


## Chapter 7

# Massive Multiplayer Online Role–Playing Games as English as a Foreign Language Learning Environments

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### ABSTRACT

*The objective of this chapter is to gain a better understanding of the usefulness of massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) for promoting English as a foreign language (EFL) acquisition. To accomplish this goal, the author analyzed specific categories of interaction occurring between English language learners while playing an online game entitled Eve Online. Previous research has proved that there are positive outcomes on EFL acquisition from the interaction that takes place while playing video games known as MMORPGs. These games immerse players in virtual worlds that are inhabited by hundreds and even thousands of other players, and all are partaking in the game in real time. Learners who choose to play the game in a foreign language are exposed to target language input in a context-rich environment where they can interact with native-speakers and other language learners.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Research on EFL acquisition has focused on the importance of interaction as a major influence on language acquisition (Gass, 1997; Long, 1983; Sykes & Reinhardt, 2013). Developments in software and multimedia creation have offered language learners access to meaningful sources of foreign language input and excellent prospects for target language interaction. The online context of technology provides a vast source of media content that is accessible in any language we might think of.

EFL teachers have used online communication tools, such as synchronous chat rooms and asynchronous discussion forums, into course curricula in order to offer learners with possibilities of engagement with fluent speakers to increase the development of various skills in the target language and at the same time promoting higher-order thinking (Beauvois & Eledge, 1995; Lee, 2001). The interaction between EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners and fluent speakers has noticeable benefits in the context of experiential language moments. The interaction between EFL learners, without fluent speakers, has also revealed beneficial and productive for EFL acquisition (Long, 1996; Pica et al., 1996).

Outside the borders of the classroom, EFL learners may find it problematic to find opportunities to engage in target language use. One of the sources that EFL learners can use to interact with fluent speakers is online games. Research on the use of online games in the context of EFL acquisition theory reports meaningful outcomes, specifically in the type of massive multiplayer online role-playing games (Blake, 2011; Cook-Plagwitz, 2008; Kongmee, Strachan, Montgomery & Pickard, 2011; Lee, 2001; Palmer, 2010; Peterson, 2010, 2011, & 2012; Rankin, Gold & Gooch, 2006; Rankin, Morrison, McNeal, Gooch, & Shute, 2009; Sykes & Reinhardt, 2013; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012). Interaction occurring in MMORPGs environments provide the potential for EFL students to engage with fluent speakers and other English learners in relevant and useful ways and in almost stress-free environments.

During gameplay, players can communicate in a synchronous way with other players logged into the game. Blake (2011) argues that players complete tasks with specific rules and objectives that can raise self-confidence as they develop meaning construction and feel they are competent problem solvers. As self-confidence rises, the motivation to learn a foreign language increases (Gardner, 1985).

Communication takes place through text displayed on the screen, which allows players to message a person or persons playing the game at the same time. Text messages can be sent to a specific player, a group of players or other players that are on the player's own team or corporation/alliance (as it is the case in Eve Online, for example), or even all players in a defined area. Communication is important and used to find other players to complete specific tasks, trade items with other players, or ask queries about the game or even non-game related. The game play often involves

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