

The Function of Personal Pronouns in French Gameplay Commentary

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Abstract

In recent years, “Let’s Play” videos, where game players show their own gameplay in real time or as a video recording, have emerged as a cultural and social practice derived from video games, and many such videos can be found on video streaming sites such as YouTube and Twitch. Let’s Play videos not only consist of the viewer’s appreciation of gameplay but also contain a linguistic component: the discourse spoken to the viewers. In this “gameplay commentary” discourse, the gameplayer/gameplay commentator uses linguistic means to bridge the physical gap with the viewers and make them feel as if they are participating in the gameplay too. Therefore, in this paper, I focus on the use of language in gameplay commentary to clarify from a linguistic perspective how gameplayers and gameplay commentators express and transmit to the viewers the events and their actions and emotions during gameplay. Specifically, I observe the use of the French first-person pronouns *je* (Eng: I) and *nous* (Eng: we) and the indefinite pronoun *on* (Eng: one/man) by a native French speaker in his videos posted on YouTube. I then discuss how the narrator shares his own experiences and emotions during gameplay with his viewers in a linguistically inclusive way through the semantic function of each subject-personal expression.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to reveal linguistically how commentators (or gameplayers) express and convey events, actions, and emotions during gameplay to the audience in “Let’s Play” videos, a cultural and social practice surrounding video games. Specifically, I focus on the use of the French first-person pronouns *je* (Eng: I) and *nous* (Eng: we) and the indefinite pronoun *on* (Eng: one/man) in Let’s Play videos uploaded by native French speakers on YouTube.

Since arcade games¹ established video games² as a mass culture in the 1970s (Matsunaga 2018, 64), video games have evolved greatly, diversifying in type, genre, and medium. Nowadays, many people play them on an everyday basis all over the world, including France, which is one of the largest producers and consumers of video games in Europe (Bonnaire & Phan 2017, 608).

Moreover, changes related to our transition into an advanced information society have led to the creation of

cultural and social practices derived from video games, termed “détournement” (Barnabé 2019a)³. The “Let’s Play” video is just one such activity, referring to the act or activity of gameplayers streaming their own gameplay in real time or as a video recording via video sharing sites such as YouTube and Twitch.⁴ The distributed Let’s Play videos are viewed by people all over the world and assessed in the comments. Thus, as Namba (2020, 112) states, “games have become [a form of] media content that is not only played, but also shown and viewed to be played.” While let’s players’ “individualized performances of video game player personalities” and their “various modes of playing” discussed by Nguyen (2016) can be important aspects to be dealt with in order to grasp what viewers watch and evaluate in Let’s Play videos, this paper will focus instead on the following question: how in Let’s Play videos does the speaker, that is, the commentator (or gameplayer), show the viewers their gameplay? According to Namba (2020, 114), viewers of video gameplay have been characterized as “not participating in gameplay in the standard way” and

¹ Arcade games are defined as “pinball or video games played with coins” (Matsumura (Ed.) 1995, 1). They are mainly found in game centers.

² The term “video game” in this article refers to “a device that projects a game on a display through a computer to be played.” For a detailed definition of video games, see the discussion by Matsunaga (2018).

³ Barnabé (2019a) uses this term to refer to “creative remix practices using video games as materials or as matrices to produce derivative works” (ibid, 1).

⁴ A live-streaming site that specializes primarily in digital games. <https://www.twitch.tv>



as “not being able to engage in the experience of playing the game as a player does in the standard way.”⁵ This means that viewers essentially cannot experience the same events and actions as those experienced by gamers during Let’s Play videos. The reason for the popularity of Let’s Play videos despite these limitations is the way in which the commentator or gamer takes measures to bridge the gap between themselves and their audience and give them a sense of being part of the gameplay. It is likely that these measures involve not only visual information, such as video game images and facial expressions of the gamers, but also the content of their speech and the way they transmit it. For example, it has been noted that in the live broadcast of a football game, the announcer or commentator describes and communicates the events in front of him or her, always keeping in mind the information sought by the audience and selecting the cognitive resources to be verbalized (Tatara 2014, 2017). While it is true that there are some differences between live sports broadcasts and Let’s Play videos, it is clear that what and how the speaker verbalizes in the discourse of “running commentary” through the media plays an important role in the viewer’s understanding of a situation or event.

