

LEARNING ENGLISH THROUGH VIDEO  
GAMES:  
Finnish Learners' Experiences

Master's Thesis

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English

February 2018

# JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

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| Tiedekunta – Faculty<br>Humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellinen tiedekunta  | Laitos – Department<br>Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos |
| Tekijä – Author<br>Ari-Pekka Väisänen  |  |
| Työn nimi – Title<br>LEARNING ENGLISH THROUGH VIDEO GAMES: Finnish Learners' Experiences   |  |
| Oppiaine – Subject<br>Englanti   | Työn laji – Level<br>Pro Gradu -tutkielma                  |
| Aika – Month and year<br>Helmikuu 2018   | Sivumäärä – Number of pages<br>88 + 1 liite                |
| Tiivistelmä – Abstract<br><p>Videopelit ovat alati kasvava populaarikulttuurin ja viihteen muoto. Videopelit ovat saavuttaneet myös akateemisen tutkimustyön mielenkiinnon mm. tietokoneavusteisen kielenoppimisen (computer-assisted language learning, CALL) ja peleihin pohjautuvan oppimisen (game-based learning) muodossa (ks. esim. Peterson, 2013; Reinhardt &amp; Sykes, 2012). Nämä tutkimusalat keskittyvät kuitenkin videopelien ja erilaisten videopeleille ominaisten piirteiden soveltamiseen muodollisissa oppimisympäristöissä, kuten kouluissa ja muissa oppilaitoksissa. Vapaa-ajalla informaalien oppimistilanteiden kautta tapahtuvaan kielenoppimiseen kohdistuva tutkimus onkin ollut verrattain vähäisempää. Videopeleihin liittyvään informaaliin oppimiseen keskittyvä määrällinen tutkimus (mm. Sundqvist &amp; Sylvén, 2012; Uuskoski, 2011) kuitenkin osoittaa, että vapaa-ajalla tapahtuvan videopelaamisen määrällä ja englannin oppimisella on positiivinen yhteys. Kielenoppijoiden omia kokemuksia videopeleistä osana kielenoppimista on kuitenkin tutkittu varsin vähän.</p> <p>Tämän tutkielman tarkoitus on tuoda esiin suomalaisten, englantia vieraana kielenä puhuvien kielenoppijoiden kokemuksia vapaa-ajalla, kaupallisten videopelijulkaisujen myötä tapahtuvasta englanninoppimisesta. Lisäksi tutkimus selvittää mahdollisuutta sille, että videopelaaminen lisää oppijoiden motivaatiota englannin formaalia opiskelua kohtaan ja selvittää osallistujien muita oppimiskokemuksia, kuten yleis- ja historiatiedon oppimista. Tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin haastattelututkimuksella, joka toteutettiin vuoden 2017 syksyn aikana. Tutkimuksen osallistujat vaihtelivat lukion ensimmäisen vuosikurssin opiskelijoista yliopisto-opiskelijoihin ja aktiivisesti työelämässä mukana oleviin osallistujiin.</p> <p>Haastatteluissa nousi esiin erityisesti positiivisia kokemuksia sanaston ja kommunikaatiotaitojen oppimisesta. Sanaston oppimisessa esiin nousivat erityisesti substantiivit ja verbit, joille monet erilaiset pelit tarjoavat välittömän ja selkeän kontekstin, joka auttaa uuden sanan oppimisessa. Erityisesti MMORPG-genren roolipelit sekä pelaajien väliseen äänikommunikaatioon tukeutuvat verkkomoninpelit koettiin hyödyllisiksi, sillä niiden kautta voi oppia englannin suullisia ja kirjallisia taitoja. Videopelien ja oppimismotivaation yhteyden analyysissä esiin nousi selkeä eroavaisuus nuorempien ja vanhempien osallistujien välillä. Nuoremmat osallistujat kokivat videopelaamisen motivoivan heitä opiskelemaan englantia, kun taas vanhemmat osallistujat suhtautuivat tähän ajatukseen negatiivisemmin. Toisaalta yksi vanhempi osallistuja kertoi videopelien lisänneen hänen mielenkiintoaan englannin oppitunteja ja tuntityöskentelyä kohtaan. Jatkotutkimuksen avulla voitaisiin tutkia esimerkiksi videopelien motivoivia vaikutuksia eritasoisten oppilaiden opiskelumotivaatioon.</p> |  |
| Asiasanat – Keywords<br>video games, game-enhanced learning, language learning, informational learning, learning motivation  |  |
| Säilytyspaikka – Depository<br>JYX   |  |

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## 1 Introduction

Video games are an immensely popular form of entertainment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The broad video games industry sees great success from both large, multi-million-dollar productions, as well as smaller, more indie-style releases. In addition to finding success in commercial video game releases, competitive play of video games, or esports, sees ever increasing numbers in both viewers and price money every year. Furthermore, in addition to strictly entertainment and competition-focused popularity, video games are beginning to find appreciation for their artistic merits. Video games and the application of game-like aspects are also finding a multitude of new applications outside entertainment. Nowadays there are many video-game-like services being designed as motivational tools for exercise, for instance. As such, one can easily see that video games are maturing as a form of media even beyond entertainment.

There is also growing interest in applying video games into teaching and learning. Video games designed solely for education, often referred to as *edutainment* (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith, & Tosca, 2013), are improving every year. The popular language learning game Duolingo (von Ahn & Hacker, 2011), as an example, is a far cry from the clunky and unmotivating language learning games of yesteryear. Contrary to many older edutainment products, playing Duolingo is a genuinely entertaining experience. However, in addition to applying video games and game-like aspects into formal learning and teaching situations, there is growing interest in studying the merits of traditional, entertainment-focused video games in informal learning situations. The differences between formal and informal learning situations, and their relation to the present study, are discussed in more detail in chapter 2.2 of the present study.

The present study adds to existing research into informal learning through video games by conducting a qualitative analysis of Finnish English language learners' informal, video-game-enhanced language learning experiences. Existing research has largely concentrated on the potential and results of video-game-based learning, while little attention has been given to the perceptions and experiences of the players and learners themselves. For the present study, six interviews with Finnish EFL learners of different ages and general life situations were conducted in the autumn of 2017. The data from the interviews was then

analysed using methods of qualitative content analysis and phenomenography. Through these methods, the present study is able to explore players' accounts of their experiences of game-enhanced EFL and other learning experiences from these EFL learners' own accounts, as well as examine how they perceive their motivation towards more formal EFL-learning and whether or not it was affected by their recreational video game play. In addition to studying EFL learning and motivation, some aspects of learning other bodies of knowledge and skills are also inspected. These experiences were connected to both other school subjects as well as spatial skills.

My own motivation for the present study is based largely on my experiences of learning English and other skills through recreational video game play. For a Finnish foreign language learner of English, video games were and still are one of the easiest and most frequent ways to be in contact with the language and an enjoyable way of learning on one's own volition. By focusing on informal learning experiences through recreational video game play, the present study will contribute to research on learning through recreational play of existing, entertainment-focused video game releases, instead of learning through edutainment software, or the implementation of entertainment-focused games in teaching. While I personally believe that video games, or especially different aspects of game-like design, have uses in a classroom environment, there are several obstacles that limit applying traditional video games effectively into a realistic, everyday context. Some such obstacles have been identified by researchers such as Baek (2008), and Kirriemuir and McFarlane (2003), who found a number of factors that inhibit the use of video games in classrooms. Some examples of these obstacles are inflexibility of existing curriculums and student unreadiness (Baek, 2008), as well as lack of support materials for teachers and budgetary concerns over game licenses as well as the necessary hardware (Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2003).

Following this introduction, chapter two will present the theoretical background of the present study. First, foreign and second language learning as it relates to the Finnish context is introduced and discussed, followed by the definitions and discussion of formal and informal learning. After these, video games as an entertainment and media form are introduced. Following this, video games for learning, as well as relevant existing research

into game-enhanced learning is presented. Finally, the English language and its position in Finnish society and video games in Finland is presented in chapter 2.7 and 2.8.

Following the theoretical background, in chapter three the present study, its aims and methodology are presented. Chapter 3.1 introduces the research questions of the present study, while chapter 3.2 goes through the process and methods used for data collection. Chapter 3.3 introduces the research methods used for data analysis.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the present study. First, chapter 4.1 discusses several background information of the participants and their general gaming habits. Chapter 4.2 discusses the participants' video game language preferences briefly. Beginning with chapter 4.3, the main focus of the present study is introduced. First, chapter 4.3 presents the findings on EFL learning experiences, chapter 4.4 goes through findings connected to EFL learning motivation and last, chapter 4.5 goes through some of the more general learning experiences unconnected to EFL learning specifically. Following this, chapter 5 concludes the present study and discusses its findings on a more general level.

## 2 Theoretical background

The following chapters present the theoretical background of the present study. First, chapters 2.1 and 2.2 provide definitions and discuss foreign language and second language learning, as well as informal, nonformal and formal learning. Second, in chapters 2.3 to 2.5 video games and the broader video game culture are presented in relation to language learning through video games. Finally, chapters 2.6 and 2.7 discuss the role of English as a foreign language in Finland and in video games in Finland.

### 2.1 Foreign and second language acquisition

Saville-Troike (2012: 2) defines second language acquisition (SLA) as both “the study of individuals and groups who are learning a language subsequent to learning their first one” and “the process of learning that language”. This additional language is usually referred to as a second language (L2) (Saville-Troike, 2012: 2). In practice, a second language is any additional language a person learns regardless of the language’s actual order in the person’s language repertoire. According to Saville-Troike (2012: 2), SLA research includes informal learning of L2, formal learning of L2, as well as L2 learning that involves a mixture of the two. The scope of the present study is within informal L2 learning, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

An often-made distinction in the field of SLA is the separation between a second language and a foreign language. While the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, the terms can be differentiated from one another. Saville-Troike (2012) gives the following two definitions for the two terms, as well as several other types of L2. Second language is typically an official or societally dominant language needed by individuals for education, employment, and other basic purposes. It is often acquired by minority group members or immigrants who speak another language natively (Saville-Troike, 2012). In Finland, common second languages are Finnish for primarily Swedish-speaking Finns, and the second official language, Swedish, for Finnish-speaking Finns, as well as either of these official languages for immigrants who speak their own native language as a first language. A foreign language, instead, is a language not widely used in the learners’ immediate social context and instead might be used for future travel or other cross-cultural communication situations, or studied as a curricular requirement or elective in school, but with no



immediate or necessary practical application (Saville-Troike, 2012). Within the context of Finland, English, as well as numerous other global languages are common foreign languages learned by Finns.

Within the scope of the present study, however, this distinction between L2 and FL is somewhat problematic, as defining English as either a second or a foreign language is not quite so clear-cut within the context of Finland. To start with, the English language is not an official or socially dominant language in Finland, which would suggest that foreign language is the more suitable definition of the two. However, for many Finnish people the English language is used very much in their social contexts, such as in the context of their video game hobby or popular culture in general. Due to this, English could be considered a second language for many Finnish language learners. Still, for the sake of the present study, English language will be considered a foreign language for Finnish learners of the language. English language's current and historical position as a foreign language in Finland and in video games in Finland is discussed in more detail in chapters 2.7 and 2.8.

## **2.2 Informal learning**

Informal learning as a concept has been pioneered by researchers such as John Dewey (1953; 1986). He theorized that learning happens through a person's experiences and he emphasized the importance of lifelong learning, which can be seen as the basis for modern theories on informal learning. This present chapter is used to define and discuss informal learning, as well as relate it to learning through video games.

In order to define informal learning, it is perhaps easier to separate it from formal and non-formal learning theories. Jay Cross (2007) defines formal learning as learning that happens in official situations such as schools and learning courses. It is official, scheduled and based on curriculums (Cross, 2007). Traditional school education would fit this definition of formal learning by Cross. Informal learning, on the other hand, is not official and can happen both intentionally or unintentionally. Informal learning is not based on curriculums and instead is practically never-ending. Some examples of informal learning situations Cross gives are asking another person for advice, which is intentional informal learning, or the experience of burning one's finger on a hot stove, which is unintentional informal

learning. Cross (2007) also suggests that the divide between formal and informal learning is not a case of either-or but a gradual scale in-between. Introducing less formal aspects, such as play, to school education is one way to make formal education less formal on this supposed scale. Conversely, introducing formal aspects, such as scheduling to otherwise informal learning, such as mainly voluntary language learning, would make otherwise informal learning move towards formal learning on the scale. In practise, learning is more often somewhere in-between the two extremes than it is at either one of them.

Livingstone (2001) provides further definitions for formal and informal learning, as well as a definition for non-formal learning, which is situated somewhere in-between the two former forms of learning. Livingstone defines formal education as education which is based on the authority of a teacher, different curriculums and a pre-established body of knowledge to be studied. In the middle, non-formal education stems from situations of voluntary studying of curriculums, such as adult education courses. Finally, informal learning is based on incidental or spontaneous learning situations without a sustained reference to a body of knowledge (Livingstone, 2001). Livingstone's definition for non-formal education, while separate from that of formal education, can be argued to be more closely related to it rather than his definition of informal learning.

In addition to these more academic definitions by Cross (2007) and Livingstone (2001), The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training has produced their own official guidelines for validating informal, as well as non-formal learning (Cedefop, 2009). Cedefop (2009) provides concise definitions for formal, non-formal and formal learning.

Formal learning is learning that occurs in an organised and structured environment (e.g. in an education or training institution or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It typically leads to validation and certification (Cedefop, 2009:73).

Non-formal learning is learning which is embedded in planned activities not always explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view (Cedefop, 2009:75).

Informal learning is learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is mostly unintentional from the learner's perspective (Cedefop, 2009: 74).

Based on these definitions provided, learning which occurs through one's recreational video game play would be informal learning. The learning is incidental and spontaneous by nature and is not based on an established curriculum for learning even though the subjects and skills that are learned may be part of some educational curriculums. For the most part, an individual's learning through video games is unintentional, assuming that the main motivation to engage in video game play is situated in the act of gameplay itself. However, in some situations learning may be a motivation for video game play. For example, a foreign language learner may choose to play an online game in which they engage in communication with other players in order to improve their communication skills in a language.

Informal learning is an important aspect for pedagogical research, especially when considering the concept of life-long learning. As discussed previously, recreational video game play can provide individuals with avenues for a multitude of informal learning situations. In addition to video games contributing to life-long learning after an individual's formal school education, some recent studies suggest that even young children can learn a wide variety of skills through video games (Kahila & Saarikoski, 2014). Thus, it can be suggested that video games may support informal learning throughout an individual's life. Sundqvist and Sylvén (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2012) discuss various second language acquisition, or SLA, terms and how they relate to learning through recreational video game play. In addition to terms and definitions by other researchers discussed here, Sundqvist (2009: 25) has suggested a general term, *extramural language learning*, for language learning which occurs outside the classroom. This term by Sundqvist covers a variety of commonly

used terms used for out-of-school learning, such as *incidental*, *unintentional* or *self-directed* learning. Most notably, it is not concerned with the level of intention on the part of the learner. Instead, in extramural language learning, deliberate intention is possible but not required (Sundqvist, 2009: 25). Rather, extramural language learning is mainly concerned with the setting in which contact with a foreign language occurs. Learning must occur extramurally, i.e. outside the school or language classroom (Sundqvist, 2009: 25). Finally, Sundqvist and Sylvén (2012: 193) suggest that regardless of the term one uses for learning outside instructed contexts, for instance while playing video games, one is always concerned with situations of informal learning. Video games in relation to learning is discussed in more detail in chapter 2.4.

### **2.3 Defining video games**

Video games have been a popular form of entertainment for several decades now. Defining them is not quite a clear-cut issue, as video games come in many different forms and complexities, and the issue can be approached from multiple viewpoints. Regarding the complexity of video games, Gordon Calleja notes that considering games like Tetris and Grand Theft Auto to be equal media objects is prone to making generalizations which “impede analytical rigor” (Calleja, 2011: 3). Tetris is a relatively tiny and simple game, whereas games in the Grand Theft Auto series are enormous multi-media constructions. In fact, several Grand Theft Auto games feature smaller “mini-games” in them, with each of these mini-games being of comparable level of complexity to all of Tetris itself. Despite this, considering Grand Theft Auto to be a collection of mini-games is not quite accurate either, nor does the fact that it seemingly has more content than Tetris make it an objectively better game.

Despite the challenges associated with it, several attempts have been made to accurately define video games. This chapter will introduce several different definitions for video games. As the present study is concerned with informal language learning through recreational video game play, the video games the study is concerned with are the common, mainly entertainment-focused video games sold to consumers, rather than games with educational goals, which are most often sold to educational institutions and groups.

Therefore, the present study and this chapter focus primarily on video games as forms of entertainment.

Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith and Tosca (2008: 22-44) present several formal and pragmatic definitions for both traditional and digital games. In a sense, several old and current video games are digital interpretations of real-life games, activities and sports. For instance, games which simulate sports such as football or tennis have been popular for several decades now. Therefore, considering some definitions for traditional, real-life games can be helpful when attempting to define video games as well.

Many of the formal definitions presented by Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith and Tosca (2008) view both traditional and digital games as systems of rules, goals and quantifiable outcomes. For instance, a game of ice hockey has defined rules for play, the goal of scoring more points than the opponent and the quantifiable outcome of victory based on the number of points scored by the teams. In the realm of video games, nearly any game fits this definition of rules, goals and outcomes. Take for example the somewhat unconventional video game *L.A. Noire* (Team Bondi, 2011), which is a detective adventure game. *L.A. Noire* has its own gameplay rules that determine what the player is able and unable to do within the game; for instance, the player can drive a variety of police, service and civilian vehicles, and interact with and collect evidence on crime scenes, but they are unable to go on vacation from their work as a detective or eat lunch. The goal of the game is to solve several police cases by utilizing various detective skills, which are based around the rules of the game. After the player solves and completes each police case, the game gives the player a quantifiable outcome of a grade based on the player's success in solving the case. Contrastingly, in some other video games the player may in fact be able to go on vacation and eat lunch, while detective work or grading the player's work is not part of the game's goals and outcomes. However, defining video games as sets of rules, goals and outcomes does not take the narratives and stories of many video games into account. It also downplays the player's own agency to a degree.

