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Digital Games and the Development of Communicative Competence

*Digitala spel och utvecklingen av kommunicativ kompetens*

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Abstract
The purpose of this paper was to review research within the field of digital games and language learning to explore whether gaming can facilitate communicative competence and foster motivation for language learning. To answer my questions I conducted a research synthesis, compiling a variety of research over the last decade to answer my questions as effectively as possible. Results showed that digital games do in fact facilitate language development and induce motivation. Research also showed that different games provide different opportunities and activities, resulting in some games fostering language competence more than others. For instance, *World of Warcraft* provided social situations where conversations were erratic, spontaneous, contextual and driven by small events in the game, while *The Sims* focused more on strategic and creative activities. Additionally, research suggested that digital games motivated learners to develop their L2 language in hope of achieving more goals together within a variety games and game types.

Keywords: *communicative competence, linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, pragmatic competence, digital games, language learning, ESL, MMORPGs, motivation and game types.*
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1. Introduction

In this degree project, I aim to investigate how digital games develop the all-round communicative competence of second language (L2) learners. I find this question both interesting and relevant as new generations are using technology more and more, exposing themselves to social networking as well as video and computer games. The curriculum for English in Sweden states that,

Students should be given the opportunity, through the use of language in a functional and meaningful context and develop comprehensive communication skills. This ability includes both reception, which involves understanding spoken language and texts, and the production and interaction, which involves expressing oneself and interacting with others in speech and writing and to adapt their language to different situations, purposes and audiences. (Skolverket, 2014, p. 1)

Thus, all-round communicative competence generally includes grammatical competence as well as several other competencies within a specific language. I have divided all-round communicative competence according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) and will look into three various competencies, namely sociolinguistic, linguistic and pragmatic competence.

Gee (2007) argues that language is not the only important communication system, but images, symbols, graphs, diagrams, artifacts and many other visual symbols are just as significant - and more so today than ever. In other words, Gee (2007) argues that we should see the multiplicity of literacy and think beyond print (p. 18).

Further, in connection to Gee’s (2007) previous statement, Lundahl (2009, p. 61) states that digital games and communication through technology constantly surrounds us and affects our teaching and learning. Lightbown and Spada (2006) write,

Language was one of a number of symbol systems that are developed in childhood. Language can be used to represent knowledge that children have acquired through physical interaction with the environment. (p. 20)
Gee (2007) also argues that we have a so-called “situated cognition” which allows the human body to not only experience things by what we know, but also from what we feel and see. In other words, the material, social, and cultural part of the world matters when we learn, and this is what Gee refers to as situated cognition (p. 9). I hypothesize that situated cognition matters when it comes to language learning through digital games as it may allow the learner to draw from feelings and visual material.

Moreover, the entire subject of digital gaming and the effect it has on the younger generations is constantly debated, more today than ever due to the significant growth within the gaming industry. Peterson (2012) refers to Aldrich (2009) and Thorne, Black, & Sykes (2009) when he writes, “The use of computer-based games has expanded dramatically in recent year. Online gaming has become increasingly widespread, and network-based role-playing games are now highly popular (Peterson, 2012, p. 71).

Lastly, I believe that the digitalized gaming industry is growing by the day and is impacting our lives both socially and professionally, therefore acquiring significant attention over the last decade by several authorities, such as Gee (2007) and Reinders (2012). Since there seems to be a growing interest within the field of digital games and the educational context of games I find it even more interesting to be part of this research and unveil what these well-known authors have agreed or disagreed upon. This is why I aim to investigate whether digital games help develop the all-round communicative competence and motivation of L2 learners.
2. Literature Review

2.1 All-Round Communicative Competence

According to CEFR, communicative competence is comprised by linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence.

1. **Linguistic competence** is defined to include lexical, phonological and syntactical knowledge. Further, it is described as a skill that varies between different individuals based on organization and accessibility.

2. **Sociolinguistic competence** is defined as the norms of language (e.g. how one expresses oneself in social context such as parties or within various game communities). Further, it includes rules for politeness, classes and social groups.

3. **Pragmatic competence** is defined as functional use of linguistic resources, e.g. production and interaction. Further, it includes the mastery of cohesion, coherence and discourses. In addition, it also includes the understanding of types and forms of irony and parody. Lastly, CEFR stresses the fact that pragmatic use is even more dependent on interaction and cultural environments than linguistic competence.

These three different categories are in Sweden generally known as all-round communicative competence. They are included into the English syllabi of the courses given at elementary and high schools in Sweden and are referred to as communication skills (Skolverket, 2014).

As human beings, we do not always make the best decisions based on logic or general abstract principles, but rather connect previous experience from both the real world and the digitalized world to each other; Gee (2007) refers to this as connectionism (p. 9).

Connectionism could also be seen as what Gee (2007) refers to as real, projective and virtual identities which Gee claims are the different personalities we bring to ourselves when playing games and that these personalities help us in making decisions regarding our real life as well as our virtual digitalized lives (p. 55-62). Gee (2007) discusses various thoughts and processes of how games teach both young and old how to engage in various learning contexts and to interact with both virtual characters (i.e. avatars), as well as other players.
Gee (2007) asks the question of how video games have come to sell millions of copies per game if games are both time consuming, hard and even frustrating at times (p. 3). So why are games seen as a “pleasantly frustrating- and life enchanting” experience? One of Gee's main arguments is that school is one of the key places where learning takes place, although it is hardly the only one. Games provide various situations where learners have to stress strategic thinking and problem solving and often collaboratively (Gee, 2007, p. 4).

Lightbown and Spada (2006) argue that learners develop language through exposure. In example, by being exposed to online communities and online games, the learner can develop their all-round communicative competence. In turn, the learner can learn lexical slang and jargon that only participants of that or a similar community may understand.