Based on the above discussion, this paper analyzes the use of language by speakers in Let’s Play videos. First, in Section 2, I discuss the characteristics of Let’s Play videos as a cultural and social practice and the differences between the commentary in Let’s Play videos and the discourse traditionally referred to as running commentary. In Section 3, I’ll clarify the subject-personal expressions that are key to the analysis of the French Let’s Play videos. After adding information concerning the methods for selecting and acquiring the videos analyzed, as well as on the profile of the speaker in Section 4, the actual speech observed in the videos will be analyzed and discussed in Section 5.

2. Gameplay Commentary as a Cultural and Social Practice

2.1 Cultural and Social Aspects of Let’s Play

⁵ However, Namba (2020, 114) states that play appreciators “may be said to be involved in gameplay in a non-standard, indirect way” and points to the possibility that viewers who do not play the game may influence gameplay through speech and other means. The viewer’s influence on the gameplay in Let’s Play videos will be discussed in detail in 2.2.

Videos

Treatment of video games as an established culture is already commonplace in the field of video game studies. Discussing the characteristics of video games from an aesthetic point of view, Matsunaga (2018) sees video games as a certain art form and goes on to say that “playing video games is one of the central phenomena of contemporary culture in developed countries” (ibid, 19). Similarly, Namba (2020, 112) states that “video game play appreciation,” which is the act of viewing others’ gameplay and reactions to the game, has already become a common culture. Thus, it seems reasonable to consider Let’s Play videos part of the established culture of video games.

However, “video game play appreciation” is not the only element that constitutes Let’s Play videos. Analyzing video game streams on Twitch, Anderson (2017) states that while game viewership is at the core of the phenomenon of enjoying watching other people’s gameplay, “the other side of the social interaction, namely the gamer or streamer, cannot be ignored” (“E-sports and Game Audiences” section). Therefore, answering the question of “what and how the speaker speaks in Let’s Play videos,” that is, “discourse as gameplay commentary,” is also an important element. (“Gameplay commentary”⁶ is hereafter referred to as discourse in Let’s Play videos.) Interestingly, this gameplay commentary seems to have an interactive nature in that it requires certain considerations about how viewers watch gameplay and what kind of information they need. This is easily seen when observing live sports broadcasts; for example, in live football broadcasts, announcers and commentators have been found to use language that takes into account the information sought by viewers (Tatara 2014, 2017). In addition, live sports broadcasts “strongly reflect the values and communication norms of each language culture” (Tatara 2017, 81). This means that the discourse of running commentary is an extremely social language practice. Similarly, in the field of gameplay commentary, the commentator needs to take measures to construct social interactions with the viewers in a way that

⁶ Obviously, despite the term “gameplay commentary”, it is likely that in Let’s Play videos speakers not only comment on the video game they are playing or their gameplay, but also talk about topics which have no connection to either of them. (e.g., the speaker’s private daily life, etc.) It will be necessary to investigate the latter type of discourse in Let’s Play videos in the future, since talk not related to video games or gameplay could also be key to the construction of the social interaction between the let’s player and the viewers.

interests them in the gameplay. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that Let's Play videos have some characteristics that make them different from live sports broadcasts. In order to explain these differences, it is first necessary to elucidate the specific characteristics of gameplay commentary.

2.2 Characteristics of Gameplay Commentary

Referring to Anderson (2017) and Namba (2020), who discuss video game streams, it can be seen that at least the following basic elements are necessary for gameplay commentary.

- (i) Gameplayer
- (ii) Gameplay commentator (video streamer)
- (iii) Viewer (appreciator)
- (iv) Medium for streaming and viewing of gameplay

First, the actual gameplay that is the object of commentary does not exist without the subject of the gameplay action, and therefore (i) gameplayers are an indispensable element of gameplay commentary. Next, (ii) the gameplay commentator⁶ is the person who conveys or explains the gameplay to viewers, and they play the same role as the announcer or commentator in a live sports broadcast. Additionally, because gameplay commentary consists of the act of showing gameplay to viewers, (iii) the viewer⁷ is also an essential component of this activity. Finally, in (iv), the medium for streaming and viewing gameplay refers mainly to video streaming sites such as Twitch and YouTube, however it may also refer to the objects and locations that enable viewing and distribution of gameplay, including special equipment (e.g., microphones and video cameras) as well as devices used by viewers (e.g., PCs and smart phones) and internet facilities.

Having reviewed the basic components of gameplay commentary, I will describe its unique characteristics and how it differs from conventional running commentary. The first characteristic is that the roles of gameplayer and gameplay commentator are often enacted simultaneously by the same person. In other words, it is possible for the individuals playing the video game to report on the progress

of their gameplay to the viewers. The videos analyzed in this paper also belong to this type. This simultaneity in gameplay commentary is extremely distinctive when compared to ordinary running commentary. For example, in a live football game, players cannot report on the game as it is being played during the game. While it is possible for a player to commentate on his own play while reviewing the recorded video after his game, of course this does not mean that the play and the commentary are happening at the same time.

