

FROM A FINNISH PLAYER TO AN ENGLISH
AVATAR:
Language alternation in immersive video gaming
sessions

Bachelor's thesis
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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Videopelien pelaamisesta on tullut suosittu harrastus, joka sisältää usein aktiivista ja monikielistä kommunikointia pelaajien kesken. Pelaamisen sosiaalisuutta ja keskustelijoiden koodinvaihtoa käsittelevän tutkimuksen asetelmat ovat keskittyneet yhdellä ruudulla pelattaviin konsolipeleihin, vaikka internet on mahdollistanut etämoninpelaamisen ja ääniviestien välittämän vuorovaikutuksen. Kokemus virtuaaliseen maailmaan eläytymisestä voi muovata pelaajien välistä keskustelua, ja ilman kehonkieltä kielellisillä valinnoilla on pelaajien reaktioiden sekä hahmoihin samaistumisen ilmaisemisessa entistä suurempi rooli.</p> <p>Tämän tutkielman tarkoitus oli selvittää, mihin tarkoituksiin ja kuinka laajasti suomalaiset videopelien pelaajat käyttivät englannin kieltä puhuessaan keskenään, ja miten heidän kokemuksensa pelin immersiiivisyydestä eli tilanteeseen eläytymisestä vaikuttavat kielen valintaan. Aineisto sisältää nauhoituksia kolmesta nuoresta miehestä pelaamassa kahta peliä, <i>Killing Floor</i> ja <i>Portal 2</i>. Osallistujat olivat yhteydessä toisiinsa pelien verkkomoninpelitilan ja Skype-pikaviestintäohjelman välityksellä. Aineisto kerättiin nauhoittamalla ääntä ja tietokoneen ruudulla näkyvää videomateriaalia pelitilanteesta.</p> <p>Analyysissä tutkittiin pelaajien keskustelun ja pelien tapahtumien välistä yhteyttä. Tulokset osoittivat, että pelaajat käyttivät englanninkielisiä puheenvuoroja esimerkiksi reagoidessaan digitaalisen maailman tapahtumiin, viitatessaan pelien omaan termistöön sekä ilmaistessaan, puhuivatko he pelaajan vai pelihahmon roolissa. Tutkimuksessa voitiin havaita toistuvia englannin kielen käyttötapoja, mutta pienen osallistujamäärän ja nauhoitettujen pelitilanteiden lyhyehkön keston vuoksi tuloksia ei kuitenkaan voida yleistää.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

As the status of English as a global language has developed, its use in media and communication in Finland has increased. One of the new media-centered activities in which English is often used alongside Finnish is video gaming. Computer and console games feature complex digital environments which require and encourage the player to interact with their contents. In addition to offering a single-player experience, many games allow multiple players to compete against or cooperate with each other. Since the text and audio of the games available in Finland is most often presented in English and online multiplayer modes allow interaction with people all over the world, many Finnish gamers draw on the foreign language while communicating during gaming sessions.

Some studies have examined video gaming as a social activity and described the functions of its multilingual aspects. Conversation-analytic and discursive perspectives have been used to investigate how language alternation carries functions such as constructing participant positions, signaling expert knowledge, and separating conversation topics (e.g. Leppänen 2007; Leppänen and Nikula 2007; Piirainen-Marsh 2008, 2010). However, little research has focused on the role of the immersivity of gaming and gamers' emotional reactions in shaping the players' language use. A key feature of video games is their complex digital environment which the player is able to interact with, and researchers have noted that this often causes players to become strongly engaged with the activity in the role of a fictional character (Burn and Schott 2004, Calleja 2011, Rigby and Ryan 2011). The present paper aims to examine the connection between this immersivity and language alternation in the players' communication.

Many video games allow players to interact with their friends or even strangers via the Internet, but this integral aspect of modern gaming has received little attention in literature on language use. Much of the research so far has concentrated on analysing interaction between players situated in the same physical space. Since internet-mediated communication is rapidly increasing in popularity, it is also important to consider the features of conversation transmitted via audio and gameplay footage alone. In this environment, extralinguistic actions such as physical gestures cannot be utilised, and the meaning conveyed through spoken language is therefore highlighted. The present study analyses this online communication.

This paper is divided into five main sections. In Chapter 2, I will overview the status of English in Finland and introduce the theoretical background of my study. Previous research on language use among video game players is also considered. The topics of Chapter 3 include descriptions of my data as well as the methods used to collect and analyse it. In Chapter 4, the functions of language alternation are analysed by discussing transcribed extracts from the data. Finally, the implications and limitations of this study are addressed in the conclusion, in which the results are also compared to those of previous research on the topic.

2 GAMING AS A MULTILINGUAL SOCIAL ACTIVITY

This chapter will discuss the theoretical background and research the present paper draws on. First, I will briefly describe the status of English as a widely used foreign language in Finland. Second, definitions of language alternation and approaches to its interpretation will be explored. Third, I will consider the phenomenon of players feeling psychologically immersed in video games and overview previous research on mixed language use in gaming situations.

