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Gaming in conversation : the impact of video games in second language communication

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A Thesis

entitled

Gaming in Conversation: The Impact of Video Games in Second Language

Communication

by

Dannielle K. Laws

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in English

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The University of Toledo

May, 2016

An Abstract of

Gaming in Conversation: The Impact of Video Games in Second Language
Communication

by

Dannielle K. Laws

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For most, the idea of using a video game to teach a class seems a bit outlandish; despite the advances made in the gaming industry, video games are generally viewed as not educational or for children. However, recent studies have been conducted that suggest using video games in an educational environment may actually be beneficial to students, specifically in the field of foreign language learning. This study examines the types of communications that can be facilitated through different types of video games; the video games used are League of Legends, a cooperative Multiplayer Online Battle Arena, and Super Smash Bros. Wii U, a competitive multiplayer home console game. This study also examines how ESL students' previous experiences with video games and learning English may impact their communication in English. The results show that most communication in English was during cooperative gameplay, but the communication may suffer if the video game requires a large amount of background knowledge or experience.

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List of Abbreviations

ESL ....English as a Second Language

LoL............................League of Legends

MMORPG..................Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game
MOBA........................Multiplayer Online Battle Arena

NS ....Native Speakers (of English)

SSB ....Super Smash Bros. Wii Us

WoW..........................World of Warcraft

<center>**Chapter One**</center>

<center>**Review of Literature**</center>

Overview of Literature

      In most modern societies, technology has become a large part of people's daily lives. The convenience of cell phones and computers has changed the way people shop, work, and learn. Every day, more schools are beginning to bring technology into classrooms, and sometimes, allow classes to be conducted digitally, allowing students to study from home instead of a traditional classroom. Some schools have given students laptops or iPads to complete and submit homework, and access textbooks and lessons posted by their teachers. Chat rooms, discussion boards, and websites like Blackboard are used for students and instructors to post assignments and other documents, while also allowing quick and efficient communication. Students can message each other or their instructor about an assignment through these tools, and their teacher or classmates can respond quickly with an answer.

      Despite these tools becoming more popular in the educational environment, there's also another type of media that's beginning to grow in popularity. For most, the idea of using a video game to teach a class seems a bit outlandish; despite the advances made in the gaming industry, video games are generally viewed as not educational or for children. However, recent studies have been conducted that suggest using video games in an educational environment may actually be beneficial to students, specifically in the field of foreign language learning. Online gaming has grown in popularity over the past few years and now many people from various countries enjoy playing games like World of Warcraft, a massive online multiplayer game which requires players to team up and

<center>1</center>

work together to meet goals and complete quests. Several studies have been done that indicate a game like World of Warcraft may benefit English language learners by creating a low-stress environment in which they must use English in real time to discuss strategies with other players in order to accomplish goals (Thorne et al., 2009; Steinkuehler & Duncan, 2008; Zheng et al., 2012b).

In these games, communication with other players is a necessity if progress is to be made, which can be done orally through programs like Skype, or through text chatting in the game. Because of this, some instructors believe that using games in which students must communicate with each other or other players will possibly facilitate natural language learning quicker than traditional methods and textbooks. In the foreign language field, requiring students to play a game in the target language may increase their knowledge and experience with the target language, better preparing them for real life conversations with native speakers of the target language, and may also increase their confidence in their language skills.

In this chapter, I will be discussing several different studies in which foreign language learners play various computer games in the target language (mostly English) and the results of these studies. The limited results of these studies are the basis for my own research into this issue; I will conduct a study in which four University of Toledo students, two ESL students and two native English speaking students, must work together to play one video game, League of Legends, and compete against each other in Super Smash Bros. Wii U. I will audio record the types of conversation and observe other various forms of communication that may take place, including any bodily gestures. Finally, I will interview the ESL participants about their experiences playing video games

and learning English. Games like League of Legends are becoming very popular, and some professional players of the game are reaching near-celebrity status, and most of these celebrities are non-native English speakers in different countries. On the other hand, Super Smash Bros. Wii U is a popular game for special events and tournaments, and, like League, is becoming popular in many parts of the world. However, despite this grow in popularity, few studies have been done on their potential use in ESL classrooms. By focusing on these two types of games, it is my hope that this study will possibly bring their usefulness to light and encourage future research on the topic in general.

Facilitating Communication and Vocabulary Usage through Technology

Before discussing the benefits of using video games in ESL classrooms, I'd like to discuss the positive benefits of using various types of technology in ESL environments, specifically chat rooms, since some video games include a chat option for players to use. Most schools and colleges are using various types of technology to enhance students' educational experiences. Some forms are basic, such as e-mail and sites like Blackboard, which allow instructors and students to submit homework and other documents online instead of traditional methods. However, some instructors use chat rooms and discussion boards, both of which can allow students to discuss assignments with each other or their teacher. In ESL classrooms, communication between students and instructors is extremely important. Using tools like chat rooms and discussion boards can immerse ESL students in natural native English, while also allowing them to discuss school-related issues, as well as personal hobbies and interests, with fellow classmates (Bikowski & Kessler, 2011). Talking with others about their similar interests may also help students learn specific phrases and vocabulary that may be specific to those hobbies,

but knowing them may allow them to converse with other people who enjoy the same hobbies (Bikowski & Kessler, 2011) while also improving their English skills though non-confrontational discussion (Ware 2004).

Because there are many different types of chat rooms, instructors may be able to design a chat room to look like a "virtual" classroom, which may allow students to feel like they're still in an "educational" setting and therefore put more effort into their studies and work (Ingram et al. 2000). Chat rooms are also important places in which students can practice their English skills with other students or other native English speakers. Because of the short time period between each message and post, "… you have to be quick with the keyboard and concentrate on communicating effectively rather than just on getting the right answer" (Ingram et al., 28). When using a chat room, students must respond to others quickly and clearly, which will encourage them to put their skills to use, and may also allow them to take in new information, such as new vocabulary or grammar information, and may use that information in their future chats or daily conversations. Instructors can therefore create a small chat "classroom" in which students and instructors can discuss class issues or students' interests and hobbies in real time, which forces students to respond as fast as they can using their current level of English skills. Instructors can also create a chat room and allow non-students to join in and discuss various topics with the students, which may increase their interest in the discussion, and in turn, increase their motivation to improve their English skills (Ingram et al., 27 – 29). Like chat rooms, video games, such as World of Warcraft and League of Legends, require players to communicate quickly in real time in order to successfully beat enemies and complete missions. ESL students playing these games would have to

type their thoughts not just quickly, but also as clearly as possible, so their teammates can understand what they're saying and react to it within a decent amount of time. However, players can discuss events and interests in the game chat that doesn't have to do with the game itself, therefore allowing a low stress environment that could allow ESL students to talk about their own hobbies while also completing tasks with their teammates.