Another characteristic of gameplay commentary is that, as Namba (2020) noted, there are cases in which interaction is possible between the commentator/player and viewer. For example, in real-time Let's Play videos, the comment function of sites allows viewers to interact with the commentators and the gameplayers as the action unfolds, which can affect the gameplay and the gameplay commentary itself. In live broadcasts of sports, however, it is almost impossible for the viewers to reach out to the players participating in the game via television. Thus, the gameplay commentary is different from conventional running commentary in terms of its potential for interaction with the viewers.

As described above, gameplay commentary differs in a number of ways from the conventional forms of running commentary discourse, and in that sense, it is quite a unique form of social and cultural practice. At the same time, however, there are some similarities in terms of the need for commentators/gameplayers to transmit information in a way that takes viewers into consideration. Moreover, verbalization by commentators or gameplayers plays an important role in sharing events, actions, and emotions during gameplay with viewers. In the next section, I focus in particular on the subject-personal pronouns used by the commentator/gameplayer in gameplay commentary and discuss why it is necessary to deal with the subject-personal pronouns they use for the analysis of this paper.

3. Subject-Personal Pronouns in French

3.1 Verbalized Subjects and Differences in Comprehending the Event

⁶ While Anderson (2017) adopts the terms "streamer" and "announcer" to describe this role likely due to the fact that gameplay videos are generally distributed online by the person commentating, this paper prefers the term "gameplay commentator" for its focus on the linguistic act of commentating.

⁷ Although the term "play appreciator" is used in Namba (2020), this paper uses the term viewer to mean "the subject who watches the gameplay."

When we are listeners in a narrative or conversation, we understand the events under discussion and the speaker's actions and emotions through the information the speaker verbalizes and the way he or she does it. Comparing examples (1) and (2), most native Japanese speakers will assume that the subject of the act of "walking to the station" in (1) is a male. In contrast, in (2), the gender of the subject cannot be determined from the spoken information alone, and even if the speakers of (1) and (2) are the same male, (1) sounds like an utterance to an intimate listener, such as a friend, while (2) sounds like an utterance in a more formal situation. This is because first-person pronouns in Japanese may be chosen according to the gender of the speaker, the situation at the time of speech, and the relationship between the speaker and the listener. Interestingly, when the two sentences are translated into English, they both refer to the exact same situation: "I, the action subject, walked toward the station." This is because the number of possible subject-personal pronouns, as well as their functions, differ between Japanese and English.

- (1) Ore wa eki ni aruite itta.
{I / TOP / station / to / walk / go-PAST}⁸
- (2) Watashi wa eki ni aruite itta.
{I / TOP / station / to / walk / go-PAST}
- (3) I walked to the station.

As is clear from the comparison between the Japanese and English examples, the way in which the speaker verbalizes the subject of a situation, specifically which personal pronoun is used as the subject, changes the listener's understanding and interpretation of the situation. Viewed another way, the speaker can influence the listener's understanding of a particular situation through the choice of the personal pronoun for the subject. Given this, personal pronouns used in the subject play an extremely important role in speech that describes certain events, actions, and emotions, and this is also true of the discourse of gameplay commentary. The viewers of a gameplay commentary take into account not only the visual information on the screen, but also the subject-personal pronouns used by the gamers and commentators in order to understand the events, actions, and emotions during gameplay.

3.2 Personal Pronouns in French

Now I present a brief explanation of the subject-personal pronouns in French (see Table 1).

Table 1. Subject-personal pronouns in French*

	singular	plural
1 st person	je **j' (I)	nous (we)
2 nd person	tu ***vous (you)	vous (you)
3 rd person	il (he) / elle (she)	ils / elles (they)

* the corresponding personal pronouns in English are in parentheses.

** a vowel or mute *h* is preceded by *j'*.

*** *tu* is used for the second-person singular familiar and *vous* for the honorific.

As Table 1 shows, subject-personal pronouns in French are more subdivided than in English. In English, *you* is used for both the second-person singular and plural, whereas in French they are distinguished by *tu* and *vous*. In addition, the third-person plural uses *ils* for men and *elles* for women in French, whereas in English *they* is used for both. Conversely, a comparison of subject-personal pronouns between Japanese and French shows that there are more first-person singular forms in Japanese than in French, with *watashi*, *boku*, *ore*... indicating the first-person singular and *anata*, *kimi*, *omae*... indicating the second person.