As for the pragmatic definitions, Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008: 37-40) present two recent definitions which focus specifically on video games. First, they introduce a definition by the

renowned game designer Sid Meier: “A game is a series of interesting choices” (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008: 37). Unlike the aforementioned definition of a set of rules, goals and outcomes, Meier’s definition emphasises the agency and control the player(s) have in video games. This agency and control the player has sets video games apart from other forms of media entertainment, over which their consumers have a lot less agency or control. Video games give their players the power to affect the game’s outcome to a varying degree. Depending on the game, the player may be offered multiple ways to tackle the challenges offered by the game or they may even be given the power to choose between multiple differing storylines, each with their own narratives and endings, such as in games like *Fallout 4* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2015). In addition to giving their player power over the broad storyline of the game, video games also allow for more minute control over the outcome and events of the game. For example, the player may be able to choose the order in which they tackle some of the game’s challenges, or which tools they use. Altogether, these far-reaching and minute choices establish a collection of interesting choices the player can make, perhaps over multiple separate playthroughs of the same game.

Following Sid Meier’s choice-focused definition, Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008: 38) present the game design oriented MDA model for defining video games which was originally created by Robin Hunicke, Marc LeBlanc and Robert Zubeck. The MDA model divides games into sets of mechanics, dynamics and aesthetics. The mechanics of a game compose the game’s internal rules and computer code (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2013). The dynamics of a game are related to the way in which the game plays in practice (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2013). In a way, it can be said that the mechanics of a game lead into the dynamics of the game. By changing the rules, the way a game is played also changes. Finally, aesthetics of a game are the multitude of positive emotional responses a game causes its player to feel (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2013). There are multiple aesthetics presented in the MDA model, such as the feelings of fantasy, discovery and fellowship, and it is important to note that not all games feature all the aesthetics of the MDA model (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2013). Similarly to the earlier definition of games as a set of rules, goals and outcomes, the MDA model lacks several common aspects of video games. As the model is created for video game design purposes, these shortcomings in an analytical context are understandable. The final

definition discussed here combines aspects of these previous definitions in order to define video games in a way which suits the present study.

Finally, for the purposes of the present study, we will adapt the definition by Gordon Calleja (2011: 11-15). Calleja follows the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's thoughts and views on defining games. Instead of strict definition, Wittgenstein views games as "members of an extended family that share resemblances" (Calleja, 2011: 8). Based on this definition of games, Calleja sees video games as a subset, or several subsets of the broader game family. As the only strict requirement to be a video game, a game must occur within a virtual space, such as a computer or a games console. The family resemblances which video games share are the player, representational signs, coded rules of game, a game's simulated environment, and a game's material medium (Calleja, 2011: 11-15).

When discussing the player, Calleja notes that within the context of video games, the term *player* is used for the human agents who interact with a game and its systems. This interaction does not necessarily hold a sense of play or playfulness, for instance in the context of serious games.

The representational sign in Calleja's set of family resemblances stands for text-, image- or sound-based elements which represent entities in a game and which the player reads to interact and make sense of a game.

Strictly coded rules set video games apart from real-life games. In real-life analog games, each game has their own sets of rules but they may be modified by the players at will, as the enforcement of the rules ultimately falls on the players or other people, such as referees themselves. A group of friends may break or adjust several commonly accepted rules of football in order to make the game better suit their own social group. Within the context of video games, adjusting the rules is often more difficult as the rules are coded into the game's computer code. Calleja (2011: 13) notes, however, that in some cases, especially within multiplayer games, a video game may feature both coded rules as well as rules negotiated by the players. Due to the strict nature of coded rules, these negotiated rules are often additional limitations, such as forbidden gameplay tactics, set up by the players.

A game's environmental properties are the rules that govern the game's world, as defined by Calleja (2011: 13). He notes that these properties are found in all games which simulate environments with physical properties in some way. Depending on each game, these coded properties may be more or less accurate to the real world. In one game the player's in-game character may only be able to run for a set period of time before getting exhausted, while in another the player's character can run infinitely. Of the two, the first case is arguably a more realistic simulation of the real world. Some games feature less complex simulations of real environments due to technical limitations, while others may deliberately limit the accuracy of their simulation out of several reasons such as artistic or entertainment-focused choices.

Finally, Calleja (2011: 14) notes the importance of a game's material medium. The general experience of playing a game is dependent on the platform it is played on. Even the same exact game will provide a different experience on a games console than it does on a PC. The most obvious factor that contributes to the differences in a video game's material medium is arguably the method used for controlling the game. The controller on games console and a computer's combination of a mouse and a keyboard provide two quite different gaming experiences.

Calleja also remarks that based on Wittgenstein's terms, many modern video games are in fact hybrid entities, which combine features of two separate families; games and virtual environments (Calleja, 2011: 15). Considering the game *L.A. Noire* (Team Bondi, 2011) again, the game features an open, virtual simulation of a late 1940's Los Angeles, which on its own is a virtual environment. In addition to this virtual environment which acts as the game's setting, many of the game's mechanics used for the gameplay can be seen as their own individual games with different rules. For instance, when the player of *L.A. Noire* is tasked with uncovering evidence at a crime scene, they are engaging in a game resembling a typical scavenger hunt. When the player is interrogating a suspect, they are engaged in a game of wits and logic. These two different mini-games are very different from one another and, with some changes, could very well be packaged into their own separate video game releases. It could also be argued that many contemporary video games borrow and share some family resemblances with other forms of media, such as film and literature. Several games make use of pre-determined camera angles and other common film-making



techniques in so-called *cutscenes* during key moments of the game's story. These sequences can in many be compared to animated films.

Drawing from this definition of video games by Calleja (2011), within the context of the present study video games are considered to be digital representations of games, which share some resemblances to one another, but are not one homogenous mass of media products. In addition to this, video games may share some aspects of other media forms. However, several features of video games, such as the presence of *the player*, set video games apart from these other forms of media. Furthermore, within the present study the word *games* is also used to refer to video games specifically, unless it is otherwise noted within the context.

For the present study, it is important to separate vernacular video games from serious games, as the focus of the present study lies within learning through these vernacular games. Reinhardt and Sykes (2012: 32) define vernacular video games as commercially sold games which are not deliberately designed for learning and teaching purposes. Reinhardt's definition of vernacular games is suitable for the present study, but a brief discussion and definition of serious games is nevertheless beneficial in order to better differentiate between the two archetypes. Serious games as a label refers to a multitude of video game types and aspects of video games, such as *gamification*, *games-for-change*, *game-based learning*, *educational computer games*, *edutainment*, *advertainment*, *corporate games*, *health games*, *military games* and *political games* (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2013). It should be noted that not every term introduced by Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. refers to full games. Gamification, for example, refers to the act of adapting and implementing some aspects of video games for other means, such as education. Despite the term *serious games*, a strict seriousness is not necessary in serious games, which is also hinted by some of the categories for serious games presented by Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2013). For instance, *edutainment* and *advertainment* suggest that entertainment is still an important aspect of at least some serious games.

Of the categories of serious games that Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2013) present, edutainment and game-based learning are the most important for the present study. Edutainment refers to video games which are made for the purpose of teaching a specific skill or knowledge,

such as a foreign language, mathematics or recycling. A recent example of an edutainment game would be Duolingo, designed by Louis von Ahn and Severin Hacker (2011). Duolingo is a mobile game that teaches the player several foreign languages, based on the player's choice. While primarily a serious game, Duolingo makes use of many entertaining features such as scoring and social aspects in order to increase user motivation. Despite these entertainment-focused aspects, the main goal of Duolingo is still quite different from the goals of strictly entertainment-focused, vernacular games, even ones with a clear potential to teach their players during normal gameplay. For example, the historical strategy game Civilization VI (Firaxis, 2016) can teach the player aspects of real history, even though the game's main purpose is to entertain its player. In the game, the player controls a human civilization with the goal of growing and developing said civilization through history and ultimately leading it to world domination through a set victory condition. Games like Civilization VI teach while they entertain, while games like Duolingo entertain while they teach.

Similarly to other forms of media and entertainment, such as literature or film, video games can also be divided into sub-categories based on the genres they belong to. However, somewhat unlike many other media genres, video game genres are often based on the gameplay mechanics and characteristics of the game instead of the narrative themes of the game in question. Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2013) argue that video game genres, especially less formal ones, vary wildly in their specificity, for example from the more general *action* genre to the more specific *baseball* games genre. Some examples of common, widely used and accepted video game genres are first-person shooter (FPS), platformer, puzzle and role-playing games, which all categorize games based on their gameplay instead of the games' narrative. Often video games combine aspects of multiple different genres similarly to traditional media, for instance in the genre combinations of sci-fi horror or historical satire. For example, the video game Portal (Valve Corporation, 2007) combines elements from puzzle, platformer and FPS games. In the game, the player has to solve a number of puzzles involving light platforming challenges through first-person shooter gameplay. While these gameplay-oriented genres are used to categorize nearly all video games, the more traditional narrative-based genres are also sometimes used alongside them. This is true

especially in the case of narrative-heavy games, in which the narrative is an important aspect of the game along its mechanics. For example, one may describe a game as a sci-fi shooter or a fantasy role-playing game, among many other such mixes.

The question of video game genre is an interesting and difficult one. As Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2013) claimed, video game genres are often very unspecific and arbitrary. In the present study, the possibility of different kinds of learning experiences stemming from different game genres and types is one object of analysis. Therefore, it is important to settle on a method of differentiating between different game genres that serve the purposes of the study. As the analysis will be based on interview data, as described in chapter 3.2, it is a natural decision to settle for more general categorization of games in genres. If the game genres analysed within the study were too specific, such as *baseball*, the number of different genres mentioned could very easily grow while the number of mentions of said genres would remain minimal. Making meaningful analysis would be hopeless based on such data, where any one game genre is mentioned only a handful of times. Furthermore, it is likely that different *sports* games, such as *baseball*, *football* and *ice hockey games* all foster similar learning experiences. Therefore, concentrating on more broad genres such as *sports* instead of narrow ones such as *baseball* is likely to lead into more meaningful analysis on the differences between different game genres and types.

In practice, mentions of more specific genres will not be discarded in any way or the interview interrupted so that the researcher can scold the interviewee on their use of overly specific game genres. Instead, while comparing different genres, *baseball games* will fall under the classification of *sports games* and so on. In situations where an interviewee mentions a game genre that does not clearly fall under a broader genre, it is important to ask for clarification during the interview. For instance, a *war game* could very well be a first-person shooter or a strategy game, which are very different types of games, depending on the game's style of gameplay. In addition to considering video game genres in the analysis, the type of game is important to take into account. Game type in this context refers to the implementation and style of gameplay in each game. Some games, especially different online games, feature more social aspects than games which are often played solo. These

differences in the type of game may affect and lead into different kinds of learning experiences, similarly to how a game genre may affect a learner's experiences.

## **2.4 Video games and learning**

Research into video games and what they have to offer to learning is a rapidly growing field. Playing video games has been identified as a motivating activity, which can benefit the development of a variety of skills, such as communicative or metacognitive skills such as planning or organization (Reinders & Wattana, 2012: 156). However, there is still room for more research in the field, including on the usefulness of video games for language learning through recreational video game play. Previous studies on video games in learning have largely concentrated on how video games could be applied to teaching within the school environment through computer-assisted learning. Alternatively, previous studies have looked into how video games teach their players to improve at and learn the games themselves, such as in the study on adolescent people's cognitive self-efficacy during video game play by Theodora Moline (2010). Moline found that the commercial games chosen to be played by the participating young people fostered their cognitive self-efficacy, i.e. their belief in their ability to learn and succeed in the challenges the games they played presented.

The findings by Moline support previous theories by James Gee (2003; 2013) and the notion that good video games support and feature good learning principles. Gee (2013) identifies sixteen different learning principles of good video games. He connects these principles to good games specifically, as badly designed games, which do not incorporate these principles, are likely to be unpopular and discarded by the consumers of video games. A bad game would likely be received as too easy, too difficult, boring or otherwise undesirable and would be quickly discarded by its potential audience.

As an example of his learning principles, Gee (2013) suggests that good games empower their players in a variety of ways, such as by giving their player the ability to customize their playing experience in a variety of ways. A common method of customizing a video game's playing experience is changing the difficulty of the game. According to Gee (2013), games also feature many good principles of problem-solving, which support the player's learning during progression through the game. As an example, good games face their players with

challenging, yet manageable problems that build upon their knowledge from previous challenges. Finally, Gee (2013) explains that games support their player's understanding of the game through system thinking and situated meanings. The player's actions rarely are entirely isolated within the game. Instead, these actions impact the player's and game's current and future actions and conditions. The game also connects the language it uses to specific meanings, such as images or actions.

However, it is important to note that Gee (2003; 2013) is mainly concerned with ways in which good video games teach their player's to play and understand the games themselves, while maintaining player engagement and motivation. Instead of directly applying to the way video games teach subjects other than playing the game itself, these principles of good learning identified by Gee are more directly connected to the way video games motivate their players. Video games and motivation are discussed further in chapter 2.5. First, some of the existing research into video games and language learning is presented and discussed.

Reinhardt and Sykes (2012: 32-45) differentiate between two commonly used terms when discussing video games and language learning; game-based and game-enhanced language learning. Per Reinhardt and Sykes, game-based learning refers to learning which is based on the use of games, i.e. games created for educational purposes (Reinhardt & Sykes, 2012: 39). Conversely, game-enhanced learning is used when discussing learning which occurs while playing typical, vernacular video games (Reinhardt & Sykes, 2012: 36). In game-enhanced L2 and FL learning, the players of a game engage in informal learning, with the act of playing the game being their main focus. Language learning in game-enhanced learning occurs incidentally, rather than intentionally in situations motivated by a will to learn. Therefore, the present study is situated in the field of game-enhanced learning. The main focus of the present is on EFL learners' informal learning experiences through their recreational video game play, which concentrates around the play of vernacular games.

Research into game-enhanced learning remains somewhat scarce. Existing studies on video games and learning have largely concentrated on the potential of video games in situations of formal and nonformal learning such as in the case study by Mark Peterson (2013) which was based on the concept of computer-assisted language learning, or CALL. Based on

Reinhardt and Sykes' (2012) terminology, CALL falls closer to the scope of game-based learning, rather than game-enhanced learning. The study by Peterson looked into a commercial massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) and found that its players engaged in beneficial foreign language interaction during normal gameplay. Despite being oriented more in game-based language learning, Peterson's findings can still give insights into informal, game-enhanced learning. The act of playing the video game in the study by Peterson was requested and set up for means of the study and thus, the setup was cannot be considered informal in nature. Despite this, the interactions within the game were still informal in nature, especially as the interactions mostly took place between players participating in the study and non-participating players. Considering cases such as these, similar findings to those by Peterson could be made based on situations of recreational video game play. Still, more attention should be given to the potential of video games and their effects on informal learning. In addition, games other than MMORPGs, which are highly social by nature, should be taken into account in current and future research.

Another study which was concerned with foreign language learners' communicational skills and their development through video game play has been conducted by Reinders and Wattana (2012). The study analysed the participants' willingness to participate in EFL communication over several gameplay sessions. It was found that a video game setting was found to be an attractive environment for communication, with communication in EFL increasing as the gameplay sessions progressed (Reinders & Wattana, 2012: 183). However, Reinders and Wattana also found that the game did not improve the willingness to participate in, or the quality of communication of students with weaker communication skills. They report that for weaker learners concentrating on the game while communicating in a foreign language was difficult, which led into rare, delayed and simple turns of communication (Reinders & Wattana, 2012: 183).

The impact recreational play of video games has on foreign language learning and language skills in more general terms has been researched by some scholars in recent years. Sundqvist (2009) found that Swedish ninth grade students, especially boys, with more time spent on extramural English activities also had comparatively better oral proficiency and vocabulary

skills in English than their peers. In addition, the amount of video game play was found to correlate with reduced anxiety over speaking in English (Sundqvist, 2009: 200). While not limited to video games in scope, the study shows that contact with English through recreational activities leads to improved language skills through methods of informal learning. Finally, Sundqvist argues that extramural English activities which require more active participation from the learner, i.e. video games, Internet use and reading, are more beneficial to L2 acquisition than activities which are more passive by nature (Sundqvist, 2009: 204). Similar results were found by Uuskoski (2011) in his pro gradu thesis; those upper secondary school students who, on average, spent more time playing video games also had on average higher English language grades. In my bachelor's thesis (Väisänen, 2014), which is complementary to the thesis of Uuskoski, the findings were also positive when video game play and English language competence of Finnish middle school<sup>1</sup> students were compared. On average, the students who spent more time playing video games had higher grades than their less-playing classmates.

Sundqvist and Sylvén (2012: 201-204) found that the play of MMORPG-style games especially was connected to L2 vocabulary learning among a variety of age groups, ranging from 11- to 12-year-olds to 16- to 18-year olds. The reason for this, as suggested by Sundqvist and Sylvén, is the degree to which language is an integral part of MMORPG-style games. Of note is the fact that, again, the study by Sundqvist and Sylvén as well as the results were connected mostly to MMORPGs, similarly to Peterson (2013). While it could be argued that MMORPG games, which are highly social by nature foster language learning, there is also room for research on other kinds of games, both single- and multiplayer.

Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio (2009) argue that lexical and prosodic repetition of a video game can help develop an EFL learner's linguistic and interactional competence. Texts in video games, such as voiced dialogue and written messages often repeat some key words of a game's story, which can lead to vocabulary learning through repetition, while interaction with other players during gameplay helps the development of interactional skills. What is especially noteworthy from the point of view of the present study is that the game that was

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<sup>1</sup> Mistakenly referred to as secondary school students in the thesis.

played as part Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio's study, Final Fantasy X, is not an MMORPG-style game. Instead, Final Fantasy X is a traditional, offline single-player RPG, yet it still fosters oral language use and social play through co-play and social interaction with peers. Thus, not only MMORPG-style games can benefit language learning.

Further proof of this can be seen in a study by Chik (2012). Chik showed that video game players identified three aspects of video-game-related activities with potential for foreign language learning. First, there is the consumption of in-game texts, such as a game character's dialogue. Second, interaction with other players in-game provides reasons and opportunities for authentic English language use. Third, participating in game-related discussions, as well as reading game-related online materials was identified as an important aspect of learning through video-game-related activities. Chik's study is one of the few studies which inspected learner perspectives on game-enhanced and game-based learning. Of note is the fact that two out of three of the identified gaming-related activities can be found within single-player games, as well as multiplayer games. Nearly all games feature some sort of language-based texts, as well as online communities and enthusiast groups. How these online gaming communities can benefit EFL learning is discussed in chapter 2.6.

