

Chapter 9

Video Game–Based L2 Learning: Virtual Worlds as Texts, Affinity Spaces, and Semiotic Ecologies

Karim Hesham Shaker Ibrahim

Gulf University for Science and Technology, Kuwait

ABSTRACT

Video/digital games have grown into sophisticated, realistic, and engaging problem-solving virtual worlds that have their own literacy practices, affinity spaces, and online virtual communities. As a result, various studies have examined theirs to promote L2 learning and literacy. The findings of these studies suggest that digital games can promote multilingual communication, L2 vocabulary development, and situated L2 use. However, promising these findings, to-date little is known about the specific dynamics of gameplay that can facilitate L2 learning. To address this gap in the literature, this chapter will draw on interdisciplinary research on digital gaming from literacy studies, games' studies, and narratology to account for the L2 learning potentials of digital games. To explain their L2 learning potentials, the chapter will conceptualize digital games as dynamic texts, affinity spaces, and semiotic ecologies, and discuss the implications of each conceptualization for game-based L2 learning and teaching.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7286-2.ch009

INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades recent innovations in digital technology and special effects have transformed digital gaming from a frivolous and childish form of entertainment into a sophisticated and widespread recreational activity. Video games have advanced in design to involve complex plots, compelling narratives, and immersive detail-rich 3D virtual worlds (Squire, 2002). This transformation has led to a massive expansion in the consumer-base of digital games to include different genders and age groups. For instance, 40% of all gamers today are females, and the average age of a video-gamer is 31 (Entertainment Software Association, 2014). Also, with the spread of local-area-networks (LANs) and high-speed Internet, video gaming has acquired a social dimension, especially with the rise of online multiplayer games that require players to collaborate in online gaming servers to achieve shared in-game goals (e.g. kill a monster). Multiplayer gaming usually involves active communication and continuous interaction between players face-to-face or online through internet-mediated communication tools (e.g. chat) to plan gameplay and coordinate shared action. In addition, the popularity of digital games along with the rise of user-created content in Web 2.0 technologies have given rise to online virtual communities centered on digital gaming and gameplay strategies. Over time these communities have grown in size and sophistication, and they developed their own social structures, sociocultural values, and literacy practices (Steinkuehler, 2006). Some of the common practices in these communities include: (a) writing, sharing, and discussing strategy guides; (b) writing, reviewing, and editing fan fiction based on video games' narratives and characters; (c) planning and coordinating shared gameplay; (d) creating and sharing gameplay resources such as gaming mods (i.e. modified game content), cheat codes (i.e. codes that enhance a player's capabilities in a video game), and game save-files (i.e. files that save gameplay progress to grant a player access to any level in a game), and; (e) video-recording and streaming of live gameplay and game strategy tutorials (i.e. video demonstrations of gameplay strategies). Besides the dominance of language-mediated interactions and literacy practices in online gaming communities, recent research on digital game-based L2 use demonstrated that L2 gaming is a common and popular activity among a significant proportion of L2 learners (Chik, 2011), and recent studies on extramural L2 gaming suggest that digital gaming can offer an engaging and immersive environment for L2 use and practice (e.g. Jensen, 2017).

The popularity of digital gaming among L2 learners (Chik, 2011), the engagement of gameplay activities (Squire, 2002), and the centrality of language use and literacy practices in gaming communities (Alexander, 2009) have motivated various studies that explored the L2 learning potentials of digital gaming (for a thorough review see Reinders, 2012). The findings of these studies suggested that digital games can

20 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/video-game-based-l2-learning/218783

Related Content

Book Review: Extending the Scope of Corpus-Based Translation Studies

Xiaowan Qin and Keming Peng (2023). *International Journal of Translation, Interpretation, and Applied Linguistics* (pp. 1-6).

www.irma-international.org/article/book-review/317105

Mind the Gatekeepers: A Critical Look at Access to Dual Language Education for Students With Disabilities

Eduardo R. Muñoz-Muñoz, Matthew Love, Marcella Cardoza McCollum, Rebecca A. Cruz, Danielle Umaña and Candice R. Nance (2022). *Bilingual Special Education for the 21st Century: A New Interface* (pp. 1-24).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/mind-the-gatekeepers/303771

Technology Use and Acceptance Among Pre-Service Teachers of English as a Foreign Language: The Case of a Learning Management System and an Educational Blog

Mehrak Rahimi and Seyed Shahab Miri (2019). *Computer-Assisted Language Learning: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 921-937).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/technology-use-and-acceptance-among-pre-service-teachers-of-english-as-a-foreign-language/219706

Factors Related to EFL/ESL Readers' Reading Strategy Use: A Literature Review

Jia Lin (2019). *International Journal of Translation, Interpretation, and Applied Linguistics* (pp. 1-12).

www.irma-international.org/article/factors-related-to-efl-esl-readers-reading-strategy-use/222825

The Importance of Virtual Learning Environments in Higher Education

Paulo Alves, Luisa Miranda and Carlos Morais (2019). *Computer-Assisted Language Learning: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 109-131).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-importance-of-virtual-learning-environments-in-higher-education/219666