2.1 English in Finland

With the spread of English in global media and communication, its importance and status in Finland have been steadily changing. It is not uncommon to find English elements in job advertisements or youth magazines, and translation via subtitles lets media such as television shows retain their original audio tracks. It is compulsory for Finnish children to study a foreign language, and English is by far the most popular option: 85 per cent of the respondents to a recent national survey had studied English at some point (Leppänen et al. 2009: 148), and 98 per cent of secondary school students were learning it in 2000 (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2003: 6). According to the national survey, reasons for the language's weekly use included everyday matters such as searching for information, communicating with others, and performing work-related activities. Despite it being considered a foreign language, Leppänen et al. (2009: 147) found that English was regarded to be more important than Swedish, one of the two official languages in Finland. Due to its prevalence in work and

entertainment as well as multicultural communication, English competence is seen as something necessary; the possibility of English changing from a foreign language to a second language in Finland has been discussed (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2003).

The increased use of English has not come without discussion of its effects on identities and the status of Finnish. English has been regarded as a threat to multilingualism and national identity; however, survey results would seem to indicate that a large majority of Finnish people have generally positive attitudes towards the language (Leppänen and Nikula 2008: 14, Leppänen et al. 2009). Taavitsainen and Pahta (2003) summarise that while Finns recognize the growing importance of English and are not necessarily opposed to it, they want to preserve the use of the official language and acknowledge it as a part of their identity.

In spite of the country valuing the native language, especially for young people in Finland, the choice of using the global language of English can also be a resource for constructing identities; Leppänen and Nikula (2008: 21) argue that Finns may regard English as a symbol of "modern occidental internationality". As Taavitsainen and Pahta (2003: 5) note, drawing on foreign languages is indeed common in youth cultures. Since many forms of entertainment Finnish youths are drawn to are presented in English, they adopt linguistic elements from the language and use them also in communication conducted mostly in Finnish, signaling membership of a particular group and building shared meanings related to the activity they are engaging in (Leppänen 2007, Leppänen and Nikula 2007, Piirainen-Marsh 2010).

2.2 Code-switching

Instances of language alternation have been described using various terms, with no clear consensus on which types of the practice each concept encompasses. Code-switching is defined as using two languages within the same conversation (Gafaranga 2007: 279). A mixed code, on the other hand, is created when elements from two languages are intertwined to create a structured, frequently emerging pattern (Maschler 1998: 137). Some researchers make a distinction between e.g. code-switching, code-mixing and language alternation, while others state it is difficult to define what each term comprises. (Auer 1984: 7-8, Alvarez-Cáccamo 1998: 29). For the purposes of the present study, code-switching and language

alternation are used as interchangeable terms that include all instances of both intra- and intersentential locally meaningful choices of language in conversation. That is to say, the functions of using elements from and switching between multiple languages both within a sentence and between turns in conversation are considered.

Auer (1984, 1998) distinguishes between two types of code-switching based on reasons for its emergence. Discourse-related code-switching is motivated by a change in topic or situation; in other words, the speakers will search for reasons for the switch in previous utterances that are part of the conversation. Participant-related code-switching, on the other hand, is brought about due to an individual's preference for the use of a particular language. Using a different kind of criteria, Blom and Gumperz (1972, cited in Wei 1998: 156) also propose two kinds of code-switching. Similarly to what Auer calls discourse-related language alternation, situational code-switching emerges from a change in situation: participants regard particular languages as appropriate for certain topics. In contrast, metaphorical switching deviates from the expected language while retaining the situation, thus serving as a means to draw attention and convey new communicative intent.

The pairs of discourse-participant and situational-metaphorical code-switching illustrate the notion of language alternation functioning as a contextualization cue. Context is constructed and constantly shaped by the decisions participants make in a communicative event. The cues used to shape it can be paralinguistic or lexical, but their content is often non-propositional, and is therefore interpreted with regard to each particular situation (Levinson 2003). As such, Wei (1998: 170) states that meaning "emerges as a consequence of bilingual participants' contextualization work". Sequentiality is therefore an important aspect to consider in analysing the functions of code-switching: utterances are constructed and shaped in response to previous actions and context (Gafaranga 2007).

2.3 Immersion and language use in video gaming

Video games are a form of media in which multimodal means are used to construct complex digital environments. Calleja (2011: 15) describes these environments as combinations of rules encountered in traditional games and storytelling made possible by digital media. In

games, audiovisual stimuli create a readily accessible world the player can explore by controlling an avatar or affecting the events on the screen in some other fashion. Rigby and Ryan (2011: 6) argue that instead of the content of a game, it is this interactive aspect that is a major component of the phenomenon of immersion. Calleja (2011) identifies two uses for the term: immersion as absorption in performing an activity, and immersion as an experience of being transported into a virtual world in which the player's actions are reacted to. In contrast to traditional media in which the viewer is purely a spectator, video games allow the gamer to play a role in a fictional story. This feature mimics prior experiences in the real world in that our actions are not independent of their surroundings, and as such invokes feelings of narrative presence and authenticity (Rigby and Ryan 2011: 87, 93; Calleja 2011: 21).