## **2.5 Video games and motivation**

Existing research recognises video games and game-like settings as motivating and engaging, despite a relative lack of formal research on game-driven motivations (Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006: 2). An early example of game motivation can be found in Bartle (1996). Bartle identified four different types of players of MUDs (multi-user dungeon), a kind of predecessor of MMORPGs. The four archetypes Bartle identified were Achievers, Explorers, Socialisers and Killers. These types are defined based on the player's interests, or motivations, for playing the game. Bartle compares these player types on two axes based on the action and object. On the action Bartle posits acting on versus interacting with and on the object axis he posits the game world versus other players. Based on these axes, Achievers wish to *act on* the virtual world, while Explorers wish to *interact with* the world and Killers wish to *act on* other players, while Socialisers wish to *interact with* other players. From Bartle's (1996) player types, it is possible to gather that games have many ways to motivate and engage different kinds of players.



Self-determination theory (SDT) addresses different factors which affect an individual's motivation either positively or negatively (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 55). A basic distinction in these factors is between *intrinsic motivation* and *extrinsic motivation*. Intrinsic motivation refers to inherently motivating or interesting factors within an action, such as reading or playing video games, while extrinsic motivation refers to external reasons for performing a task or action. An example of extrinsic motivation would be a reward for doing a certain task, or a punishment for not doing said task. Ryan and Deci argue that in extrinsic motivation has traditionally been considered a less desirable, albeit effective, form of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 55). Instead, they argue that there are different kinds of extrinsic motivations, ranging from external regulations to the individual's integration of the external regulations and values that motivate them to act (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 60-65). On the end of external regulations for extrinsic motivation would be an apathetic student, who is urged to study a subject by their teacher as the subject will be beneficial to the student in the future. The student may grudgingly accept this motivation and perform given tasks in class. On the end of integrated extrinsic motivation would be an enthusiastic student, who studies and performs tasks due to the student acknowledging and valuing the future benefits studying can provide them. Despite these integrated extrinsic motivations being quite internally driven, it is important to note that they are not intrinsic motivations, and extrinsic motivations cannot become intrinsic motivations through integration (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 62).

Extrinsic motivations, however, do not apply to the act of video game play as much as intrinsic motivations do. The act of playing a video game is motivating and desired on its own, which means that based on Ryan and Deci's definition, video games are intrinsically motivating. In fact, Ryan, Rigby and Przybylski (Ryan et al., 2006: 3) note that players often pay to get to play games, and gaming as a hobby may even be subject to disapproval by others. Ryan et al. (2006: 3-4) compare a sub-theory of SDT, *cognitive evaluation theory (CET)*, with intrinsic motivations for video game play. According to CET, events and conditions that support an individual's feeling of autonomy and competence also increase their intrinsic motivation. Autonomy within SDT is related to the degree of free will one has when performing an activity. Doing something out of interest or personal value increases the

degree of autonomy and thus, the degree of intrinsic motivation (Ryan et al., 2006: 3). Ryan et al. suggest that participation in games is nearly always voluntary and thus, player autonomy during gameplay activities is also high. However, similar to the different reasons for play in the player types identified by Bartle (1996), Ryan et al. also acknowledge that different people's willingness to play a specific game also differs between players (Ryan et al., 2006: 3). The other factor for intrinsic motivation discussed within CET is competence. According to CET, factors which increase an individual's experience of competence enhance intrinsic motivation. There are a variety of factors which may affect the experience of competence, such as opportunities to learn something new, suitable level of challenge and positive feedback (Ryan et al., 2006: 3). Both autonomy and competence relate back to several of Gee's (2013) principles of good learning, such as *pleasant frustration* and *customization*.

In addition to autonomy and competence, Ryan et al. present *presence* and *intuitive controls* as factors that increase intrinsic motivation during video game play (Ryan et al., 2006: 4). Presence is concerned with the level of feeling that one acts within a game world, immersing themselves within the game. An opposite of positive presence would be a perceived disconnect between the game world and the real world, or between the player and their in-game character. In fact, *intuitive controls* can be one factor which affects the player's feel of presence within a game. Intuitive controls is mainly concerned with the ease with which a game's method of controlling the game is picked up. Unintuitive controls can lead into a frustrating experience, which reduces the perceived level of competence and thus, the player's will to play the game.

Ryan et al. also suggest that another sub-theory of SDT, *basic psychological need theory (BPN)*, can be applied to video game motivation (Ryan et al., 2006: 4). Adding to the needs for autonomy and competence, BPN introduces the need for *relatedness*. Simply put, the need for relatedness refers to the need for connecting with others. Ryan et al. are sceptical of how non-player characters or artificial intelligences within video games can satisfy this need for social connection, but they argue that multiplayer games, like MMORPGs, provide players with opportunities to connect with one another (Ryan et al., 2006: 4).

It is also possible, that as an intrinsically motivating experience, video games can in fact serve as an extrinsic motivation for some other actions, such as language learning. Several video games, such as MMORPGs are highly social by nature (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2012), and thus require a certain level of language competence so that the player can succeed at the game. This is also true for many single-player games with an emphasis on the game's story; to get the most out of a game's story, the player needs to be able to understand the language used to deliver it. As such, video games can provide a reason for formal study and learning of English for an EFL learner, in addition to fostering informal, incidental learning. However, Whitton (2010: 38-41) found that for adult learners who were otherwise motivated to play video games, learning by playing video games was found to be a less motivating or even demotivating experience. Whitton's study was based on the idea of game-based learning, i.e. games designed for learning, however and not on game-enhanced or incidental learning through recreational video game play. Nevertheless, the findings do indicate that some video game players may feel reluctant to engage in game-based learning, despite enjoying games as a recreational activity.

This notion that recreational video games may extrinsically motivate EFL learners to study through contexts other than game-enhanced learning has seen relatively little research. Returning to the classifications of extrinsic motivations by Ryan and Deci (2000: 60-65), it is possible to theorise how video games could provide extrinsic motivation for EFL learning. SDT separates extrinsic motivations into four different forms; *externally regulated*, *introjected*, *identified* and *integrated* extrinsic motivations (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 61). According to Ryan and Deci, external regulation is often perceived as the most meagre form of extrinsic motivations as it is reliant upon external demands or externally imposed rewards. In fact, an external reward may in fact be the avoidance of some form of punishment. After external regulation, there is introjected regulation. Introjection refers to a regulation which is internal to a degree, but which is still controlling as an individual performs introjected tasks to avoid guilt or anxiety, or to gain a sense of pride (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 62).

Identification and integration, finally, are autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation. In identified forms of extrinsic motivations an individual identifies with the importance of a task or behaviour and therefore accepts its value as their own (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 62). A

student who views a certain subject as important for their future self and thus puts effort into studying it has identified with the value of the subject. Integration, which SDT views as an even more autonomous form of extrinsic motivation than identification, occurs when the value of certain task or behaviour is fully incorporated into an individual's self-image (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 62). The ability to play video games can be considered an identified or integrated form of extrinsic motivation for EFL learning, as it is a goal for EFL learning which a video game enthusiast is likely to value and endorse. However, external rewards for a task are more often seen as external regulations by SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 61), which suggests that video game play as reward for EFL learning is not quite an autonomous motivation. On the other hand, the intrinsically motivating nature of video games supports the notion that a video game enthusiast would value being able to play video games as a positive end goal of language learning, similar to how a student may value a specific subject for its future benefits and career possibilities.

## **2.6 Online gaming communities as platforms for communication**

Moving on from language learning through video game play itself, there is another avenue for learning based around video games as a hobby. Popular video games especially have large, social, out-of-game aspects and communities to them. This also applies to games which are primarily or even entirely single-player only, as has been suggested by previous research (see e.g. Piirainen-Marsh & Tainio, 2009). Akin to consumers of other forms of media, the consumers of video games will often take part in discussion related to games they enjoy and have experience of. Some enthusiasts will also take part in gaming-related events and conventions as well as produce and share their own fan content, among many other activities that are related to video games, but not connected to the act of playing directly. Socializing around games in this way, people take part in a wide variety of gaming communities. Previous studies, such as the one by Chik (2012) have identified online gaming communities as an avenue for language learning and use.

These gaming communities can be seen as a kind of community of practice, which as a term was pioneered by Lave and Wenger (Lave & Wenger, 1991), (Wenger, 1999). Similar to a community of practice, the members of gaming communities come together within the community, which is based around their shared interests. Within a gaming community, its

members share knowledge related to the game and learn from each other. In his book, Gee (2013) suggests another term to use for gaming and online communities that he argues is more apt than community; affinity space. According to him, the term community of practice has a number of issues that the term affinity space avoids. Gee takes issue primarily with the memberships and belongingness inherent of communities and groups. Online communities in reality are often very open and do not foster a strong sense of community in the traditional sense. Instead, membership in online spaces can range from short-term, passive consumption to long-lasting, active prosumer-like membership (Gee, 2013). According to Gee (2013), the concept of affinity space also emphasizes the organization of the space as being important. In fact, organization of the space is as important as the organization of the members or people of the space is (Gee, 2013). This is unlike the concepts of community or group which, according to Gee (2013) overly stress the importance of the people. In affinity spaces, the virtual or digital space and the way it interacts with the people within is also crucial for the space (Gee, 2013). Affinity spaces have a number of characteristics that define them. For example, the people within an affinity space are related to each other through their shared interests, endeavours, goals or practices and they are not segregated by age or proficiency (Gee, 2013). In affinity spaces young and old people, as well as beginners and masters come together in one shared space. Within an affinity space, anyone can choose to produce content and there are many ways for participation in the space (Gee, 2013).

When compared to the more traditional concept of community, affinity spaces are defined by their relative informality and lack of strict hierarchies. Communities often have strongly defined leaders and roles. Classroom communities, as an example, are led by the teacher who is also the sole producer for in-class content that the students then consume, unlike many online communities where different members are equals and anyone is allowed to both produce and consume. While Gee's (2013) criticism of the term community in relation to online and gaming communities is valid and the term affinity space as he defines it is arguably more suitable, the present study will use both community and space as terms for video-game-related groups. This is due to the prevalence of community as a term and its existing use in referring to online and gaming communities.

Affinity spaces, or communities, based around video games exist both online and offline. Offline, video game enthusiasts come together in many different situations. In addition to conventions and other large events, people join gaming-related affinity spaces at schools, workplaces and many other such environments. Today, video games are discussed much like sports, TV shows or books are as part of normal everyday conversation. Online, video game communities offer people another platform for discussing their favourite games. The easy accessibility of online communities allows individuals to interact with large numbers of people with similar interests. As such, online communities are also popular platforms for sharing fan content produced by enthusiasts. In short, video game discussion online can be very varied in nature.

Two different examples of online video game communities and the kinds of discussion and content they feature can be found on the online social media site Reddit. First, there is the community based around the popular MMORPG game World of Warcraft (often abbreviated to simply WoW); [reddit.com/r/wow](https://www.reddit.com/r/wow), which currently has over 500 000 subscribed members<sup>2</sup>. At the time of writing, the front page of the community has many links to helpful resources for community members, including the changelog for the game's most recent content patch and the community's discussion thread for said patch and links to many other WoW communities both on Reddit and on other online platforms. Popular discussion threads from the same time include multiple topics on fan art and in-game screenshots, a link to an interview with a successful in-game player group (called guild in WoW), as well as a video showing a recreation of a large in-game city made within another game. Many of these discussion threads feature dozens of comments from different users. World of Warcraft is one of the most popular video games from the last century, so it is not very surprising that it has such a sizeable and active fan community.

An example of a smaller online video game community can be found at [reddit.com/r/hitman](https://www.reddit.com/r/hitman). It is an online community of roughly 19 500 subscribed members<sup>3</sup> interested in games in the video game series Hitman. Like the Reddit WoW community, the front page of the Hitman community has a number of links on it. There are links to both

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<sup>2</sup> Subscription base as of January 27, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Subscription base as of January 27, 2018.

other related fan communities as well as official Hitman social media sites. Popular discussion topics at the time of writing feature in-game screenshots and videos, questions about the game and its mechanics and a link to an online article about the most recent game in the series. In addition to the article link, all of the discussion threads are based on the most recent game in the series, which was released in an episodic fashion during the year of 2016. The Reddit Hitman community is much less active than the WoW community is by comparison. Only a handful of discussion threads feature more than a handful of comments and a few of the topics on the front page are in fact without comments. However, it is a great example that shows that even less popular and more niche games can have thriving online communities dedicated to them.

In addition to online gaming communities based on a specific game or franchise, there are numerous communities dedicated to video games in general or on a specific gaming platform or genre. Online gaming communities offer a great platform for people to come together to share their own specialized knowledge on video games and to learn from others. For a non-native speaker, online communities are also a great way to interact with both native and other non-native speakers of a language. In many cases on the Internet, the language of the community is English, like in video games themselves. Thus, for English language learners, video games as hobby give opportunities for learning the language both through active recreational gameplay as well as through interaction with other video game enthusiasts.

## **2.7 English in Finland**

Today, English is used as an official or working language in many major international political organisations and gatherings, such as the Commonwealth, the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Crystal, 2003). English is also often the language of choice whenever participants do not share a first language. English also dominates many branches of international media; the press, advertising, broadcasting, cinema and music (Crystal, 2003). Crystal makes no mention of video games but, similarly to TV and cinema, English is the dominant language in the international video games industry, especially in the Western world.

Being a global language, the English language is also arguably the most common foreign language in Finland. In addition to Finnish, the Swedish language has a status as an official national language in Finland and thus is often not considered a foreign language for primarily Finnish speaking learners. Looking at the statistics for speakers of the language in Finland, according to the Finnish statistical institution Tilastokeskus, English is only the 5<sup>th</sup> most common foreign language spoken as a mother tongue in Finland (Tilastokeskus, 2017b). It is preceded by languages such as Russian, Estonian and Arabic, which understandably have more native speakers in Finland due to immigration.

However, as a second and foreign language English is much more popular and common. It is the most commonly learned foreign language in Finnish schools today. According to the Finnish national statistical institution Statistics Finland, or *Tilastokeskus* in Finnish, 99,2 percent of Finnish gymnasium (also often called upper secondary school or senior high school) graduates in 2015 had studied English as part of their education (Tilastokeskus, 2015). Also per Statistics Finland, 70,5 percent of Finnish primary school students, aged 7 to 13, studied English in 2016. Furthermore, 99,4 percent of students in middle school, aged 13 to 16, studied English in 2016 (Tilastokeskus, 2017a).

As a broad generalisation, there are three different groups of English users. There are those who speak the language as their first language, those who speak it as a second language and finally, there are those who speak English as a foreign language. This division is supported by a variety of scholars, including Graddol (1997). Following Kachru's (1985) three circles approach to visualising these L1, L2 and EFL groups, the groups have also become known as the inner, outer and expanding circle. Finland falls comfortably within the expanding circle of Englishspeakers due to the language's status as a primarily foreign language within the country. However, in recent years there have been both colloquial as well as academic contexts in which English is somewhat jokingly referred to as *kolmas kotimainen*, or the *third native (language)* as the English language grows in popularity and familiarity within Finland.

Leppänen, Nikula and Kääntä provide a clear and concise summary on the growth of English language and its status in Finland since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century following the country's independence (Leppänen, Nikula, & Kääntä, 2008). Prior to World War II, English



arrived in Finland as an officially recognised language in certain schools and institutions. First, it was introduced as a language option alongside French in girl schools. Following this, it became a subject in boy schools as well during the 1940's. During this time, the language's influence also started to show in Finnish popular culture as several Anglicisms (Leppänen et al., 2008). Thus, English has had a long history in Finland, despite being a country which is geographically distant and isolated from primarily English-speaking countries.

After World War II, the English language continued to secure its position and reach in education, media as well as commerce. In education, English grew in popularity, especially at the expense of the German language. During this period in the 1950's, English begins to overtake German as the most popular foreign language in schools, beginning with learners in larger cities. With the growth of Finnish international trade, the need for the English language in commerce and trade also increased. In popular culture, through the arrival of American rock & roll music and cinema, more authentic forms of L1 English were introduced to the Finnish people. With the advent of TV, many English language shows are shown on TV. At first, dubbing is utilised, but the decision to transition to subtitling is later made (Leppänen et al., 2008).

Starting in the 1960's, interest in English as a modern, international language grows rapidly alongside increased international travel and English also becomes a common language for popular and youth cultures. Subtitling replaces the habit of dubbing for TV and cinema. In foreign language education, English fully overtakes the German language in popularity as a subject, followed by Swedish in late 1960's (Leppänen et al., 2008).

The 1970's and 1980's were very comparable to the 1960's in character. The importance of English for the Finns kept on growing alongside the increasing political, economic and cultural westernisation of the country. The use of English language expressions in media forms such as youth culture, advertising and music became more common over the decades. With the modernisation of the school system in the 1970's, it became compulsory to study one's first language and the country's other official language, as well as at least one foreign language, where English was a popular option (Leppänen et al., 2008).

Like before, the importance of the English language as a language for international communication grows in the 1990's. In 1995 Finland joined the European Union, which further tied Finland together with Western Europe. Through companies like Nokia, Finland grew into a leading role in the world of modern high technology. Growth in the general use of information technology and the Internet also makes using and knowing English more important for the general Finnish people. In education, the amount of education offered in English grows. 10 English language gymnasiums are founded and university-level education in English becomes more common. The use of English in various other aspects of society also grows even further (Leppänen et al., 2008).

The 2000's are characterised by economic and cultural globalisation. Many businesses grow beyond national borders, which calls for the use of a common language within said businesses. Many Finnish and Nordic companies choose English as their business language, even over other first language choices. The Finnish society is also becoming increasingly multicultural through immigration and refugees. The Internet also connects the Finns with other cultures and nationalities online, where English is used especially in foreign interaction (Leppänen et al., 2008).