Fostering Communication through Video Games

While technology like discussion boards and chat rooms allow students to become confident in their English skills and experience natural English and vocabulary, video games can also be used to encourage students to work harder for any possible "rewards" offered in the game (Arnseth, 2006). Games can also give students the chance to develop and personalize their own method of gameplay and identity (Arnseth, 2006; AlShaiji, 2015). AlShaiji (2015) believes that because children now grow up surrounded by technology, using video games in an ESL environment can increase and motivation in learning, stating that "vocabulary learning is often perceived as boring by learners…", but by using video games, "teachers…can ensure that their young learners are prepared for the adventure of reading and writing" (126). Students may find learning another language to be "very difficult and stressful". However, using games in the classroom can allow students to "…practice language before they must use it in the 'real world'" (AlShaiji, 126). Video games can function as one a safe virtual environment in which ESL students can practice the language with each other, helping them get comfortable with the language, while also improving their English vocabulary and communication skills.

The amount of freedom, communication, and self-expression a player can experience through gameplay depends on the game being played. Currently, the most popular games used in studies are MMORPGs (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games) like World of Warcraft, Final Fantasy XI, and Ever Quest II. These games are similar in that they allow players to create their own characters, giving them the freedom of self-expression (Zheng et al., 2012b; Thorne et al., 2009) and work with other players all over the world to fight enemies and complete tasks. Because teamwork and strategizing are heavily stressed, even to the point where some major fights and events cannot be completed unless a group fights together, communication between players is a necessity (Zheng et al., 2012b). These games include a text chat option, but if players want to communicate orally, a third-party program, such as Skype or TeamSpeak, is required. These conversations take place in real time, which forces players to respond to each other quickly (Zheng et al., 2012b). Instructors can take advantage of this by creating a group within the game that consists only of their students; doing this will allow students to practice their communication skills with each other in order to complete missions, but because these games require an internet connection, students will come across non-student players from various parts of the world who may also speak English as second or foreign language.

In-game conversations don't always have to consist of game-specific issues, either, since students and players can discuss current events, popular movies, TV shows, and other areas of interest. According to Thorne et al. (2009), "…online fan fiction communities promote informal…types of learning that are beneficial for adolescents' L2 literacy development, as well as for their sense of self-efficacy in…English (805). When

students have the chance to converse about topics they're interested in, their English skills will improve, as well as their general communication skills and self-confidence. Video games create an open, stress-free environment in which students can communicate freely with other players and students about hobbies and game strategies, giving them the ability to learn and use new vocabulary, and gain more confidence in their English skills. Steinkuehler and Duncan (2008) support this idea from their own study, in which they viewed an online forum for World of Warcraft. In this forum, random players discussed various battle strategies against difficult enemies and bosses; these discussions also included suggestions of types of weapons, armor, and which types of classes (warrior, mage, etc.) that work best together (534-536). Steinkuehler and Duncan's results suggest that "…game related forums… are rich sites for social knowledge construction" (540) and that "…we should actively seek out ways to build bridging third spaces between school and home that incubate forms of academic play such as those studied here" (542). However, because the players were mostly anonymous, it's unclear how many were native English speakers or ESL speakers, so these results may be different with more specific participants.

Another category of games that have been used and studied are 3D virtual worlds; games like Second Life and Quest Atlantis (now known as Atlantis: Remixed) are commonly used in educational settings due to their ability to be easily modified. In 3D virtual worlds, players can customize their avatar in many ways, similar to MMORPGs, and, if the instructor chooses, can be played alone or with other players. The missions or tasks in the game can be changed to fit lesson plans. In a study done by Zheng (2012a), several native English speaking students learning Chinese were required to work together

in a virtual environment created by a university's Confucius Institute using Second Life. Researchers were interested in the relationships and identities that could develop through students' in-game experiences. Instructors at the Institute created specific quests and riddles that made the learners work together and communicate in Chinese in order to solve them and obtain special items (Zheng, 547-549). The researchers noted the relationship between the three learners became very close, involving jokes about the scenery as well as checking in on each other during the gameplay, and were able to complete tasks fairly quickly together (Zheng, 549). Zheng states that virtual worlds can be considered "…ecosystems which learners simultaneously shape, as they play out their identities in the L2 sociocultural context…" and may also help "…language learners step out of classroom discourse and step into real world problems where they can coordinate with others and apply the knowledge they have gained in the classroom (Zheng, 557)".

While most of the studies in this field focus on MMORPGs and 3D Virtual Worlds, other categories of video games have not been as heavily researched. It's common for most households at this point to own at least one home console system, and depending on the system, there are many genres of games to choose and play. A study was done by Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio (2009) in order to observe the ways players interact with each other during a collaborative playing session, two male ESL learners worked together to play Final Fantasy X, a one player game on the PlayStation 2. When one student was playing the game, the other one attempted to help their friend out by offering suggestions or strategies to defeat the enemies. During the gameplay, both students heard and repeated certain phrases that the characters say, even sometimes laughing and mocking them together (Piirainen-Marsh, 175). Other times, when the

attacks did a large amount of damage to the enemy, the students would use the phrase "overkill" repeatedly to describe the situation (173). Piirainen-Marsh suggest that "…the players' participation…demonstrated that the players recurrently attend to and draw upon the language of the game as a key resource for attending to and interpreting scenes and events in the game world and building social play" (179) and video games create an "…informal learning environment that enhances the development of certain skills" (180). This study suggests that using home console games can benefit ESL students because they create a low-stress environment and allow players to discuss gameplay strategies, as well as help students hear and repeat new vocabulary.