Further, Lightbown and Spada (2006) refer to Elman, Bates, Johnson, Karmiloff-Smith, Parisi, and Plunkett (1996) who explained language acquisition in children and how their minds can associate a word or a phrase with different essential contexts and thus create a memory for further use. In other words, when the child then hears the word or phrase it will bring to mind what it represented in a previous situation that they had already encountered (p. 23).

According to Ellis (2002), the emphasis is on the frequency with which learners encounter specific linguistic features (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 41). Connectionists claim that learners learn language and develop their knowledge of language gradually through exposure to the various instances, such as digital gaming, thus resulting in language competence development. Lightbown and Spada (2006) write:

After hearing language features in specific situational or linguistic contexts over and over again, learners develop a stronger and stronger network of 'connections' between these elements. Eventually, the presence of one situational or linguistic element will activate the other(s) in the learner's mind. (p. 41)

All things considered, I hypothesize that regular and consistent exposure to a specific or similar scenario (e.g. language scenario) will provide the ESL learners with a variety of experience that can later be used in other similar situations and contexts to assist their future conversations. In other words, game communities can provide the ESL learner with many opportunities for language development and can grant the ESL learner with many scenarios and tools which the learner can draw upon for various future situations.

Reinders (2012) concluded that ESL learners can draw upon past experiences and transfer them to new, similar contexts to solve problems or familiarize with other games when playing
a similar game (Reinders, 2012, p. xiii). Furthermore, Reinders (2012) argues that games with good game design have features particularly relevant to language learning and that these are an important tool in language and literacy learning, e.g., create talk and text both in-game and outside of the game (Reinders, 2012, p. xiii).

2.2 Motivation

Gee (2007) speaks of something he calls the problem of content (p. 22). Problem of content may be that we today try to teach our students in school through textbooks and other various means without motivating the students first. Gee’s example is basketball: he argues,

> No one would want to treat basketball as “content” apart from the game itself. Imagine a textbook that contained all the facts and rules about basketball read by students who never watched or played the game. How well do you think they would understand this textbook? (p. 22, 23)

One can claim that video games do not necessarily need to be a waste of time since you never learn anything “in general” and instead you always learn something specific (Gee, 2007, p. 23), and I hypothesize that this might be a pillar for why learners are drawn to digital games.

Gee (2007) also uses the definition semiotic domain which means that different signs and events have different meanings based on culture, experience and history. For instance, childbirth was historically seen as a home-based event that was to take place with family and friends, however, as hospitals and medicine developed, the view of childbirth took a different meaning for many (p. 19), yet in some parts of the world childbirth can still be seen as a home-event.

Gee (2007) claims that the 'semiotic domain' is any set of practices that recruits various modalities such as images, words, symbols, sounds, gestures etc. (i.e. game communities where games are discussed) and argues that the semiotic domain should be seen as an area where people act and value differently based on past experience, ideologies, principles and morals. In addition Gee (2007) mentions three key points that happen when we engage actively in a semiotic domain:

1. We learn to experience (see, feel, and operate on) the world in new ways.
2. Since semiotic domains usually are shared by groups of people who carry them on as distinctive social practices. We gain the potential to join this social group, and to become affiliated with such kinds of people (even though we may never see all of them, or any of them, face to face).

3. We gain resources that prepare us for future learning and problem solving in the domain and in related domains. (p. 24)

One could conclude that while the problem of content may be an issue in today's schools, semiotic domains allow the English second language (ESL) learner to draw upon modalities from past experiences to motivate themselves or interest themselves in a specific subject to achieve a goal. In the light of this, I argue that this is exactly what digital games provide the ESL learners with, opportunities to learn and draw from previous experiences.

This in turn leads me to another question, namely, why are games more appealing than books with today's growing youth? Why are children and teenagers more motivated to start their computers than to open a book? Gee (2007) argues that games, unlike books and movies, provide an interaction possibility. With books, you get a storyline created, where you simply have to accept what has been written with no ability to alter the story. Neither movies nor books provide the interactive possibility that games provide. Repeatedly, Gee (2007) claims that you can become sad and upset when you're playing a video game and your character dies, but you also usually get “pissed” that you (the player) have failed (p. 80). Some might feel that they have simply failed their character and simply start again and motivate oneself to become better and not fail again, resulting in an emotional investment, an emotional investment that is different from any investment you have in a book or movie. Harmer (2001) claims that, “Errors are a natural part in language learning and development. Errors are always going to exist when you work with language. Errors and mistakes should and will happen” (p. 138).

Moreover, in the figure below MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, and Noels (1998) show a multitude of properties needed to reach so called “willingness to communicate” and includes, different attitudes, motivations, confidence and a mixture of contexts to achieve.
Eventually, the problem of content can lead us to ask the question, what makes the ESL learners motivated to learn a new language? At the very beginning of Lightbown and Spada (2006) we are given a selection of various questions where one can agree or disagree of how languages are learned (p. xvii). One of these questions specifically caught my interest, namely “The most important predictor of success in L2 acquisition is motivation”.

Lightbown and Spada (2006) claim that the motivation of L2 learning is a complex phenomenon and can be defined in terms of two factors. The first one being the learners’ communicative needs and the second one being their attitude towards the L2 community. If the situation presents itself or requires the learner to speak the language, the learner will in turn be motivated to develop the language to be able to communicate (p. 63).

Thus, the ESL learners develop both the sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence without being aware of the process, simply because they are in need of a specific terminology to be able to progress further within a game. Moreover, the ESL learner develops a new experience or memory which leads to another semiotic domain relation that can be used in later similar scenarios.

