to be systematically received in radically heterogeneous ways that we were

neither able nor entitled to prescribe" (1991, p. 39). Pratt also uses the contact zone as a model through baseball cards. At the beginning of her piece, she explains how baseball cards were a tool of education for her child, using them to gain skills in literacy, mathematics, history, economics, and social dynamics in ways that traditional educational spaces could not provide.

This transplantation of the contact zone across different contexts, particularly the concept of baseball cards and interest in baseball fandom, presents opportunities for both transplantation and expansion of the concepts presented by Pratt in other contexts. This paper positions online games and virtual worlds as virtual contact zones, utilizing Pratt's model to look at how virtual worlds and online games are situated within a larger shared social space encompassing members from various backgrounds all coming together. These differences can be reflected by nationality, language, technical expertise, and access to technology. Like Pratt's model, the virtual zone does operate within a context of asymmetrical power structures. It is most apparent between those who build and operate the virtual world and the users who buy into and interact with the virtual world. There are also differing power shifts between players, sometimes along the lines of national identity or language, mainly when communicating with the aforementioned virtual world creators.

The virtual contact zone builds on the literature that uses the contact zone in two ways. One, the virtual contact zone extends previous work looking at the contact zone to examine and model virtual and distance learning environments, in order to look at activities and communication in other kinds of virtual environments. The virtual contact zone also expands the ideas of space within the contact zone to be a multi-sited space within mostly digital, paratextual spaces informed by the virtual world. It is important here to note that the virtual contact zone acknowledged the presence of power differentials between its members, much like Pratt's model in colonial spaces. That being said, the stakes in those power relations in the virtual contact zone are far less severe than those in the contact zone of the colony. The concept of a virtual contact zone is not meant to suggest that virtual worlds have contexts similar to colonial life, especially for those subject to its effects. For another, the members of the contact zone with powers are the creators of the virtual world, and the players often buy into the virtual world. The virtual contact zone asks us to consider the relations between subjects when the subjects with more power are the creators of a space, and those with less power voluntarily make their way into that space along with other virtual world users.

Challenges in the Localization of Videogames and MMORPGs

Localization has been an ongoing practice in the video game industry since the 1980s, when Japanese games became popularized in North America and Europe. There are several challenges video game localization has to overcome to adapt titles across regions. It is worth addressing that localization includes translation, but localization also includes works to adapt content to the various target cultures, such as changing cultural references that would not be

understood in the target language and adapting idioms and expressions that maintain the same idea as the original text, but are not literally the same. In games, this may also extend to localizing mechanics or functions, such as games made for Sony Consoles switching the accept and cancel buttons between Japanese and International versions from ◯ and ✕ to ✕ and ◯, respectively[1]. There are several challenges video game localization has to overcome in order to adapt titles across regions.

Game localization in Translation Studies has typically been recognized as a hybrid between Audio-visual translation and software localization (O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013). On the one hand, localizing text and audio takes up most of the work, since those need to be translated and localized for the target country and language. With voice work, in particular, localization teams aim at providing analogs to accents, speaking and writing styles, and matching genre conventions in the target language. On the other hand, elements such as interfaces and inputs must also be localized. The developer or a subsidiary publisher localizes games aimed at a global market (and budgeted accordingly) in the target country or region. Game localization shares the challenges of other media translation and localization by needing to adapt narrative, dialogue, informational text, etc. Game localization also has to deal with software internationalization issues, that is make sure the actual mechanics and interface are accessible to an audience of end-users other than those originally targeted by the developers. Videogame localization poses several challenges for developers, such as translation of the text, translation of non-verbal cues and animation, and translating software elements such as interfaces and input schema.

As a subset of localization, video game text translation has its own set of challenges, as described above, with its balance of maintaining the literal meaning of the original text with making non-literal narrative devices culturally legible. Games have utilized both "domestication" and "foreignization" strategies in localization, as defined by Venuti (2008), with neither approach seeming to be better, at least from an economic and developer standpoint. For example, the 2005 rhythm game *Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan!* was domesticated to American audiences as *Elite Beat Agents* in 2006. Aside from changing the songs used from popular Japanese pop songs to English-language pop, the publisher changed the main characters from a culturally legible group, the Ouendan (応援団, literally 'cheering/support squad') to an Americanized "Men in Black" style federal agent in black suits and sunglasses (Mandiberg, 2012; Stern, 2007).

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[1] With the introduction of the Playstation 5 in 2021, Sony has elected to standardize these controls, conforming to the international mode of ✕ as confirm and ◯ as cancel which has led to some outcry by Japanese users used to the previous convention (Ashcraft, 2020).