Gaps in Current Research

One issue I've noticed in many of these studies is the lack of background information regarding students' and their history with technology, especially video games. Because games like World of Warcraft and Second Life are well known and popular in various countries, ESL students may already be familiar with these games and may have even played with native English speakers during this time. However, many studies focus on college-aged or high school students, and therefore ESL learners' past experiences with gaming and other forms of technology at earlier ages is scarce. AlShaiji (2015) states that "…in Video Games' English vocabulary classes, the environment was comfortable, cooperative, and non-threatening so that less confident children who normally refuse to participate in the English class wanted to participate in the class activities" (130). Therefore, it's possible that if a child is exposed to certain games at an early age, they may develop more confidence in their English skills and participate more during in class activities. In my study, I'll explore the possible correlations between

previous gaming and English learning experiences with students' current English levels and skills.

Another issue is that some games, such as League of Legends, aren't being researched as much as the others, despite their growing popularity. Like MMORPGs, these games require teamwork and constant communication among teammates and players to create strategies and win the game. MOBAs also have specific in-game phrases and vocabulary that may be used during gameplay, but also repeated in daily conversations with friends and other people in the gaming community. They could also offer students the chance to play with or against fellow classmates, as well as unknown players from different countries, thus requiring students to use English as a form of communication in order to win the game and accomplish tasks. These games are also generally free to play, so monthly subscription fees or expensive and demanding equipment aren't required to play them; an instructor could create several accounts for their students, and the students could download and play these games on their own computers at no charge.

One final issue that is problematic for this field is the lack of competitive gameplay, specifically games that allow students to compete against each other. The majority of games used by instructors and in studies are generally focused on the communication facilitated through teamwork. However, if ESL students have to compete against each other in a video game, various forms of communication may change; students may become more competitive, focusing more on the game and less on other things in the environment that may be surrounding them. They may tease each other or make jokes in a playful manner, and various gestures may be made through their body

language. My study may shed light on the changes that may occur in communication and body language when students compete against each other in a competitive game, as well as the potential benefits, such as easier access and low-stress environments, that these games may have in the classroom.

      In the next chapter, I will discuss the research questions and methodology of my study, including more information on the video games which are being looked at, the participants, and their experiences with learning English and playing video games. Finally, in Chapter Three, I will discuss the results of the study and the possible implications they may have for this field of research.

Chapter Two

Study and Methodology

Brief Introduction

While the majority of studies done on using video games in ESL settings feature online multiplayer role playing games and 3D virtual worlds, very few have studied the possible use of online multiplayer battle arena games and home console systems. These games can be useful for medium-sized classrooms, since League of Legend can have up to 10 people play at a time and Super Smash Bros. can allow up to 8 people to play at the same time. However, these games can generate different types of communication that may not develop in these other types of video games. This study attempted to examine if these games can be used to encourage communication in ESL students, and if so, in what ways they accomplish this, and how these games could be used in ESL classrooms.

Research Questions

1. Which genre of video games, multiplayer online battle arenas or home console games, results in more communication?

2. Does playing competitively or cooperatively as a team encourage ESL learners to communicate more?

3. What kind of communication (e.g., arguing, strategizing) takes place during cooperative gameplay? And during competitive gameplay?

Description of Context in which Data was Gathered

The area in which the study took place was a computer lab at the University of Toledo; this computer lab is generally used by various classes for special in-class assignments that require the use of a computer. This room is also used by the University's

E-Sports Club, a club specifically for people who want to play online multiplayer games with each other, for their weekly meetings, during which the computers are used to run games, and other gaming supplies are held in the room as well for members to use. The room is only available through special request, and because of this, is a reasonable setting for the participants to sit in during the study without worrying about privacy issues or being interrupted.

The games being played, League of Legends and Super Smash Bros. Wii U, were set up in the room before the study began and participants arrived. I chose League of Legends because it's free to play, which makes it more available for all players, and focuses on team work and accomplishing goals in a timely manner. League of Legends required a computer and an account to play, so I set up accounts and computers for the participants beforehand. Super Smash Bros. Wii U required more preparation and equipment than League of Legends, such as a television, a Wii U gaming console, and several controllers. I chose this game because of its popularity and how easy it is to pick up and play whether one has experience playing the game or are new players. The television was provided by the E-Sports Club, but the rest of the items needed was provided by myself.

Background and Role of the Researcher

I'm a second year graduate student in the ESL program at the University of Toledo and have many years of experience in gaming. I've taught English Composition for International Students for a year and a half, and also worked as a tutor in the University of Toledo's Writing Center. I'm familiar with the games used in the study, having played both games for an extended period of time.

During the study, I observed the students as they played through both games, audio recorded their conversations and took notes on my computer of any gestures or other types of body language students used while playing the games. I also interviewed the ESL students before the games were played, as well as after, to get a better understanding of the participants' experience with learning English and playing games before and after the gameplay. I also collected and analyzed the data gathered (For interview questions, please see Appendix).

Participants, Including Participant Recruitment

Four participants, two undergrad ESL students and two native English speaking undergrad students from the University of Toledo, were chosen for the study. The two ESL students were Japanese and female; one student, given the alias "K", was 22 years old, while the other, "E", was 23 years old at the time of the study. The two native English speaking students were both male and 23 years old; the two male students were given the aliases "D" and "O".

Participants were recruited using two flyers: one for native speakers and one for ESL students. I went to several Comp classes, handed out the flyers, and briefly described the study being done. The students then contacted me and a time and date was scheduled for all four to meet and take part in the study. I chose two ESL students and two native English speaking students with various histories regarding video game experience. Although, my main focus was on how the ESL students communicated during these games, I chose to have two native English speakers in order to encourage the ESL students to speak English more with each other as well as the native speakers. All four of the students were familiar with video games in general, but only the native

English students had ever played League of Legends (the native speakers were actually part of the University's E-Sports Club, in which members meet weekly to play games like League of Legends). The two ESL students had played Super Smash Bros. Wii U before, as well as other similar competitive games, and had enjoyed them, but only one of the ESL students had heard of League of Legends. However, she never played it; she stated that she was interested in trying to play it, but wasn't sure how to start. All four students had played Super Smash Bros. Wii U before, though, and were fairly familiar with how the game is meant to be played.