## **2.8 English in video games in Finland**

As reported by Leppänen et al. (2008), the English language has reached an important and central position in popular culture alongside the national languages of Finnish and Swedish. In Finland, media such as TV, movies and video games, provides an excellent opportunity for exposure to the English language outside schools, as dubbing outside children's programs is rare. Instead, Finnish and/or Swedish language subtitles are used for the translation of TV shows and movies. This provides the viewers of TV shows and movies exposure to the English language even while they are consuming the media primarily in their first language. This fact often comes up when the reasons for the Finns' English language skills are discussed, as dubbing is often seen as the more common method for foreign media translation.

Similarly to TV and movies, video games in Finland are often not translated by dubbing over the original audio. Exceptions to this are mainly games for children and some sports

games, where Finnish play-by-play commentary is considered more authentic for Finnish audiences. However, video games are very often not translated at all for the Finnish market. This means that the only language options available for both audio and text are English, as well as certain other global foreign languages, such as German, French or Spanish. Thus, Finnish players often have no other choice but to play their video games in English, perhaps with English language subtitles enabled.

There are several reasons for why video games are rarely translated into Finnish. Primarily, there is the fact that the Finnish market is relatively small, with the language having under 6 million speakers internationally (Simons & Fennig, 2017). Thus, publishers may deem the market too small for the expenses of game translation, especially as the Finnish market is used to English language releases. Furthermore, translating a work of art or media is always a challenging task. This is true especially for translating video games, which has certain characteristics unique to it. According to Karvonen and Karvonen (2017), translators of video games often only receive the written texts of a game for translation. This means that the translator must work without access to the audio-visual or interactive resources of the game while producing game translations. The translator also rarely has the chance to play the game during the translation process and the texts they receive lack their natural context. Without the necessary context, translating an expression such as *fire* in isolation can be very challenging, as the term can refer to multiple different concepts such as *campfire*, *firing a gun* or *firing an employee*, which all have different meanings and words in Finnish (Karvonen & Karvonen, 2017).

Due to the prevalence of English in video games and issues with game translations, many Finnish gamers may in fact prefer the experience of playing their games in English even when a Finnish language option is available. This is an aspect of video game play in the Finnish context which has seen little academic research. Instead, research into video games and learning seem to assume that Finnish gamers play their video games exclusively in English. While the notion is grounded in reality due to the scarcity of Finnish-language games, some attention should be paid to the language preferences of Finnish gamers.

### **3 The present study**

#### **3.1 Research questions**

The present study examines several aspects of game-enhanced learning and learners' perceptions and experiences of learning English as a foreign language while playing recreational video games. While the main interest is on EFL learning through games, learning of other subjects, as well as of more general knowledge is also looked into in brief. In addition to language learning through video games themselves, the study will investigate the possibility of video games as a hobby increasing one's motivation for English language use and learning outside video games.

The research questions for the study are as follows:

- What kind of experiences do Finnish EFL learners have of learning English through recreational video game play?
- What have the players learned while playing games in English?
  - Have players of different game genres learned different language skills?
- Does playing video games increase a player's motivation for learning the English language through other contexts?

#### **3.2 Data collection**

For the collection of data, the choice between utilising either quantitative or qualitative data came up. For these two options two very different data collection archetypes exist; interview or questionnaire. Utilising a questionnaire or a survey for data collection makes sense when one wants a large amount of impersonal, quantitative research data. Some recent examples of studies on language learning through video games that utilise quantitative data are the pro gradu thesis by Uuskoski (2011) and my own bachelor's thesis (Väisänen, 2014), both of which were mentioned in chapter 2.4. For the bachelor's thesis, collecting and analysing quantitative data was the clear choice as the goal of the study was to compare language competence, amount of video game play and other hobbies, and video game preferences of a large group of people.

Rather than utilising a survey and quantitative data, for the present study the choice was made to utilize a series of interviews and qualitative data. As the study focuses on the personal experiences and views of individuals, a qualitative approach was deemed the more suitable option over a quantitative approach. The present study does not aim to strictly compare or grade individuals with one another, by for example comparing their time spent on video games and their English language skills. Thus, making use of less participants but more in-depth, personal data was found to be the better option. On the other hand, the sub-question "*Have players of different game genres learned different language skills?*" would arguably be better answered through quantitative data such as language testing. However, for that very reason the question is relegated to sub-question status. In a situation where the interviewees have vastly different video game preferences, differences in their learning experiences are examined as possible patterns to be explored further through more suitable, quantitative research methods.

For the present study, the choice was made to utilise modern, semi-structured interviews as described by Hyvärinen, Nikander, Ruusuvaori, Aho, and Granfelt (2017: 17-20). In a semi-structured interview like the ones used in the present study the interview script has at least the topics to be covered by the interview determined before the interviews are conducted. This is very different from more structured interviews, which have their entire line-up of questions, and possibly answers, written down beforehand. In addition to the broad topics of the interview, a semi-structured interview script may still contain any number of prepared questions just like the scripts for structured interviews (Kvale, 2007: 57). In this sense, the difference between a structured, semi-structured and unstructured interview is not a binary matter of either or but a scale ranging in-between the various options. Regardless of the structure of the interview script, in a semi-structured interview there is a degree of openness to the script. It is possible for the interviewer to divert from the pre-determined question path according to their own judgement (Kvale, 2007: 57). For example, the interviewer may choose to ask for clarification or justification following an answer in order to better understand the interviewee's point of view.

Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008: 35) suggest that an interview is a suitable data collection method when the aim is to emphasize the person as the subject of research and to provide more

context for their answers. An interview gives a person the chance to explain their own views, opinions and experiences instead of them being reduced to simple data points on a scale. Per Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008: 35), using interviews for data collection is also beneficial when the topic that is researched is unknown or less explored in some sense, or when it is likely to produce varied answers. These points support the decision to use interviews in the present study. The aim is not to provide general knowledge but to delve into the individual experiences of several people. Therefore, it was to be expected that the participants would give differing, even unexpected answers that a strict survey could not adequately uncover.

In the present study, the interview script was prepared with multiple open-ended questions that were to be asked during the interview in a set order. Using only open-ended questions was a deliberate choice as it was deemed difficult or even impossible to provide the interviewees with suitable answer choices. During specific interviews, the decision was made to both omit some of the prepared questions as well as to ask new, unprepared questions when it was deemed necessary during an interview. In some situations, a question was answered adequately during an earlier question, while in other situations an answer provoked further questions on the topic. As such, the present study arguably leans more in the direction of structure in the field of semi-structured interviews.

As Kvale (2007: 18) explains, in modern research interviews the interviewer and interview subject often regard one another as partners or equals. The interviewer's goal is not to interrogate the interviewee or to change their view on the topic of the interview, as is the case in several other interview-like situations. Instead, qualitative research interviews aim for a situation where the interviewee tells about their own views and experiences naturally and on their own terms. The interviewer is to retain a neutral point of view and lead the interview along the pre-determined interview path, which is based on the interview script. This also supports the more modern research fashion which steers away from structured interviews that aim to extract information from the interview subject. This approach by Kvale (2007) supports the present study's focus on the individual experiences rather than quantifiable data they may possess. The approach was encouraged through several actions taken by the interviewer, such as by approaching the interviewees as an equal or as a fellow video game enthusiast.

### 3.2.1 Data collection process

The data for the present study was collected through interviews as described in the previous chapter. The final data consists of six individual interviews. Data collection took place in late 2017, during the months of September and October. Prior to this, attempts had been made to find interview participants and to collect research data in the spring of 2017 but, despite continued assistance from a few local upper secondary schools, voluntary participants for the interviews were not found then.

Finally, in the autumn of 2017, there was more success finding interested participants for the study. In the autumn, participants for the interviews were sought by both contacting local upper secondary schools as well as through word of mouth with friends and colleagues. This made it possible to reach a wider pool of potential participants for the interviews. Contact with one local upper secondary school English teacher was established through the school's principal and the co-operation between the teacher and researcher was indispensable for the success of the present study. Word of mouth was also greatly beneficial for finding participants and thus arranging all the interviews in a timely manner.

The interviews were conducted in Finnish due to it being the primary language of all participants. Allowing the participants to speak in their native language made it possible for them to express themselves more exactly and naturally. In a few interviews English was used to express or convey certain concepts relating to video games. This was due to the established terms for these concepts being English-only or without a suitable Finnish translation. An example of such a situation is the concept of random matchmaking in online games. Regardless of this, the interviews were conducted mostly in Finnish.

The location where the interviews were conducted was left primarily up to the interviewees' decision. Physical locations were preferred due to the proximity of the interviewer and interviewees, but the option for an online interview through a platform such as Skype existed as a backup option. Hyvärinen et al. (2017: 116-117) note that the location of the interview may affect the interview, and thus it is worth some thought. For instance, in interviews that are related to a person's work, the workplace may be an enlightening location for the interview (Hyvärinen et al., 2017: 116). Two of the interviewees chose to be

interviewed at their educational institute, while the four others preferred a café. A café as a location for an interview can be a good, neutral location that eases the interview subject to talk more openly (Hyvärinen et al., 2017: 116-117). As the interviews were about the interviewees' free time activities and experiences, the location of the interviews did not matter very much. The different locations were unlikely to affect the interviews to a notable degree. However, a café as the place of interview did lead to some distracting background noise during the interviews. Luckily the noise was not an immense obstacle and the interviews could be conducted without any notable distractions, apart from a few situations where a question or answer had to be repeated. As a final note on location, being able to interview each subject at their homes or at the place where they most often play video games, possibly while they are actively playing a video game could have led to some interesting insights. However, due to challenges organizing such a situation with each interviewee would have posed the option was dismissed.

As the interview script for the interviews was semi-structured, each interview differed from one another to a certain degree. The themes and topics discussed were the same in all interviews, but the extent to which each of them was discussed varied based on the answers of the interviewee. In some situations, the interviewers also chose to ask follow-up questions not mentioned in the interview script itself as certain questions stirred up interesting discussion.

The interviews themselves were recorded into digital audio format during each interview situation. According to Hyvärinen et al. (2017: 116), recording an interview has many benefits to it. Having a recording to return to makes it possible for the researcher to make observations about things they did not notice during the interview session (Hyvärinen et al., 2017: 116). For purposes of analysis and to allow for precise extracts, the audio recordings were then transcribed into text. Apart from the aforementioned background noise that made transcription more laborious at times, there were no issues with the final recordings. As such, all six interviews could be included in the final data that was analysed.



### 3.2.2 Participants

All the interview subjects were Finnish men, which was not a deliberate choice. Finnish as the nationality for all participants was to be expected due to the data being collected in Finland. This is reflected in the research questions' concentration on Finnish language learners specifically. However, it could have benefited the present study to feature both men and women as interviewees. Regrettably, due to time constraints with the data collection it was not possible to wait for interested female participants to join the study.

Three of the interviewees were upper secondary school students, while the other three had already finished their secondary education. Of these three, two were currently studying at university, while the third had finished his vocational education and was actively employed. These differences in the participants' life situations made it likely that differing views and experiences were brought up during the interviews.

In this final study, the names of the participants are replaced by pseudonyms in order to retain their anonymity. Using pseudonyms makes discussion of the interviews and interviewees sound more natural than using more abstract handles, such as *Subject A* or *Person 1*. This way discussion on the findings from the data is more natural to read and the text flows more fluently. The pseudonyms and basic educational background information of the interviewees is presented in the following table.

**Table 1 Participants**

| Pseudonym | Educational situation                                   |
|-----------|---|
| Jussi     | Final (3 <sup>rd</sup> ) year of upper secondary school |
| Marko     | Finished vocational education, employed                 |
| Tapio     | University  |
| Kalle     | First year of upper secondary school                    |
| Harri     | University  |
| Ville     | First year of upper secondary school                    |

### 3.3 Methods of analysis

As the present study is based on a qualitative data set, it was a natural decision to apply qualitative methods of data analysis as well. In addition to the data set itself, the research questions of the present study support a qualitative approach to data analysis, except for the sub-questions as discussed in chapter 3.2. For analysis, the present study utilizes qualitative content analysis. This was the clear choice as the research aims to analyse content of the research subjects' answers specifically, with less regard for their discourse or meaning-making. As Krippendorff (2013: 24) points out, content analysis as research technique aims to make replicable and valid inferences from texts. Replicability and validity of these inferences go hand in hand; different researchers should be able to draw the same conclusions from the same set of data. Furthermore, Krippendorff (2010: 234) notes that content analysis deals specifically with "unstructured meanings" as opposed to structured meanings, such as those inferred from statistical data or structured interview data. Content analysis is used when one is looking for meanings that cannot be inferred by direct observation or comparison. Instead, the meanings stem from the analysis of the data.

Julien (2008: 120) describes qualitative content analysis as a process where similarities in texts and themes are categorized. According to her, qualitative content analysis helps one reduce and make sense of data. In comparison to *quantitative* content analysis, *qualitative* content analysis is inherently interpretative; the analysed texts and their interpretations are subjective and dependent on the context in which they are analysed (Julien, 2008: 120). When analysing a political speech, for example, the context or point of view from which a researcher analyses the text in question affects the inferences that stem from the analysis. Within the confines of the present study, the context of language learning through video games was considered prior to the analysis, when the interview script was being drafted. This makes the text that is analysed in the present study primed towards the context from which it is analysed.

Krippendorff (2013: 25) also notes that in his definition for content analysis, the term *text* does not restrict the use of content analysis to specifically written texts. For content analysis, the text that is analysed can be nearly any form communication, such as speech, written text or a webpage. In the present study, the texts that are studied are recordings of speech that

have been transcribed into textual form to ease analysing them. For the purposes of the present study, the transcription was done verbatim; grammatical errors, false starts and other such mistakes in the original interview recordings are retained in the transcriptions as well.

In qualitative content analysis, the analysis of texts leads to smaller, individual pieces of data being identified as belonging to a theme (Julien, 2008: 120). As such, content is categorised into themes or topics that are then further analysed. The themes that are identified depend on a variety of factors, such as the aim of the study and the analysed text itself. Julien (2008: 120-121) notes that one single piece of text can be relevant to multiple themes that are analysed.

In addition to qualitative content analysis, a research approach known as phenomenography is utilised in the present study. As defined by Louise B. Limberg, Phenomenography studies variations in human experiences of different phenomena (Limberg, 2008). Phenomenography's focus on experiences puts the point of interest on the individual instead of the world in which phenomena occur (Limberg, 2008: 612). This approach is helpful for the present study, where the focus is on the interviewees' individual experiences of learning, rather than on the results or other directly quantifiable outcomes. In the present study, the focus is not on assessing if language learning can happen while playing video games, but on how the learners perceive or experience the learning that happens while they play.

Ruusuvuori, Nikander and Hyvärinen (2010: 10) identify several phases to qualitative data analysis. After deciding on the research aims and questions and data collection, there are the processes of data reduction and organisation, followed by classification and identifying of themes and then the analysis and data comparison itself. These are then followed by presenting and discussing the findings (Ruusuvuori et al., 2010: 10). According to Limberg (2008: 613), preliminary data analysis already takes place during the collection and transcription of data. Initial findings and themes emerge as soon as the researcher begins to work with the data. This sentiment is also supported by Ruusuvuori et al. (2010: 10) who note that the different phases of analysis are closely related, yet separate from one another.

It can be said that the different phases of qualitative content analysis do not necessarily take place in a linear fashion. Analysis flows back and forth between the different phases, as was the case in the present study as well. Preliminary analysis and data reduction was done during the transcription of the text, and classification and comparison took place in somewhat alternating manner. This way, certain findings that would otherwise have gone unnoticed were discovered while going through the data for a subsequent time.

In the present study, data analysis took place following the phases of analysis as presented by Ruusuvuori et al. (2010). After the interview data was collected and transcribed, classification and reduction of data began. Reducing data by identifying important utterances and sequences in the data was followed by classifying these important elements into their own categories and themes. These categories came about based on both the research questions and the data itself, as suggested by Julien (2008: 120). After data reduction was completed, further themes and classifications for data were identified, and the data organised so that related themes were joined more closely together. This made the data more coherent and primed it for the theoretical discussion that follows the analysis itself. After the data was classified into themes, the primary analysis was conducted. Data under each theme, as well as the themes themselves were compared to one another. These comparisons lead to the findings and interpretations, or inferences as named by Krippendorff (2010). Finally, the findings were written into a form that makes it possible to present and discuss them in the following chapters.

## **4 Learners' experiences of learning English through video games**

### **4.1 Gaming backgrounds and preferences**

In this chapter, the varying gaming backgrounds of the interviewees are discussed briefly. Besides the differences and similarities in their general backgrounds that were mentioned previously in chapter 3.2.2, there are some further aspects to the interviewees, and their gaming backgrounds especially, that bear introduction. First, chapter 4.1.1 introduces differences and similarities in the habits and the amount of experience of video game play that the participants have. Second, chapter 4.1.2 discusses some of the video game and game genre preferences that the interviewees brought forward.

#### **4.1.1 Gaming habits and experience**

All the interviewees were relatively active gamers, with their time spent on video games ranging from roughly an hour each day to up to four hours each day. Regardless of individual time differences, everyone considered themselves to be active video game players. The biggest outlier in the group was Kalle who said he did not play a lot during the weekdays, instead choosing to play games almost solely in the weekends. Still, other participants also reported that they often spend more time playing video games in the weekends. However, they all said that they spent a notable amount of time playing games on weekdays as well. Marko and Harri, who were the two most active players, also mentioned that the amount of time they spent on games fluctuated a lot from one week to another, whereas this fluctuation in play-time was much smaller for the other participants.

The interviewees had all started playing video games actively at roughly the same time in their lives. Most mentioned beginning to play video games in first, second or third grades of primary school, even though some mentioned having some memories of playing video games at a younger age. Contrary to the others, Tapio and Harri mentioned that they started playing video games some time before primary school when they were given a video game console. Getting a games console was a common introduction to video games for all participants, with browser-based games on the family computer being another common introduction. Based on each participant's current age, they therefore had drastically different amounts of experience of playing video games, as they all had started playing at around the ages six to ten. The older participants Marko, Tapio and Harri had played video

games for fifteen to twenty years thus far, while Jussi, Kalle and Ville had about ten years of experience each. These differences in the individuals' amount of general gaming experience seemed to correlate with some differences in their reported EFL learning experiences which were related to video games.

