MOTIVATION AND DIGITAL GAMES FOR ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING*

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ABSTRACT: Digital games are already well established in our contemporary society as an entertainment industry, and are present in our daily lives as students, teachers, family members and players as well. In this article I present a brief overview of digital games as a field of study for learning English as a second language, emphasizing on its motivational aspects. Digital games can be highly motivational for the learning of English as a second language since it unites fun, entertainment and situated learning. As a conclusion, digital games can be seen as beneficial, since it can be seen as complementary to school curricula, either inside the classrooms or as extra class activities, since it offers interaction with other players, a new virtual life and contextual learning.
KEYWORDS: Digital Games. English as a Second Language. Motivation. CALL.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the years of the digital technology era, the history of Computer Assisted Language Learning (henceforth CALL) passed for several phases. From drill-and-practice softwares to word-processing programs, from audio and video resources to network and hypertext softwares, there has been a gradual integration of technology in second language classrooms over the last twenty years (Warschauer and Merkill, 2000). However, as stated by Steve Jobs in an interview[1], technology itself does not enhance language teaching: "I used to think that technology could help education. […] But I've had to come to the inevitable conclusion that the problem is not one that technology can hope to solve. What's wrong with education cannot be fixed with technology. No amount of technology will make a dent".

Technology, then, may be used for assisting, improving and motivating language learning and teaching, but is not the solution for educational challenges. Bearing this in mind, this article addresses the relation between CALL, digital games and motivation for language learning.

1. DIGITAL GAMES, MOTIVATION AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Conforming Davies, Otto and Rüschoff (2014) mentioned, the evolution of digital technology has been happening in a linear and organized fashion after CALL was established in the 80s as a field of study in the United Kingdom (UK). CALL stands for Computer Assisted Language Learning and takes for granted that computer is used as an umbrella term to designate technological and digital devices that can be used for teaching and learning languages, such as computers, tablets, mobile phones and video game platforms. Levy and Hubbard (2005) consider CALL a unique area of study because it approaches and attracts different viewpoints and debates surrounding the terminology in language teaching and learning with computers in its broadest meaning. Included in CALL research is, the authors exemplify, speech recognition, computational and corpus linguistics, dictionary development, word processing, digital archives, on-screen reading, e-mail, chat and

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[1]Interview given in 1996 to Wired, in New York city, as can be seen in http://www.wired.com/2012/01/apple-education-jobs/ (website accessed in January 7th, 2016).

conferencing, only to name a few.

Several studies (Beatty, 2010; Bagheri, Roohani and Ansari, 2012; Hirschel and Fritz, 2013; Stroud, 2014; Underwood, Luckin and Winters, 2014) show that CALL activities and tasks are better, more engaging and more motivational than those done in traditional ways, such as textbooks or worksheets. As stated by Beatty (2010), CALL makes great opportunities for second learning through software designs that can access learners' styles, such as including comprehensible input and output by opportunities to use the target language via comprehensible, relevant or interesting topics, not grammatically sequenced and provided in sufficient quantity, as is the case of digital games. All in all, CALL is a well-positioned nomenclature, being used by leading professionals in the area, being also inclusive for different areas of research, which can be extremely useful in academy.

Since their origin, back in the 1950s, digital games have been conquering new spaces and new audiences in people's leisure time, being for their motivational aspect, or because of the prompt feedback, interaction or multimodal appeal. Several recent studies cite digital games as beneficial learning tools of several scholar areas and content subjects, including the learning of a foreign language (Gee, 2005; Prensky, 2001; 2007; Squire, 2006; Chik, 2011; Gee and Hayes, 2011; and Sykes e Reinhardt, 2013). Digital games are characterized by several elements, such as objectives, characters, narrative, rules, restrictions, interaction, challenge, competition, rewards and feedback (Prensky, 2001; 2007; Wangenheim and Wangenheim, 2012) that contribute to learning and development of cognitive processes of players. Digital games require from players several abilities, new virtual identities, goals, interaction, dilemmas and choices. Besides that, leveling-up and moving up in these games is emotionally pleasurable and motivational (Gee, 2005; Prensky, 2005).

In addition to motivating learning, good digital games[2] represent good learning since they may allow learners to feel like active agents, instead of passive recipients, where they can learn different styles, new skills, strategies, and consolidating ideas and concepts best when they see how they fit into a context; all elements that can very highly motivational (Gee, 2005; Wang et al, 2008; Yu-lin, 2015). According to Prensky (2001; 2007), motivation is a combination of fun and participation plus learning and entertainment. Similarly, Gee (2005) states that what motivates gamers is basically the principle that they can create and live a new identity in a new virtual environment. Squire (2006) complements this view and declares that what motivates gamers to play even after a long day of work and study is the fact that they are agents in a new world, living a new life and a new identity virtually, inside the game.