Data Gathering Procedures, Including Instruments

Before the students began to play the games, I interviewed the ESL students individually about their background with English and playing video games (For list of interview questions, please see Appendix). The first game they played is League of Legends; this style of game will cause them to play cooperatively as a team and capture the opposing team's base. The ESL students practiced playing the game using the tutorial offered, but K's computer froze up, causing the tutorial to crash halfway through. However, after restarting the computer, K decided that the tutorial had taught her enough, and she didn't want to go through it again. The opposing team were computer generated and the difficulty level was chosen based on the student players' skill levels. While the participants were playing, I recorded all participants' audio conversations and observed how they played the game together, but I focused mostly on how the ESL students reacted to the games and communicated to the other participants. I attempted to record any text posts the students make, but there was very little text posting. The only time text communication was used was before the game began, when E, one of the ESL students,

wrote "Yooooo", to which D, one of the native English speakers, replied "suuuuup". After this, the game began, and the participants communicated orally from that point on. The game lasted for roughly 30 to 35 minutes, not including the tutorial, which was roughly 15 minutes.

The second game played was Super Smash Bros. Wii U, a competitive game in which players select a character from the available list, and attempt to knock each other off of the battle arena without falling themselves. The player who can knock out the most people is the winner. During this game, I recorded the audio conversations between the students, as well as observed how they played the game. Because the rounds for this game is much shorter than League of Legends, the participants played three five-minute rounds of Super Smash Bros. Wii U for a total of 15 minutes. After these games were finished, I interviewed the ESL students individually about their thoughts on the games played in the study.

Data Analysis

After the study and interviews are conducted, I transcribed the interviews and organized them by student, so I can see on an individual level how their views may have changed based on their past experiences and the games played during the study. A list of the types of communication that took place during the game sessions was made to determine which types occurred the most. I also compared the students' interviews to see if there were any similarities or differences in their views on gameplay and if students' past experiences with video games may have related to their performance in the study and their opinions of it.

The next chapter will discuss the results of the study, as well as the possible implications for future research and education.

<center>**Chapter Three**</center>

<center>**Results and Discussion**</center>

The purpose of this study was to observe two ESL students and two native English speaking students playing two different kinds of video games, one being a cooperative Multiplayer Online Battle Arena called League of Legends and the other a competitive game called Super Smash Bros. Wii U, in an attempt to answer three research questions: 1) which genre of these video games can facilitate more communication in the target language, which is English, 2) does playing competitively or cooperatively as a team encourage ESL learners to communicate in the target language more, and 3) what kind of communication takes place during cooperative gameplay and competitive gameplay. These genres of games were chosen due to the lack of representation in previous studies, which typically used 3D virtual worlds or Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games. Before the study, the two ESL students were interviewed about their experiences playing video games and learning English. During the study, I observed and took notes of any communication, both oral and physical, and after the study was complete, the ESL students were interviewed about their thoughts regarding the games used in the study.

Results

The results of the data indicate Multiplayer Online Battle Arena games, like League of Legends, can facilitate more communication, ESL students seemed to prefer playing Super Smash Bros. Wii U due to the ability to pick a controller and begin playing without learning and knowing anything about the game. Results were categorized into three categories: the ESL participants' past experiences with learning English and playing

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games, their opinion on the games played in the study, and types of communication, which was broken down into two separate sections, oral and physical gestures, which were then broken down into more specific categories. The specific categories under the oral section were: giving commands, asking for help or advice, offering help, using game-specific vocabulary, discussing in-game events, oral outbursts, joking or playful banter, swearing, talking in L1 and in TL, supportive speech, and strategizing speech. The physical section included clapping, covering or hiding the face in some way, stomping on the ground, and throwing the head back.

Background and Previous Experiences. Both ESL participants were from Japan and spoke English as a second language, but were interested in learning a third; one student, K, stated that she had tried learning Chinese, while E was currently learning Spanish. Both participants had been learning English for over 10 years; however, E stated that she had moved to the United States when she was 11, so she was more immersed in the English language than K. Both were also familiar with video games and played them frequently, and both stated that they had played games from the Super Smash Bros. series in the past. E admitted she enjoys playing role playing games, fighting or competitive games, and rhythm games; she also stated that she plays games almost every day, but she doesn't play fighting games as often because she's "not so good at it". K, on the other hand, did not play games very often, but when she did, it was usually a competitive game like Super Smash Bros., or a role playing game, like Kingdom Hearts.

Both participants stated that they enjoyed playing with friends mostly and didn't play online with strangers often, although E said she preferred playing alone. When asked about they play competitively against friends or as a team, and the native languages of

their friends, E said she played competitively against her friends, who spoke mostly

Japanese or English. K, however, stated that she had friends from all over the world,

including India, but most of them spoke English; however, she did not clarify whether

she liked competition or teamwork in games. Both participants stated that when they

played with other people, they typically used English because many friends speak it, but

they would occasionally switch to Japanese when their friends are Japanese speakers.

Types of Communication. After analyzing the data collected concerning

communication used throughout both League of Legends and Super Smash Bros. Wii U,

the game that seemed to have generated the most communication in the study was League

of Legends. In order to come to this conclusion, I separated the different types of

communication into certain categories, putting certain gestures or types of

communication used into which categories fit the best. Some types overlapped and fit

into more than one category; however, the two most used types of communication were

talking to all participants in English and participants, mostly K, talking to themselves

(The complete list of communication gathered and categorized can be found in the

Appendix).