Most of the participants said that they nowadays play video games on a computer. Dedicated games consoles were also a popular, often secondary, option for the platform to play on. The only interviewee who did not play any games on a PC was Harri, who did not have a computer suitable for video games at the time of the interview. Still, he did mention having enjoyed games on a computer earlier. Only Marko and Ville mentioned games on smart phones, with Marko telling he very rarely played games on the platform and Ville saying he hardly ever played games on his phone.

Based on their answers, every participant was found to be a very enthusiastic gamer. For the participant, the session length of individual gaming sessions was especially high, even though the regularity of play varied from one individual to another. Their individual concentration or focus on the games did not come up through direct questioning, but many interviewees did infer that they played games with a high degree of concentration, varying from one play session to another.

#### **4.1.2 Preferred games and game genres**

The participants enjoyed playing a wide variety of different games, on a variety of different platforms. Genre-wise, popular genres were first-person shooters, role-playing games, and strategy games, which came up in multiple interviews. Specific games that were mentioned multiple times were *Overwatch* and *World of Tanks*, both of which are competitive online games, albeit of different genres. Interestingly, only the younger participants Jussi, Kalle and Ville mentioned enjoying competitive online games, whereas the older participants Marko, Tapio and Harri preferred single-player games, local multiplayer games or online games with less emphasis on competition between players, such as online role-playing games. To a degree, this difference in preferred game genres can be seen in the motivations and reasons for why the individuals prefer the games that they play. There was as much variance in the reasons for why the participants enjoyed the types of games they played as

there was in the games that they enjoyed. Everyone had at least some individual reasons for enjoying specific kinds of games, but there were also cases of similar motivations for playing certain games.

For Jussi, the sense of competition was an important factor for enjoying specific games. This is understandable, as the feeling of competing against a human opponent is decidedly unique and cannot be reproduced with AI opponents.

Excerpt 1.

Jussi: No siinä World of Tanksissa se et siinä koko ajan oppii uutta ja se on niinku multiplayer-peli, niin siinä saa jallitettua vastustajat aina eri tavalla. Ja tota, se on vaan se et on parempi kuin toinen. Se on siinä.

*Jussi: Well in World of Tanks it's that you learn something new all the time and it's like a multiplayer game, so you can always outsmart opponents in a different way. And well, it's just that you're better than the other. That's it.*

In this excerpt from the interview with Jussi, he mentions some of the positive feelings multiplayer games can give their player. The feeling of outsmarting and beating one's competitors is a common feeling in competitive settings other than video games as well, such as sports or spelling bees. For a player who enjoys competition and outplaying their opponents, the various competitive online games, such as World of Tanks, are a clear choice for a preferred game genre or type.

In this excerpt, Jussi also mentions the ability to learn something new while playing the game. After a follow-up question he explained that he meant learning skills and knowledge that is applicable within the context of the game itself. This knowledge is mainly various strategic options available to the player, as well as ways to counter otherwise powerful plays or moves by the opponent. Later during the interview, Jussi did also mention learning some outside-game knowledge from World of Tanks in addition to learning how to play the game itself. These learning experiences are discussed in chapter 4.5.

In addition to the competitive games mentioned earlier, Jussi also mentioned that he enjoyed games which are based on building and planning a variety of systems such as cities or networks. One of the games he mentioned was the city-builder Cities: Skylines, in which the player manages a modern city and its infrastructure. For Jussi, the motivations for playing games in the building genre are quite different from his motivations for enjoying

competitive games, as can be expected. Most building games are single-player games and do not have an option to play against a comparable computer-controlled opponent either. Instead, challenges in building games stem from aspects such as resource management. Thus, building games lack the competitive nature of games such as World of Tanks or Overwatch entirely. Instead, enjoyment in building games stems from the act of planning and constructing, which is like the enjoyment provided by building blocks, for example.

Despite first mentioning competitive shooters, such as Overwatch and Counter-Strike, as games he enjoyed, Ville later mentioned interesting gameplay ideas and mechanics as one of his primary motivations for playing video games. As such, he said he enjoyed a variety of indie games as their designers tended to experiment and take more risks with their games. Marko also had similar thoughts on what interested him in games. He said that interesting gameplay often grabbed his attention when choosing a new game to play. For these two players, exploring what video games as a medium or an art form can accomplish is a highly motivating factor for playing and enjoying video games. Ville especially was fond of the idea of games with interesting mechanics, narratives or otherwise special ideas, possibly even over the higher production value of more mainstream games.

Those participants who played mainly single-player games found the stories and settings of the games to be more important than the players of competitive games did by comparison. For instance, Marko mentioned that games without a good story often failed to hold his interest in them for long. As he mentioned, gameplay was often what grabbed his interest in a game, but it was the story that held his interest for a longer period. The story of a game is also what made him return to the same game time after time for multiple playthroughs. Despite game stories being more important for the players of single-player games, Kalle did say that one of the reasons he liked to play Overwatch was the game's story and characters, which had interesting and varied stories and backgrounds. Thus, it is not possible to say that stories in video games only interested those interviewees, who played single-played games and vice versa.

Tapio, who enjoyed playing a variety of strategy and role-playing games, found the historical settings and contexts of the games he enjoyed interesting. Many of the strategy



games he played allowed their player to pick and choose from multiple historical nations to play as and progress through history with. During gameplay, the player's actions then affect and change history, thus mixing real and fictional historical events together. Tapio also mentioned the importance that a game's story has to him nowadays.

Excerpt 2.

Tapio: Nuorempana tarina ei niinkään kiinnostanu, että halus skipata kaikki. Sitten lukiossako se oli, tai yläasteella kun Mass Effect ykkösen pelas ekan kerran, niin siinä sitten koko tarinan seurasi alusta loppuun kunnolla ja useamman kerran toistin sen pelin läpi.

*Tapio: When I was younger, the story didn't really interest me, so I just wanted to skip everything. When I was in upper secondary, or was it in middle school, when I played Mass Effect 1 for the first time, then I properly followed through the whole story and went through the game multiple times.*

Excerpt 3.

Tapio: Esimerkiks kun Fallout 3:n kun joskus samoihin aikoihin [kuin Mass Effect] pelasin, niin se [motivaatio] saatto olla enemmän sitä että pääsee muutamaa mutanttia räiskimään.

*Tapio: For example, when I played Fallout 3 roughly at same time (as Mass Effect), then it [the motivation] may have been more in that you got to shoot a couple of mutants.*

In these two examples Tapio looks back on the time when stories in video games started to interest him more. He had previously mentioned that before his current interest in strategy and role-playing games he used to play first-person shooters more often than nowadays. Fallout 3 mixes both role-playing and shooting mechanics, but for Tapio the motivation to play the game was much more heavily on the shooting aspects of the game. Comparatively, when playing the action role-playing game Mass Effect, Tapio was much more interested in the story of the game than he was when playing Fallout 3. According to Tapio, Mass Effect is one of the first games that made him become interested in the stories of video games, which can be seen as a case of his intrinsic motivations for playing video games shifting over time, which is a phenomena acknowledged within SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000). From Tapio's interview, it can be seen that he enjoys both new narratives and stories such as those in games like Mass Effect, as well as retelling and adapting of existing stories, such as historical events.

For Harri, who claimed to play exclusively single-player games, the reasons for enjoying specific video games differed somewhat from those of Marko and Tapio, who enjoyed the stories and settings of games. Instead of the stories in video games being one of the driving forces of his motivation to play, Harri enjoyed primarily difficult and highly challenging

games, such as those in the Dark Souls series of action games. According to him, overcoming a difficult challenge led to a true feeling of success unlike any other. To a degree, he also enjoyed the exclusivity of playing and finishing games that are commonly known as hard and challenging, as presented in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 4.

Harri: Kait siinä on vähän se, että kaikki ei tykkää siitä [pelistä].

– ja sitten kun pääset siinä [pelissä] eteenpäin, niin siinä on se todellinen jes-tunne.

*Harri: I guess there's a bit of the fact that not everyone likes it [the game].*

*– and then when you manage to progress in it [the game], then there's that real yes-feeling in it.*

The tough and challenging reputation of the Dark Souls and other similar games likely deters some video game players away from such games, while Harri finds enjoyment and perhaps even pride in playing and completing them. This sense of pride one feels over playing difficult video games is similar to people's enjoyment of other niche or underground sub-cultures and can be considered a case of introjected extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 62). Introjected motivations are connected to the avoidance of feelings of shame and on enhancements of one's ego or pride. Ego and pride apply to the case of playing games which are commonly regarded as difficult. Naturally it is possible to enjoy games like Dark Souls as simple games, but being part of an underground sub-culture can also be an important facet of many people's enjoyment of the series and other similar games. In a way, games such as those in the Dark Souls series can even be seen as a counterpoint to many modern and popular video games, which are sometimes criticized for being too easy, casual or streamlined in nature. Harri's notion of perhaps enjoying the fact that not everyone likes the games suggests that he also enjoys being part of the exclusive group of Dark Souls fans.

Harri also mentioned that he found the way in which games in Dark Souls and other similar games tend to tell their stories interesting. According to him, the games do not spell out their story in such an upfront manner as games often do. Instead, the Souls games use story-telling methods such as text-based item descriptions to provide background on the games' story and world. This leads to the fanbase of the games piecing together and speculating on the story of the games, which Harri found intriguing. Harri's knowledge about the fanbase and its scrutinizing over the games' stories also supports the previous notion that being a

member of an exclusive group that enjoys difficult video games is a motivating factor for him.

The motivations for playing were widely different from one interviewee to another. Some enjoyed primarily the competition with other players, while others enjoyed the mechanics of the games themselves. Interestingly, it was specifically the younger participants who mentioned playing games that were primarily competitive in nature. Still, they also enjoyed games in other genres and styles as well. In fact, only Kalle said that he only played games of one specific genre or style, which for him were competitive online games. For the other participants, different games responded to different motivations for playing video games, similar to the different player archetypes of Bartle (1996). In that sense, the participants' ways and motivations for video game play could be compared to the ways in which people in general read books, watch TV and movies, and enjoy other forms of media and art. Chiefly, one person often enjoys multiple different genres and styles of the same medium for different reasons, despite their own preferences steering them in one specific direction.

## **4.2 Video game language preferences**

Before delving into the present study's main interest of EFL learning experiences, a brief chapter on the general language preferences of the participants is warranted. While it was highly likely that the participants played their games exclusively in English, due to reasons such as those mentioned in chapter 2.8, it was important for the study to discuss the participants' language preferences and experiences while playing video games. When analysing the participants' motivation for EFL learning, it is important to verify how much the participants play games in English. Nowadays it is quite rare for video games to receive any Finnish translations, be it dubbing or subtitling. However, nearly every interviewee had played some video games in Finnish. Most of these experiences were from the participants' childhoods.

The older interviewees Marko, Tapio and Harri had all played video games in Finnish, with most of their experiences taking place in their childhoods. Most of the games they had played were children's games, such as games based on Disney movies released in the participants' childhood. The other games that these older participants had played in Finnish

were sports games and educational games, which they had played at school. Of note is that many of the games the three participants had played were fully translated into Finnish, with even character dialogue and play-by-play commentary being performed in Finnish. Comparatively, the younger participants Jussi, Kalle and Ville did not have as much experience of playing games in Finnish as the older participants did. Jussi remembered having possibly played some Internet-browser-based games which were in Finnish, while Ville still had some of his games, such as the online shooter Counter-Strike, use Finnish subtitling. Kalle did not remember having played or even hearing of any games that were in Finnish. In general, it was rare for the participants to nowadays play games in any language other than English, with only Ville occasionally playing certain games in Finnish.

There were very few situations where the interviewees mentioned having experience of playing video games in languages other than Finnish or English. In fact, only Harri had played games in other languages. Still, these experiences were negligible due to the limited amount of them, as well as them occurring in Harri's early youth, according to him. His experiences of playing video games in foreign languages other than English are discussed briefly in chapter 4.5. Other cases of video games in other foreign languages were limited to games with individual characters who spoke a foreign language which was not translated into English for narrative or other reasons. However, these cases are limited to a few characters in games which are otherwise in English, so the games mentioned in them can be regarded as being English language video games.

As for the language preferences, most of the interviewees vastly preferred playing games in English, even if they were given the choice between English and Finnish. Common reasons for preferring English were the universal nature of the language and the perception that Finnish translation in video games often sounds or reads off or unnatural. The fact that not many games are translated was also mentioned by some participants, as they found playing all their games in the same language preferable. Marko remembered that he used to change the language of subtitles in his games to Finnish, if given the option, when he was younger. However, nowadays he always used English subtitling, as well as English language audio. Differing from the rest of the participants, Ville, who even still played some games with Finnish subtitles, said that he did not mind playing games in Finnish very much. Still, he

did mention that, similarly to the others, he occasionally found Finnish translations sounding off or being poorly done. Regardless of this fact, he did not mind the translations enough to change the language setting for the games he had in Finnish, despite his mild preference for English in video games.

Based on the answers of the participants, they all had at least a mild preference for English while playing video games. There were a few reasons for this preference, such as rarity, poor quality or limited number of translated video games. Another factor is also the prevalence of English in video games in Finland, which may be the reason why several participants regarded Finnish language games with feelings of unnaturalness or clumsiness. As the participants played the majority of their video games entirely in English, there was a clear possibility for EFL learning stemming from their vernacular video game play. The number and timing of experiences the participants had of playing video games either fully or partially in Finnish or in foreign languages other than English were rare. As such, the participants can be considered to do most of their gaming in English, apart from those situations in which they explicitly mention otherwise. This shows that for the interviewees, English is their primary language for video games and can form a regular environment for informal learning.

## **4.3 EFL learning experiences**

### **4.3.1 Vocabulary learning experiences**

Many of the interviewees found it difficult to express or remember situations where they had learned or become aware of having learned English by playing video games. They often found it easier to express what they had learned, such as vocabulary or communication skills, but detailing individual situations of EFL learning experiences was difficult for most participants. By further discussing what the interviewees had learnt, many of them could then memorise and bring up specific moments and situations where they had experienced learning. Much of the learning the interviewees had experienced through video games was connected to aspects of language competence that often develop over a period of time, such as grammar or reading comprehension. Therefore, it is understandable that the participants often found it difficult to go into much detail about some of the learning experiences they had had.

The most common examples of learning English that the participants could put into words had to do with the learning of vocabulary. While all participants did mention that they believed vocabulary was one aspect of language which an EFL learner could learn through video games, not all mentioned concrete examples of vocabulary learning through video games. For others, specific examples of vocabularies and words they had learned was one way to illustrate their video-game-enhanced EFL learning.

Excerpt 5.

Jussi: -- No Runescapesta tuli sellasia yksittäisiä sanoja niinku "use". Pitää "usettaa" tämä "itemi" tohon noin. Sellasia niinku yksittäisiä sanoja jota tuli jankattua siellä, niin ne jää aika hyvästi.

-- sieltä se "examine", minä aina isältä kyselin niitä että mitä nuo [sanat] tarkoittaa ja isä ei tienny.

*Jussi: -- Well from Runescape I got single words like "use". You had to "use" this "item" in that there. Single words like that I used to repeat in there, they stick quite well.*

*-- from there that "examine", I always used to ask my father what those [words] meant and he didn't know.*

Jussi remembers learning English vocabulary through video games starting with his very first video game, Runescape. According to him, he picked up video games at around the time when he was also beginning to learn English at school, so learning from games and school supported one another. During the interview, Jussi himself mentioned that he believed he would not have been able learn as much English through video games as he had, if it was not for his early English lessons in primary school. By playing the online RPG Runescape, Jussi started learning single words for which the game provided clear meaning, such as verbs like "use" or "examine". In the game, words like those mentioned by Jussi are given instant, clear context as the player's in-game character performs the actions dictated by the player's commands, which is an example of Gee's principle of situated meaning (Gee, 2013). The player can instantly see what it means to use a key on a lock, or what happens when they examine a road sign, et cetera. For learning English in this manner, it is important that the different actions are given a variety of contexts that clarify the meaning of them. For example, if "use" applies only to using keys on doors, it is possible for the player to misinterpret the meaning of "use" as "open" or "unlock".

It is also worth noting that, arguably, games with these so-called point-and-click mechanics, where the player clicks on specific actions, items and objects, are becoming rarer as more contextual actions are becoming the norm in modern video games. The same button on a

controller or a keyboard can be used for multiple different actions that depend on the current context of the game, for example to open a door when near one or to talk to an in-game character. These sorts of contextual actions do not link the meanings with actions as clearly as Runescape in Jussi's example does. Thus, learning word such as "use" or "examine" in the same way as Jussi has will be less likely for current and future EFL learners.

In addition to giving meaning and context to verbs, as mentioned in the earlier example provided by Jussi, video games can teach their player other words, such as nouns and adjectives. Nouns are understandably more common in the examples of the interviewees, as they are easier to comprehend based on the context provided by a video game. In fact, no examples of learning adjectives were brought up by the participants. Regardless of this, the possibility for learning adjectives through video games cannot be entirely discarded. In the interview with Ville, he brought forward the idea that at least the tone of an adjective is often easy to understand based on the context in which it is used, even if one cannot form a dictionary-level definition and understanding for the adjective.

Marko has also experiences of learning vocabulary through video games, similarly to Jussi. In the following excerpt, he mentions learning some English vocabulary even before his formal English lessons began.

Excerpt 6.

Marko: -- mitenkä minäkin niinku -- niinsanotusti opin sitä [englantia] siinä kun pelas sitä [peliä] kokoajan siinä ja sen jälkeen yleensä niinkun ne hahmot ja nämä puhu esim asioista. Kyllä sä saatoit sieltä niinku aina yhen sanan ymmärtää välistä.

-- että jos pelissä sanottiin niinku "auto". Niin sen jälkeen, kun meni englannin tunnille niin sä tiesit heti, kun luit sen sanan niin olit silleen että "wauh". Tavallaan ties sen jo valmiiks.