Similarly, ≈while the game *Tetris* is an abstract puzzle game with no narrative elements, many versions of it utilize Russian imagery and music, most famously the use of a chiptune version of "Korobeiniki," an 1861 Russian poem turned folk song (Shaver, 2017), to highlight the game's Russian origins and its creator Alexey Pajitnov. In addition, while localization teams have tried to exercise caution when translating cultural elements, there have been instances where North American localizers attempted to "Americanize" foreign elements to a degree where character names and even appearances have been altered. In perhaps one of the most extreme examples of this over-localization, the 1996 PlayStation Game *Shin Megami Tensei: Persona* changed the Japanese high school setting and characters into an American high school, giving the characters anglicized names, and even changing the race of one of the characters to a young black man. As Mangiron (2021) argues, localization teams working on Japanese games are more likely these days to preserve Japanese elements, as part of the audience appeal of Japanese games tends to be in their target culture. There is also now an overall higher baseline assumption of knowledge of Japanese popular culture among audiences of these games, in what Henry Jenkins describes as pop cosmopolitanism when looking at the ways "transcultural flows of popular culture inspire new forms of global consciousness and cultural competency," (p. 117, 2004). Accordingly, localization of Japanese cultural elements is limited to certain game components that would require extensive knowledge of Japanese pop culture. One example is in the 2016 game *Danganronpa V3* which localized a joke referencing Japanese Baseball teams to one referencing the NFL teams (Schrier, 2017).

Localization adds to these challenges beyond translation by reconsidering non-linguistic cues. Localization teams must be sensitive to cultural norms of visual communication, especially regarding imagery or actions that players can perform or interact with. Character actions, such as the body language of avatars, may be inappropriate or even offensive in the target language's culture and may need to be changed on a technical level to remodel and reanimate sequences (DiMarco, 2007). One example of this was the recent version of Mario Kart (Dayus, 2017). A character performed a physical gesture, in this case "raising a clenched fist while the other arm holds the raised bicep," which was a playful competitive gesture. However, the emote was changed because of concerns that the gesture could be interpreted as a similar vulgar gesture in certain European countries, Italy in particular. For all video games being adapted to China, certain enemies, such as skeletons, have to be changed due to legal restrictions in depicting skeletons in Chinese media due of cultural norms.

In addressing the issue of audience, Costales (2016) ran a study of regional Spanish video game players that suggests (similar to Esser 's 2016 argument about television localization) that conceiving an audience in video game localization is more complicated than simply conceiving a regional or national audience. It may be even in markets where English is not the primary language, the ubiquity of English as a lingua franca in global media has made foreignization strategies popular, and that video game players with access to the Internet can turn to English language websites for information and official details. While the findings are not necessarily

generalizable to the game-playing audiences, Costales notes that his findings suggest that perhaps "the localization of video games into a specific market is becoming more complex due to the influence of the global on the local." The multimodal nature of games and the globalized nature of contemporary popular culture have perhaps shifted audience expectations towards code-switching from a native tongue to English.

The last major challenge to video game localization is the logistical challenge. Localization is often an afterthought in the development cycles. Until recently, games were localized by small teams of less than a dozen people and text was translated by one or two individuals. As game development has ballooned over the last ten years, the number of regions games that need localization has increased, and the teams have grown. Even now, frequently localization is still performed by outsourced contract firms that may not necessarily specialize in video game localization rather than by a team that is an integral part of the developer or publisher. The amount of text that needs to be translated and localized can lead to production flow issues and typos, minor mistranslations, or even overlooked text. If they feel there is not enough of an audience for a title outside the domestic market, a publisher may decide not to create a localization. In these cases, fan translation and localization may emerge to close the gap, especially in regions that tend to be minimized in the larger games market, such as Latin America and the Middle East. These fan translations tend to operate in spaces such as fan-subbing, which has been looked at in Translation Studies (Díaz Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez, 2006) or with distribution within the contemporary media law landscape (Müller, 2014), where companies mostly look the other way and do not seek litigation provided the projects are noncommercial. However, exceptions do exist (Kretzschmar & Stanfill, 2019).

Live service games, such as MMOGs, have an additional set of challenges regarding localization. While there is some research in online game localization (Chan, 2018; Heimberg, 2006), the unique challenges of localizing such games have traditionally not been a focus. Live service games, which require constant maintenance and regularly produced content over a long period, create new challenges unique from other forms of video game localization. One such challenge is the simultaneous play from multi-lingual audiences. While live service games that silo players by regions, such as Korean MMOs like *Blade and Soul* and *Lost Ark*, can afford time delays between different localizations, online games which maintain simultaneous release schedules across many regions need to ensure every supported localization is ready for release simultaneously throughout the lifespan of the game. Even if players are sequestered into regional servers, the expectation is that everyone can play the content at the same time of release. In these cases, it often works to integrate localization teams with the developer to facilitate quick content production and localization turnover.