Shedding some light to motivation, Wang et al. (2008) cites that there are three main reasons why gamers play: 1) relationship with other people (through interaction that derives in pleasure); 2) immersion (in virtual and games fantasy worlds); and 3) achievements (through goals and challenges overcame). These authors still mention that passion is an important element of motivation, and can be defined as a strong inclination toward an activity that one finds important, invests time in, and likes.

Mentioned in Wang et al (2008), some authors present their views and definitions regarding motivation. Vallerand et al (2003) states that there are two types of passion that are motivational: 1) harmonious passion and 2) obsessive passion. The first is characterized as engagement by choice and its harmony with other activities in different domains, often resulting in positive outcomes. The second is defined as internal pressure that forces a person to engage in the chosen activity and results usually in negative outcomes. There is also self-determination theory, stated by Deci and Ryan (1985), that concludes that autonomy, competence and relatedness are paramount elements of motivation. In addition, the scholar Dornÿei (2005) suggests a definition of motivation: Ideal L2 Self, which says that individuals' ideal self-image can be used to express the wish to become a successful language learner. Besides the authors mentioned previously by Wang et al (2008), there is another researcher of motivation, Gardner (1985), (in Tumolo, 2014; Yu-Lin, 2015)

[2]James Paul Gee (2003; 2005) mentions that good games lead to good learning following a set of learning principles, such as agency, customization, well-ordered problems, stablishing of skill and strategies, and system thinking.

that affirms that motivation to learn languages is a combination of effort, willpower and positive and favorable conditions to reach language learning. Gardner divides motivation in two main categories: 1) integrativeness and 2) instrumentality. The former deals with language learners' affective disposition of the target language; while the latter focusses on using target language as a tool for career, travel, or specific purposes. In sum, although not yet a consent on its definition, motivation seems to be about interest, fun, engagement and passion.

Having presented só far a theoretical background on technology, digital games and motivation, in the next paragraphs I present briefly two pieces of research on these topics to exemplify attempts to integrate, into classroom technology in general, and digital games in particular, aspects related to motivation that must be taken into consideration in a language learning classroom. Wang et al (2008) researched about intrinsic motivation and passion in digital gaming and concluded that gamers in Singapore displayed moderately high scores in passion, motivation in playing computers by autonomy, and had positive affects and increased hours playing on weekends. For this study, a total of a hundred and fifty-five students of secondary schools between eleven and seventeen years old were the participants. The measures used were a passion scale (especially created for this study), dispositional flow scale and perceived locus of causality, besides cluster analysis.

Similarly, Yu-Lin (2015) researched about the impact of technology integrated instruction to elementary students language learning motivation. A total of thirty-five third-graders from English as foreign language classes were the participants and the instruments of research used quantitative measures, correlation and regression analysis to analyze data. From the results, the author 4 concluded that there is a positive relation between language learners' perception of using technology to learn and their learning motivation, and Yu-Lin also mentioned that if students could learn with technology alone with their motivation, in a utopic setting, they could improve their final performance of target language.

Although researchers presented earlier have not agreed in only one definition on motivation, motivational aspects and elements coincide in many studies about digital games and learning, namely: combination of fun and participation; freedom to feel like agents in a new world, living a new life and a new identity virtually; goal orientation, interaction, feedback and narrative; autonomy, competence and affinity; combination of effort, willpower and positive and favorable conditions to reach language learning; among others. Therefore, it seems safe to suggest that digital gaming enhance motivation to learn languages in new virtual environments with new virtual identities.

CONCLUSION

In this article I argued that digital games and motivation are entangled, and, to prove my point, I mentioned theoretical background and presented research in the area that stated that digital games and motivation can assist language learning, developing the use of digital technologies as well. Digital games can foster and motivate the learning of a second language, such as English, but can also go beyond and assist integration of motivation to learning environments. Digital games have aspects that can be taken to real life experiences, triggering the players with more community flexibility, sociability, and helping players to keep the attention when and where necessary (Ramos, 2013). Medina (2005) mentions that digital games produce strong motivation in their players, encouraging persistent behaviors in players to master the game, adding engaging stories in the game, good quality graphics, appropriate challenges and feedback, assisting in learning languages as well. All things considered, motivation and technology intertwine and combine with one another very constructively in the language learning processes.

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