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LEARNING ENGLISH THROUGH VIDEO GAMES

Амангелді Балжан, Сыздыкова Аиша

Студенты бакалавриата 1-курса Факультета Архитектуры и строительства ЕНУ им.

Л.Н.Гумилева, Астана, Казахстан

balzhan.amg@gmail.com , aishasyzdykova@gmail.com

Научный руководитель - Ч.З. Утемисовна

Annotation: This article examines the impact of video games on English language learners. Results of researches conducted by several field-workers showcase that students' insights on playing video games aimed at foreign language learning were positive. As well investigations made by us in form of survey among youngsters in age between 16-20 indicate that types of games and English proficiency have strong influences on students' perceptions. This work's purpose is to present several of the latest theories in video game studies and new media literacies, in addition to theories of language learning.

Introduction

Nowadays technology's role as an alternative tool for English language learners increases as educators recognize its possibilities to create both independent and collaborative learning environments in which students can acquire, immerse and practice a new language (Butler-Pascoe, 1997). With the use of the Internet, video games multimedia, and practice programs, students can engage in individualized instruction designed to meet their specific needs and participate in cooperative projects that will encourage communication with peers in their classrooms and throughout the global community. Relating to Larson (1999) and Li (1999), "the transactional nature and the pedagogical relevance of some state-of-the-art videogame-based interactive technologies make videogames a viable vehicle for foreign language learning". Video games can provide the ability to shape real life conditions, environments and positions in a way which is not feasible through any other source.

This article will explain why computers and video games can take an important part in language learning, and why we have an extraordinary opportunity to educate, not only our children but everyone who is intended to obtain the foreign language through video games.

Literature review

The corps of our article is based on using video games as educational tool. Even if it has long been a much thought-of goal, yet rarely an achieved one. Although video games may not yet be able to educate users in a content area effectively, language learners may benefit from video games. Educational software developers have struggled to present a substantial amount of content and context without sacrificing the degree of control game players expect. However, various studies carried out over the years in several universities of the U.S, England and Sweden with students of different majors, as well as current language teaching methodologies support the use of video games to learn language.

Dornyei & Clement (2001, p.399) claimed that "one of the main premises for using video games to educate has been to harness learners' motivation". Although, motivation is a crucial element in language learning, motivation alone does not guarantee the acquisition of a language. This was stated in another study performed by Prensky (2004) who found out that one of the most

difficult things teachers had to do was to aim for a balance between video game interaction and learning its language which may result too strenuous for some players' cognitive abilities".

Nevertheless, Brett emphasizes in his research in 2001 that the natural repetition which is present in video games, such as the constant set-up of mini-battles in role-playing games and the frequent use of interactive menus in virtual pet and simulation games, allows a language learner to be continuously exposed to the target language and creates more opportunities for acquisition to occur as opposed to other media, such as movies or books, which often do not reuse the same vocabulary or grammar, making acquisition more difficult and slow-paced. Interestingly enough, the repetition in video games allows a language learner to use their own initiative to use known language (semantic context, vocabulary or grammar) to decode unknown elements through constant exposure.

Furthermore, Crawford (2003, p.261) made a stunning discovery in his research when he stated that "a videogame provides players with a useful kinesthetic link to its language" resulting in players having to give a total physical response to actions prompted. Total Physical Response (TPR) activities are used in order to connect the language item whether, vocabulary or grammar, to a physical action, hopefully making the language easier to grasp, which is quite similar in video games where players perform on-screen actions that may serve to link the language they learn to their native language.

Results and Discussion of the survey

Here we present all data gathered from the questionnaire related to the research questions we conducted among several students as well as the analysis of what was said in each question.

At the beginning we asked 3 questions to get general information about language acquisition of the correspondents. The results showed that considerable number of them have good language level since learning it in primarily school and also have experience in playing computer games in English. This features make a significant ground for our research.

4. – Which genres of games are the most useful for language learners?

The answer to this question was a bit variant since out of the twenty eight students fourteen claimed that the most useful game genres for them were action/adventure games as they can employ various decoding strategies. While the remaining six said that in their view the most useful game genres were role playing video games because they can benefit from the repetition patterns present in these games

From these answers it can be inferred that videogames can cater for every mood and personality and can certainly aid these students in their learning process. However, which game genre is most useful to them depends on their language level.

5. – What grammatical patterns or chunks of language do you usually learn from video games?

Out of the twenty eight students who answered this question, thirteen answered that they usually learn phrasal verbs and idioms from video games while the other eleven students said they revise through videogames grammatical patterns such as reported speech and conditionals.

From these answers it can be inferred that for these students video games help best as an aid to learn phrasal verbs and fixed expressions while others use them as revising materials.

6. – Do video games help language learners actually acquire language, or do they serve more as a linguistic priming or practicing device?

Out of the twenty eight students who answered this question eight believed that video games help language acquisition whereas the remaining twenty believed they just serve as a practicing device.

From these answers it can be assumed that videogames can serve more as a practicing device for these students

7. – Do language learners benefit from having their actions described by a sports video game?

Sixteen of all twenty eight students who answered this question said they did benefit from this approach because it was quite practical.

From these answers it can be assumed that videogames can come as a new refreshing approach toward language instruction that students would really appreciate since both males and females showed much interest in sports video games.

8.– How long would it take a learner to acquire a language through a video game rather than through classroom instruction or self-study textbook?

All students had different views on this particular question. Two believed you could learn English through this medium in one year while another ten believed you could learn it in more than a year and yet another sixteen claimed the time you learn it was entirely up to the learner.

From the answers given by these students it can be inferred that there's no agreement on a learning curve. According to these students how fast students learn the language depends on other factors such as motivation and what kind of learners they are.

9. – Do students retain lexical or syntactic language studied through video games longer than identical language studied through traditional classroom and self-study activities?

Out of the 28 students who were asked this question, 18 answered that they thought retention was easier and lasted longer for them through video games whilst other 10 claimed they benefited more from traditional classroom instruction.

From these answers it can be inferred that even though for these students retention is generally easier through video games due to their interaction capabilities with players, how well students retain language patterns through either way will depend on what type of memory they possess.

Conclusion: As a result most of these students claim that they can learn a language using video games. According to all the following researches not only is it a refreshing new approach but it is also beneficial for vocabulary acquisition and the subconscious learning of pronunciation. Many business, medicine, and law schools in northern Europe are implementing video games such as Kristen's Cookies, Dexter and Objection as part of their curricula, whilst other schools introduce more commercially known titles, for example Brain Age and Trauma Center to their science and math courses. We think that in aim of encouraging English language among qazaqstani students it is crucial to make the process of acquiring engaging and interesting.

Literature

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