Of all online or live service games, the amount of material that needs to be translated for an MMORPG can be daunting. Heimburg notes that an older game, *Asheron's Call*, contained about 350,000 words, with about 15-20,000 more words added in additional monthly content (p.

138). In *Final Fantasy XIV*'s case, English Localization Lead from 2010-2019 and current overall Localization Supervisor Michael Christopher "Koji" Fox commented on the translation needed for the game's first expansion content released in mid-2015:

> We receive text from not only the scenario team, but also various other teams, and we're constantly working to perfect the text right up until the last minute. It's constantly a fight against time. For the expansion, we translated roughly 15,000,000 words between eight people in 2.5 months. Part way through we were concerned we wouldn't finish, so we had help from people of other project's teams. (2016)

Heimburg states that the text displayed to players is not the only text that has to be considered. However, localization teams have to consider what forms of text input players can use to name things like characters or items or to communicate with other players. For example, *Final Fantasy XI* does not allow players to natively type in Japanese within the game client; players created fan mods to overcome that barrier. In other cases, games may attempt to circumnavigate issues of text communication, such as *Phantasy Star Online* for instance, by using pictographs for player communication. This option creates new challenges, such as the problem of judging the appropriate specificity and universality of symbols chosen and the problem of players using too many symbols at once, causing clutter and noise in communication (p. 138). In addition, interactive text that players see, such as when receiving an item, has to be programmed. Specific item names are coded such that scripted phrases such as "You receive the Sword +1" are designated within the code as "You receive the $ITEM." Localized issues such as gendered language, as in French, can complicate issues, necessitating further "meta-language" to be coded into nouns, usually by tagging words with markers such as a type of noun (pronoun, name, place) and gender (male, female, neuter). This degree of specificity underlies the point that localization needs to be considered very early in the process of MMORPG development, since this meta-linguistic programming, among other tools in implementing localization to players, works better the earlier in development it is implemented (pp. 148-149). Along with text-based elements, there is also voiced content, such as in cutscenes, which must be translated and voice acted in the target languages, further complicating the organizational hurdles MMORPG localization faces. Finally, Localization teams must address accessibility concerns, such as changing user interfaces to accommodate languages requiring more space in their writing, such as English or other alphabet-based languages, compared to ideographic or syllabic script forms like Mandarin Chinese, Korean, or Japanese.

Aside from organizing and setting up localization teams, developers must also decide how players who may speak different languages can communicate with one another. One way to deal with this issue can be to segregate players by servers based on language or region. Another is to develop chat systems that allow players who speak different languages to communicate. One early example was Syzran, an autotranslation feature added to *Ultima Online*. Another

method was used by *Phantasy Star Online*, which allowed players to communicate by selecting generic phrases from a menu and drawing pictographs for other players.

Localization is thus a complicated process, traditionally performed by a small team expected to manage many hundreds of thousands of words of text. More recently, localization has increased in importance. In larger budget games or online games like *FFXIV*, large teams are assembled to translate and localize games in-house with a large publisher like Ubisoft or Square-Enix, or to act as an outsourced external company. Furthermore, localization has to also work across media, such as vocal performance and animation. Finally, localization has to manage quality control and decide how heavily they will alter content to be accessible to the target audience. Localization is one important aspect of creating a shared understanding within a contact zone.

Lore and the Construction of Narrative in Games

Virtual worlds, by and large, rely on narrative techniques to help build the fiction of their world. Storytelling devices such as lore or worldbuilding enable players to invest in the virtual world by creating context and points of identification. These games can also utilize paratexts such as official websites, published books, forums, live streams, and live appearances to strengthen further narratives built into the virtual world, similar to transmedia storytelling strategies. These strategies rely on understanding how players in virtual worlds create and understand narrative (Atarama-Rojas & Menacho-Gíron, 2018; Rish, 2014; Jenkins, 2004).

Lore is a term used by designers, players, and game studies scholars to describe a different but intersecting set of narrative elements present in games. This paper uses lore to describe narrative elements present in online games and virtual worlds embedded by developers in the stories, quests, item descriptions, environments, etc., and decoded by players. One example of lore used in this way is Ball's (2017) discussion of how *Bloodborne* takes diffuse and obscured lore hidden in item descriptions text, visual environment, and sparse dialogue to construct narrative threads. Lore also encompasses narrative information produced through emergent gameplay and other interactions with game systems. Gillis (2011) describes *World of Warcraft* players sharing occupational folklore to create player narratives aimed at instrumental play (Iser, 1993).