According to Lundahl (2009), one of the most important momentum of learning is the learner’s sense of accomplishment, which I argue, is provided by games (e.g. achievement
systems, where the learner can complete various scenarios or actions and be rewarded with an achievement for their completion), thus resulting in increased motivation.

In the light of this, it can be hypothesized that games motivate ESL learners to engage in language development in the hope of achieving a special goal within a specific game or community, in other words resulting in language development simply by being the means to an end.

2.3 Game Types

For the purpose of analysis, it is useful to have a framework of the various types of games. Walsh (2010) described digital games as,

Systems that exist as codes and algorithms within machines and the game player interacts with the machine by communicating with the hardware and software. This is a constant, evolving experimentation with ideas about how the digital game works in tandem with the machine on which the game is played. This evolves over time, as players experience new games across a variety of existing and emerging platforms. This experimentation and interaction includes inputting and receiving the codified messages games designers incorporated into the system. (p. 26)

Research shows that massive multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPGs), such as the predominant MMORPG World of Warcraft (Wow), revealed to include all kinds of activities when played (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2012, p. 304). These activities could be described as active, exploration, problem solving, strategic, social, and creative play and be applied to many of today's digital games.

Dongwan (2013) claims that communicative competence development was more likely to occur when players engage in MMORPGs since MMORPGs present more valuable opportunities in terms of language learning (p. 287). Fuster, Carbonell, Chamarro, and Oberst (2013) described MMORPGs contra traditional video games,

MMORPG are very different from the traditional videogames with which this industry started out. In the traditional videogames, regardless of their type (arcade, shooter, adventure, sports, etc.), a sole participant plays against the machine. In MMORPG in contrast, there is interaction with other players, since the best way to progress in games of this type is by forming clans or guilds of players with the same goals. In turn, within such guilds there are rules, assigned roles and hierarchies. Moreover, the interaction with other guilds
can be very varied: alliances, open conflicts, commercial transactions, etc. This complex interactivity constitutes one of the most important characteristics of MMORPGs. (p. 1)

Thorne, Fisher, and Lu (2012) point out that several studies “uniformly [have] assessed *WoW* and other MMORPGs as developmentally rich environments for the learning of literacy, scientific reasoning, problem solving, leadership, and collaboration” (p. 281). However, Thorne et al. (2012) also emphasize that there still is “an outstanding need for meticulous empirical studies that critically evaluate the environments games provide for L2 learning” (p. 282).

I hypothesize that the ESL learners constantly want to develop and stay active within the game process. Since many MMORPGs require interaction between learners to provide more content, this in turn motivates the learners to learn English to advance further within the game. Moreover, I believe that MMORPGs provide a stronger all-round communicative competence development since MMORPGs (e.g. *EverQuest*, *Lineage*, *WoW*) provide the learners with all six various types of activities.

Fuster et al. (2013) carried out a questionnaire study where they asked a variety of ESL learners a lot of questions concerning digital gaming, mainly MMORPGs. The sampling and research was conducted for two months on online communities for several MMORPGs (such as *Aion*, *EVE-Online*, *Guild Wars*, *Rift* and *WoW*). Questions asked were,

- Which MMORPG do you prefer? (e.g., *Aion*, *EVE-Online*, *Guild Wars*, *Rift* and *WoW*)
- How many hours do you spend per day?
- How many avatars (i.e., characters) do you have?
- What role do you prefer playing? (e.g., tank, damage dealer, healer or support)
- How old are you? (Fuster et al., 2013, p. 3)

The figures show that a majority, 31.6%, played *WoW*, followed by *Lord of the Rings*, 21.9%, and then lower numbers on the remaining MMORPGs mentioned (p. 3). Hours spent showed an average of 23 hours per week (p. 5) and the standard profile of the ESL learners was 25 years, who were either studying or working at the time of the study. This shows that a general age of ESL learners playing MMORPGs are between 20 and 30 years old. In addition, it seems to be clear that *WoW* is one of the most preferred MMORPGs in the world at the time these studies were conducted. But how is all-round competence (i.e. linguistic, sociolinguistic
and pragmatic competence) developed in digital games? I will address this in the results sections.
3. Research Question

My research questions aim to determine what previous studies have to say about what L2 learners acquire in terms of communicative competence through gaming. Thus my research questions are:

1. In what ways can the communicative competence of ESL learners be developed through digital gaming?
2. Can gaming provide motivation for language learning?

Further, I have chosen to divide communicative competence into three various competencies, namely, linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR, p. 13). In addition, I have chosen to add a second question relating to motivation and whether or not gaming provides motivation for language learning.
4. Method

For the purpose of this research, I chose to conduct a research synthesis. Ortega (2010) explains research synthesis as “an investigation and evaluation of past findings in a systematic fashion, always explicating the methodology followed in the review so as to enable replication by other reviewers”. In addition, Ortega (2010) argues that, “No single synthesis can give a definitive answer to a research problem, because research is a human enterprise that is contingent on the time and space in which it is produced” (p. 119).

Moreover, Norris and Ortega (2006) argued that the purpose of a research synthesis is to integrate available research evidence, such that both patterns and inconsistencies may be identified with precision (p. xi). In addition, Norris and Ortega (2006) claim that, “Research synthesis compiles findings /.../ seek generalizations /.../ across studies (p. 7)”. Additionally, Ortega (2010) spoke of norms and ethical conducts, because synthesis only work with existing studies and previously reported results, they need not be concerned with norms for ethical conduct towards human participants. However, there are other ethical consideration worth mentioning. As with most quantitatively oriented research, syntheses and meta-analyses can be dangerously attractive and persuasive in their claim to take stock of accumulated evidence and in their aspiration to provide so-called final answer to important but elusive questions in a given domain of study. (p. 10)

Bryman (2008) also suggested a definition of methods and methodology saying,

By “methods”, we typically mean the techniques that researchers employ for practicing their craft. “Methods” might be instruments for data collection like questionnaires, interviews or observations: they might refer to tools used for analyzing data, which might be statistical techniques or extracting themes from unstructured data: or the term might refer to aspects of the research process like sampling. Methodology is the study of the methods that are employed. (p. 160)

My research was a mix of qualitative findings, as I aimed to find several authors, within my field of inquiry, who had claimed similar claims as I have. Norrish and Ortega (2006) claimed that there is an importance in how research is found and how primary studies are
selected for review. I provided bullet-points for my main focus when searching for relevant articles. Articles with similar inclusion criteria as mine were included into my results and analysis and articles that divert from my inclusion criteria were excluded.