Gamers do not only interact with characters and environments programmed into the games, but often also with other players. Players participating in the activity of playing a multiplayer game can be gathered around a gaming console in a single room or engage in co-operation and conversation through the internet while situated in different physical spaces. Many games function in a fast-paced real-time environment, and as Leppänen (2007: 157) notes, effective performance requires expert communication between participants. Research has found that Finnish gamers use English phrases and terms to comment on each others' actions and to signal knowledge of the semantic field of a particular game (Leppänen 2007, Piirainen-Marsh 2008: 163). In addition to this social aspect invoking constant interaction and negotiation, Rigby and Ryan (2011: 92-93) argue that shared experiences with other players enhance the impression of emotional presence in a game.

The sense of immersive gameplay can be reflected in players' communication, from choice of language to differences in individual lexical items. Due to the interactive and immersive characteristics of video games, players often identify with the characters they are controlling and can communicate this through their linguistic choices. For example, personal pronouns may suggest the distance the player sets between the avatar's actions and their own, and choosing to talk in the language of the game instead of the player's native language can signify an alignment of speaking from the point of view of the controlled character (Burn and Schott 2004, Leppänen 2007: 157, Leppänen and Nikula 2007: 358-359). Furthermore, the choice of English versus Finnish can be a contextualization cue: it may be used to separate

utterances commenting on in-game events from those related to other topics (Leppänen and Nikula 2007, Piirainen-Marsh 2008, Piirainen-Marsh 2010: 3020). Lastly, code-switching is also a means of indicating emotional responses to in-game events through use of, for example, evaluative repetition of characters' English lines (Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio 2009, Piirainen-Marsh 2010: 3025).

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of my study is to explore how a group of three young Finnish adults uses English elements in their communication while being immersed in the activity of playing a video game. The present paper describes how they alternate between Finnish and English while gaming, and aims to explain how their linguistic choices relate to their perception of being present in the virtual environment. In order to analyse the locally situated functions of the language alternation in the data, it is necessary to examine the conversations in their immediate interactional context. In order to do this, the study will focus on the following questions:

1. What characterizes the events which cause the players to switch into English?
2. What purposes does English serve in these situations?
3. How extensive is the use of English elements, i.e. do the players borrow simple phrases or construct long turns in English?

3.2 Description of the data

The data consists of video and audio recordings of three male friends playing action-focused computer games. The material was recorded in December 2014 and February 2015, and the combined length of the data is approximately two hours. At the time of recording, all of the players were 19 years old. The participants had been friends for several years and often played games together in their free time. Due to being closely acquainted with each other, the players were able to interact casually and spontaneously in these co-operative gaming

sessions. This relationship was the main reason why these particular participants were chosen: a sample consisting of people previously unacquainted with each other would most likely not have conversed in a natural and comfortable fashion.

The participants were playing online and communicating with each other through voice chat. In addition to the players' conversations, the in-game events on the computer screen were recorded and taken into account in the analysis. Voice chat is not a built-in feature of the games featured in this study, and as such the conversations were transmitted via Skype, a messaging program that supports both text- and audio-based conversations. Both the gameplay footage and the voice tracks were collected simultaneously into the form of video files using a video capture software called Fraps.

The data consists of extracts from two games, both of which were chosen based on their familiarity to the participants and the availability of multiplayer mode. The first game, *Killing Floor*, is a co-operative shooter in which the goal is to fight zombie-like beings in a three-dimensional environment. The game is presented in first person perspective, i.e. from the point of view of the character the player is controlling. It was released in retail for Microsoft Windows in May 2010. The gameplay is notably multiplayer-oriented: the amount of enemies is dependent on the number of players, and actions such as trading items and healing other players' avatars are recommended. As is typical of action shooters, the gameplay is fast-paced and players are therefore required to make decisions and communicate with each other in real time. All three participants are featured in the *Killing Floor* data set.

The second game, *Portal 2*, represents the puzzle-platformer genre: the player advances by moving the avatar between several platforms while solving puzzles and avoiding obstacles. It is also rendered in three-dimensional first person view, and was released for Microsoft Windows in April 2011 as the sequel to *Portal*. The objective is to explore a maze-like laboratory with the help of teleportation. In order to accomplish this, a special device is used to create portals connecting two surfaces, allowing the characters to move between rooms or across distances. Multiplayer mode requires the players to work together in order to advance,

and interaction is thus an integral part of effective gameplay. It should be noted that only two out of the three participants in this study were engaged in playing *Portal 2*. The third group member included in the *Killing Floor* extracts did not partake in this other session.

3.3 Method of analysis

The analysis draws on Auer's (1984, 1998) interactional approach to conversational code-switching in aiming to investigate the significance and functions of language alternation in the data. This view is interested in analysing the procedures participants use to interpret instances of code-switching. To elaborate, since each interactional situation is a unique event with every sequential act shaping the context and subsequent turns, the meaning of code-switching cannot be interpreted by simply classifying types of alternation without examining how the participants arrive at the switch. The present paper refers to this interactional and procedural approach in analysing the functions of Finnish-English-code-switching; the goal is to examine how players use English to contextualize utterances and to indicate their stance towards events in the games.

In order to prepare the recordings for analysis, English elements used in the conversations were identified and parts of the data featuring the phenomenon of language alternation were transcribed. Since the internet-mediated interaction between the players was limited to audio transmission and their in-game actions, this paper will not consider extralinguistic cues such as physical gestures, which might otherwise be featured in analysis of conversation. The English elements are examined based on both their content and the way they affect or are affected by the utterances surrounding them.