During League of Legends, all four participants were placed on a team with 1

computer-generated player and had to compete against another team, which consisted of

five computer-generated players. The communication during this game was typically

short, casual statements and phrases, but did include the ESL participants asking for help

when fighting an enemy, or asking for advice on which power-ups to "level up". I believe

the main reason for this is because the ESL participants were new to the game, while the

native English students were seasoned players, so when certain enemies or goals were

presented during the gameplay, the native English students knew what to do ahead of time, but the ESL students did not, so they asked for help or clarification. Some of the conversations included the native English speaking participants discussing with the ESL participants which characters are best, which moves are more powerful, and what items they should buy to improve their character. Some of the smaller conversations were between E and K in Japanese, but this was usually when one of their characters had been attacked or killed off and they were waiting to be respawned. It seems like this was due to instinct; because their native language was Japanese, it was natural for them to have outbursts and small talk in Japanese.

Regarding talking to themselves, K seemed to be very interested in the game, and constantly mumbled under her breath or spoke to herself in Japanese while playing. Out of all the participants, she was the one who "died" the most, but she had a good sense of humor and began making jokes about her skills; at one point, she began referring to herself as "useless girl", even following one of the native English participants' character, and said "Here comes useless girl", and when she was attempting to help another player fight an enemy, she shouted "Useless girl will save you!" She was able to laugh at the game and continued playing, despite her poor skills. However, E would get easily frustrated, even swearing in English occasionally, especially when she was attacked. During one moment, she had tried to use a move that would teleport her back to her team's base, but didn't realize it took several seconds for the teleport to work, and she ended up being attacked by enemies; she stomped her feet and said "I was recalling! That's BS!".

The rest of the communication evolved from asking for help or advice to actual strategizing and planning as the game went on. The native participants would tell the ESL participants a plan to attack the base, and the ESL students would follow their orders. This behavior was likely the result of the ESL students being unfamiliar with the game, so they attempted to work together with the native English speakers by following orders. Sometimes, this didn't work out well due to the native speakers use of game-specific vocabulary; one native speaker told K and E to "attack the inhibitor" and they were unable to accomplish this task because they didn't know what that was, so one of the native English speakers explained what the inhibitor did and how to destroy it. After this explanation, the ESL students understood enough to attack and destroy the inhibitor. Towards the end of the game, though, all four participants were able to attack the enemy base and win the game, which led to several outbursts and all participants saying "good job" or "nice job". The native participants explained to the ESL students what the statistics at the end of the match meant, and congratulated them on doing pretty well for their first game.

There was significantly less verbal communication in Super Smash Bros. Wii U, but the communication that did take place was mostly teasing, and there was an increase in body gestures. During this game, all participants were playing against each other competitively, with the ultimate goal of knocking the other players' characters off of the stage, while avoiding being knocked off as well. However, the ESL participants did switch back to Japanese during more exciting moments; one moment involved K's avatar almost getting thrown off the stage by E's, during which K repeatedly shouted E's name and stomped her feet until her character was knocked off, after which she lowered her

head and sighed. I believe, like the outbursts in Japanese during League of Legends, this is mostly due to instinctively using their native language to during an emotional outburst. However, some funnier moments featured a character which attacked by throwing bacon and sausages at the other characters; one of the native speakers began using this attack and shouted "have some sausages" to which everyone laughed loudly. K was significantly better at Super Smash Bros. than League of Legends, and she was able to defeat the other participants several times, including one time when she unleashed a special attack and knocked two characters out at the same time; this shocked everyone, especially K, who said "I don't even know how I did that".

  Post-Study Interview. After interviewing the ESL participants about their thoughts on the games, both enjoyed Super Smash Bros. more than League of Legends for various reasons; K like it because it was easier to play than League of Legends, while E like it more because she's "competitive" and likes "kicking peoples' butts". However, both enjoyed playing with the other participants as a team in League of Legends because it was "new and interesting" to both of them. When asked about which game they believed would facilitate English communication, both students suggested League of Legends. K said that there was more communication and chatting in League of Legends, but she felt like the focus of the game was more on battling enemies, so the communication might suffer. E stated something similar, but also believed that League of Legends has more vocabulary that English learners would need to understand before they began to play the game, but if learners ask for help defining this vocabulary, that could be considered communication as well.

When discussing why they may use English when playing games, both students stated they didn't like the idea of "leaving people out" of their conversations during gameplay, so they chose to speak English to include all friends and players. K went further, stating she wanted to share her "excitement and feelings with everyone," so she tries to speak in English to get that across. Finally, when discussing what forms of communication these games may facilitate, both believed that daily "simple" communication could come from them; however, K stated that Super Smash Bros. Wii U may only cause people to scream out loud, but maybe "if they're [English learners] confused with how to play, … they have to ask other people and it could be helpful for communication."

Discussion

In the interviews, both ESL students stated that games like League of Legends, specifically ones that involved team work, could help English learners with basic, casual communication. They stated that if players weren't sure about the game or what to do, they could also ask other players questions and get the answers, which is a form of communication. I noticed this scenario play out several times while observing the participants playing League of Legends; a native English speaking participant would command the other players to attack an object or specific enemy, but the ESL students didn't know what the object was, so they'd ask or repeat what the native speaker said, and he would explain it until they understood. However, the students also argued that communication similar to asking for help in League of Legends could also have been done in Super Smash Bros, despite it being "easier to play." One ESL student stated that most communication in Super Smash Bros. consists of outburst or small phrases, but if a

player is confused about how to perform a certain move, they can ask others for help. This would be similar to asking for help in League of Legends, but I didn't see this type of communication happen during the study when participants were playing Super Smash Bros. Wii U. This may be because Super Smash Bros. Wii U doesn't require such a large amount of previous knowledge to play like League of Legends would; one can pick up a controller and begin playing without having to learn much about the game beforehand.

Implications for Teaching

It can be said, therefore, that games requiring team work, such as League of Legends, seem to facilitate casual and natural communication in the target language and can be used as a possible tool in ESL classrooms. While League of Legends requires some knowledge of in-game items, enemies, and vocabulary, these things can be learned quickly through playing and communicating with other players. Also, League of Legends can allow up to ten people to play one game together, so instructors with a larger class may be able to break up their class into several groups and allow them to play together, and because League of Legends is free to play and doesn't require a computer with very high specifications, the game can be downloaded on most computers, whether they are Mac or PC. Finally, League of Legends creates a low-stress environment, in which players are able to focus on the game and communicate with their team members to win the game.