These narrative elements matter because the majority of time and effort spent by players and localizers is on understanding and, in the latter case, translating these narrative elements to players. This effort in creating points of identification and story with narrative elements is critical in creating a virtual contact zone. For players of online games, narrative is the means of identification with the story and the world. Several similar models of narrative structure are useful to conceptualize the form in which narratives are constructed by authors and decoded by

readers. In particular, Young (2007) identifies Chatman's (1990, 1978) model as helpful in looking at the narrative structure of games.

Chatman's model supposes a few key assumptions on narratives. First, a narrative is fundamentally communication (1978, p. 31). Second, this communication is not directly between author and reader but through implied authors and readers embedded in the narrative that both author and reader imagine as they construct or decode the work (p. 32). The narrative itself is divided into two parts: story and discourse. The story contains elements that Chatman defines as "content" (p. 19), such as plot, characters, etc. The second part of the narrative is the discourse, or expression, of the narrative and how the work tells the story. In a narrative, the order of events is encoded by creators and presented to audiences (typically as a plot). It is then reassembled and decoded by audiences to make sense of the narrative. While the model developed by Chatman was primarily aimed at film, there is some use in constructing an analogy between how filmgoers and players in virtual worlds find and construct narratives. The most striking differences are in the affordances game offer compared to film. Games often disperse narrative information across space and time, allowing players to access narrative elements non-linearly across different points of virtual space. This gives players in virtual worlds a more pronounced, direct hand in collecting and decoding narratives among themselves. In-game narrative information, such as worldbuilding details, character dialogue, and player quest options, collectively allows players to assemble narratives in a unique order depending on play style. Oftentimes this narrative information presented to players is referred to as lore. It is often collected together in texts, talked about and debated among players, and used to create a shared understanding of a game.

Players in virtual worlds participating in this process of narrative sense-making as they come across components of narrative, temporally and within the narrative space, is a key activity for building investment in these virtual worlds. This sense-making activity is partially why transmedia texts rely heavily on these interpretive activities by readers in order to construct narratives. Virtual worlds are further advantaged as texts in that they rely more on discursive elements rather than a temporally locked story. Virtual worlds allow players to create emergent narratives and make connections, both inside the virtual world, and through paratextual elements such as published books, websites, forums, wikis, etc. Jenkins (2004) notes the role of games as environmental storytelling, each game's designed systems allowing for non-linear narrative motivated by player actions, embedded narratives "within the mise-en-scene awaiting discovery" (p. 11), and emergent narrative where systems can present players with conflicts and goals and narrative emerges from players addressing these conflicts and goals within the designed game system. Pearce (2010) discusses how players in virtual worlds, through emergent gameplay, interact with extant systems, both inherent to the world and through social networks among players, in "play ecosystems" (p. 45) that exhibit different emergent behaviors among players based on the affordances present in the virtual world.

Games already utilize various narrative techniques to tell stories during and throughout gameplay. Abstract games can use theming to create a context for the conflict. Games with characters create identification between the player and who or what they control. Games can have plots structured similarly to other audio-visual media that players uncover as they play through levels, chapters, or scenarios. Games within virtual worlds utilize space to tell narratives, either plot-related quests or worldbuilding elements. These elements can be textual or audio-visual. Other times, art design, lighting, and the number and type of objects created for space have their own narrative, much like mise en scéne in a film is used. Finally, players can receive, and store information through informational text, such as item descriptions discovered in-game. This type of information is another way for players to learn about the space they inhabit and gain further context and investment in the game's narrative. Another advantage to using tools for discourse in virtual worlds is that this also allows players to create their own narratives through the discursive practice of role-playing. Emergent behavior and the creation of emergent narratives using the discursive tools available have long been a major activity of users in virtual worlds (Curtis, 1992; Dibbel, 1995; Taylor, 2001; Pearce, 2010).

Lore and Localization in FFXIV

Final Fantasy XIV's localization process focuses on a model of in-house division within the game's publisher. The Localization team works closely with the developer. In addition, *FFXIV*'s approach to localization is notable in how closely localization plays a role in developing narrative through discursive means of expression available to the developer. In a sense, localization is part of the development process much earlier than usual, and, because of the focus on language, plays a deep role in building that world. These approaches contribute to constructing the virtual contact zone by creating a system for simultaneous content development, and increasing the interest in the world's narrative across different regions of players.

The localization team estimates that each patch, released in 4-month cycles between biennial expansions, has around 100,000 words of text that need to be localized across each of the four supported languages: Japanese, English, French, and German. Expansions are large chunks of content that expand on the virtual world released every two years, along with the patches, which are a much larger localization task. According to Fox in a Live Letter, "For the expansion, we translated roughly 15,000,000 words between eight people in 2.5 months. Part way through we were concerned we wouldn't finish, so we had help from people of other project's teams" (Cherzy, 2016).