*Marko: -- how I like -- supposedly learned it [English] in that when you played it [a game] all the time and after that often like the characters and such spoke about stuff for instance. You could like understand one word from here and there.*

*-- like if in the game like "a car" was mentioned. Then after that when you went to English class, you knew straight away when you read that word and you were like "whoa". In a way you knew it already.*

This example is noteworthy as Marko explains he could pick up some English vocabulary from video games despite not having the necessary skills to fully or even mostly understand the language of the games he was playing. Unlike the previous example with Jussi, in this example the learner is in contact with English before they have begun studying English at

school. Despite this, Marko could pick up the meaning of an occasional word, such as the word “car”, which was most likely easy to understand based on the context given by the game. In fact, as mentioned earlier, most of the vocabulary learning experiences of the interviewees were connected to the learning of nouns and verbs, which are easier to comprehend than adjectives or other more complex parts of speech.

For Marko, these early experiences of learning new words from video games were a stunning experience, as he became conscious of his learning at school. Marko’s early experiences of learning English through video games were likely a motivating experience for him and made him more interested in the subject both in and out of school. Marko’s motivation towards learning English is discussed further in chapter 4.4. Below is another example of vocabulary learning experiences from the interview with Marko.

Excerpt 7.

Marko: -- Olikse WoWissa, kun ensimmäisen kerran sanottiin ”zeppelin”. Mä olin vaan, että ”mikä ihme on zeppelin”. Sitten, kun välillä juoksentelin jossain mikä just silleen Undercityn [kaupunki pelissä] ulkopuolella, joku huutaa että ”zeppeliini Orgrimariin [kaupunki pelissä] on kohta tulossa”, että siinä sitten ”tääh?”. Sitten vasta kun löysit sen tornin missä se on se zeppeliini niin sä oot silleen että ”aa”.

Marko: -- *Was it in WoW, when the word “zeppelin” was said for the first time. I was just like “what on earth is a zeppelin”. Then, when I was running around somewhere which was like outside Undercity [an in-game city], someone shouts that “the zeppelin to Orgrimmar [an in-game city] is coming soon”, so you’re like “huh?”. Then only once you found the tower where the zeppelin is you’re like “oh”.*

In the excerpt above, Marko recalls a situation where he learned the meaning of the word “zeppelin” after first hearing it be mentioned by an in-game character in World of Warcraft. At first, he remembers being puzzled by the meaning of the word, as a zeppelin was not present when it was mentioned. After some time, Marko then found the zeppelin in question and understood what the word referred to. It is important to note, that, in this example provided by Marko, there was some time between him seeing the word for the first time and him truly learning what it meant. Unlike in the earlier example of Jussi, video games do not always provide instant context or meaning for unknown and new words the player can come across. Because of this, it is possible for a learner to meet new words and not understand their true meaning if they do not play long enough to receive the necessary context.



In addition to the need for a long enough playtime in certain situations, the players themselves also need a high enough degree of engagement with a game and its language in order to learn vocabulary or other aspects of language through it, which is supported by findings on game-based and game-enhanced learning through MMORPG-style games (see e.g. Peterson, 2013; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2012). However, language is also an important aspect of many single-player games and thus, these games require a certain level of engagement from their players. This idea is illustrated by the following example, in which Harri mentions two different single-player games which he played at around the same time in his youth, but which he played with distinctly different levels of attention paid to the language of the games.

Excerpt 8.

Harri: -- Niin Alienissa saattasin-saatoitin tyliin ohittaa sen [kielen] koska se ei ollu sillä tavalla niin tärkeä juttu, että se selkee... Se oli sillä tavalla intuitiivista, että "mene tuonne" ja "ota tuo" ja "tapa tuo" ja...

– Pelasin myös Dino Crisistä pentuna. Ja... Pleikkari ykköselle sekin. Niin siinä oli tärkeää se että... ymmärtää vähän sitä mitä puhutaan, tiät minne mennä ja... aa... tyliin paikassa X saattoi olla joku tunnusluku johonkin tiettyyn kaappiin-kassakaappiin. Tai sitten johonkin tiettyyn oviin-oveen. Piti niinkun hiffata se että... että mitä-mitä tässä nyt sanotaan. Ja sitten sieltä yksittäisiä sanoja rupes poimimaan. "Facility". "Code". "Door code".

Harri: -- *So in Alien I might-may have like bypassed it [language] because it wasn't such an important thing, so it was clear... It was intuitive, like "go there" and "take that" and "kill that" and...*

– *I also played Dino Crisis as a kid. And... it was also for the PlayStation 1. So, in that it was important to... understand what was being said a bit, you know where to go and... emm... like in place X there could be a passcode for some specific safe. Or for some specific doors-door. You had to like realise what... that which-which was being said. And then from there you started to pick up single words. "Facility". "Code". "Door code".*

In this example from the interview with Harri, he mentions some words which he learned while playing the game Dino Crisis at a young age. Harri's experience of learning vocabulary through Dino Crisis can be compared to his experience of playing and not learning vocabulary through some of the other games he mentioned. Due to the intuitiveness of games like Alien, which Harri mentioned, he did not need to understand or pay attention to the language of the game. With Dino Crisis however, he needed to understand the instructions and tasks the game put in front of him. In a sense, this is like Tapio's experiences with the games Fallout 3 and Mass Effect, which he mentioned in Excerpts 2 and 3. Tapio paid little attention to the story of Fallout 3 and instead concentrated on the mechanics of the game, similarly to the way Harri did with the Alien game he played.

With *Dino Crisis* and *Mass Effect*, Harri and Tapio paid more attention to the story and language of the games out of both necessity and interest. By concentrating more on the language of the game, Harri could remember words he had learned by playing *Dino Crisis*, while he could not remember any he had learned from *Alien*. This suggests that simply playing video games is not likely to lead to much language learning if the player is not motivated to actively follow the games' language. This theory supports SLA theories on noticing and attention (see e.g. Ahn, 2014). According to the noticing hypothesis of Richard Schmidt (2012), foreign or second language input does not become language intake, and thus lead to language learning, unless the input is noticed. As Harri and Tapio had to pay attention and therefore notice the language in some of the games they played but not others, the games which required attention led to experiences of EFL learning.

Harri's *Dino Crisis* example is also interesting in relation to another comment he had made earlier in the interview. He remembers learning the meaning for the word "facility" after he asked an adult what the word meant, since the meaning of the word was not made clear by the game's context itself. According to him, characters in the game would repeat the word multiple times in dialogue which made it catch his attention, despite him not knowing much English in general at the time. After learning the meaning of the word with the help of an adult, he did not see the word used in other situations for many years, until a test in English class. Due to the word being interesting to him when he was young, he could still remember it to this day despite the word not being in his active vocabulary in the meantime.

#### **4.3.2 Other EFL learning experiences**

After the vocabulary-learning-related learning experiences, which constituted the majority of EFL learning experiences brought up by the participants, it is time to discuss the other EFL learning experiences which the participants mentioned in the interviews. First, experiences of learning text-based communication skills as well as receiving feedback on one's text-based communication through a video game are presented. Second, experiences of learning oral communication skills are discussed.

It is interesting to note that certain vernacular video games can provide their players rapid feedback on their language in addition to feedback on their gameplay performance. In

general, video games give their players feedback on their gameplay in variety of ways. For example, a game may impede the player's movement in the game after an erroneous button press. This feedback on one's gameplay performance is one contributor to the so-called game feel, as defined by Swink (2009). In addition to this feedback on gameplay, certain games can provide feedback on the player's language performance as well as their gameplay performance. Naturally this is true for language learning video games, where language is the objective of the game, and thus an integral part of the core gameplay. However, language-focused feedback is also possible in certain entertainment-focused video games, such as online games with prominent social elements. Social elements in this case are certain aspects of game design that warrant player interaction and co-operation. Probably the most popular game genre with plentiful social elements is massively multiplayer online role-playing games, MMORPGs, in which players often group up, trade and otherwise interact with one another in order to progress in the game. Of the study participants, Marko is the only one with a good amount of experience playing various MMORPGs, such as World of Warcraft. According to him, the games have helped him with his spelling especially.

Excerpt 9.

Marko: -- pieniä niinkun kirjoitusvirheitä on. Että esimerkiks kun pitää sanoo "off" niin laittaa joko kahella F:llä tai yhdellä F:llä, että kumpaa niinku meinaa kun se kuitenkin tarkoittaa eri asiaa. Niin sen ite huomasiin, että kun aloitti WoW:in [World of Warcraftin] pelaamisen niin kun oli yhteydessä niinku tuntemattomien kanssa niinku englanniks. Niin sen jälkeen ne aina korjaa sua kokoajan pikkuhiljaa. Niin siinä huomaa, että kyllä mä sitä kautta niinku opin myös kirjottamaan paljon. Melkein enemmän kuin koulussa, kun koulussa se oli, että kirjoitettiin kokeeseen tai jotakin muuta esseetä kirjoitettiin englanniks, niin siinä vaiheessa se oli että kokeen jälkeen katoit vaan, että paljonko sait pisteitä. Että se niinku jää muuten kahtomatta.

*Marko: -- there are small like typing errors. Like for example when you have to say "off" you write it with either two F's or one F, based on what you like mean as it means two different things after all. So I noticed that when I started playing WoW [World of Warcraft] and when you were in contact with like strangers in like English. Then after that they always correct you all the time, bit by bit. So in that you can see that I learned also to write a lot that way. Almost more than in school, since in school it was so that you wrote on a test or something else like an essay you wrote in English and at that point it was that after the test you just checked how many points you got. So otherwise it was left unchecked.*

For Marko, MMORPG games were a great help when he was learning to write in English especially. Often, when Marko spoke to other players using the in-game chat features, other players would correct his grammar and spelling. Experiences such as this one presented by Marko relate back to the findings of Peterson (2013); players of MMORPG-style games

engage in beneficial foreign language interaction. An interesting comparison that Marko makes to school education here has to do with the rapid nature of feedback he received from other players. The immediate nature of in-game communication allows for rapid exchange of information, such as gameplay strategies. However, it also allows for feedback on one's actions to be delivered in a quick fashion. As this feedback from other players is nearly instantaneous and linked to Marko's current actions, he felt that he could better absorb and learn from feedback in games than he could from the feedback he received from tests and exams at school. In school, the problem for Marko was that the feedback often came after a delay such as the length of time between him submitting a test and the teacher evaluating and returning the test. With school tests Marko would often simply check the marks he received and spend little to no attention on the mistakes he had made. Because of this habit of discarding the feedback he received, Marko would not reflect on his performances and often would not learn much from the mistakes he had made.

Considering Marko's example of the difference between the words "of" and "off", the benefits of quick in-game feedback are especially clear. In a school test, mistaking the two words for one another would likely lead to feedback which requires a degree of effort to learn from. The mistake is not a simple typing error, which would be relatively quick and easy to take in and learn from. Instead, in order to truly understand the mistake one has made, one would have to look at the surrounding context of the word so that they can realize the mistake they have made. Instead, in the case of in-game feedback the necessary context is already in the person's mind as they receive the feedback quickly, while still in the moment where the mistake is made. In order to learn from this kind of feedback, one needs to perform much less mental work. The acuteness of in-game feedback is related to Gee's (2013) principles of good learning in games, namely to *Interaction*. While Gee applies Interaction mainly to the sort of back-and-forth dialogue a game has with its player, there is also interactive dialogue between different players of the same game.

In addition to learning text-based communication skills, online video games can provide avenues for learning and practising oral communication skills. Many video games have a built-in system for voice chat, or the players may use some external voice chat application.

Excerpt 10.

Kalle: -- No varmaan puhuminen on ehkä mikä kehitty eniten [pelatessa], koska mä en niinku muuten sitä oikeestaan käyttäis tai ei puhuis. -- Se ehkä harjaantuu kaikkein eniten pelatessa.

*Kalle: -- Well, probably talking is maybe what develops the most because [while playing], as I wouldn't like otherwise really use it or talk. -- It may get honed the most while playing.*

Kalle plays the online shooter *Overwatch*, which often demands quick, in-the-moment communication between teammates. The game does provide hotkeys for several common voice commands, such as requesting medical assistance. By using these hotkeys, the player is able to communicate some basic, yet vital information to their teammates without producing the necessary messages themselves, either textually or orally. To communicate other information, such as specific strategies or feedback, the quickest method available for communication is to use the in-game voice chat. Compared to more common text-based communication, it is faster and does not require for the player to stop moving their in-game character to type their message. Previously during the interview, Kalle had mentioned that he found oral communication in English to be probably the most challenging aspect of the language for him. Per this excerpt, video games are one of the rare ways for him to practise his verbal skills on a regular basis. Kalle says that if it was not for video games, he would likely not use or speak in English very much. This notion can also be compared to the findings by Peterson (2013), where video games were found to provide situations for both language input and output. While *Overwatch* is not an MMORPG, like the game in Peterson's study, it still features a notable amount of language-based interaction between its players. For EFL learners, such as Kalle, this often English-language interaction can be considered to be beneficial for their learning.

Considering Kalle's use of voice chat in games such as *Overwatch*, it is worth noting that voice-based communication in video games has been identified by foreign language players to be more challenging and demanding than text-based communication (Reinders & Wattana, 2012: 182). However, in games such as *Overwatch* it is often used out of necessity even by players such as Kalle, who speaks English as a foreign language.

While discussing the aspects of language that are challenging for him, Kalle explained that pronunciation and other aspects of oral communication tended to be difficult or at least challenging when compared to skills such as reading and writing. However, Kalle

mentioned that while playing games he is not as conscious of his difficulties with oral communication. While playing a fast-paced game such as *Overwatch*, the player needs to be highly focused on the game itself and thus, they have little attention to spare to the exactness of their articulation. In some cases, such as here with Kalle, this can be considered a benefit as it makes the person more likely to take part in communication as they are not as aware of the possible mistakes they make.

However, it is important to note that Kalle was not able to describe a singular case where he had learned verbal English skills through video games. This is not surprising as when compared to vocabulary skills, communication skills are developed gradually over time. Therefore, examples similar to the ones focusing on vocabulary learning are unlikely for communication skills, as it is harder to become conscious of a single situation in which one has learned to verbally or vocally communicate using English.

#### **4.4 Video-game-driven motivation for EFL learning**

One of the main interests of the present study is learning motivation that stems from a learner's video game hobby, referred to as game-driven motivation here. In addition to EFL learning occurring during gameplay sessions, video games can work as catalyst for increased motivation to learn English in other contexts, such as in school or through self-learning. As video games in Finland are dominated so heavily by the English language, players need a solid grasp of the language to fully enjoy the medium. As was discussed in chapter 4.2, all participants at least mildly preferred their games to be in English, even if they were given the option to play in Finnish. They all also played games almost exclusively in English, apart from a few rare exceptions. Therefore, having strong English skills can be important for the participants to successfully play video games that make extensive use of the language. This need for language skills that video games provide was found to be a motivating factor for learning by some of the participants. During the interviews, the interviewees' motivation for EFL learning was estimated by both direct questions and discussion, as well as based on comments regarding learner motivation that came up in other contexts. Interestingly, the interviewees brought up both cases of increased and decreased EFL learning motivation that stemmed from video games.

The younger interviewees Jussi, Kalle and Ville were somewhat more positive when considering the effects of video games on their EFL learning motivation. They all mentioned video games as at least potentially having aided their motivation to learn the language. For them, playing video games provided the necessity for learning, as knowing English allowed them to be more successful at and get more out of the video games they played. In the following two excerpts from Jussi, he explains how his motivation to learn English originated from video games.

Excerpt 11.

Jussi: -- se [motivaatio oppia] lähti siitä Runescapesta, koska silloin tuli se tarve niinku osata sitä englantia, että sai kaikki questit läpitte vedettyä ja sitten siitä jatku siihen että mä katoin Minecraft-videoita niinku englanniks.

*Jussi: -- it [motivation to learn] started with Runescape, since then you had the need to know English so that you could complete all the quests and from that it went into me watching Minecraft videos in English*

Excerpt 12.

Jussi: -- Joo on siis... Mää koen että englantia on äärimmäisen tärkeä kieli, enkä minä ilman sitä selviäis.

-- Se oli se Runescape se motivaatio siihen [kielenoppimiseen] että nyt pitää osata englantia.

*Jussi: -- Yeah it is like... I feel that English is an extremely important language and I wouldn't survive without it.*

*-- It was Runescape which was the motivation for that [language learning] in that now I have to know English.*

For Jussi, his first video game, Runescape, presented him with a need and thus motivation to learn English. By playing the game, he realized that he needed at least a basic level of knowledge over the language to successfully progress through the game. As a quite traditional online role-playing game, Runescape uses large amounts of text-based dialogue and other text forms in the gameplay tasks and activities it faces its player with. In addition to language input from the game itself, Runescape also provides its player with language input from other fellow players. Without proper English skills, a player of Runescape could easily get lost or stuck on a mission, or be excluded from group-focused gameplay with other people. However, Jussi did also mention that he later began watching videos of the adventure game Minecraft in English.

In the following two quotations, Kalle and Ville discuss their feelings on game-driven motivation for EFL learning. As previously mentioned, both men held relatively similar feelings as Jussi did in the previous two examples.

Excerpt 13.

Kalle: -- kokee että niinku jos sitä [englantia] opettelee niin sitten... No pärjää niissä peleissäkin sitten hyvin.

*Kalle: -- one feels that if you study it [English] then... Well then you do well in the games as well.*

Excerpt 14.

Ville: -- Mut kyllä se- kyllä se on varmaan niinku vaikuttanu kuitenkin siihen [motivaatioon] että-että ajattelee että "okei, tästä on hyötyä mulle" vaikka ihan niinkun pelatessa.

*Ville: -- But yes it- yes it probably has affected it [motivation] in that-that you think that "okay, this is beneficial to me" while gaming for instance.*

Kalle and Ville are not quite as firm as Jussi on their stance on whether video games have increased their motivation to learn English or not. They both still expressed generally positive attitudes about video games increasing their motivation to learn English. Kalle brought up the idea that being good at English enables a player to do well at video games, independent of their gaming skills. This notion suggests that for playing video games, language competence can be a necessary skill in addition to the mechanical and systemic understanding of video games themselves. Even in simple or otherwise straight-forward games, English language skills can often help the player by allowing them to decipher useful information and clues about the game and its current or future conditions. This is especially helpful when one is playing a game that is unknown to them, as once a game becomes familiar the tasks within the game also become familiar. This idea of needing to learn English to be able to play and fare better at video games is an example of extrinsic motivation for formal EFL learning. Extrinsic motivations are external outcomes and separate from a given activity itself (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 60).