Instructors could use in-class activities to prepare students for these games. League of Legends does require more background knowledge in order to play, and this could be learned through the tutorial offered in the game, but also through in-class activities that can teach students some of the information needed to know before playing

League of Legends. For example, instructors can show videos made by League of Legends to introduce the basics of the game in an entertaining way. Another activity could also be a game with similar goals as League of Legends, which would require students to be split up into teams and must communicate with each other in English to meet the goals.

Limitations

A major limitation in this study is the small size of the participants used; only four participants took part in the study, and only two of those four were actual ESL students. A larger group, in general, may yield different results, but using more ESL students may also yield different results. Because there were only four participants, and League of Legends usually requires five players on a team, a computer controlled member had to be used with the participants, which may have caused issues in the game that wouldn't have happened with a fifth human player. Another limitation is the language spoken by both the ESL students was Japanese, which allowed them to communicate with each other in Japanese during the game play; using ESL students with various languages could force them to communicate mostly in English, therefore possibly creating different results in the study.

Suggestions for Future Research

In future studies, a larger group of participants should be gathered for the study; League of Legend allows ten people to play together, but Super Smash Bros. Wii U can allow up to eight players for one game. Another suggestion would be selecting ESL participants who speak various first languages to ensure that most of the communication done in the study would be done in English.

Conclusion

  This study attempted to expand on the past research of using video games to teach English as a Second Language. Using two types of games that aren't generally discussed, a Multiplayer Online Battle Arena game called League of Legends, which requires team work with other members to accomplish goals, and a competitive home console game called Super Smash Bros. Wii U, in which players must knock other characters off of the stage to win. Participants were two ESL students, both native Japanese speakers, and two native English speaking students; after the study was completed, the two ESL students were interviewed about their thoughts on the gameplay. The results of the study and interviews support using cooperative games like League of Legends in order to facilitate communication in English due to the emphasis of teamwork and strategizing, but games like Super Smash Bros. Wii U. This information could be used for further research, including using these games alongside various in-class cooperative activities that can facilitate natural communication in English between classmates.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Background Questions

1. What is your home country?
2. What languages do you speak?
3. How long have you been learning English?
4. Do you play video games?
5. What kind of video games have you played?
6. How often have you played these video games?
7. Do/did you play by yourself, on a team, or against other people online?
8. Who do/did you play with or against? Where did they come from?

Post-Observation Questions

9. What did you think of these games?
10. Which game did you like more? Why?
11. Did you like playing against players in Super Smash Bros. or playing as a team in League of Legends? Why?
12. In the past, when you've played video games, did you ever communicate with someone you were playing with (or against), using written or spoken English? If so, tell me about it.
13. If you answered yes to the question I just asked, can you tell me who you were playing with (or against)? Where were these people from? What were their native languages?
14. If you did communicate in English while playing video games, can you tell me why you used English?
15. Do you think that people could play video games like this to improve their English? If so, tell me more about your opinion of this.

16. If you think people might play video games to help them improve their English, what kind of games do you think would be most helpful? Why?

17. If you think people might play video games to help them improve their English, do you think that Smash Brothers would be better for this purpose, or would League of Legends be better? Why?

18. If you think people might play video games to help them improve their English, what areas of English do you think video games could help them most with?

Appendix B

Recruitment Flyers

Is English Your Native Language? Do You Like To Play Video Games?

Hello! My name is Dannielle Laws and I'm a graduate student looking for participants in my study.

All you have to do is play some video games with other participants in the study and talk about your experiences playing them. The study will be on campus and all the tools needed will be made available.

You won't be graded on this and there aren't any special rewards, but you will be helping out a student with her degree and you get to play some video games!

If you are interested in volunteering, or if you have any questions, please e-mail me at dlaws7@rockets.utoledo.edu

Thank you for your time!

Is English Your Second Language? Do You Like To Play Video Games?

Hello! My name is Dannielle Laws and I'm a graduate student looking for participants in my study.

All you have to do is play some video games with other participants in the study and talk about your experiences playing them. The study will be on campus and all the tools needed will be made available.

You won't be graded on this and there aren't any special rewards, but you will be helping out a student with her degree and you get to play some video games!

If you are interested in volunteering, or if you have any questions, please e-mail me at dlaws7@rockets.utoledo.edu

Thank you for your time!

Appendix C

Interview Transcripts

Interview Questions: K

Background Questions

1. What is your home country?
    a. Japan
2. What languages do you speak?
    a. Japanese, English, little Chinese
3. How long have you been learning English?
    a. Over 10 years
4. Do you play video games?
    a. Yes
5. What kind of video games have you played?
    a. RPGs (Kingdom Hearts),
6. How often have you played these video games?
    a. Not so often
7. Do/did you play by yourself, on a team, or against other people online?
    a. Played with other people, multiplayer, not online
8. Who do/did you play with or against? Where did they come from?
    a. With friends usually, not by myself. All over the world, some friends from India, America, Japan

Post-Observation Questions

9. What did you think of these games?
    a. Tutorial was kind of hard to catch. I kind of figure out how to control when I play. Directions in game were confusing. (LOL)
    b. SSB More familiar/easier to play. Played it in the past.
10. Which game did you like more? Why?
    a. SSB. It's kind of the first time to LOL, so it was interesting, but SSB is easier.
    b. I like playing with my friends and being excited
11. Did you like playing against players in Super Smash Bros. or playing as a team in League of Legends? Why?
    a. Team stuff was good. I like it. I've never played it before.
12. In the past, when you've played video games, did you ever communicate with someone you were playing with (or against), using written or spoken English? If so, tell me about it.

a. At the time, I speak in Japanese with E, but if there are foreign people I try to speak English. I think online, if I learn to play the game, I will speak with other in English. I was a little confused.

13. If you answered yes to the question I just asked, can you tell me who you were playing with (or against)? Where were these people from? What were their native languages?
　　　a. Direct communication
　　　b. Both Japanese and English

14. If you did communicate in English while playing video games, can you tell me why you used English?
　　　a. When I only speak Japanese, the foreign people don't understand. I want to share my feelings with everyone, so I try to share in English. Sometimes I can't help it and I get excited and speak Japanese.