While the developer has a team focused on writing story and lore content, localization plays a significant role in this narrative development process. This is largely since the Localization Supervisor and former English Localization lead, Michael Christopher "Koji" Fox, is also part of the team of writers responsible for lore headed by Banri Oda. Fox's role and the

importance of English as a lingua franca have influenced the importance of localization and the cohesiveness of the virtual contact zone.

The localization has three aspects: story content, story elements, and non-narrative text. Story content here includes the "main scenario," the term used by the developer to indicate player quests that are part of a single narrative, side quests, and all of the dialogue needed for all the non-player characters that are part of those quests, as well as incidental dialogue for other NPCs. Aside from quest text as described above, the localization team translates story elements such as different types of small repeatable quests players can accomplish. Fox has mentioned that these are the parts of the game's narrative he and the English localization team have the most latitude and creative freedom in. The use of story elements in these quests has also increased interest in in-game narrative and lore, particularly in the story elements unrelated to the main narrative of *FFXIV*.

Quest types such as F.A.T.E.s (timed battles that appear in the world and players can work together to complete) and Levequests (individual quests which can be repeated) were initially written with very spartan, functional text. In addition to narrative content, the localization team has also had freedom in designing player titles, small bits of text players can append to their character names and achievements. The localization team was also primarily responsible for creating paratexts, such as a printed Lore book, released in English before being released in Japanese. Finally, the localization team translates non-narrative textual elements such as support desk text and the slides appearing in the streamed Live Letters. While the answers and announcements in the live letter are translated to the supported languages in a follow-up post, as described in the last chapter, it is notable that the slides are only in Japanese and English.

A concrete example of the impact of localization on development involves creating NPC names based on different languages. In an interview, Fox notes:

> NPCs as well are actually a collaboration between all of the localization team members. For example, the Hyur and Miqo'te names for NPCs are all done by the English team, the Elezen names are all conceived by the French team, the Lalafell names come from the Japanese team, and the Roegadyn names are a joint effort between the German and English teams and so, again, you have all these aspects of the game that are being created by not just the Japanese side, but also by the localization side as well (Nelva 2013)

In the case of *FFXIV*, it is worth noting the localization process for the game's other supported languages: French and German. Like the English localization team, French and German teams are based in Tokyo and have similar access to scripts, writers, and other parts of the development team focused on creating narrative and textual elements. The translation process differs in a few ways. First, localization focuses on different parts of the work to translate, which leads to situations where all teams have translated different parts of the script, for example, at different times. Second, all of the localization teams internally communicate in English. While

this is a side effect of English's role as a corporate lingua franca, it has also helped keep all teams in accord. That said, as we will discuss below, the French and German teams take fewer liberties with the localization than the English version regarding including pop culture references and other elements.

These aspects seem to suggest that English has a privileged position among the localizations, both because of its presence as a common language among localizers, and the role of English localization in shaping scripts both by vetting borrowed English in the Japanese script and by shaping certain discursive elements such as quest text. This privileging of English over other localized languages, along with the inherent privilege of developers over players in the virtual world, lends itself to the contact as a model, as the effects of these imbalances have led to player frustrations and protests about how certain aspects of lore are localized and the developers and localizers themselves have to manage community perceptions of the localization as it impacts the virtual contact zone of *FFXIV*.

Community Perception of Localization and Lore

Players have sometimes expressed frustration with the English-localized version of the game. Two complaints, in particular, stand out. One argues that the English language material favors more florid language and word choice at the expense of clarity. Second, is an overuse of pop cultural references in the non-dialogue quest text, as described above. These sorts of complaints are not an uncommon phenomenon among fans and developers, especially with Japanese-developed games. In some cases, players wish to address what they see as a change in the nuance of language that differs from the original intent, with some more extreme fans even feeling that the localization is an out-and-out mistranslation.

Table 1 is an example of such a comparison made by a player and posted on one of the leading English-language paratextual sources of information about the game (agneslynd, 2015). With a disclaimer that the literal translation "is not how I see the translation team should be handling the dialogue," they directly compare a character's dialogue in Japanese, a literal English translation, and localized English.