4 LANGUAGE ALTERNATION IN TWO GAMING SESSIONS

This chapter presents the results of my analysis. I will examine the data through transcribed extracts, which were categorized under four subheadings based on their contents and the possible reasons for the language alternation they include. First, instances of situational and discourse-related code-switching will be analysed. Second, I will examine cases of the players repeating lines of dialogue featured in the game. Third, English constructions that feature

references to gaming community practices as well as other contexts will be inspected. Finally, I will present some examples of the ways players insert individual English terms into their mostly Finnish conversation.

In the analysis and transcriptions, the three participants in this study are referred to by the tags P1, P2, and P3. Some of the examples also feature automatic lines uttered by non-player characters, and these are represented using the label NPC. In order to preserve anonymity, names of any existing locations or players have been changed. In cases where written text displayed on the screen is particularly relevant in shaping the conversation, it is included within double parentheses. Full English translations of the extracts are provided below each example. Screen captures of the games and explanations for the transcription conventions used can be found in the appendices section.

4.1 Situational and discourse-related code-switching

Language alternation was found to often function as a contextualization cue that signaled whether the participants were producing utterances in the role of their characters or as players engaged in the activity of gaming. Example 1 depicts a situation in which P2 constructs two English turns to display identification with his avatar in *Killing Floor*. The player characters are being attacked by a large wave of enemies. Their hit points are decreasing, and P2 asks the others for help in replenishing his character's health. He uses the first person pronoun to refer to the avatar he is controlling, and in doing so situates himself within the game and speaks in the role of the character. This footing is emphasised by uttering the request in English: most of the conversation between the players in the data, including the turns immediately preceding this exchange, is conducted in Finnish. The players' native language is used to discuss various topics unrelated to the game, as well as planning actions together as players. The switch of language therefore highlights P2's turn and shifts his alignment from player to a specific character. Furthermore, English is the language featured in the game menus and spoken by the non-player characters. Using it when identifying with a game avatar may therefore seem more appropriate than talking in Finnish.

Example 1

1 P2 heal me please
 2 P3 [tuus tänne]
 3 P1 [.hh eughh]
 4 P3 noni
 5 P2 I'm on my bloody la:st legs (.) siel on mun [liekin]heitin
 6 P1 [yeah]

1 P2 heal me please
 2 P3 [come here]
 3 P1 [.hh eughh]
 4 P3 alright
 5 P2 I'm on my bloody la:st legs (.) there's my [flame]thrower
 6 P1 [yeah]

This exchange is followed by the extract shown in Example 2, which demonstrates a player's reaction to events described through written text. P2 and P3 are engaged in fighting the aforementioned challenging wave of enemies, and P3 acts as if there was no problem. The humour in this utterance's contrast to the actual situation becomes apparent when P2 makes an amused sound in response to his friend's remark. Meanwhile, an unrelated player tells the others to run by using a text chat box, and an automated system message soon informs the participants that an avatar has been killed by a monster. These English lines of text prompt P2 to construct his next turn in the same language. In addition to connecting the utterance to the preceding messages, this switch of language once again changes the player's footing and reinforces his absorption in the role of his character. Similarly to Examples 1 and 2, instances of using the language of the game when particularly identifying with a character or switching to comment on in-game events have also been found in previous studies on the topic (Leppänen 2007; Leppänen and Nikula 2007; Piirainen-Marsh 2008; 2010).

Example 2

5 P3 juu ei täs mitää
 6 P2 ((snorts))
 7 ((player text message: RUN!))
 8 ((automatic game text: Evelyn was eaten by a Crawler.))
 9 P2 to the sta:irs

5 P3 yeah this is nothing
 6 P2 ((snorts))
 7 ((player text message: RUN!))
 8 ((automatic game text: Evelyn was eaten by a Crawler.))
 9 P2 to the sta:irs

Another example of code-switching as a marker of context is presented in the following example from a *Portal 2* mission. The avatars are situated on opposite sides of a vast chasm, which player 1 has just crossed by walking and jumping across a series of bridges and is now

waiting for P2 to do the same. P1 uses Finnish to ask whether his friend knows how to arrive at the goal, but P2 chooses to state his uncertainty in English. He constructs his reply in a manner that emphasizes his own role in performing the actions: he uses the first person pronoun to refer to the avatar and focuses on himself instead of, for example, asking how P1 cleared the obstacle. As noted by Burn and Schott (2004), usage of the first person pronoun indicates engagement with the player's avatar and its tasks. Similarly to the instances of language alternation in Example 1, this distinct English turn separates discussion of in-game performance as a character from Finnish talk as players.