4.1 Data Gathering

The majority of the articles included in my research synthesis were acquired through an electronic database search in Cambridge Journals (ReCALL). ReCALL is mainly used by European scholars for European articles resulting in the emphasis being on European languages and contexts. However, I will still make use of studies conducted outside of Europe, as long as they are second language learner studies. Additionally, I made use of Linguistic and Language Behavior Abstract (LLBA) as it included an assortment of articles relevant to my research questions. In addition I made use of the search tool Summon since it provided additional research that added new interesting perspectives and matched my inclusion criteria. Furthermore, I made use of Gee (2007) and Reinders (2012) due to the fact that they are seen as an authority within my field of inquiry.

The database search included keywords such as, digital gaming, language acquisition, communicative competence, linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, pragmatic competence and game types.

4.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were selected with ESL learners’ context in mind and focused on language competence development. In addition, I am limiting my research to full portable document format (PDF) files and legitimate published articles ranging between 2004 and 2014 to keep the research as fresh as possible. Lastly, I aimed to mainly look at studies conducted by European scholars to narrow my study, however, this was found to be an implication, simply because there is a lot of material (e.g., case studies and observations) conducted in countries such as Japan and China, that should not be excluded since they treat second language learners competence development just as well as European studies.
Inclusion Criteria

- Date between 2004 and 2014
- Focus on gaming and language learning effect it has on ESL learners
- Focus on motivation provided by playing digital games
- Focus on massive multiplayer games
- Focus on learner-learner interaction
- Focus on experiments and data gathering
- Focus on teacher and classroom views

Exclusion Criteria

- Focus on single player games
- Focus on a single game
- Focus on technology
- Focus on theory only

I included a variety of studies to analyze in the results section. That being said, eight studies, being case studies, observations or survey papers, were included in this research synthesis to provide a more accurate reading and allow me to answer my research question sufficiently. To support my claims, I refer to other position papers found throughout my database searches.
5. Results

5.1 Gaming and Communicative Competence

In order to be able to answer my research questions properly I have chosen to divide the sections of language competence into subsections dealing with each competence development separately. This will be followed by a final section that will deal with motivation. Lastly, I will make use of quotations to support my claims.

5.1.1 Gaming and Linguistic Competence

Current research shows that players who engage in MMORPGs such as *EverQuest, Lineage* or *WoW* are provided with contexts where they can develop their target language interaction, thus developing their target language discourse management skills and therefore lead to better communicative competence (Peterson, 2012, p. 72). In addition, MMORPGs provide features such as Guild memberships which allows the learner to join a collaborative group and build relationships with other players. The purpose of Guild memberships is to achieve common goals, teamwork and progress within a specific game, this eventually leads to even more interaction exposure, not to mention other opportunities. By joining a guild, a learner can easily learn from more experienced players and game-related web forums resulting in linguistic development.

Furthermore, Dongwan (2013) also found that learning by playing video games was not the only way ESL learners learned language and developed language competence but also by interacting and engaging in gameplay through online discussions and collaboration.

Sundqvist and Sylvén (2012) argued that ESL learners benefited from communicating online (2012, p. 197). It was argued that, compared to music and TV, games provided better opportunities for language development due to the activity that the learner had to engage in to achieve various goals. Music and TV did not provide this kind of engagement and were rather
“passive” (Sundqvist and Sylvén, 2012, p. 197). In their study, Sundqvist and Sylvén (2012) found that boys played games more than girls (p. 197). The amount of time spent online for boys was approximately 40.1 h/week for gaming and an additional 6h for the internet. Moreover, the hours were not the only thing that differed, but the games themselves differed as well. While the boys preferred WoW, the girls preferred The Sims, which, as argued in Reinders (2012), did not contribute as much to their language acquisition (p. 197). Questionnaire data and interviews corroborated these game-related findings. In other words, Reinders (2012) and Sundqvist (2009) saw the same results, where boys and girls did not play the same games. Boys seemed to prefer the more action-adventure based genres (such as WoW, Counter-Strike, Call of Duty), girls preferred the simulation genres (such as The Sims and Restaurant City) (p. 199). In other words, boys engaged in more interactive games, such as WoW, which required more interactivity to be able to succeed in the so called “end-game,” while girls on the other hand, engaged in more “passive” games, such as The Sims which does not require further interaction to accomplish all goals.

In another study, Sundqvist and Sylvén (2012) conducted a similar study, but with younger participants. The results were very similar to their previous study where the hours spent for boys and girls were non-significant. What was significant, however, was the fact that boys spent more hours playing. Out of the 10.6 hours per week boys spent at the computer, 4.4 hours were playing digital games, unlike girls who spent 8.4 hours and only 1.1 hours playing. This was then measured with their success rate on the national test. The tests showed that those exposed to daily doses of digital games acquired higher scores on the test, while those who did not spend as much time in front of games daily scored less (p. 199). Reinders (2012) refers to several authors who have written the following.