Table 1:

Comparison of Japanese, Literal English and localized English partial script of the character Midgardsormr for quest "黙約の塔へ"/"The Rising Chorus"

Japanese	Literal English	English Localization

ほう、汝も「超える力」を持つか・・・。幻体ごときでは、敵わぬのも道理よ。	So you too possess the Echo. That is why the phantom form cannot win over you.	By Her gifts has thou earned a moment's reprieve.
然らば、我と引き合わせたのも、ハイデリンの意志か。 問おう・・・汝は何故、ここへ参った？	In that case, it is Hydaelyn's will that we shall converse. Tell me, why are you here?	Speak, mortal, and I shall listen.
[PC speaks to Midgardsormr]		
確かに、北天の星を燃やすは、我が一族の猛き咆哮。進軍を告げる、鬨の声だ。	This is true, the star in the northern skies burns with the valorous roar of my kin. This is the battlecry, calling to advance.	Guided by a star...? Heh heh heh.
一族が向かうは、イシュガルド・・・。畏れを忘れ、罪を犯したヒトの棲処。	Their destination is Ishgard, home of the people who have forgotten fear and have sinned.	My people have heard the song. Ishgard shall burn.
[PC looks agitated]		
これは報復よ。イシュガルドの民は、己が罪から目を背けた。その罪こそが、尽きることない戦の火種。	This is retribution! The people of Ishgard are blind to their sins. Their sins demand battle without end.	Sons must answer for their fathers' misdeeds.
そればかりか、あの者どもは今、再び罪を犯そうとしておる。故	And yet more, they want to sin again. This is why my kin roars.	We do not forget. We do not forgive.

に、我が一族は咆哮を とどろかせたのであろ う。		

Similar to this approach, players will also look at other localizations for comparison, in the case of *FFXIV*, its German and French localization, and the more recent version in Korean and Chinese, to a lesser extent. Players who primarily play in French or German note in community forums such as Reddit that those localizations are drawn directly from the Japanese version. The French and German versions thus use more direct language than the English version. Another result of this is that the English localization tends to include more humor in its writing.

Regarding the second point, the use of pop culture in the English language localization sticks out compared to Japanese or other localizations. One example is a quest where players team up to fight a giant crab named Cancer in all versions of the game. The names of the quest in the main four languages (translated to English) are: "Usurper of Dead Faces: Cancer" (Japanese), "It's Not Lupus" (English), "Challenge: Cancer, the Death Helmet" (French), and "Crab XXL" (German). While all four titles, to varying degrees, describe the nature of the quest, the English version doubles as a reference to the TV show *House M.D*. Players have complained that this use of pop-cultural references broke the immersive experience of being in the virtual world, even though these references are mostly non-diegetic in nature.

A case study that serves as a good lens for looking at the relationship between the contact zone and localization can be seen by community reaction to how the developers localized a pivotal moment within the game. For players to progress and unlock content, they must participate in "Main Scenario Quests," story-focused quests that create a shared narrative of the player character as the "Warrior of Light," questing as they travel around the game world. These quests offer plot and non-player characters forming relations with the player. They also add discursive narrative elements such as interactive objects and side conversations with NPCs not directly related to these quests in order to flesh out the world and lore.

In one such set of quests, an important NPC that players come to know closely (for many who had been playing since the game's release in August of 2013, almost two years) is killed in a dramatic moment. The dialogue surrounding the death of this character, Haurchefant Greystone, as well as his last words, bring the storyline the players are involved into focus. It also served discursive functions of raising the dramatic tension toward the story's climax. Players scrutinized this dialogue to understand the nature of the character's relationship with the player in the quests he had been a part of.

As part of this process, players looked at the different localizations of all the story moments with the character of Haurchefant. They discovered what they felt to be a change in characterization in the English version compared to others. Players noted that the English localization erased overtly romantic and sexual subtexts with the character's appreciation of the Player Character. Players used this discrepancy to argue that this element of the relationship was written out of the English script. Some players went as far as to complain that the English localization changed what was a clear attraction Haurchefant had for the player to just subtext. Table 2 compares quest text looking at the difference in Japanese, Literal English, and Localized English. This particular quest the table draws from became the center of controversy among players regarding what liberties the English localization team was taking in their translation. In addition to the omissions in dialogue from the English localization, certain other changes were made, such as removing reaction shots by the player being taken aback by the more forward remarks and some high-angle shots of Haurchefant gesticulating when he gets excited.

Table 2:

Table of Opening dialogue between Japanese, English, and English localization of the quest "風霜にわかに"/ "When the Cold Sets In" (mechanicalzombie, 2015). Blank cells indicate dialogue was cut from that version.

Japanese	Literal English	English Localization
オルシュファン:おおお、[プレーヤー]ではないか！どうした、さらに強靭になった肉体を、私に披露しにきたのか！？	HAURCHEFANT: Oh, if it isn't [PLAYER]! What is it? Have you come to show me the development of your chiseled body?	
オルシュファン:……違う？………………本当に？	HAURCHEFANT……No? ………………Are you sure?	
オルシュファン: ふむ、ならば仕方あるまい。その顔を見れば、重要な用件だということはわかる。盟友たるこのオルシュファンに、何なりと言うがいい。	HAURCHEFANT: Hmmm, then it can't be helped. Looking at your face, this must be an important matter. Say what you must to your dear ally, Haurchefant.	

