ijo musi : Game Design Document

A game about learning toki pona through the exploration of mysterious ruins.

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1 Formal Aspects

- Type: video game (3D).

- Tools used: Godot, Blender, possibly Beepbox.

- End product: browser game if stable enough (unlikely). Executable otherwise.

- Platforms: PC.

- Needed hardware: PC and usual devices (monitor, mouse, keyboard, sound system).

- Available languages: toki pona only (with possibly some very occasional english).

- Genre: exploration, narrative, language learning, mystery, puzzle.

- Number of players: 1.

- Duration of play: a session could be as short as a few minutes or as long as it takes someone to complete the whole game in one sitting. The total duration of the game will depend on how many levels can be created within the time constraints of this project. Furthermore, playtests will be necessary to estimate it. There is little to no replayability.

- Target age group: 16+.

2 Design Pillars

The game design must:

- Go about language acquisition through ***exposition*** and not through translation[1].

- Construct the language barrier as ***a series of small obstacles to be overcome*** and not as a list of chores to be dealt with.

- Encourage the player to ***investigate*** the environment to find clues and context that allow both to understand the story and to acquire toki pona as a language.

- Regulate access to content based on both ***passive*** (comprehension) and ***active*** (expression) uses of toki pona skills.

- Illustrate that toki pona was developped as ***a language for thoughts***, and not as a tool of efficient communication.

- Invite the player to reflect on some questions essential to ***philosophy of language***[2].

3 Design Values

3.1 Experience

The player will:

- Move through the game space.
  At all stages of play, they should feel:

    - Inquisitive

    - Curious

    - Immersed

  During early stages of play, they should feel:

    - Wary

    - Disoriented

    - Overwhelmed

    - Intimidated

  During late stages of play, they should feel:

    - Confident

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[1] To clarify: the game should never, ever, link a toki pona word to an english word in order to communicate its meaning. Of course, the player themself will often make that link in their head once they get the meaning of the word, but the *act* of getting to that meaning should never pass through translation. For example, a fruit could be sitting near a label that reads "kili". This would lead to the player understanding that "kili" is a word that can refer to fruits. In their head, they will likely link the tooki pona word "kili" with the english word "fruit". But the game itself should not put the player in front of a text that explicitly makes that link *in the game.*

[2] The idea here is not to educate on specific philosophical concepts or models, but rather to put the player in an environment prone to stimulate philosophical reflection.

– In control

- Investigate scenes to find contextual clues[3].
  At all stages of play, they should feel:

  – Inquisitive

  – Curious

  – Smart (they should not feel like they stumble on knowledge or solution to puzzles, but like they conquered it)

  – Empathetic (the player does not have to identify with the characters or be "on their side", but they should care about each character's actions and their consequences)

  – Rewarded (by their better understanding of the plot, a strenghtening of their toki pona skills, and by their ability to solve puzzles thanks to environmental clues)

  During early stages of play, they should feel:

  – Lost

  During late stages of play, they should feel:

  – In harmony with the environment (for example, the location of objects should make sense to them)

  Occasionnaly, they should feel:

  – Various emotions towards characters (mostly: sad, angry, amused, annoyed)

  – Intrusive (like they are snooping where they don't belong)

  – Surprised

- Read texts of various forms and types that are dispersed throughout the game space.
  At all stages of play, they should feel:

  – Eager to learn more about the story and characters

  – Active (extracting information rather than receiving it)

  During early stages of play, they should feel:

  – Frustrated (it should be enough to motivate them to overcome the challenge posed by the reading of texts in a foreign language, but not enough to make the act of learning appear as tedious)

  During late stages of play, they should feel:

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[3]These clues might give insight about the plot (such as locket containing a portrait) or help formulate theories about toki pona and its vocabulary (such as a sign displaying a message in toki pona akin to "caution: dangerous cliff ahead" in front of said cliff). As much as possible, clues should do both at once (such as a name written in toki pona on the door of a character's room).

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Occasionnaly, they should feel:

– Various emotions towards characters (mostly: sad, angry, amused, annoyed)

3.2 Themes

- Language as a way to shape one's mind
  Language has a tremendous influence on one's relationship to the world. It is the primary tool one uses to communicate thoughts. More than that, it often is the primary tools one uses to *formulate* those thoughts.

- The struggle for peace through simplicity

- Responsibility

- Hubris

3.3 Point of View

3.4 Challenge

3.5 Decision-making

3.6 Skill, strategy, chance, and uncertainty

3.7 Context

3.8 Emotions

4 Target Audience

ijo musi is aimed at adults with previous experience of video games and an interest for toki pona.

5 Conditions of Play

ijo musi is meant to be played alone in a setting that allows for immersion (without too much outside stimulation). It is meant to be played on a computer using a keyboard and a mouse, or a controller.

6 Features

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7 Gameloops

8 Graphics and Concept Art

9 UX and UI

10 Characters, World, Synopsis