Interaction is the term used to refer to the interpersonal activity that takes place both face-to-face and electronically between people or between people and computer, as well as the intrapersonal activity that occurs within our minds (Chapelle, 2001). Interaction in the foreign language has been found to contribute to language acquisition. Interaction helps generate comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985), encourages negotiation of meaning (Pica, 1994), facilitates noticing (Schmidt, 1990), produces negative feedback (Schmidt, ibid.) and encourages output. (Swain, 1985) (p. 159)

Furthermore, Reinders (2012) refers to Swain’s Output Hypothesis, which claims that, for successful L2 acquisition (SLA) to occur, comprehensible input is not enough. The learner needs to be given the chance for communicative output during interaction to be able to progress and develop language competence (p. 159).
With digital gaming growing by the day, game developers are becoming more and more aware of the language the learners are being exposed to, causing them to emphasize meaningful communication by for example, and adding mature language filters to show that they do not support foul language. Since the learners still engage on other various communities and third-party programs such as *Ventrilo, Teamspeak* and *Skype*, preventing all kind of foul language exposure is simply impossible.

Cornillie, Thorne, and Desmet (2012) defined MMORPGs saying, “*WoW*, as well as other MMORPGs, are game worlds that are populated by individuals representing increasingly diverse social strata, ages and linguistic background” (p. 245). Moreover, Cornillie et al. (2012) provided a figure by Vandercruysse, Vandewaetere, and Clarebout (2012), who suggested presupposed benefits of language learning by playing digital games (p. 249).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game Elements</th>
<th>Presupposed Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fun or enjoyability</td>
<td>enjoyment, pleasure, motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rules</td>
<td>structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goals and objectives</td>
<td>motivation, stimulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interactive/interaction</td>
<td>being active, interacting with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outcomes and feedback</td>
<td>learning, informing about progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problem solving/competition/challenge</td>
<td>adrenaline, excitement, creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>representation/story/fantasy/context</td>
<td>emotion (enthusiasm), stimulation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This supports the hypothesis that the game elements provided the respective presupposed benefits. However, Cornillie et al. (2012) suggests that researchers should be cautious in claiming that these game elements in themselves provide interaction and language development (p. 249). For example, having fun or enjoying a game does not in itself provide motivation.

I argue that interaction seems to be one of main key points in linguistic development, since there seems to be an essential need for learners to engage in such activities as discussions on online communities and third-party program conversations. Their target-language, English in this case, seems to develop simply because they are in need of the language to develop their characters and achieve higher goals within a specific game. Moreover, various games all seem to provide intuitive learning, no matter what game type or activities offered. It is however worth noting that games do not necessarily force or motivate all learners to engage in interactive roles as they offer a vast variety activities, activities that can be done individually.
within the game worlds, thus resulting in less language development for learners who do not engage in interactive interaction or are motivated enough to learn the language to advance within a game.

Rankin, Morrison, McNeal, Gooch, and Shute (2009) explored language development in eighteen ESL and eight native speakers in the English MMORPG, *EverQuest*. The results showed that ESL learners who interacted with native English speakers (NES) scored an overall higher rate in comprehension of vocabulary items, and that communication patterns were characteristic of collaborative social interaction in context (p. 161-164).

Dongwan (2013) writes:

Participants played games to learn English or they learned English to play games. The repeated words or phrases, particularly regarding history and geography, led to the situated learning of these words and phrases during game play. (p. 292)

Rankin et al. (2009) found that the ESL learners who interacted with NES through chat messages in *EverQuest2* tended to be more willing to chat, and thus, scored 57.14 on outgoing chat messages. While native speakers score an overall higher score than the ESL learners and generated an average of 74.25 chat messages, it still showed that ESL learners were willing to communicate to proceed within *EverQuest2* (p. 163). Additionally, Rankin et al. (2009) made use of an application and scripted their own tool called *ClockWerk* (CW). CW was designed to show deviations in linguistic patterns between the NES and the ESL learners. There was no significantly measured difference. It was found, however, that NES players demonstrated more attempts to influence their ESL teammates, making suggestions and instructing actions. Thus, NES took a leader role, while ESL learners seemed to follow the lead (p. 165).

Thorne and Black (2007) concluded that online games and language learning have found benefits ranging from increased student motivation and engagement to enhanced vocabulary use and expanded opportunities for intercultural communication, this by various interactions, such as a L2 learner in communication with a native speaker within the games.

This leaves us with the question of sociolinguistic- and pragmatic competence development.
5.1.2 Gaming and Sociolinguistic Competence

The use of communicative strategies in digital games include expressions of appreciation, greetings and humor. Rama, Black, van Es, and Warschauer (2012) claim that digital games, especially, MMORPGs “emphasizes communicative competence, or the ability to communicate meaningfully and effectively within a given context” (p.327). Moreover, Blake (2011) argues that,

Ironically, few people stop to reflect on the fact that traditional classroom practices can vary widely with respect to techniques, class sizes, individual student attention, and teacher talents in ways that can often tarnish the privileged status normally accorded to the face-to-face classroom experience. (p. 20)

By interacting with people online through voice-communicative programs, such as Teamspeak, Skype or Ventrilo, the learners are exposed to the social part of communication. This in turn develops the sociolinguistic abilities of the learner as they learn the norms and code of conduct for the group in question, including the appropriate use of greetings and leave-takings, small talk, informal language and hand humor to create and maintain social cohesion (Peterson, 2012, p. 88).

Muniandy, Nair, Shanmugam, Ahmad, and Noor (2010) conducted an observation in Malaysia where learners went to school and were exposed to the English language pretty early in their childhood. In addition, parents spoke English with their kids as much as possible. However, Muniandy et al. (2010) found that it was not enough to expose oneself to social situations and use the language. It was found that it is simply not enough for a second language instructor to use the language in social situations, they must also be familiarized with sociolinguistics. In other words, Muniandy et al. (2010) argued that cultural refinements matter, and the students need to be aware of formal and informal language use.