オルシュファン:······なるほど、開拓団の件で訪ねてきたのだな。皆まで言うな、それだけわかれば十分だ。	HAURCHEFANT: I see. So, you've come about the expansion of Mor Dhona. You need not say the rest — I am already well aware of the situation.	Haurchefant: The incident with the new frontier hands? No, no, you need not elaborate—I have been following their progress with no small amount of interest.
オルシュファン: ふふ······開拓団······！実に肉躍るたくましい響きではないかしかもお前が参加しているとあらば、なおのこと······イイ！	HAURCHEFANT: Fufu… the expansion of Mor Dhona… truly, my blood dances to that robust sound! And if you are participating in it, there might even be… splendid!	
オルシュファン: モードゥナに一大拠点が築かれれば、かの地の帝国軍も、クルザスへ介入しづらくなるだろう。加えて、お前には個人的な恩もある······	HAURCHEFANT: An adventurer's guild in Mor Dhona will make it difficult for Imperial forces to invade Coerthan soil. Moreover, as I have a personal obligation to help you…	Haurchefant: Brave men and women all… They do our nation a great service. The existence of a fortified outpost in Mor Dhona will do much to dissuade the Empire from trespassing on Coerthan soil.

Of course, as with any discussion, it is worth noting that the playerbase was not unified in that opinion, with some preferring the less overt version of dialogue the English team went with, as it made the character both less creepy and less overtly comedic, particularly in light of the dramatic turn the character makes in the recent expansion. As one user on a forum put it, "I prefer NA Haurchefant TBH. He still totally wanted me to be his pony but he had a better sense of boundaries," (flidget, 2015).

Players went on official forums and other online communities to support this argument. They often created literal fan translations of Japanese, French, and German into English. These fan translations showed that while French and German scripts tend to hew close to the Japanese script, the relative freedom of the English localization team created a divergence in how the relationship between the player and Haurchefant was characterized. Table 3 shows an example of the difference between Japanese, English, and German takes on localization.

Table 3:

Opening Dialogue for "ただ盟友のため" / "A Knight's Calling" / "Um Ishgards willen" in Japanese, English, and German

Japanese	Literal English	Localized English	German	English translation of German
聖騎士シャリベル: まさか力を使ってまで、圧倒されるだなんテ……！	SER CHARIBERT: Even with this power, we were overwhelmed…?!	Charibert: Our power… How can this be!?	Charibert: Verflucht! Wo ist meine Kraft?!	Charibert: Curses! Where is my power?!
ゼフィラン: 退け、もう十分だ！	ZEPHIRIN: That's enough! Fall back!	Zephirin: Fall back!	Zephirin: Zurück! Das reicht!	Zephirin: Back! That's enough!
アイメリク: 父上……！	AYMERIC: Father…!	Aymeric: Father, please!	Aymeric: Vater! Bitte!	Aymeric: Father! Please!
オルシュファン [プレーヤーに」アイメリク卿は、地下監房に囚われておられた。　見てのとおり、救出は成功したぞ！	HAURCHEFANT: [to the player] Ser Aymeric was held captive in the lowest level. As you can see, our rescue attempt was successful!	Haurchefant: [to the player] We were not too late, my friend!	Haurchefant: (zum Spieler) Wir haben dien Großmeister in einer Zelle gefunden!	Haurchefant: [to the player] We found the Grand Master in a cell!

アイメリク：何故なのです、父上ッ！	AYMERIC: Why must you do this, Father?!	Aymeric: Why must you do this, Father!?	Aymeric: Wieso, vater? Wieso tust du das?	Aymeric: Why, Father? Why are you doing this?
アイメリク：宿敵であったニーズヘッグが討たれた今こそ、嘘で塗り固められた歴史を正し、竜との対話を試み、イシュガルドは新たな未来へ進むべきときなのです！	AYMERIC: Ishgard's enemies are fallen, and Nidhogg is defeated! We should forge a new future for Ishgard, one rooted in dialogue with the dragons, not one coated and hardened by lies!	Aymeric: Nidhogg is fallen! There is no need for further deception! Now is the time to renounce the lies which led us down this path—to start anew!	Aymeric: Nidhogg ist tot! Jetzt ist der Zeitpunkt, die eschichte richtgzustellen und das Gespräch mit den Drachen zu suchen! Wir müssen eine neue Ära des Friedens einläuten!	Aymeric:Nidhogg is dead! Now is the time to put history right and to seek a conversation with the dragons! We must herald the start of a new era of peace!