Example 3

1	P1	tajusitsä miten se tehää
2		(3.5)
3	P2	euhh how do I
4	P1	uhh (.) just tollee (.) just noin
1	P1	did you understand how to do it
2		(3.5)
3	P2	euhh how do I
4	P1	uhh (.) just like that

What follows is approximately a minute of the players advancing in the maze and communicating non-verbally, through use of motions their characters can perform. Soon P2 opens a portal in a wall at the end of a narrow bridge the players are stuck on, creating a vertical beam in midair and amusing them both. This leads to P1 reacting as transcribed in Example 4 and induces an instance of discourse-related code-switching. P1 first reacts to the event within the game in the role of his character, using English to align himself with the scenario just as P2 had done a short while earlier when trying to cross the bridge. His Finnish utterance in line 5, on the other hand, is prompted by looking through the portal P2 has created, and is an evaluation of the peculiar bird's eye-view of the bridges the angle presents. It is therefore a comment on superficial features of the game instead of in-game events, and the switch into Finnish emphasizes this difference and change of footing.

Example 4

1	P1	<u>↑w(h)a:(h)t</u> (.) never cro:ss the beams
2	P2	e (h)he (h)e
3	P1	hh hmh
4		(2.0)
5	P1	oho (.) hienon näköst

1	P1	<u>↑w(h)a:(h)t</u> (.) never cro:ss the beams
2	P2	e (h)he (h)e
3	P1	hh hmh
4		(2.0)
5	P1	oh (.) that looks cool

4.2 Repetition of utterances

The above examples demonstrate that the players' English knowledge allows them to creatively construct unique turns in the language. However, they can also make use of elements they have heard before in the games. The following exchange occurs shortly after Example 1 presented above, in which one of the players produces English phrases when requesting help in *Killing Floor*. The players are running away from enemies in a maze, trying to navigate their way to an exit. After a brief stretch of Finnish conversation, P2 repeats the exclamation uttered approximately one minute earlier, and is followed by a non-player character saying the same line. This makes it apparent that the sentence is directly borrowed from the game. By using a familiar phrase, the player connects his utterance with the ingame context and displays knowledge of the scenario by anticipating the phrase's appearance. These actions correspond to Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio's (2009) findings on repetition as a sign of expertise. After this insertion, he quickly switches back into Finnish in order to reply to P3's question in line 1.

Example 5

1	P3	eiks tuolt pääse pois
2	P2	I'm on my ↑bloo:dy last legs ↓ei mun tietääkseni
3	NPC	I'm on my bloody last legs
4		(6.0)

1	P3	can't we get out through there
2	P2	I'm on my ↑bloo:dy last legs ↓not that I know of
3	NPC	I'm on my bloody last legs
4		(6.0)

Despite it being similar to the examples of situational and discourse-related language alternation in that it is most likely interpreted as spoken by a character, this use of an English phrase can also be considered an instance of metaphorical code-switching as described by Blom and Gumperz (1972, in Wei 1998: 156). The player does not construct a unique English turn, but instead borrows something all the participants have most likely heard numerous times in the game. The insertion deviates from the expected language in the conversation without necessarily initiating a new topic or indicating a change in footing: its purpose would seem to be to anticipate the NPC's behaviour and highlight the turn. It indicates immersion in the game not necessarily by strongly situating the speaker in the role of a character, but instead in the sense that the player is focused on the events and is able to anticipate what is about to happen. P2 immediately changes his tone of voice and switches into Finnish without a pause after the insertion, suggesting that the borrowed line is simply a quick note.

Another function of utterance repetition is exemplified in the following brief *Killing Floor* example, in which the players are examining a merchant character's inventory and deciding which weapons to buy. An attempt to purchase an item too expensive triggers the rejection in line 1. P2 reacts to this by repeating the merchant's utterance in a noticeably nasal and high-pitched manner. In doing so, he makes fun of the pre-programmed line of dialogue and displays an affective response to ingame actions. Repetition can therefore be a way to evaluate and comment on the environment the players are immersed in, as has been observed in literature on the topic (Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio 2009, Piirainen-Marsh 2010). Furthermore, the focus required in order to note an utterance and comment on it displays engagement with the game. Similarly to the other examples, this evaluation does not lead to further conversation in English: its function as a solitary comment is accentuated by P1's use of Finnish to initiate a new topic after a pause.

Example 6

1	NPC	you ain't- you ain't got the money for that one babe
2	P2	@you ain't got the money for that babe@ ((nasal voice))
3	(1.5)	
4	P1	pitäsköhän vaa (.) rullaa (.) larin kaa viel joo:
1	NPC	you ain't- you ain't got the money for that one babe
2	P2	@you ain't got the money for that babe@ ((nasal voice))
3	(1.5)	
4	P1	wonder if I should still (.) go with (.) the lever action rifle yeah

4.3 Referencing other contexts and unconventional constructions

Despite being able to speak fluent English, the players in the data occasionally used intentionally unconventional constructions. In Example 7, one of the players is searching for weapons while walking toward a merchant character's location in *Killing Floor*. P2 offers to give him a rifle, and P1 responds by producing an English turn which attributes an unusual adjective to the helper's name. This utterance is a modification of a catchphrase ("thank you Based God") referencing a rap artist and popularized through social media on the internet. This demonstrates that in addition to borrowing terms and phrases from the game, such as when P1 announces his arrival at the trader's shop in line 5 of this example, the players are also able to creatively utilize English to comment on in-game events without using elements featured in the immediate context.