The slight differences in the attitudes towards one's learning motivation which were found in the answers of Jussi and of Kalle and Ville suggest that they may have internalised the value of studying English for video game play to different degrees. For Kalle and Ville, video games may have served as a more identified, or even an introjected or external form of extrinsic motivation, while for Jussi they were a more integrated form of motivation for EFL learning. As explained by Ryan and Deci (2000: 61), external and introjected forms of extrinsic motivation are entirely or mostly dependant on external needs, demands and rewards. The chance or ability to play video games, which is an intrinsically motivating activity on its own, can be considered an external reward for learning, i.e. a form of extrinsic motivation for learning English. Kalle and Ville both acknowledge that studying English



benefits their gaming ability and thus, are more motivated to learn English in formal settings. However, it should be considered if video game play should be viewed as an external reward or an identified goal for these participants. Per Ryan and Deci (2000: 61), identified forms of extrinsic motivation stem more from the individual voluntarily performing an action. Instead of the action only leading to a separate benefit, the individual acknowledges the beneficial nature of the activity itself (2000: 62). In identified and integrated forms of extrinsic motivation, the individual values an activity and its results for their personal importance to them. For the participants of the present study, who are video game enthusiasts, the act of playing video games is a personally valued activity, and as such can be considered a self-endorsed goal instead of an external reward. Therefore, for Jussi, Kalle and Ville, video game play can be viewed as an identified or integrated form of extrinsic motivation, which are more autonomous and self-determined forms of extrinsic motivations.

Ville talks about the beneficial nature of language skills for video games. He feels that knowing the language of a video game can provide the player with an edge over other players, who are more likely to get stuck on a specific task or obstacle. During the interview, however, he expressed some negative attitudes towards formal studying of the language, as he felt that English lessons were somewhat difficult for him. The following example illustrates these feelings that Ville holds.

Excerpt 15.

Ville: -- Kyllä varmaankin että... no siis... Englannin tunnit on sinänsä vähän haastavia mulle, koska niissähän käydään yleensä niinkun kielioppiasioita läpi. Ja mä oon vähän semmonen, että mä en niinkun opi sitä kieltä oikeestaan niinkun sääntöjen kautta ollenkaan. Että se on mulla niinkun – mulla o-mulla on hyvä kielikorva, mikä on siis että mä pärjään hyvin englannissa.

Ville: -- *Yes probably so... well... English lessons are in a way a bit challenging for me, as in them you go through grammar items. And I am a bit like that, that I don't like, really learn the language through rules at all. So I have like – I hav-I have a good a good ear for languages, so I do well in English.*

Ville's initial positive response in the quote is to the question if he feels that his motivation to learn and study English has increased because of his video game hobby. After the initial positive response however, he notes that he often finds English lessons challenging as he feels that he learns more by doing and the so-called "language ear". Following the excerpt above, he explained that he is often able to use grammatically correct language by instinct,

even if he is not able to explain the relevant grammar rules themselves. Despite the feelings of uncertainty Ville has towards English lessons, he does still feel that video games have increased his motivation for EFL learning, as he explains in Excerpt 13. Considering that, it is possible that without video games and the need for English language skills that they provide, Ville would feel less motivated to learn and study English both in and outside school. Because of this, he would likely fare worse at the language, as he finds the formal studying of it difficult.

The older interview participants were somewhat more negative about video games and their effects on motivation to learn English than the younger participants were. Nowadays, the older participants all felt that their English skills were at a comfortable level where they did not need to study more, apart from the occasional situation where they came across English vocabulary that was previously unknown to them. In fact, Marko, Tapio and Harri all said that they often went out of their way to find out the meaning of new vocabulary they came across, for instance. An example of this can be seen in the following excerpt from Harri.

Excerpt 16.

Harri: -- nytten niin en tunne tarvetta opiskella [englantia] enää. Että jos tulee jotain uutta sanastoo, niin mä otan siitä selvää mutta – siihen se jääpi. Että minä en tunne tarvetta opiskella sitä enää sen enempää. Puhumista ehkä.

*Harri: -- now I don't feel the need to learn more [English]. So if some new vocabulary comes across, then I find out what it means but – that's as far as it goes. So I don't feel the need to learn it any further. Speaking, maybe.*

The other two older interviewees, Tapio and Marko, also expressed similar feelings regarding their current motivation for EFL learning. They no longer have regular English lessons in their lives and do not feel the need to learn more English, unless they find a shortcoming in their language skills. Still, the mention of wanting to find out and understand new language one comes across every now and then shows that they are still committed to a degree of life-long learning. In short, the older interviewees do not currently feel motivated to actively learn and study English and are comfortable with their current language skills in general. However, they all are open to the idea of learning more if the need for it arises.

Contrastingly, when they recalled their learning motivation as it was when they were undergoing English studies at school, Tapio and Harri especially had quite negative views on the effect that video games had on their motivation to learn and study English at school. According to them, they often felt that they learned enough English outside school and thus, felt somewhat demotivated to learn and study the language at school. As the first example of this is the following excerpt from the interview with Tapio.

Excerpt 17.

Tapio: -- Mulla ei varsinaisesti tullu sellasta hirveetä intoo siihen [oppimisen] kun niinku tuntu, että minä osaan luonnostani englantia. Ei tarvinnu hirveemmin opiskella sitä lisää. Mutta sitten, jos mulle selvis joku puute niin kyllä mä sitä niinku harjotin. Lisää. Koitin harjotella sitä. Ja niinku... Kyllä sitä ainakin ala-asteella sitä niinku... harjotteli vähän kovemmin. Sillonhan se kovin pohja sille [kielitaidolle] tulee.

*Tapio: -- For me I didn't necessarily get like an enthusiasm for it [learning] as I felt that I naturally know English. I didn't really need to study it more. But then, if I came across some deficiency I did like practise it. More. I tried to practise it. And like... At least in primary school I did like... practise a bit harder. As it's then when the firmest base for it [language skills] is made.*

In this excerpt, Tapio is looking back to his learning motivation as it was when he was still learning English at school. According to him, the fact that he was learning so much English outside school itself did not motivate him to learn more English at school. Thus, it could be said that his motivation to learn was not affected either positively or negatively due to video games. Instead, Tapio put in similar levels of effort as he did with other school subjects. In this excerpt he also mentions that if he ever found his language skills lacking, he was driven to improve his language skills, which shows that he was motivated to learn and improve his language skills when he had a requirement to do so, instead of being especially motivated every day in English class. Compared to Tapio's relatively neutral opinion on his learning motivation, Harri's experiences of learning motivation are quite different and noticeably more negative, as can be seen from the following extract.

Excerpt 18.

Harri: -- Varmaan-varmaan se -- kiinnostus sitä englannin kieltä kohti kumpusi sieltä [videopeleistä]. Mutta... Ylimielisesti sanottuna niin minä opin tosi paljon peleistä ja -- leffoista ja -- ympäristöstä ennen niinkun siitä että minä istuin luennolla. Ei luennolla kuin oppitunnilla tyyliin ja... Kotiläksyjä en tehny niinkun... se aina mitä... se aina vuosien varrella niin vähäni se läksyjen [teon] määrä peruskoulussa.

*Harri: -- Probably-probably it -- the interest in English sprang from there [video games]. But... To put it arrogantly, I learned very much from games and -- movies and -- the environment before I like was sitting down in lectures. Not lectures but like lessons and... Homework I didn't do like... it always like... over the years it always decreased, the amount of [doing] homework in comprehensive school.*

Harri is uncertain of his motivation towards EFL learning in general. To a degree, he agrees that a general sense of interest on the language may have sprung from his video gaming hobby. However, he is quite opposed of the idea that his motivation to explicitly study and learn the language would have increased thanks to video games. As Harri explains, he felt that he was learning plenty of English through his daily life and this fact led to his overall motivation to study and work at school decreasing over time. It is worth noting that he mentions movies and his general environment alongside video games themselves in this context. This suggests that he does not feel that all his EFL learning outside the school environment happened through video games. In addition, Harri also expressed grief over the ease of school work, as whenever he put effort into school work and doing tasks, he found school work too easy for him. Since English at school was too easy for Harri, he did not feel the obligation to do school work outside tests and exams, in which he still fared well. According to him, most of the mistakes he made were due to carelessness or oversights on his part. However, he noted in another part of the interview that he remembered feeling a degree of enthusiasm for English as he was constantly in contact with the language. This suggests that it was Harri's motivation towards learning English in school that was negatively affected by video games and not his general willingness to learn the language.

Of the older participants, Marko had the most positive experiences of video-game-driven motivation for learning English. From the following excerpt, we can see that for Marko English lessons were some of the most motivating lessons at school:

Excerpt 19.

Marko: -- No englannin tunnit on itseasiassa sen [pelaamisen] takia aina ollu semmonen mitä mä aina oon oikeesti kuunnellu loppuosalta. Yleensä mulla on koulunkäynti yleensä vähän semmosta että enemmän juttelen kavereiden kanssa kesken tunnin mutta englanti oli yleensä aina semmonen asia kun oon periaatteessa enemmän kuunnellu opettajaa. Sekin kun aina esimerkiks tunnin lopussa aina pitää jostakin sivusta aina tehdä jotkut tehtävät niin siinä mä yleensä aina ne teen.

*Marko: -- Well, because of it [gaming], English classes have actually always been one thing that I have always actually listened to in the end. Often, going to school for me is a bit more of me chatting with friends in the middle of class but most often English was always such a thing where I have basically listened more to the teacher. There also that for instance at the end of class you always had to do some tasks on a page and most often I do them.*

According to Marko, in most classes other than English he spent more time talking to his friends in class than on paying attention to the teacher. Because of his video game hobby, during English classes he felt motivated to pay attention to the lessons instead, as the subject was connected to his own hobby. Having a connection to any school subject through one's hobbies is understandably an extrinsically motivating factor for most people, as this connection provides them with an obvious need for the subject in question. This can apply to a plethora of school subjects, be they foreign languages, maths or physical education.

Comparing Marko's experiences and feelings on learning motivation to those of Tapio and Harri, it is worth noting the different educational and academic backgrounds of the three. As mentioned in chapter 3.2.2, Tapio and Harri are currently studying at university level, while Marko has finished his vocational studies and is currently employed. Based on this fact, as well as Marko's thoughts on his motivation towards school in the previous excerpt, it can be assumed that he is the least academically-oriented of the three. It can be assumed that for Marko, English was one of his strongest subjects at school. Comparatively, for Tapio and Harri English was likely more uniform with other subjects, at least when one considers their overall grades. Based on the experiences of all three, it is possible that recreational video game play may have an adverse effect on the EFL learning motivation of generally high-performing students, while for low-performing students video games may have a favourable effect on their EFL learning motivation. From the accounts of the three older interviewees, it can be seen that this effect is mainly on their interest-based intrinsic motivation. For high-performing students, the seemingly too easy English lessons fail to hold their interest as they feel they outperform in class. Contrastingly, for lower-performing students this effect is the opposite, as their interest towards English lessons seems to be

increased. This increase may be due to the way in which video games link the English lessons to the students' real life and personal interests, whereas some other subject may lack this link to the student's life.

For the younger participants especially, videos related to video games were also an important aspect of their hobby and game-related language learning. Jussi especially emphasized the importance that YouTube-videos had for his learning and even suggested that he had received more English language input by consuming YouTube videos of several subjects, including subjects other than gaming such as technology and engineering. However, YouTube and other out-of-game activities were not considered very important by the participants. While most of them mentioned passively taking part in these activities, by watching videos or reading discussions, none mentioned actively taking part or producing out-of-game content or texts. However, some participants mentioned discussing games with their friends and that some of these discussions occurred in English, even between native Finnish speakers. Therefore, while out-of-game contexts and activities were not considered to be as important for EFL learning as in-game texts and interaction between players in multiplayer setting were, they cannot be considered entirely insignificant either. For Jussi, his initial interest in gaming-related YouTube-videos had morphed into a general interest in informative and educational YouTube-videos, which were mainly in English albeit unrelated to video games. These findings suggest that gaming communities are not as vital for game-enhanced EFL learning, as in-game language and activities are and that their importance varies between individual players.

#### **4.5 Other learning experiences**

In addition to learning experiences in relation to English, the participants had experiences of learning other subjects and topics as well. While not the main subject of the present study, the differences in the nature and themes of the experiences is interesting from the point of view of game-enhanced learning in general. The participants had wildly different examples of themes they had learned, ranging from emotional skills to knowledge about guns.

Marko was unsure if the following example he brought up could be considered learning, as it is not necessarily related to a school subject, or another topic that people often learn.

However, learning emotional skills can easily be considered proper learning, as they are a quantifiable phenomenon. Emotional skills are also occasionally taught to children, for example. Marko himself had no experience of consciously learning or being taught emotional skills.

Excerpt 20.

Marko: -- No, ekanä tulee mieleen mitä minä oon oppinu, niin...En mä tiä, mulla se on silleen, että kun nykyään pellaisin pelejä niin mulla on niinkun tunteet siinä [pelissä] paljon mukana. Että esimerkiks, jos jotakin periaatteessa tapahtuu siinä [pelissä], niin minä ajattelen sen pelin yleensä sillä tavalla myös että niinku jos se ois oikeeta elämää -- Mä eläydyn siihen [peliin] paljon. Jos on jotain surullista pelissä, niin siinä tulee itellekin vähän semmonen surullinen olo siihen heti.

Marko: -- *Well, first thing that comes to mind is what I've learned, so... I dont know, for me it's like that when I play games nowadays, I have like feelings with me in that [the game]. So for example, if something happens in the there [the game], I most often think of the game as if it was real life as well -- I sympathize with it [the game] a lot. If there's something sad in a game, then I myself get a bit of a sad feeling as well.*

For Marko, playing and experiencing video games has made him more immersed in the stories of the games. This immersion has taught him some emotional skills, such as empathy, and nowadays games can elicit an emotional response from him. The fact that these emotional skills were the first thing that came to Marko's mind, as he mentioned, as well as the relative difficulty of expressing the notion of them makes it believable that Marko has learned at least some emotional skills by playing video games and considers learning them an important experience. It is understandable that certain video game stories can elicit emotional responses from their players, similarly to how certain books or movies can emotionally move their readers or viewers. Empathizing and immersing oneself with the stories to such a high degree, however, is somewhat surprising, even though existing research acknowledges video games as generally engaging and immersive experiences (Ryan et al., 2006). Of the other interviewees, Kalle and Ville also expressed some notions of emotional responses evoked by video games, although their experiences were limited to feelings of interest and intrigue, rather than sadness and empathy.

Marko also brought up some less serious experiences of learning certain themes and topics. Two of these examples were alleged sports or athletics skills and lots of trivia knowledge.

Excerpt 21.

Marko: -- Nyt mä muistan. Sen mä ainakin opin peleistä, mitä me veljen kanssa tehtiin. Me pelattiin SmackDownia, niin kun me ruvettiin painimaan, sitten me tehtiin niitä liikkeitä siinä [pelissä]. -- Urheilutaitoja. Hypitään toisten päälle.

Marko: -- *Now I remember. A thing that I at least learned from games, which we did with my brother. We played SmackDown, then when we started wrestling, then we did those moves in that [game]. -- Sports skills. Jumping on each other.*

SmackDown games, which are based on a professional wrestling franchise, were quite popular in Finland in the early 2000's, at the time when the show itself was popular on TV. Children copying some of the flashy in-ring moves performed by the show's athletes was a common side-effect of the show's popularity. This was despite the numerous warnings in the show urging people not to copy the performances. Marko, however, explicitly mentioned copying the moves based on the video games instead of the TV show. One possible reason for this is the difference in the presentations of the TV show and the video games. When compared to the TV show, the video game displays the moves and their execution in a somewhat clearer fashion. The games utilise a relatively static camera and digital animation makes the moves and their execution happen the same way every single time. On the show instead, there are many more indirect camera angles which make seeing the way the moves are performed more difficult.

It is possible that this kind of learning of athletic skills could also apply to the learning of some aspects of physical skills and sports, such as football. For example, certain sports strategies can possibly be applied to real-life sports from video-game-based simulations of said sports. Also, copying the execution of certain athletic moves may be possible from video games similarly to how Marko had learned certain wrestling moves by copying wrestling games. However, this most likely requires for a game's animations and presentation to be of high enough quality and clarity, which may not always be the case. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Marko himself did not remember learning sports-related skills other than wrestling through video games. However, he said that he did not play many sports games in general, so his relative lack of learning of sports-related skills is not necessarily proof that one cannot learn these skills through video games.

In a somewhat similar vein to Marko's previous example of sports-related learning, Tapio mentioned that he had learned about cars and their perception especially by playing a variety of racing games. Like doing sports, driving a car is also a primarily physical activity.



In the following quote, Tapio goes through his experiences of learning car-related skills through video games.

Excerpt 22.

Tapio: -- Ehkä niinku autoilupeleissä jonkin verran helpottaa se hahmotus autoon.

Ainakin itelläni se tuntu, että kun pienestä pitäen kuitenkin on niitäkin pelannu, niin ymmärtää auton mitat vähän paremmin; missä menee se puskuri ja vastaavaa.

*Tapio: -- Maybe in like driving games they help with the perception of a car. At least for me it felt like that, since I have played those games from a young age, you understand the dimensions of a car a bit better; where the bumper is and so on.*

It is somewhat surprising that one would be able to learn and apply car-related knowledge from a video game to a physical real-life activity, as the two activities are very different from one another. Learning a language or some primarily mental knowledge or skill through video games is likely to be easier, as the subject matter is handled in a comparable manner in both video games and real life. Reading in-game texts and communicating with other players is a strictly language-based activity, whereas the act of driving a car inside a video game environment is vastly different from driving one in the real world. Some scholars (e.g. Steinkuehler, 2007) have studied differences in in-game and other literacy practises and consider gaming language its own literary practise and skill. Still, it could be argued that in-game and out-of-game communication in English is more comparable to one another than driving a car in and out of video games is.