I should also add that there is an indefinite pronoun *on* in French, which has properties similar to those of the subject-personal pronouns. This *on* grammatically requires the same conjugation for predicate verbs as the third person singular (*il/elle*); however, the subject referent is ambiguous and diverse. According to Oda (2016), it not only means "people" or "someone," but is also used as a first-, second-, and third-person substitute, as well as a colloquial variant of the first-person plural subject *nous*.

Although a complete treatment of the above-mentioned personal pronouns is necessary in analyzing French discourse, for reasons of space, this paper will focus mainly on the first-person singular subject *je*, the first-person plural subject *nous*, and the indefinite pronoun *on*. *Je* and *nous* are personal pronouns that include a first-person perspective and may be expected to be used more frequently by gamers/gameplay commentators to describe their own gameplay. *On* is also included in the

⁸ TOP: topic marker. PAST: past tense.

present analysis because it is sometimes used as a substitute for *je* or *nous* depending on the context.

Before moving on to analysis and discussion, I will review the methodology used in the selection and acquisition of the videos dealt with in this paper and the profile of the speaker.

4. Methodology – Selection and Acquisition of the Video Data

The video data for this study was provided by the gameplay commentator who originally recorded the videos to be distributed on YouTube. This method circumvents the “observer’s paradox”⁹ and enables the analysis of gameplay commentary discourse in spontaneous speech without interference.

The video data was provided by Erinku¹⁰, a French YouTuber, who is also the gamer/player/commentator in the videos. He is a 22-year-old male and friend of the author whose native language is French and who currently resides in Arles in the south of France. Selection of the author’s friend as a research subject¹¹ was appropriate in terms of research ethics. Although the videos are publicly available on the Internet, the purpose and method of the study were explained to the gamer/player in order to obtain consent. The prior relationship between the researcher and the gamer/player also facilitated follow-up interviews to clarify parts of the analyzed discourse, to accurately comprehend the speaker’s speech and behavioral intentions, and to confirm the speaker’s language awareness.

Erinku specializes in *The Legend of Zelda* series produced by Nintendo and has over 400 Let’s Play videos on YouTube that would require a considerable amount of time to analyze comprehensively. Therefore, in the present article I focus on the videos for *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D*¹², hereinafter referred to as OoT3D (Table 2). The reason for this choice is, firstly that this set of videos was filmed in April 2020, and as such functions

as an appropriate example of the tendencies of relatively recent gameplay commentary by French native speakers. In addition, Let’s Play videos of OoT3D are uploaded by many gamers from different linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds. This therefore will enable a comparative study of gameplay commentary according to the speakers’ profiles such as nationality, language, gender and so on in future research. The five videos listed in Table 2 were released on five consecutive days, but were actually filmed on the same day, and therefore it is possible through the observation of these selected videos to perceive chronologically homogeneous and consistent speech and behavior.

Table 2. Information on the analyzed videos

Video Title	Time	Delivery date
#01 - <i>La Malédiction de l’Arbre Mojo</i>	31 m 35 s	2020/4/17
#02 - <i>Allons voir la Princesse</i>	30 m 55 s	2020/4/18
#03 - <i>Le Village Cocorico</i>	36 m 17 s	2020/4/19
#04 - <i>La Caverne Dodongo</i>	39 m 44 s	2020/4/20
#05 - <i>Grandes Fées et annexes</i>	33 m 51 s	2020/4/21

Figure 1 below shows the arrangement of the following visual elements in Erinku’s Let’s Play videos on YouTube: (A) the gamer/player/commentator, (B) the game’s item mode screen, (C) the main images of gameplay, (D) the main character (Link) and (E) the map of the dungeon. Via this layout of the screen, the video viewers see Erinku playing the game as a gamer/player and commenting on the events in the game and his own gameplay as a commentator. As previously mentioned, the simultaneity of these two roles is a typical characteristic of gameplay commentary. Therefore, the selection of Erinku’s videos as target data to be analyzed in this paper is appropriate, as it permits the observation of how a gamer/player’s or commentator’s style of speech, especially his use of subject-personal pronouns (*je/nous/on*), is related

⁹ This is the idea that the presence of an observer may interfere with or otherwise influence the informant’s spontaneous speech.

¹⁰ Although his videos are available on YouTube, in consideration of his wishes, the URL of his channel is not provided here; only the name of the channel is noted.