Example 7

```
1   P1   onks kellää (.) mun magnumii tai jotaa
2   P2   mie voin heittää sulle ton mun larin
3   P1   yes: (.) thank you Based Antti
4   P2   ootas (2.0) missä se on
5   P1   mie oon tääl traderil
```

```
1   P1   has anybody got (.) my magnum or something
2   P2   I can give you my level action rifle
3   P1   yes: (.) thank you Based Antti
4   P2   wait (2.0) where is it
5   P1   I'm at the trader
```

In the following example, the players use English elements to respond to an NPC merchant's utterance advertising a store. While walking along a path marked by guiding lights, P3 immediately makes a reference to an abbreviation often utilized in gaming contexts and on the internet: "/r/" indicates a request for an item. There is no common Finnish variant of the practice, so the player inserts the English phrase into his comment but pronounces the elements in Finnish to better integrate them into the rest of the sentence. Once the players arrive at the location and the merchant can be seen on the screen, P2 deliberately presents a remark in a very phonetic and Finnish fashion in line 5, utilizing mispronunciation and adding a plural marker to the end of *money* to produce a humorously incorrect utterance. He once again makes a request in the language of the game that corresponds to the NPC's line, but the nonstandard manner in which it is uttered creates a mocking impression. This case is then different from the fluent English used in the other examples, and could thus be interpreted as the player being immersed in the game from a different perspective, speaking as if he were the

merchant instead of the avatar he is controlling. Similarly to the evaluative repetition of another NPC's utterance in Example 6, this is a way to criticize the merchant's behaviour and show affective response.

Example 8

1	NPC	the shop is open boys (.) come and get me
2	P3	kautta är kautta aseita ja (.) [kaikkea]
3	P1	[niin]
4		(7.0)
5	P2	<i>pliis händ ouver the monis</i>
6		(1.0)
7	P2	ei tääl muuten oo mitää servul tota (.) [rankki]rajotust
8	P1	[aijaa]

1	NPC	the shop is open boys (.) come and get me
2	P3	slash r slash weapons and (.) [stuff]
3	P1	[yeah]
4		(7.0)
5	P2	please hand over the moneys
6		(1.0)
7	P2	by the way there's no (.) [rank] restriction on this server
8	P1	[I see]

4.4 Individual English terms in Finnish conversation

In the following series of exchanges, the players insert multiple English terms into their mostly Finnish conversation and commentary. The context is one in which the players are talking with each other while exploring the abandoned ruins of a fortress in *Killing Floor* and shooting any monsters they come across. In the first few lines of Example 9, P1 is describing his experience in a different game in which he and his friend built a replica of a real-world building and used it as a playable stage. He uses the English terms *death match* and *admin abuse* to describe their activities in the game. There are no precise Finnish equivalents for these actions, so the player is able to communicate his meaning most efficiently by using the original terms that might be encountered within the English game; Leppänen (2007) also notes that the time and effort needed to translate items may interfere with gamers' performance in the game. By using precise language, the player shows his expertise in gaming terminology and also expects the other players to be familiar with the activities.

Example 9

1 P1 siihen myö rakennettii itte (.) uimahalli Toivola ja sit myö
 2 pidettii siel death matchei ja vedettii kunnon †admin †abusee
 3 siel
 4 (1.0)
 5 P2 [h(h)a(h)ah]
 6 P1 [se oli ihan sikahauskaa]

1 P1 we built our own Toivola swimming hall there and then we held
 2 death matches and did some real †admin †abuse
 3 -
 4 (1.0)
 5 P2 [h(h)a(h)ah]
 6 P1 [it was tons of fun]

The players vary between preserving the original pronunciation of the English elements and modifying them to better fit the Finnish sentences. In the second line of Example 9, *death match* is a straight borrowing that preserves the English pronunciation, while *admin abuse* is altered to a distinctly Finnish-sounding utterance with an ending that corresponds to Finnish noun conjugation. A possible explanation for this is the status of *death match* as a common term featured in numerous games and often used in community conversation. In contrast, *admin abuse* is a phrase constructed to describe actions some players may take. It is not a fixed term, and does thus not feature as such a natural part of the gamers' vocabulary. Due to their integration within discussion of various topics in Finnish, these individual lexical items would not seem to signify any particularly immersive engagement with the game. Unlike the phrase- or sentence-length English items featured in the other examples, they do not differ from the surrounding conversation or prompt any particularly special reactions.

Two additional uses for English terms can be seen in Example 10, which is a direct continuation of the previous example. When the players start walking up a flight of stairs leading to the top of the ruins, P2 first predicts in Finnish in line 1 that someone will find a bag of gold. Once he reaches the top, he then highlights this discovery by saying *coins* with emphasis, now using an English word instead of Finnish to describe the items. This connects the utterance more strongly with the game world. Even though this particular game displays money collected as pounds, many virtual environments refer to their currency as specifically coins. In the last line of this example, P1 displays alignment within the game world not only by using the first person pronoun but also through utilizing an English phrase to describe the environment. He responds to P2's comment about destroying the gold by speaking as if he was one of the characters in the game, questioning what use a bag of money has in a world

engulfed in catastrophe. Instead of describing the atmosphere in Finnish, the player uses the popular expression *zombie apocalypse* to refer to the scenario. As the objective of the mission the players are engaged in is to survive the attack of undead creatures, this utterance displays immersion within the events of the game.