Regarding the German localization, for example, one user noted, "The German team was not shy about the blatant Catholicism references like the English team was. The Archbishop is called the Pope. The Vault is called the Archbasilica, which usually refers to the official seat of the Pope in real life." (whenarrowssing, 2015).

The controversy surrounding this apparent discrepancy in characterization became a matter for the developer to communicate with players about in late 2015. In a special live letter held at the G-STAR 2015 conference in Busan, South Korea, to promote the recently released Korean version of *FFXIV* (*FF14Sokuhō;* Mainai, 2015*;* Ishii, 2015), Yoshida and the development team were asked about the differences between the Japanese and Korean version of Haurchefant. Yoshida responded that this was because the Korean team used the English localization as their base script rather than the Japanese. This change in base scripts is what has led to the discrepancy. Similar to other moments of communication and mortification, Yoshida took the time to apologize for the confusion and to explain how this was being addressed within the localization teams. Yoshida's apology was followed up on the English-speaking side of the playerbase by a forum post by one of the English localization team members, John Crow (2015), who explained:

In the Famitsu interview, [Producer Naoki Yoshida] further clarifies that these changes were made due to LOC team concerns that Haurchefant's behavior might be interpreted as problematic.

However, these changes to Haurchefant's characterization were made without consulting the relevant parties. As a result, the JP and EN/FR/DE playerbases came to perceive Haurchefant differently, culminating with these significantly different cutscenes in patch 2.3

Some fans protested when videos illustrating the differences between the JP and the EN/FR/DE cutscenes were posted online. After internal discussion, it was decided that efforts would be made by the EN, FR, and DE LOC teams to bring Haurchefant's characterization gradually closer to that of the JP Haurchefant throughout future updates. Moreover, the development team enacted a new policy that all cutscenes would be fundamentally the same so that users across all regions would have more similar experiences.

It is worth noting here that Crow follows a similar address to that of Yoshida and other members of the development team in taking responsibility for what was perceived as a breach of player trust and outlining how steps will be taken to fix these errors, as well as show a desire to be reintegrated as equal embers of the contact zone by showing that they understand their role as developers.

Over the months since, we have taken many measures to ensure that similar problems do not arise in the future, and I am proud to say that the LOC team works more closely with the scenario and cutscene teams than ever before... Quite frankly, I am glad to see so many fans willing to voice their opinions, because it shows how invested you are in our story—that you care as much as we do. However, I do hope that everyone understands that these decisions are not made lightly—that we carefully consider the consequences of our actions.

This case study illustrates some of the issues and concerns players have towards localization in *FFXIV*. Language plays a significant role in creating a shared understanding of the larger contact zone. Players have a deep investment in the lore of virtual worlds, both in the story's content and how the story is told. Lore thus plays a prominent role in how players become invested in the contact zone, and issues of language and localization can become sticking points for the communication between players and the developer as discrepancies in localization cause confusion between players who opt for different versions. Players will also look to see differences between different localizations, especially if they notice significant discrepancies between versions. As both interlocutor between players and as holders of power over the virtual world, the developer must decide how to address these issues both with players and internally as

an organization. Players may also take steps to communicate and localize in ways the developers cannot through platforms outside of the game itself, such as forums, subreddits, or discord servers.

Conclusion

The original conception of the contact zone was founded on a context of colonization that, for good or ill, necessitates several systems to translate and communicate across its members in various languages. The messy, material exchange of cultures results from systems of power, trade, language, and social connections and how people within these contact zones interact with them. Virtual contact zones, such as the one created for players of *Final Fantasy XIV*, are spaces where players make sense of the world through similarly fluid emergent behavior, given the affordances of the systems. One such affordance, localization acts as the main mechanism through which the linguistic elements of the virtual world, such as messages by the developer, client languages and user interfaces, and most importantly, lore and storytelling, are communicated to players. In this way, localization is a key process for instantiating the virtual contact zone, creating a shared understanding among players. That said, when decisions made by the developer concerning localization have not always been passively accepted, similar to the patterns of communication by the developer in other contexts, there has been a willingness to make changes and remain in open communication with the playerbase.

Future research in the virtual worlds can benefit from looking at how localization creates a shared sense of place within the virtual contact zone. In particular, looking deeply at the interactions between payers from different languages in terms of direct communication, hearsay and secondhand ideas of what players from certain countries or regions are like, and even gameplay styles would help to add further nuance to how online games function as virtual contact zones. What kinds of contestation exist between players? What kinds of commonalities do lore and narrative create? How do these begin to shape power dynamics between the playerbase and developers? These questions are pertinent for further understanding online games and virtual world development.

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