¹¹ Of course, it must be acknowledged that selection of a friend of the researcher as a research subject may have led to some bias in the analysis by the researcher. In the present paper, only Let’s Play videos whose analysis was consented to were dealt with due to research ethics considerations, although in future studies, analysis of a wider array of data including those not subject to the bias of friendship will be necessary.

¹² An action-adventure game in which the hero Link uses a variety of tools and items to solve dungeon mysteries, fight powerful enemies, and advance his adventures. Originally sold in 1998 for the Nintendo 64, the game was re-released in 2011 in a Nintendo 3DS version (cf. <https://www.nintendo.co.jp/3ds/aej/#/>).

to the two roles that he plays and constantly switches between throughout the analyzed videos, and an analysis based on this observation will reveal how the use of these subject-personal expressions allows him to share with the viewers the events, actions, and emotions that he experiences during gameplay.

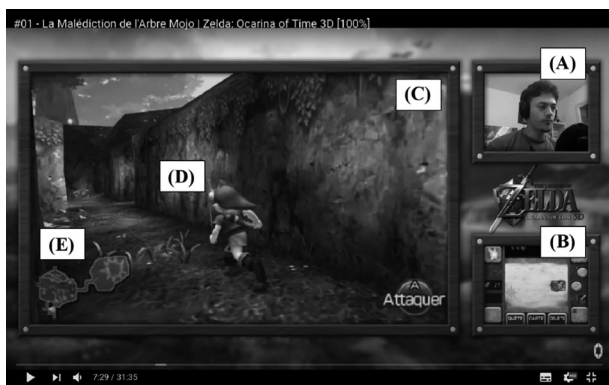


Figure 1. Scene from Erinku's Let's Play video

5. Analysis and Discussion

In this section, I analyze how Erinku expresses his emotions, his actions, and the events that unfold in the game as a gameplayer and commentator, with a focus on his use of the first-person subject pronouns *je/nous* and the indefinite pronoun *on*. The examples listed below are actual utterances observed in Erinku's videos, with the number and time of the video in which the utterance occurred in parentheses. Each example is accompanied by a corresponding English translation.

5.1 Use of the First-person Singular Subject Pronoun *je*

The fact that Erinku combines the roles of both gameplayer and commentator means that when he refers to himself as subject, the referent of *je* may be the gameplayer or the commentator.

First, I analyze *je* representing "Erinku as a gameplay commentator." (4) is an utterance from a scene in which Erinku is explaining to the viewers how often he delivers his Let's Play videos. The act of "shooting" or "making a lot of videos" in this utterance is clearly not a gameplay action or an action by a game character, but rather refers to the process by which a gameplay commentator produces a video. Thus, *je* (*j'*) here represents Erinku as a commentator. (5) is an utterance from his greeting to the viewers at the beginning of the video in which Erinku uses the second-person plural pronoun *vous* to direct the viewers. Here, *je*

(*j'*), who is positioned vis-à-vis *vous*, can reasonably be thought of as the subject of the gameplay commentary. Thus, in utterances referring to the production and streaming of gameplay videos, or in utterances that foreground the relationship of commentator-viewer, *je* is used to refer to Erinku as the gameplay commentator.

- (4) car là j'ai un peu de temps pour tourner. donc je vais faire beaucoup de vidéos d'avance. (#01, 11 m 43 s)
'because now I have a bit of time to shoot, so I'm going to make a lot of videos in advance.'
- (5) bonjour à toutes à tous, c'est Erinku, bienvenue dans ce nouvel épisode de Zelda Ocarina of Time 3D, j'espère que vous allez bien. (#03, 00 m 08 s)
'Hello everyone, this is Erinku, welcome to this new episode of Zelda Ocarina of Time 3D, I hope you're all doing well.'

Additionally, gameplay commentators are expected to provide explanations and their opinion on the video game being played and gameplay, similar to a commentator on a live sports broadcast. In (6), Erinku refers to *ça* 'it (= the image of a gameplay video)' and in (7), Erinku refers to *il* 'he (= the main illustrator)' using thinking verbs such as *penser* 'to think' and *croire* 'to think (or to believe)'. Thus, in the act of expressing overarching thoughts and opinions about the game being played and Let's Play videos, in a kind of "meta-game/gameplay speech," *je* refers to Erinku as gameplay commentator.

- (6) mais je pense que ça reste totalement regardable. (#01, 05 m 14 s)
'but I think it's still totally watchable.'
- (7) euh j'crois- j'crois qu'il s'est- qu'il s'est chargé de toutes les illustrations du jeu. (#04, 05 m 59 s)
'uh I think- I think he- that he took care of all the game illustrations.'