15. Do you think that people could play video games like this to improve their English? If so, tell me more about your opinion of this.
　　　a. Could be. I think so. Depends on the people.

16. If you think people might play video games to help them improve their English, what kind of games do you think would be most helpful? Why?
　　　a. I think LOL could be helpful, but it's focused on how to battle/defeat opponent. More communication and chatting is better.

17. If you think people might play video games to help them improve their English, do you think that Smash Brothers would be better for this purpose, or would League of Legends be better? Why?
　　　a. I think SSB for many people. Some of them are not good at games like me. So if they're confused with how to play, they have a harder time. But SSB is easier and some people don't know how to hit or kick, so they have to ask other people and it could be helpful for communication.

18. If you think people might play video games to help them improve their English, what areas of English do you think video games could help them most with?
　　　a. Simple explanation. How to use this/do this. Listening, communication, screaming stuff. "Oh my god rawrarar". Learn to show their excitement and feelings with everyone. Little speaking.

Interview Questions: E
Background Questions

1. What is your home country?
　　　a. Japan
2. What languages do you speak?
　　　a. Japanese English and learning Spanish

3. How long have you been learning English?
   a. Well I've been going to English communication school since I was 5 maybe. But I don't think it help that much I move here when I was 11 so then I probably started learning English by living here, we still have English classes in high school and junior high.
4. Do you play video games?
   a. Yes yes.
5. What kind of video games have you played?
   a. Fighting games, RPG, rhythm
6. How often have you played these video games?
   a. I play rhythm games a lot like every day, but fighting games not so much cause I'm not so good at it, but RPG I play a lot cause I get into it.
7. Do/did you play by yourself, on a team, or against other people online?
   a. Mostly by myself, but sometimes I play with my friends, not so much online but we get together and play local. Play with and against, I play smash a lot teams against.
8. Who do/did you play with or against? Where did they come from?
   a. Mostly Americans, not so much other places, just Japan maybe.

Post-Observation Questions

9. What did you think of these games?
   a. So like language wise or? Yeah it's always fun, I like personally playing against everyone alone not team but I think communication wise you would talk more on a team. You have to tell other people what to do, so it's better for language practicing.
10. Which game did you like more? Why?
    a. Smash, because I like kicking people's butts, I am competitive
11. Did you like playing against players in Super Smash Bros. or playing as a team in League of Legends? Why?
    a. I like both but it's like different team is more accomplishing something together against everyone is more a self you know?
12. In the past, when you've played video games, did you ever communicate with someone you were playing with (or against), using written or spoken English? If so, tell me about it.
    a. Ahh, actually I don't think so, I don't play online games so much so, yeah with friends I talk in English if I was playing with Japanese friends I would talk Japanese.
13. If you answered yes to the question I just asked, can you tell me who you were playing with (or against)? Where were these people from? What were their native languages?

a. English and Japanese, Chinese ah Arabic maybe.

14. If you did communicate in English while playing video games, can you tell me why you used English?
    a. Because everyone pretty much knows English and I don't want anyone to feel left out, even though there is a Japanese person in the group I would still try to speak English so everyone could understand me.

15. Do you think that people could play video games like this to improve their English? If so, tell me more about your opinion of this.
    a. I think so, I think it's a good way.

16. If you think people might play video games to help them improve their English, what kind of games do you think would be most helpful? Why?
    a. Team work, so that other people can say do this and go there and stuff.

17. If you think people might play video games to help them improve their English, do you think that Smash Brothers would be better for this purpose, or would League of Legends be better? Why?
    a. I think, it's hard, lol is hard and I think the vocabs are going to be more hard but smash I don't think you could learn properly from smash because it's just yelling. I think lol is better for that.

18. If you think people might play video games to help them improve their English, what areas of English do you think video games could help them most with?
    a. Not something professional but more communicating everyday stuff.

Appendix D

Observation Notes

League of Legends: Tutorial

K and E very vocal – both talking in Japanese to each other and themselves

When K dies she yells and stomps

E dies she shouts – puts her head down and laughs

K laughs with her

D & O speak back & forth using in-game vocabulary ("screen tearing" "19 ping?" "smurfing/smurf account")

E finishes tutorial – watches K

Offers some ideas, but speaks mostly in Japanese

Under attack K stomps her feet, repeats a phrase in Japanese and tries to run away from the enemies.

E asks O how to go heal – explains to go back to base and buying items

Explains how to buy, what gold is.

K looks through the different attack options and discusses how to do these with E – O also helps explain which buttons to use to work attack.

K keeps repeating the word for "help" in Japanese and runs away

League of Legends: Gameplay

E types "yooooo" into chat log

O types back "suuuup"

Choosing characters right now

K and E continue to speak Japanese

NS start moving in – communicating with each other

E asking about minions – O explaining they "spawn" later

Native speakers strategizing – "Go bottom, top" "everyone's mid"

E repeats "minions are coming" in same tone as game narrator says

K continues to speak Japanese – E speaking back

K asking if she can heal other players –

K dies – stomps feet and laughs – NSs says "no!"

E swears – says fuck a few time

O thought game "glitched"

D and O stick with talking to each other mostly – discussing the enemies' strength "no armor"

E shouts for help – O says "I'm coming" makes odd grunting noise – trying to reach E in time to heal/fight enemies

Mostly quiet – players are focused on the game

Occasional remarks about gameplay – enemies attacking, weakness, health

K runs to a tower on her base and says "heal me"

K carefully looks down at her keyboard to check with spells and attacks she wants to do

E dies – frustrated noises – says "wait a minute" in Japanese

K attacks an enemy, but sees that it's causing more harm, so she runs back to a tower, and looks at her attack options

O says they're coming to help E – fighting a dragon – E says "yes yes yes yes" and "get em"

K dies – puts her hand in her hands – says "I can't destroy this" and "come back", "yeesh"

E says "no no no no" and "run away" – dies and says "I was recalling! You can't move? That's BS"

K comes across E's body – points at it on the screen and asks "is that you?" – they laugh

K then dies – pulls headphones off and pulls away from the computer – E points to her body and asks jokingly "is that you?"