Example 10

1	P2	lähin löytää (salee) kultasäkin
2	P1	no niinpä näkyy
3	P2	<u>coins</u>
4	P3	kyytii vaan
5		(3.0)
6	P2	löydä kultaa (.) ammu säkki paskaks
7	P1	hhh mitä mä tällä teen (.) nyt on zombie <i>apokalypse</i>
1	P2	the closest one is (totally) gonna find a gold bag
2	P1	so it seems
3	P2	<u>coins</u>
4	P3	take them along
5		(3.0)
6	P2	find gold (.) blow the bag to pieces
7	P1	hhh what do I do with this (.) it's a zombie <i>apocalypse</i> now

To summarise, multiple possible motivations for and scopes of language alternation can be found in this set of data. Simple phrases borrowed from English and lexical items modified to fit Finnish grammar and pronunciation are interspersed throughout the players' conversations as a natural part of discourse concentrated on gaming. They can signal expertise, convey communicative intent precisely, and refer to popular culture or the gaming community. Uttering longer phrases or entire turns in English, on the other hand, would seem to be more strongly connected to the players' experience of immersion within the digital environments. These elements can be imitations of in-game dialogue or creative, novel constructions. The choice of language can often be used to indicate whether the interlocutor is speaking in the role of a character or as a player, and language alternation can efficiently separate topics of conversation. Finally, the use of English can also be a means of evaluating events or NPC actions within the games.

5 CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to analyse the purposes and extent of English use and language alternation among a small group of Finnish video game players. Video and audio footage of their playing sessions was collected, and the data was analysed by inspecting transcribed extracts of conversation and examining their connection to in-game events. The length of English items ranged from single words to entire turns, and code-switching was found to have several discourse-related and evaluative functions in the participants' interaction. Theories on the immersive quality of video gaming as well as on different types of language alternation provided the framework for the analysis.

Analysis of the data found that English seemed to be used for multiple purposes related to organizing discourse and reacting to gameplay aspects. In accordance with theories of code-switching having a contextualizing or discourse-related function (Li Wei 1998, Auer 1998), language alternation was used to separate specific event-related topics from more general talk and, in doing so, to signal footing on the player–game character continuum. English phrases and terms were also used to efficiently refer to items and to comment on non-playable characters' behaviour. As such, use of the foreign language was largely triggered by situations that included particularly evident identification with characters or commentary on in-game events. These results largely correspond to those of previous research on the topic (e.g. Leppänen 2007; Leppänen and Nikula 2007; Piirainen-Marsh 2008, 2010). However, in contrast to the studies referenced in this paper, the present study analysed internet-mediated audio communication instead of interaction where the participants are situated near each other. Its strength is in providing data and interpretations of situations in which many non-verbal gestures cannot be used and spoken content thus becomes especially essential.

The small scale of this study presents limitations as to what its results can be interpreted to implicate. Firstly, the study only featured three participants, all of whom were of the same age and gender. At the time of the data collection, all of them had also been friends for several years. The results are therefore representative of a very small and homogenous sample, and their implications cannot thus be directly generalized to a wider population of video game players. Secondly, no more than approximately one hour of footage was collected from each

game. It is possible that the players' experience of immersion would have strengthened had the sessions been longer. Furthermore, the multiple different genres of video games prompt different action paces and conversation topics. Only two such genres were explored in this study.

Another limitation of the study itself that must be considered is the effect of data collection on the participants' speech patterns. If individuals are aware that their actions are being recorded, they may not behave and converse as comfortably and naturally as they would in a normal situation. As such, the data may not entirely correspond to the conversation the participants would engage in outside of this study. Nevertheless, it can be assumed to indicate some general trends in the players' interaction.

The basis and methods of this paper could be extended and adapted to conduct more studies on the topic that would together provide a more complete picture of gamers' language use. Further research could include data based on different types of games and participants. For example, the language use featured in competitive games could be compared to the co-operation-oriented activities examined in this study. It would also be interesting to analyse interaction between more varied group members or people who are not as familiar with each other. This study focused on language alternation, but other features of conversation between players, such as negotiating positions or group dynamics, could also be analysed using similar data.

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APPENDIX 1: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