Two primary differences in driving a real and a virtual car are the method used for controlling the vehicle and the physical and visual feedback of the experience. In order to increase player immersion, controllers dedicated to racing games, which consist of a wheel and pedals, have been produced by a variety of companies specializing in video game peripherals. These specialized controllers make the act of driving a car in a video game more akin to the act of driving a real car. Still, even with such a purpose-built controller, there are still a variety of drastic differences between the two mediums. For one, playing and viewing the act of driving a car on a TV or a computer screen lacks much of the physical feedback of driving an actual car on a real street. Many racing games also do not have a camera view in which the player sees the road ahead from within the car itself. Instead, the player has to choose from several camera angles from outside the car. Furthermore, typical displays that render a two-dimensional image make it more difficult to perceive and estimate distances, which is one thing Tapio explicitly claimed to have learned through video games.

Considering all these limitations and differences between the acts of driving a car in a video game and driving a car in real life, the fact that Marko has been able to learn and apply knowledge from video games into real life is interesting. Tapio does not claim to have learned everything about driving a car through video games, or even consider video games to have been his primary learning medium, but he acknowledges that they have helped his learning. He mentions having played driving games from a young age, likely much before his actual driving lessons. It is likely that driving games worked as an introduction to driving for him, even if the games themselves were not an entirely realistic simulation of the act itself. Even in less realistic arcade-style driving games, the player gets to experience some aspects of driving in a safe environment. For example, the need to slow down by braking and how a car's brakes may lock up can be safely experienced in a video game environment. This early experience and introductory notion for car-related learning is supported by Tapio's seeming uncertainty over his learning. He uses certain mitigatory phrases, such as "maybe" and "a bit", which suggest that he is not entirely certain of his experiences or does not feel strongly about them. This does not mean that he has not learned anything. Rather, it suggests that Tapio has not learned to drive by playing video games to such a degree as he has learned some of the other skills he detailed in his interview.

Returning to experiences of language learning through video games, Harri was the only interviewee who mentioned experience of playing games in languages other than English or Finnish. In the following excerpt, he recounts his lack of learning experiences related to these other languages.

Excerpt 23.

Harri: -- tässä tämmönen hassu esimerkki että... Äiti kun toi Venäjältä niitä pelejä ja ne tuli, niin jotkut oli ihan englannin kieleksi. Ja näin. Sitten jotkut saatto olla tyliin, että niistä [sic] kielivaihtoehtoina... öö... ranska, saksa ja venäjä. Niin niin... Valitettavasti saksaa ja ranskaa ja venäjää en oo oppinu.

*Harri: -- here's this kind of a funny example that... When my mom brought me those games from Russia and they came, then some of them were in the English language. And like so. Then some may have been in like, that from them [sic] as language options... umm... French, German and Russian. So so... Alas, I have never learned German or French or Russian.*

In the excerpt above, Harri mentions receiving likely pirated games from Russia when he was a child. Varying from one game to another, the games sometimes had differing language options and sometimes Harri had to play a game in a language other than Finnish

or English. Despite these experiences of playing video games in foreign languages, Harri says he has not learned any of these languages, except for English. There are a few likely reasons for the fact that Harri could only learn English through video games.

First, Harri does not give an estimate on the amount of games he played in foreign languages other than English. It is possible that the games that did not have an English language option were very rare and thus, Harri did not play them anywhere near as much as he played games in English. This would not have led to the necessary amount of language input to learn much of any of the languages Harri mentioned. It is also possible that Harri has forgotten any pieces of the languages he mentions due to not using them outside these games he used to play as a child. Alternatively, it is possible that he did not wish to play the games very much due to their unfamiliar language choices, which would also lead to too little language intake for any noteworthy language learning.

Second, the foreign languages Harri mentioned are much more uncommon than English in other forms of popular culture and media in Finland. Due to this, even if Harri played relatively similar amounts of games in all the different languages, English language would still likely have overshadowed the others through other aspects of Harri's life. Third, English and Swedish, which was not touched upon the interview with Harri, are the only foreign languages he has studied at school. Despite his negative statements towards his motivation to study English, it is possible that without school-based English teaching that supported his game-enhanced EFL learning Harri would not have learned as much English as he did. The foundation that English lessons, especially those in primary school, provided him with was vital for the EFL learning that he could experience through video games.

Another possible reason for Harri's lack of French, German or Russian learning can be based on the noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 2012) as well as the attention and awareness theories (Ahn, 2014). Harri may not have had the necessary level of attention and awareness in order to notice and understand the various linguistic aspects of other foreign languages, for a variety of individual reasons. In the end, researching game-enhanced learning of languages other than English could prove interesting and beneficial for research into the learning of those languages specifically.

Experiences of learning some bodies of more general or trivial knowledge were also mentioned by some of the research participants. Of these experiences, the following excerpt from Marko's interview is perhaps the most interesting, as it deals with a very specific piece of knowledge which came up within the context of a trivia game.

Excerpt 24.

Marko: -- yks oli, kun kerran oltiin baarissa pelaamassa tuota Trivial Pursuitia. Niin, jos muistan oikein, niin oliko se kun Yrjöltä kysyttiin se kysymys että... Se oli se niinku roomalaisten tuo taistelu... olikse se [taistelu] muoto? -- mä muistan, mä Hermannin kanssa pelasin sitä Rysee -- siinä kuitenkin ollaan just semmonen roomalainen äijä. Ja se just monta kertaa huutaa, että tulee just semmonen kieleke, niinku miljoona jousipyssymiestä tulee niinku ampumaan sua. Niin se kun se huutaa just sen sanan [”testudo”] että ne [sotilaat] menee siihen asentoon [muodostelmaan].

*Marko -- one thing was, when we were in a bar one time playing that board game Trivial Pursuit. Well, if I remember right, Yrjö was asked the question of... It was like a Roman battle... was it a [battle] formation? -- I remember I played that video game Ryse -- anyway, in that you are one of those Roman dudes. And many times he shouts, when there's like a cliff of like a million archers coming to shoot at you. And he shouts that word<sup>4</sup> [”testudo”] specifically so that they [soldiers] go into that position [formation].*

Marko's example of learning a specific term used for an ancient Roman battle formation is much akin to the other experiences of learning vocabulary the interviewees brought upon in the interviews. The game Marko talks about, *Ryse*, is an example of another game that provides instantaneous context for some of the language within the game. In Marko's example, other in-game characters perform according to the player's commands and give meaning to otherwise unfamiliar vocabulary. This is one of the strengths of the way in which video game teach their player, as suggested by Gee (2003; 2013). Similar findings regarding repetition of game language were made by Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio (2009).

In addition to very specific, even trivial knowledge, some of the participants mentioned learning more broad items of knowledge. For instance, Tapio especially mentioned having learned various historical facts and general historical knowledge through the strategy games he enjoys playing.

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<sup>4</sup> Marko could not remember the word “testudo” during the interview and instead referred to the term as “word” while discussing his learning experience. The correct term was verified after the interview and is included within the excerpt in brackets.

Excerpt 25.

Tapio: -- yleistuntemus monesta... esim historiassa auttaa, siellä on- jos on keskittynyt jollain tavalla historiallinen joku peli. Se on niinku se faktat kunnossa, niin sittenhän se on niinkun esimerkillistä

*Tapio: -- general knowledge about many... for instance in history it helps, there is- if is concentrated- somehow historical some game. It's like that the facts are correct, then it is like exemplary.*

In this example, Tapio hypothesises that one may be able to learn general knowledge about many subjects. However, to support his ideas, he mentions learning history through video games as an example. For Tapio, several historical facts he had become acquainted with through video games had even helped him in his history lessons at secondary and upper secondary school. In addition to Tapio, both Kalle and Jussi mentioned that they had learned some historical knowledge and facts. Kalle gives a specific example of the kind of knowledge he had learned, which can be seen in the following example.

Excerpt 26.

Kalle: -- No tietty, se vähän riippuu pelistä tai niinku esimerkiks nyttän niinkun mitä mä sillon joskus pelailin sitä World of Tanksia. Siinä kun oli niistä tankeista enemmän [tietoa]... tai niinkun historiasta silleen

*Kalle: -- Well of course, it depends a bit on the game or like for example now like what I used to play back then, that World of Tanks. As in it there was more [information] about the tanks... or like about history like so*

Jussi had similar experiences about learning historical knowledge related to the various tanks in the game, as he also had played the game. In World of Tanks, the player can choose a tank to use from the game's selection of both more modern and historical tanks. While browsing through the selection, the player is provided with some information about the use and history of the different tanks themselves. Interestingly, despite this information being entirely optional for gameplay, both interviewees who mentioned having played the game also mentioned reading and learning from these snippets.

It is important to consider, however, that this extra information chosen for the game is deliberately chosen by the developers, and are most likely interesting, peculiar or otherwise curious facts from history. The interesting nature of the information is likely to make the players of the game more likely to read through and take in the knowledge provided. If the information was dull historical statistics, it could be more likely for the information to be ignored by the game's players. This interest-factor is likely to apply to other general knowledge that video games have the potential to teach. Thus, learning more statistical or

dull knowledge through video games could be less likely than learning more fascinating information, such as the extra information in *World of Tanks*, is.

Finally, Harri mentioned having learned some basic firearms-related knowledge through some of the games he has played. Some of Harri's thoughts on learning about firearms are presented in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 27.

Harri: -- Tämä on vähän hassu asia mutta aseista jonkun verran [olen oppinut] – riippuu toki miten realistinen peli että – esimerkki, Quakesta ei opi mitään. Aseista. Mutta sitten tyyliin joku *Rainbow Six* oli tämmönen hyvä peli [aseista oppimiselle].

*Harri: -- This is a bit of a funny thing but [I have learned] a bit about guns – it of course depends on how realistic the game is, so – an example, from Quake one doesn't learn anything. About guns. But then like some Rainbow Six was a good game [for learning about guns].*

Later in the interview, Harri also added to his thoughts the notion that he caught a certain interest in firearms from video games. He mentioned considering a gunsmith's profession or at least serving as a gunsmith while doing his military service. Harri also gives examples of the kinds of games through which one can plausibly learn firearms-based knowledge and of those one cannot. *Quake*, and similar unrealistic, arcade-style games, are understandably not beneficial to learning. Instead, games which steer towards a degree of realism, such as *Rainbow Six*, can plausibly teach their players about firearms.

It is interesting to note that all of these examples of learning general knowledge through video games were related to either history-, war- or firearm-related knowledge. There are several possible causes for this imbalance towards knowledge centred specifically around history and war. The most likely is the fact that Tapio and Kalle especially mentioned enjoying the kinds of games which are thematically centred around history and war. Tapio enjoys playing several historical strategy games, while Kalle and Jussi had played the real-time strategy game *World of Tanks* which, as the name suggests, focuses on tanks and tank-based warfare. With the subject matter of the games being focused on history and war, it can be expected that the players primarily learn knowledge regarding these subjects. If the participants were to play games which handled different subject matter, they would likely learn different kinds of knowledge. This idea is supported by the variety of examples about learning other, non-related bodies of knowledge that these chapters have displayed.

## 5 Conclusion

The present study examined Finnish language learners' experiences of game-enhanced learning of English. As research into game-enhanced learning, the present study was focused on learning which occurs during recreational video game play. In addition, the present study investigated gamer perceptions regarding game-driven EFL learning motivation and the participants' experiences of learning other, non-English-related bodies of knowledge and skills. The study was conducted as a qualitative study through semi-structured interviews with six different interview participants, who ranged from upper secondary school students to university students, as well as one individual who was in active employment. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions of both some background information as well as questions directly related to the research aims of the present study. The interview script for the interview can be found as Appendix 1 following the bibliography.

The data was analysed through means of qualitative content analysis and phenomenography. Content analysis was used to identify similarities and themes from the data, while phenomenography was used for analysing individual experiences that the research participants brought up. As a result, some similar experiences, as well as a few diverging experiences of EFL learning were identified. In addition, some notable differences in EFL learning motivation were found, as well as experiences of learning general knowledge and skills.

The participants found it easiest to relay their experiences regarding EFL vocabulary learning, mentioning different contexts and ways in which they had learned new vocabularies while playing video games. Some notable experiences of not learning English were also brought up by certain participants. These experiences support some existing research and theories, namely on the need for noticing and attention in language learning (Schmidt, 2012). Games which required more attention from their player in order to progress in the game were connected to more detailed experiences of vocabulary learning, while games which were straight-forward in nature were connected to experiences of non-learning. These experiences support Schmidt's noticing hypothesis by presenting cases of

language learning in situations where a learner noticed foreign language input as well as cases where the individual did not notice the input and consequently did not learn from it.

In addition to learning vocabularies and other EFL skills from game texts, participants who played multiplayer games discussed their experiences of learning with and from other players. Important aspects of these learning experiences were the rapid nature of feedback, as well as unique opportunities for oral communication that many multiplayer games provide. Somewhat surprisingly, gaming communities were not important for the participants in general, or for their EFL learning. They were more passive consumers of out-of-game content and communities and felt that language use which occurred within games was more important for their learning than out-of-game language was.

When looking into the possibility of video game play functioning as a form of extrinsic motivation for EFL learning, it was found that the younger participants were notably more positive towards the idea that video games had positively affected their learning motivation. For these participants, video games had provided a concrete need for English language skills and thus, these participants agreed with the notion of video games motivating EFL learning in contexts other than video games themselves. The ability to effectively play video games functioned as a goal for EFL learning and studying English in formal settings, such as at school. Older participants, however, were more negative towards this idea. In general, they felt that their English skills were at a comfortable level as is and they did not need to study the language any more, apart from situations where they faced deficiencies in their language skills. What is notable, however, is that some of the older participants suggested that video games in fact reduced their motivation for formal EFL learning, especially at middle and secondary school levels. They had often felt that they had learned enough English by playing video games and consuming other forms of media and therefore did not need to put as much effort into studying English as they otherwise would have.

However, of the older participants the one who was in active employment and was generally less educated had felt that English was one of the rare subjects for which he felt motivation and interest for. He suggested that video games increased his EFL learning



motivation by linking English at school to his own personal life. For future research, studying the link between recreational video game play and EFL learning motivation for learners with different competence levels could be an important topic of study, as the possibility of video games increasing the learning motivation of otherwise unmotivated or underperforming students through recreational video games was brought up by the present study. As the present study was a qualitative study, and only one of the participants fit the generally unmotivated learner's profile, no generalisations can be drawn from it. However, the possibility that video games can motivate generally unmotivated or low-performing EFL learners should be researched in more detail.

In further research, considering female players' experiences and views on language learning could be an interesting topic. The present study only attracted male participants, which was not an intended situation, even though it was somewhat to be expected. Stereotypically, women and girls are perceived to play less and different kinds of games than men and boys. This higher amount of video game play is sometimes credited as one of the causes for boys' comparatively good English grades. What kind of experiences do women who actively play video games have of learning English through game-enhanced contexts would be an interesting topic for future research. Are perhaps their experiences of learning through interaction with other players somehow different?

One research participant also suggested that he had benefited greatly from feedback on his language that other players had given him, and compared it positively to the feedback he had received at school. Looking into the nature and results of this feedback from one's fellow players could be beneficial for both formal and informal EFL learning, if some of the positive aspects of in-game language feedback could be applied in formal education. Namely, the quickness and *in the moment* nature of in-game feedback was acknowledged as beneficial for game-enhanced EFL learning.

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## Appendix 1 – Interview script

### Taustatiedot pelaamisesta ja kielitaidosta

#### *Background information on playing and language competence*

Kuinka paljon pelaat videopelejä viikossa?

*How much do you play video games in a week?*

Kuinka kauan olet pelannut videopelejä, eli milloin aloitit pelaamisen?

*How long have you been playing video games, i.e. when did you start playing?*

Millaisia tai mitä pelejä pelaat?

*What kinds of games or what games do you play?*

Miksi pidät kyseisistä peleistä?

*Why do you like such kinds of games?*

Oletko ikinä pelannut kielenoppimispelejä, esim. Duolingo?

*Have you ever played language learning games, such as Duolingo?*

Millä laitteilla pelaat?

*What devices do you use to play?*

Miten pelaat yleensä? (Yksin, yhdessä samassa tilassa, yhdessä netin välityksellä jne.)

*How do you often play? (Alone, together in a shared physical space, together online etc.)*

Kun pelaat moninpelejä, pelaatko niitä tuttujen vai tuntemattomien ihmisten kanssa?

*When you play multiplayer games, do you play them with people you know already or with people who are unfamiliar to you?*

Oletko pelannut videopelejä suomen kielellä, joko tekstitettyinä tai dubattuna?

*Have you played video games in Finnish, either subtitled or dubbed?*

Jos olet, pidätkö enemmän videopeleistä suomeksi vai englanniksi?

*If you have, do you prefer video games in Finnish or English?*

Jos et, pelaisitko videopelejä suomeksi?

*If you haven't would you play video games in Finnish?*

Millainen englannin taitosi on?

*How is your English language competence?*

Puhutko englantia äidinkielenä tai käytätkö kieltä paljon vapaa-ajallasi? (Pelit pois lukien)

*Do you speak English as your first language or do you use the language a lot on your free time? (Excluding video games)*

Mitkä asiat englannissa koet sinulle vaikeimpina?

*What do you find most difficult to you about the English language?*

### **Peleistä oppiminen**

#### *Learning from games*

Oletko oppinut videopelien kautta jotain?

*Have you learned something through video games?*

Oletko itse oppinut videopelien kautta englantia?

*Have you learned English through video games?*

Millaisessa tilanteessa tai miten olet huomannut oppineesi jotain?

*In what kind of situation or how have you noticed that you have learned something?*

Kohtaatko peleissä sellaista englannin kieltä, jota en ymmärrä?

*In video games, do you come across such English language that you don't understand?*

Mitä teet tällaisissa tilanteissa?

*What do you do in these kinds of situations?*

### **Englannin käyttö ja motivaatio**

#### **Use of English and motivation**

Koetko motivaatiosi oppia ja opetella englantia kasvaneen peliharrastuksesi myötä?

*Do you feel that your motivation to learn English has increased due to your video game hobby?*

Oletko hyötynyt koulussa videopeliharrastuksestasi?

*Have you benefited from your video game hobby at school?*

Onko peleistä ollut hyötyä muissa aineissa kuin englannissa?

*Have you benefited from games in subjects other than English?*

Käytätkö englantia enemmän myös pelien ulkopuolella videopeliharrastuksesi myötä?

*Do you also use English more outside of video games due to your video game hobby?*

Keskusteletko englanniksi ihmisten kanssa, joihin olet tutustunut videopelien kautta?

*Do you use English when talking with people who you've met through video games?*