Rama et al. (2012) found that there is a rich potential for providing language development opportunities. Moreover, many of today's MMORPGs, including WoW, have an achievement system, which creates an urge for players to accomplish various achievements and to do so they need to communicate and expose themselves to interaction with other players. Where does this communication take place? The game consists of several chat rooms for players, in many cases second language learners, to communicate with other players, may they be native or ESL learners.

Chunhong and Griffiths (2011) conducted a survey in China that included 102 ESL learners and the questions were focused on cultural difference between the western world and
China. While this in itself is not part of my research, the answer given to one specific question could be applied to my research. The question was, “What do you think the teachers should do in English classes to improve /.../ communication skills”. Three students answered like this:

I hope that the teachers can show /.../ political news in class and organize some discussions about them so that we can know about the current affairs in the western countries, play some movies that reflect the mainstream cultures in the western countries and explain the key culture differences between them and the Chinese cultures.

In my opinion, the teachers should give up the main objective of grammar teaching in class. They need to teach us how to communicate with the foreigners, distribute some materials about the western cultures to us, and explain the idioms and the contexts for us to use them.

It is necessary for the teachers to help us make some foreign friends, introduce some websites for us to be exposed to the current affairs, fashions, updated cultural events in the western countries. The teachers should reserve time for explaining western cultures in class so that the students can get more touch with them. (p. 116)

This shows that, even in very culturally different countries, learners wish to be provided with opportunities, similar to the ones given in many western countries, to engage and encounter learners of other cultures and languages. This in term would allow those learners to engage in face-to-face interaction, thus, developing sociolinguistic competence. Additionally, I would like to argue that language learning through social interaction online is simply not enough, but needs to be combined with language learning in the classroom where teachers set the general language rules, such as grammar. Moreover, Chunhong and Griffiths (2010) concluded their survey and suggest a complication with learner-learner interaction,

Results /.../ show that it is vital for students to be aware of the importance of cultural differences for intercultural communication and to show respect for these differences. With the purpose of developing their intercultural communicative competence, students should take every possible opportunity to communicate with foreigners /.../ it is also necessary for them to empathize with foreigners and avoid ethnocentrism when communicating with them. (p. 119)

I believe and argue that, by exposing learners to other cultures, and appealing to their interests, as seen in Chunhong and Griffiths study, learners can be taught to understand and empathize with other learners more readily. In turn, in doing so, the sociolinguistic
competence will develop as well. This, in turn, leads to the question of pragmatic development.

5.1.3 Gaming and Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic development entails the mastery of cohesion, coherence and discourses. It also includes the understanding of types and forms of irony and parody. CEFR also stressed the fact that pragmatic use is even more dependent on interaction and cultural environments than linguistic competence.

Taguchi (2011) argues that since 1980, “pragmatic competence, namely the ability to communicate and interpret meaning in social interactions, has become an essential component of L2 proficiency” (p. 289). Moreover, Taguchi (2011) argues that, “Pragmatic development entails acquisition of both [pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics] knowledge bases, as well as efficient control of them in real-time communication” (p. 289-290).

Peterson (2012) concluded that ESL learners used a combination of transfer and adaptive discourse management strategies in order to effectively manage their interaction (p. 88). Moreover, the data gathered showed that learners effectively utilized types of positive politeness, including the appropriate use of greetings and leave-takings, small talk, informal language, “hand humor” to create and maintain social cohesion (p. 88).

Taguchi (2009) conducted a study where she included four groups of participants. The first group was 30 native Japanese learners, the second was 30 NES, the third was 24 American learners of Japanese who had at least six months experience in Japan and with the culture, and the last group was 24 American learners of Japanese who had no experience with Japan or the culture. Taguchi (2009) then used an oral discourse completion test to include and exclude participants for a more accurate result. The participants were then enrolled in Japanese courses in a variety universities for observation of pragmatic language development. Taguchi (2009) analyzed and found that the lexis and phrasal expressions that appeared in each compliment response included the use of negative wordings. This showed a denial strategy trend, where the learners would use negative words to convey meaning to a specific context. Taguchi (2009) concluded that the study revealed that the distribution patterns of the three compliment response strategies differed between the L1 and L2 speakers. Additionally, the results showed that the Japanese second language learners produced more target-like
compliment responses, which are characterized by the frequent use of avoidance strategies (p. 181). Lastly, it showed that the Japanese second language learners had a tendency towards using stronger negation responses, such as “that's wrong”, “that's not right” and “heavens no”. Native speakers would be use softer negation words, such as “sonnakoto (wa) nai” (It's not really like that) (p. 181). Taguchi (2009) concluded that L1 transfer alone cannot sufficiently account for these divergences from the target language norms, because their L2 Japanese responses differed greatly from the base-line native English speaker responses (p. 182).

Rama et al. (2012) suggest that there is an acceptance of pauses and errors in WoW due to simultaneous playing. The pauses provide language learners with valuable time to formulate utterances. The acceptance of errors makes ESL learners feel safe and more willing to take risks. In contrast, Rama et al. (2012) also point out some limitations: gamers might not find co-players whom they feel comfortable with. Moreover, newcomers might struggle with the game itself, preventing them from focusing on language. Additionally, Rama et al. (2012) claim that learners who are too meticulous and focused on language form may avoid risk-taking and use language less actively, resulting in slower or no pragmatic competence development at all. Moreover, Rama et al. (2010) claimed that learners within MMORPGs seemed to be able to formulate utterances due the pauses provided by the simultaneous playing. The acceptance of errors seemed to make the learners feel safe and more willing to take risks, allowing them to reach “willingness to communicate”.