On the other hand, in what situations does *je* indicating "Erinku as a gameplayer" appear? A typical example of such speech is in a situation that first refers to the action of controlling a video game. (8) is an utterance from a situation in which Erinku pushed the wrong controller button, and *je* (*j'*) here refers to Erinku as a gameplayer.

- (8) ah mince, ah j'ai- j'ai appuyé sur le mauvais R. (#02, 05 m 09 s)
'oh shoot, oh I- I pressed the wrong R.'

Another example of an utterance in which *je* refers to Erinku as a gameplayer is one that represents the actions and situations of the game character. In (9), the utterance describes a scene in which the main character, Link, catches a fairy, a recovery item, with a corked bottle, although the subject of this action is *je* (*j'*). On the surface, it seems that the actor carrying out the action of “catching a fairy” is Link. However, use of the subject *je* indicates Erinku as the main agent controlling this character, in other words as the gameplayer. A certain number of tokens of this type of speech, in which the actions of the game characters are represented by *je*, was found in the video data covered by this study. Moreover, as in (10), some speech is made by Erinku as if he were the game character he controls, although it is practically impossible for a real gameplayer to self-identify with the *kokiri*, a fictional ethnic group. Utterances similar to (10) frequently appear in moments when Link interacts with other characters or fights against enemies in the game. Due to the fact that in OoT3D, Link does not speak (except for choices in the dialogue and interjections such as a shout), his concrete and personal thoughts and emotions on the events within the game often remain unclear. Given this, it is likely that in (10) Erinku uses *je* to supplement the game with his own speech to make it sound as if Link himself was saying it, and that this functions as an instance of role-play, creating a comedic performance for the viewers. This playful speech, which can be considered one of the actions constituting “détournement by *play*¹³” (Barnabé 2019b), enables the gameplayer to add an extra element of imagination and interpretation to new events and stories which are verbally absent in the original gameplay of OoT3D. As a result, viewers are also encouraged to let their imagination and interpretation run free.

(9) yes je l'ai eu, j'ai eu la fée, je l'ai attrapé dans le flacon, yes. (#04, 32 m 31 s)

‘yes I got it, I got the fairy, I caught it in the bottle, yes.’

(10) Navi, est-ce que tu crois que je sais pas plonger, je suis un kokiri de qualité quand même. (#01, 19 m 02 s)

‘Navi, do you think I don't know how to dive, I'm a quality kokiri all right.’

So far, I have argued that the person indicated by *je* may be either the gameplay commentator or the gameplayer. However, this distinction is not always clear. For example, in an utterance such as (11), which expresses the subject's intention or motivation, it is not obvious whether *je* refers to the gameplay commentator or the gameplayer. Therefore, it is more reasonable to assume that the referent of *je* is not determined in a binary fashion by the game commentator or the gameplayer, but rather is a matter of the degree to which it is foregrounded or backgrounded.

(11) moi je veux faire le stand de tir. (#02, 13 m 26 s)

‘I want to do the shooting stand.’

5.2 Use of the First-Person Plural Subject Pronoun *Nous*

In this section, the use of the first-person plural subject pronoun *nous* will be discussed. There are few examples of the use of *nous* in the videos analyzed in this study due to the fact that *nous* tends to be used in formal, public speech situations and standard written language (cf. van Compernelle 2008). Considering that gameplay commentary is a verbal and informal linguistic act, the fact that *nous* is used fairly rarely is only to be expected. Nevertheless, there are some interesting points revealed when examining the instances of *nous* that do appear.

(12) la nuit est toujours là dans la plaine d'Hyrule, nous rencontrons que des Sakkoss. (#02, 11 m 02 s)

‘the night is still there in the Hyrule Field, we meet only Stalchildren.’

(12) is said in a situation where Link is in a place called “Hyrule Field.” In reality, only game characters are able to meet the fictional creature “Stalchild” in the game's fictional land. In addition, in terms of the gameplayer's control of that game character, the “indirect” subject of the

¹³ According to Barnabé (2019b), “détournement by *play* (détournement par le *play*)”, which does not involve any modifications to the original game, concerns “the way of playing it [=the game], the possibilities of interpretation (in the theatrical meaning of the term) that it [=the game] allows” (ibid, 89). Let's Play videos can be categorized as this type of détournement.