O and D run to help E, who's saying "help me" – K says "we are useless!" Then says "useless girl is trying to save you" in a humorous way.

K dies again – "how many times I have to die?" laughs that her character's hair fell into the shape of a heart – sings "such a loser", says "I'm not stopping"

O shouts somebody go to the bottom lane – K says "OK" then complains "Why he walk so slow" "Hey! Why I walk so slow?"

E says "OH MY GOD" "he's so strong what the hell!?"

O says "run away!"

K asks "You die?" to E – E says "not yet. Where are my minions?'

D says "you ready? Let's do this!"

NSs says "get him shoot him!"

D points out that E and K aren't following along – tells them "next time they level up put a point in R"

E and K say "me?"

Both agree that they can't "push" – not explained in tutorial

K dies – follows D and says "useless girl is following you"

O says "we're doing good"

K says "help me help me I can't even beat minions" and laughs

Starting to head to enemy base

K dies again – puts head in hands – E says something in Japanese

K says "go back to your home" and presses b to return to base repeatedly

O shouting at bot – says "leave morgana bot"

K heads back to enemy base – says "cha cha cha" then dies again – "why?"

E asks "what does this 'E' do?"

K says "double kill" – E says "yes! Yes!" – K says "triple kill" – E "we're good"

Referring to D's killing three enemies

E gets killed suddenly – says "what was that?!" shocked

D and O ask how certain characters got in certain locations

E says "level up arrow isn't showing on my R" – O explains that they have to wait – E asks if she should wait – O says "no level something else instead"

D and O then ask each other about the levels that players have to be in order to level up attacks – both are unsure of which level

Heading to enemy base – E asks "we didn't win yet?" O says – "we have to hit certain lanes"

D says "I'm firing my laser"- dies

O says "don't be a hero"

K dies – everyone is laughing – says "sleeping time"

O says "we have super minions now"

E says "inhibitor" and O explains "yeah when you destroy the inhibitor you create super minions"

E dies – "I didn't even see myself. Where was I?" – makes FFFFFFF noise as if she wants to swear.

K is hesitant to attack – doesn't want to die – tries to attack and runs away

O asks D "want their blue? We have dragon buff"

K is attacked – "nononono" – O and D says "on my way"

O says "he ulted away- these bots are smart"

D dies – "he brought down the hammer"

Everyone at enemy base – O says "Kill em!"

K killed – O says "I'm too slow"

E killed enemy – O says "nice! You got him"

E got quadra kill – O says "nice!" K repeats "quadra kill" then "shut down"

E says "who are you!? Help me?

O says "morgana (bot) help her! She's not doing anything"

O tells E to buy more things – E does and says "I'm so fast now"

K destroys a small base – can't go near bigger bases because she'll get killed

E fighting "we got this we got this" – gets attacked "oh my what!? I'm dead"

E repeats "shut down" – O repeats it as well

K and E speak in Japanese

O asks about certain enemy in game – D explaining about it

O tries to help K – "I'm coming!" – she dies

E kills enemy – K says "good job"

K says to herself "I don't know why I die" – laughs under her breath

D fired powerful attack – gets a double kill – K says "whaaaa?"

O and D laughing at bot player – O "She's confused"

E "what's a turret?" – "turret detected" – speaks with K in Japanese

K is trying to plan an attack – O says "shoot em shoot em just right click on em"

O "their nexus is exposed. Hit it!"

Game is over – they won

K says "I didn't do anything" laughs and claps

O explaining the results – K laughing at her stats- asks who "meek username was"- D says me and K says "I thought so"

Super Smash Bros. Wii U: First Match

All beginning to figure out controller and characters

E types in her name

They select their characters

E and K talk in Japanese

Choose random – final destination stage chosen – Japanese girls says "damn!"

All begin fighting against each other – E finds out "z button's broken I can't grab"

O "wowowow"

K almost falls off the stage, but save herself – makes ch ch ch noises –

Falls off and puts her head down

O says "oh I'm so dead"

K screams

K dies – sighs

K hits a character – both e and k go "oooh"

E hits K – K says "E-SAN E-SAN E-SAN!" (Calling E's name with Japanese honorifics)

D almost falls off edge and says "no way!"

O points out the controller he has isn't responding well

D falls off stage and says "what? No…"

D messing with O – O says "I swear to god dude."

K and E look at a character using a volleyball to attack – they say "volleyball!" together and laugh

E won – says "yaaay!" everyone else says "yay" quietly

Super Smash Bros. Wii U: Second Match

Everyone chooses character, but E asks to go back and pick someone else

K picks Yoshi and imitates the noises Yoshi makes

O attacks and says "buh bye" – screams when he almost falls off

E character (Kirby) sucks up Yoshi and steals his powers – K notes how cute he looks now

D gets knocked out – says "oh god!"

E is ferocious – definitely more competitive

K is knocked out – cries and throws head back

E says "I didn't do anything!"

K is getting beat up – keeps trying to fight back, says "die die die"

O dies "what the fuck?"

K whines and screams

O says "get out of here pac man (Ds character)!" – D laughs

E confused "I thought I was ---"trails off

O and D discuss an attack that's super powerful

Yoshi gets hit – K imitates the noise he makes

K and E both stomp and yell when they get knocked out

O won

Super Smash Bros. Wii U: Third Match

All pick their characters

O is off the screen with his character- E says "what the?" everyone laughs

K is knocked out

E asks how to use certain move – O not sure

E says "leave me alone I'm harvestin"

O says "have some sausages" and throws sausage and bacon (character attack)

K manages to save herself – repeats a phrase in Japanese and whines

E says "ha ha!"

K does super move and knocks two people out – everyone gasps – O says "good job!" – K says "I don't even know how I did that"

D knocks out E – E says "oh!"

E and K speak Japanese – most are too focused to talk

E says "toad is really strong!"

O says "I'm fine" – D says "I knocked you in the air"

D won – K says "you're strong!"