Tian (2014) conducted a case study involving one Chinese L2 learners' pragmatic behaviors, more in detail, refusals, which entails high pragmatic competence of the speaker. The Chinese student had passed the countrywide examination of English language proficiency and had very prominent English language skills. He however, argued that his English language declined due to the exposure of the English language outside of class. Additionally, the student had no cross cultural experience at all. The data collected in this case study was through role-play tasks, which could easily be argued to exist in digital role-playing games. Moreover, Tian (2014) referred to another researcher to define direct and indirect speech where it was claimed that direct speech is where the learner says what he or she means, while through indirect speech, the learner means something more or something other than what he or she says. Tian (2014) concluded,

The [learner] knew some strategies in doing speech acts of refusals and he was able to change his refusing in different ways according to the variations of situations. However, the limited L2 proficiency restrains him from utilizing more complex linguistic codes to fulfill his pragmatic strategies in refusing. As we can see in
his responding to his interlocutor, there were some grammatical mistakes in his language: e.g., “although… but…” (line 5); “I’m very like…” (line 5); “borrow it to…” (line 16); “But buy a ticket for you is (line 36)...and all the sentences were simple and short: e.g., “It’s very cheap”; “Don’t pay” (line 7); “I have a little child” (line 11)... Long-time pauses and repetitions appeared frequently in his expressions: e.g., “Anyway you ah did your job very well” (line 7); “but, but buy a ticket for you is, is hum unfair for other people” (line 36); “Maybe you can... ask the, the train station, right, the train station” (line 39). Undoubtedly the fact that he couldn’t express himself freely in L2 directly and negatively influenced his choice of refusing strategies. (p. 214)

Tian (2014) found that “there is a correlation between L2 linguistic and pragmatic proficiency”. In addition, it was found that “L2 pragmatic competence, to some extent, was determined by his limited linguistic ability” (Tian, 2014, p. 215).

Thus, this research shows that it could be argued that pragmatic competence is developed through digital games, specially role-playing games. However, according to the research by Taguchi (2009) it was clear that norms and ethical boundaries were not necessarily transferred between first and second languages. Thus I argue that pragmatic competence development can in itself not occur without cultural context and cultural transfer. Moreover, the case study conducted by Tian (2014) seemed to show that pragmatic competence is entwined with linguistic competence and, thus, limited to the linguistic competence.

5.2 Gaming and Motivation for Language Learning

Prensky (2003) refers to the sine qua non of successful learning which he argues is motivation, a motivated learner cannot be stopped. Continuously, Prensky (2003) argues that in this day and age much of the content that needs to be learned by students is not directly motivating to them and terminology such as “boring” or “dry” often crosses their lips. Moreover, Prensky (2003) writes that it is probably safe to say that today’s teachers, trainers and other kind of educators are rarely as effective in the motivational department and this in turn causes an issue for students to learn (p. 1). Prensky (2003) argues,

It is the very attitude we would all like our learners to have: interested, competitive, cooperative, results-oriented, actively seeking information and solutions. It therefore makes a great deal of sense to try to merge the content of learning and the motivation of games, and this is indeed what is happening. (p. 2)
I would like to connect this section to Gee's (2007) theory about the problem of content and how we may and should motivate the ESL learners by appealing to their interest more than we currently are in today's society. I argue that we should be willing to take a step outside of our comfort zone with textbooks and try something different that might interest the learners more than the content we are currently teaching. Prensky (2003) writes,

What attracts and “glues” kids to today's video and computer games, I believe, is neither the games' violence, nor even their subject matter, but rather the learning the games provide. Kids like all humans love to learn when it isn't forced upon them. (p. 2)

So the question remains, why are games more appealing than books in today's growing youth? Why are children and teenagers more motivated to start their computers than opening a book? Fuster et al. (2013) discussed MMORPGs,

... these games have an open and non-linear nature: players can choose their own itineraries of plot development and there is no specific end-point, rather the games are eternal, and there are always new attractions and activities to undertake. Even so, at the end of a particular mission the player is rewarded with additional skills and information, placing them in a new and advantageous situation from which to continue the game. (p. 1)

I basically argue that this is once again a question of interaction ability, as argued previously by Gee (2007). Games provide the learner or the individual interacting with the game with different opportunities that are not provided by books or movies. As you watch a movie or read a book you simply have to accept the content without any possibility to alter the outcome, this is simply a possibility in games. In addition, MMORPGs generally have an un-ending story where you can explore and learn so much, causing the learners to continuously exposing themselves to the games and various game communities.

Fuster et al. (2013) argued that MMORPGs include element of escapism and stress relief, and that the most important motivation was of a social nature. Continuously, Fuster et al. (2013) argued that friends can transcend from a virtual context to become real world friendships. Which could eventually lead to the question of relationship development with other learners through digital games, however, that's a question for future research.

Walsh (2010) referred to two case studies, where two teachers, Paul and Maureen, brought their students to the Game On! exhibit at the Australian Centre for Moving Images. Both had been working as English teachers for many years and had no experience in including digital games into the curriculum, but were willing to try the case study.
In the first study, we look at Paul who described his students as highly motivated but not particularly interested in print-based literacy. Through collaborative discussions with the students, Paul managed to come to the conclusion of a PowerPoint presentation with his students, where they would present their favorite digital games or characters, thus being able to use PowerPoint as a virtual presentation and orally present, resulting in grade material for the curriculum. Fast forwarding, Paul discussed the results of the project saying,

Look it’s been fantastic teaching this stuff with the kids. The kids have just got so into it. I just… and I’ve got kids writing stuff that they haven’t been writing all year and especially one boy who really struggles and he’s been great. He’s really got into it and I’ve seen him working on it at lunchtime and recess. So as an exercise the kids have really enjoyed it, and enjoyed doing it, because it’s sort of something that they really…it’s really spoken to them. (Walsh, 2010, p.31)

Thus, digital games and images seemed to facilitate motivation in this case study. Students who was seen to not have produced anything at all previously, were all of a sudden producing mind-blowing presentations on topics that interested them (Walsh, 2010, p. 31-32).