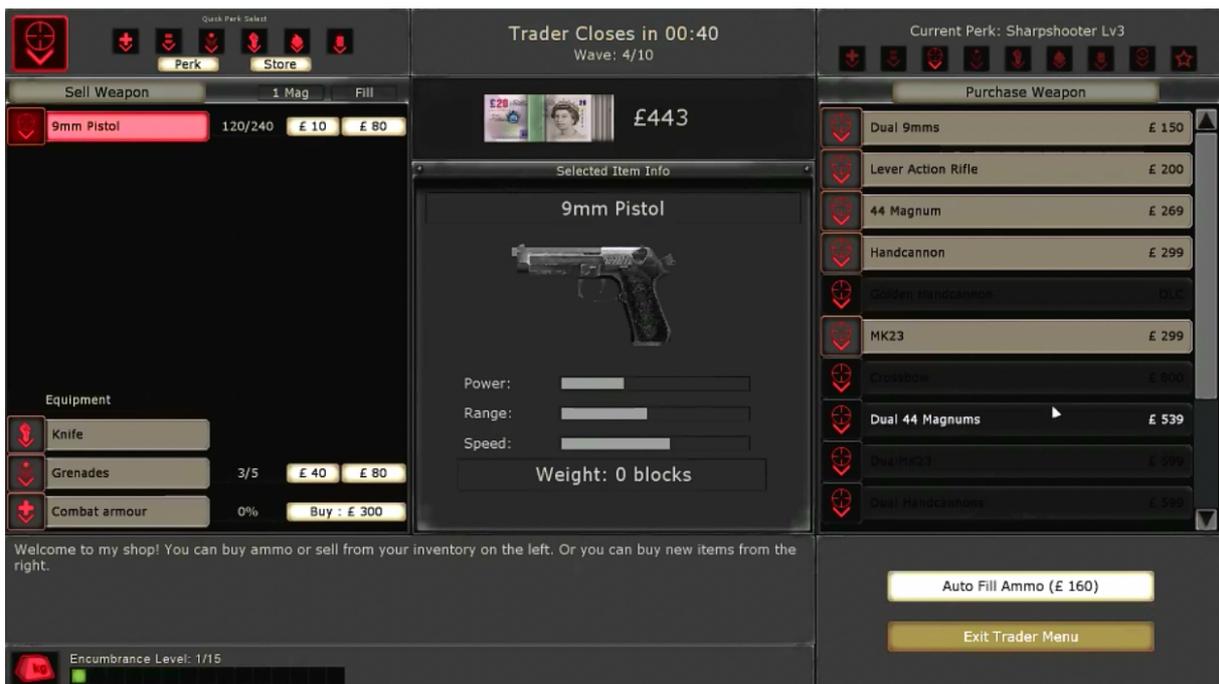
<u>word</u>	emphasis
wo:rd	sound extended
wo-	word cut off
<i>word</i>	altered or unusual pronunciation
@word@	animated voice
(.)	short pause in speech
(2.0)	silence timed in approximately tenths of a second
(word)	uncertain hearing
((nasal))	transcriber's descriptions
hh	audible aspiration
.hh	audible inhalation
a(h)a(h)ha	laughing
↑	rising intonation
[]	overlapping utterances

APPENDIX 2: SCREEN CAPTURES OF THE GAMES IN THE DATA

All of the images represent the point of view of the player referred to as P1 in the data. Blocks of white colour were added to some of the images to hide the players' screen names.



Killing Floor



Killing Floor



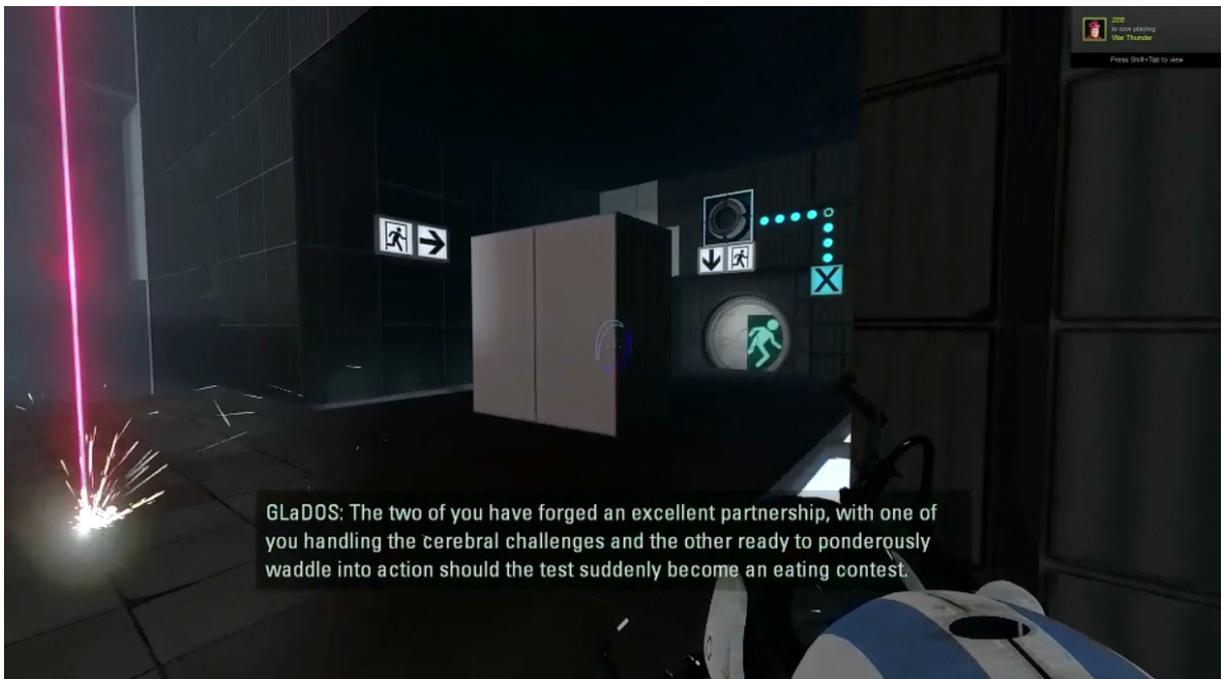
Killing Floor



Killing Floor



Portal 2



Portal 2