“meeting Stalchildren on the Hyrule Field” is Erinku as the gameplayer. However, Erinku expresses the subject of this sentence not with the first-person singular pronoun *je*, but with its plural *nous*. According to him, the *nous* includes not only gameplayers, but also the viewers. In other words, the viewers, who are not technically able to participate in the gameplay, are incorporated into *nous* as provisional subjects of the gameplay. Aoki (1989), who conducted a contrastive study of pronoun expressions for each person in French and Japanese, points out that *nous* is used in speeches and lectures to share knowledge between the speaker and the audience.

(13) “Nous allons à présent examiner...” (Aoki 1989, 41)
 ‘We are now going to examine...’

Following this point, it can be seen that the use of *nous* in (12) is not a particularly unusual phenomenon. It is likely that Erinku uses *nous* in this scene in order to share the events in the gameplay with his viewers. This means that the viewer is positioned by *nous* on the side of the gameplayer and treated as a linguistically included though not actively involved participant in the actions and events within the gameplay. This is a possible linguistic solution to bridge the physical gap between the commentator and his viewers in gameplay commentary. As mentioned above, however, there are few examples of the use of *nous* in the videos analyzed in this study, and the number of utterances such as (12) in which *je* is replaced by *nous* is also small. Instead, its colloquial variant, the indefinite pronoun *on*, is more frequently observed than *nous*. This is because *on* is more compatible with the verbal and informal language activity constituted by gameplay commentary.

5.3 The Indefinite Pronoun *on* as a Substitute for *Nous*

Here, I analyze utterance (14) in which the indefinite pronoun *on* is used as the subject instead of *nous*.

(14) et donc bien évidemment on a reçu la pierre pour nos efforts. (#01, 28 m 47 s)
 ‘and so obviously we got the stone for our efforts.’

(14) is uttered in the scene in which Link is awarded *l’éméraude Kokiri* ‘Kokiri’s Emerald’ by a game character named *Arbre Mojo* ‘Great Deku Tree’ after defeating an enemy boss and conquering a dungeon. The utterance of

pour nos efforts ‘for our efforts’ suggests that *on* in (14) is used as a variant of *nous* ‘we’. However, Kokiri’s Emerald is a fictional item in the game, and the only actor who can get this stone is the game character, and by proxy its indirect actor, the gameplayer. Therefore, logically, the subject of “getting the stone” should be expressed by the first-person singular subject *je*. In addition, in (14) efforts made to defeat the boss and conquer the dungeon belong to a single game character or gameplayer, but are referred to in the plural person, “we,” by the possessive personal pronoun *nos* ‘our’. Namely, as observed in 5.2, Erinku incorporates the viewers into the subject of “getting Kokiri’s Emerald” by making *on* the subject in (14). In (15), Erinku similarly adds the viewers to the “owner of the sword” by uttering *notre épée* ‘our sword’ and making *on* subject in place of *nous*.

(15) on a notre épée sublime, damn. (#01, 07m26s)
 ‘we’ve got our superb sword, damn.’

Many utterances such as (14) and (15), where the subject of the verb for an action by a single game character or the gameplayer is expressed by the indefinite pronoun *on*, were found within the observed videos. Thus, in the next section, I would like to discuss another reason why *on* is actively used instead of *nous* as a means of introducing the viewers to gameplay by considering the difference in semantic function between *nous* and *on* and the effects produced by using *on* instead of *je*.

5.4 “Dilution of the Action Subject”

Oda (2016), who considers the semantic function of the French indefinite pronoun *on*, sees the basic semantic value of *on* as a “dilution of the action subject” (ibid, 14). According to Oda’s discussion, when *on* is used, the action subject of the predicate is diluted and backgrounded, while the focus is put on the action or event that the predicate represents. In addition, due to its nature as a personal pronoun, *nous* objectively describes the action or event to which the utterance refers to from the outside, whereas *on* describes the action or event that the utterance represents by placing the speaker inside the action or event (Oda 2016, 30). To simplify, in an utterance with *nous* as the subject, the action or event to which the sentence refers is objectively transmitted to the viewers while the subject remains conscious of its existence. On the other hand, in cases where *on* is the subject, the subject of the action or

event that the sentence represents is no longer conscious, and the action or event is conveyed to the viewers in a focused state. In addition to the formal/informal nature of the contexts in which they are used, *nous* and *on* differ in how actions and events are perceived, and this difference is precisely one of the reasons why gameplay commentators actively use *on* when verbalizing their gameplay to the audience. Just as in the case of live sports broadcasts, gameplay commentary is required to convey the events that occur during gameplay, as well as the actions and emotions of the gameplayers, in a realistic way to those who do not take part in or share them. While *nous* allows for the inclusion of viewers on the subject side of the gameplay at the level of the person's grammatical category, the subject remains conscious of his or her existence and the speech is only an objective narrative. Contrariwise, the use of *on*, which can foreground actions and events, allows gameplay commentators (gameplayers) to retire their presence into the background and, conversely, bring the viewers into the focused in-game experiences and sensations. In (16), the speaker has succeeded in the mini-game and obtained the item he was aiming for, but by using *on*, foregrounds the situation of "obtaining the item", draws the viewers into the scene, and shares the emotion of joy with them in a realistic manner.