In the second study, Maureen had redesigned the English curriculum allowing the students, who struggled with print-based literacy practices to draw from own interests, such as gaming, to redesign, play and research digital games in school. Maureen described,

This learning project is not about playing computer games in school. It is about interacting with them as a resource that can teach students about their world through virtual worlds. It involves a dynamic classroom environment in which students work individually and collaboratively to engage, explore, explain, extend, evaluate and celebrate their work. (Walsh, 2010, p. 33)

The students were to work around a student-designed and maintained wiki that surrounded digital games, known as Game-O-Rama. Game-O-Rama introduced the students to distinctive digital features and requested the features to be identified by the students (e.g., plot, genre, character development and point of views). Similar to Paul’s project, Maureen designed for the students to write reviews and research their specifically interested game (Walsh, 2010, p. 34). Through the act of designing, the students then engaged more readily with the English curriculum (Walsh, 2010, p. 36).

In sum, Paul and Maureen's projects were successful on many levels (Walsh, 2010, p. 36). The students surpassed many of their previous accomplishments by simply engaging in something that motivated them. By placing digital games at the heart of the education, Paul and Maureen managed to include digital games and include games into the literacy. Walsh
(2010) argues that the redesign of the curriculum allowed the students to draw from past experience from the culture of gaming and apply it to their assignments. In other words, the redesigned tasks allowed the learning to take place in classroom context (p. 37).

I argue that motivation is required to acquire better language competence. In addition, interaction is required on two separate levels, one being input, and the second being output. The ESL learner needs to take into context whom they are speaking to and direct their speech accordingly. What kind of social situation is the learner engaging themselves in? Who is on the receiver end? Slowly, the ESL learner needs to adapt their all-round competence to suit the situation and group, thus in turn, developing their all-round communication. Lastly, it was seen by Walsh's (2010) study that, by appealing to the students main interests and involving them in the curriculum planning, their motivation increased and in turn lead to overall better performance in classroom environments.
6. Conclusion

Firstly, I found that there is an obvious connection between digital games and language learning. Digital games provide the learners with a virtual “face-to-face” interaction possibilities, resulting in all-round competence development. ESL learners who played MMORPGs, seemed to use their all-round communicative competence in-game through collaborative and scaffolding interaction to reach a common goal. For example, they can help one another through strategies by engaging in problem solving together. Moreover, they use questions, clarifications and responses. Evidently, all-round communicative competence seems to be the key to success in digital games, especially MMORPGs where communication is required to advance.

Secondly, research showed that not all games improve language learning. I found that the learners need to actually interact with other players to successfully improve their all-round competence, not simply input games. In other words, an output-input theory is required for successful language competence development. For instance, research pointed to the fact that MMORPGs (e.g. WoW) provide the learners with so many possibilities and opportunities to develop their target-language, possibilities and opportunities that are not necessarily provided by games such as, The Sims. In correlation, I argue that games such as The Sims, do not provide the same all-round communicative development since they do not provide the learners with the same possibilities, activities and opportunities. That being said, I believe it is of importance to note that I am not discrediting The Sims for being unable to provide language learning, simply claiming that it does not provide the same language learning possibilities provided by digital games such as Lineage, EverQuest or WoW.

Thirdly, I found that linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence were all rather entwined in digital game. As games provide various activities and opportunities, learners have a wide variety of chances and scenarios to take part of, or even ignore should they not wish to participate in interaction with other players. This, however, could and probably would result in slower, or no language competence development at all. It is my belief that learners are
Motivation, however, seem to be one of the key elements for interaction.

That being said, I believe that we can learn to control the so called ”problem of content” and notice the learners by appealing to their interests, I believe that language learning will surpass terminology such as ”boring” or, more politically correct, ”dry”. Should the learners be motivated enough to engage in interaction with other players, then I argue, their target-language would develop significantly. Should they, however, choose not to engage in interaction and social situations, their language might stay the same or only slightly develop since they limit their exposure to new semiotic domain experience. Moreover, good video games provide a variety of learning conditions, thus resulting in more engaged and driven learning. If ESL learners do not learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn. I argue that the goal for the ESL learner (e.g. communication to advance in games) is much more important than the journey of language learning. Language competence development is therefore simply means to an end.

Lastly, while it was argued by research that games provide a never-ending storyline that can be altered by the ESL learners I still believe that there is a limit to this since game designers develop a game on a foundation that is impossible for the ESL learners to change, simply experience. I understand, and agree with the fact that games do provide a variety of possibilities and interaction activities, I do however, not agree that books are seen as limited. I argue that, as semiotic domains are seen everywhere, it can also be seen in the way an individual experiences a book, simply because a book can be experienced and seen in many ways depending on the reader.

For further research, one might want to ask the question of what the issues with L2 learners’ language could be if exposed to digital games? Moreover,

1. What are the linguistic disadvantages with exposing oneself to digital games?
2. What could be life changing for gamers when engaged in digital games for longer periods of time?
3. How do gamers or learners distinguish reality from virtuality, i.e. how come some learners and gamers can distinguish between real life and virtual life and how come some cannot?

There has been several cases where learners have been playing for longer periods of time without breaks or nutrition causing fatal effects such as paralysis or death. Moreover, there has been cases where learners have learned actions, such as killing or theft through games and applied these actions in real life situations, in turn hurting other people.
7. References


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