(16) oh yes, yes, on l'a eu, on l'a eu, on l'a eu, on l'a eu
mesdames messieurs, quel plaisir. (#05, 07 m 03s)
'oh yes, yes, we got it, we got it, we got it, we got it
ladies and gentlemen, what a treat.'

In this way, in French gameplay commentary, the actions and emotions of the gameplayers and the events that unfold are conveyed to the viewers by substituting *je/nous* and *on* in order to share the experience of the gameplay with them.

6. Summary and Future Research

This paper analyzed gameplay commentary as a cultural and social practice derived from video games, focusing on the subject-personal pronouns *je/nous* and the indefinite pronoun *on* used by French native speakers. The results show first that the first-person singular subject *je* is used to refer to both the gameplay commentator and gameplayer, and that *je* referring to gameplayers in particular is used as an indirect subject of the actions and speech by fictional characters in the game. Furthermore,

this use of *je* enables the commentator (gameplayer) to perform a playful role-play as a game character via linguistic resources and to use his imagination to reinterpret and derive new meanings from the original world of OoT3D. Second, by setting the first-person plural subject *nous* as the subject of a sentence that might otherwise be expressed by *je*, the speech linguistically includes the viewers as participants in the actions and events within gameplay, though they are not actively involved in the actual game. Third, in some utterances the use of *on*, the colloquial variant indefinite pronoun of *nous*, in place of *je* dilutes and backgrounds the gameplayer and highlights the actions and events that the utterance represents. With *on* as the subject, the actions and events are foregrounded without awareness of the subject of the gameplay, allowing the commentator (gameplayer) to share the experiences and sensations gained in the gameplay with the viewers as if they were positioned in the gameplay themselves. To summarize, the gameplay commentator/gameplayer shares his own experiences and emotions during gameplay with his viewers in a linguistically inclusive way through the semantic function of each subject-personal expression.

Incidentally, the above discussion on the use of *je/nous/on* observed in Erinku's videos brings about an interesting but complex question: is there a particular relationship between the use of these subject-personal expressions and the events or topics the let's player is talking about? For instance, observation of the above examples (cf. (14)(15)(16)) may suggest that *on* is used in positive events (e.g., when Link obtained an item). Further analysis is needed, however, regarding negative gameplay situations. In (17), which describes a situation in which Link (the gameplayer) was trying to cross over to the other side of the lava by using a pillar that moves up and down and had to wait until the pillar rose to a sufficient height due to inopportune timing, *on* is used as the subject. Thus, simply describing the positivity/negativity of an event or action represented by the utterance is not enough to adequately identify the contexts in which a particular personal pronoun is apt to be used. Given this, extending beyond the semantic function of each personal pronoun described in this paper, more concrete observation and analysis of speech contexts that warrant certain pronouns' uses within a larger body of Let's Play videos will need to be conducted in order to quantitatively and qualitatively reveal which personal pronouns are most likely to be employed in what events in gameplay, and in what topics talked about by gameplay commentators/gameplayers.

(17)bon malheureusement on va devoir attendre notre tour cette fois-ci, car on- bah on est arrivés à un mauvais moment, hein. (#04, 13m20s)
 ‘well unfortunately we’re going to have to wait for our turn this time, because we- huh we arrived at a bad moment, right’

Furthermore, in addition to the subject-personal pronouns I have focused on in this study, it is necessary to confirm whether there are other linguistic expressions on the speaker’s side that enable viewers to simulate gameplay experiences. Finally, there is merit in contributing to the body of work already begun by cross-linguistic studies of live sports broadcasts (cf. Tataro 2014, 2017) by examining the differences and similarities in linguistic usage between different languages, societies and cultures in the field of gameplay commentary. Because Let’s Play videos of OoT3D are created by many streamers with linguistically and socio-culturally diverse profiles, it would be desirable and interesting to introduce into future research the perspective of cultural contextualization and to conduct comparative research that includes Let’s Play videos practiced in different languages (e.g., Japanese, English).

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