Exploring the Potential of Video Games for Enhancing English Spoken and Written Communication Skills

Bachelor's thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Digitaalisten videopelien pelaaminen on yksi maailman suosituimmista harrastuksista nykyään. Kielenoppimista videopelien avulla on tutkittu runsaasti niiden tarjoamien erilaisten kielenoppimismahdollisuuksien takia. Tämä tutkimus keskittyy verkossa pelattavissa videopeleissä tapahtuvaan vuorovaikutukseen pelaajien keskuudessa. Tutkimus pyrkii vastaamaan siihen, ovatko videopelit hyödyllisiä englanninkielisen kirjoitetun- ja puhutun viestinnän kehittymisen kannalta.

Tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisena tutkimuksena, johon haastateltiin kahta suomalaista pelaajaa heidän kokemuksistaan videopeleistä sekä viestinnästä muiden pelaajien kanssa. Haastattelu koostui avoimista kysymyksistä, joiden avulla pyrittiin selvittämään, miten he kokevat muiden pelaajien kanssa viestimisen vaikuttaneen heidän englannin kielen viestintätaitoihin.

Tuloksista kävi ilmi, että haastateltavat kokevat pelien olevan hyödyllisiä erilaisten kielen osa-alueiden kehittämiseen, kuten sanaston laajentamiseen, kielioppiin, luetun- ja kuullunymmärtämiseen ja puheen- sekä tekstin tuottamiseen. Tärkeimmäksi kehittäväksi tekijäksi haastateltavat kokivat sen, että pelatessaan he altistuvat vieraalle kielelle paljon enemmän, kuin missään muualla.

Aihetta voisi tutkia enemmän siten, että seuraisi joukkoa pelaajia pitkällä aikavälillä ja vertailisi heidän kielenoppimistuloksiaan sellaisiin ihmisiin, jotka eivät pelaa vapaa-ajalla.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Video games are one of the most popular leisure activities today. In the context of language learning, one of the key characteristics of video games is interaction. "Interactivity, the extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time, is a defining characteristic of video games […] while television is something you watch, a video game is something you do" (Reinders 2012: 115). In other words, the use of language is more important while playing video games than in many other forms of media. It is therefore important to explore their potential benefits in the field of language learning. In the past, when video games were a new phenomenon, they were viewed much more negatively than they are today. Some researchers dismissed playing video games as useless activity only suitable for leisure time. They thought that while video games might be fun, they are not serious learning environments and cannot be used as such (Reinders 2012: 11). Today, especially language learning from video games is studied extensively. There are numerous studies regarding language learning from gaming and many of them conclude that video games can have a positive effect on language learning (e.g., Johnson et al., 2004; Prensky 2001; Rasti-Behbahani 2021).

Online multiplayer games provide great opportunities for interacting in a second language (L2) and that can be advantageous when it comes to language learning. Since multiplayer online video games offer multiple ways to interact with other people while gaming, it can lead to improved communication skills. There can be thousands or even millions of players online simultaneously interacting with each other through in-game written chat or voice chat. While gaming, one can improve their language skills without even noticing by reading other players' conversations in chat, listening to them in voice chat or producing language themselves. Considering the opportunities for interaction in a foreign language and various other possibilities for language learning such as acquiring vocabulary, it can be assumed that video games can provide great opportunities for informal language learning.

This study examines those opportunities, focusing on written and spoken communication in online multiplayer video games. The present study aims to find out whether online multiplayer games can

improve one's ability to communicate in English and what kinds of similarities and differences in language learning there are when comparing written and spoken communication. By conducting semi-structured interviews with people who are very experienced in online multiplayer games, I will examine their opinions on the matter and compare their answers to previous research on this field. My hypothesis is that online multiplayer games can greatly improve one's ability to communicate in English based on the assumption that online games offer a great number of chances to interact with other players, meaning that by actively playing and interacting with other players on the server, one is using English continuously, thus improving in it.

The second chapter presents the theoretical background for this study, defining key terms and discussing previous studies in the field of language learning. The third chapter introduces the research questions and discusses the methodologies used for data collection and analysis. The fourth chapter examines the collected data in more detail, and finally, the fifth chapter summarizes the findings of this study and considers their implications.

2 BACKGROUND

In this chapter, I will introduce the theoretical background and relevant concepts to the present study. The main focus of this study is to find out whether or not utilizing video games as a resource to improve spoken and written communication skills in English is useful. Chapter 2.1 discusses game-enhanced second language learning and informal language learning that may occur while playing video games. Chapter 2.2 discusses interaction in commercial video games.

2.1 Game-enhanced second language learning

Game-enhanced second language learning, refers to the use of commercial, non-educational video games as resources for second language learning (Reinhardt 2019: 141). One type of game-enhanced learning involves improving communication skills through playing video games. While games such

as Duolingo are specifically designed for language learning, GESLL encompasses games not created for educational purposes, like RuneScape and World of Warcraft (WoW). RuneScape and WoW are often cited in the context of game-enhanced second language learning because they are massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), offering a substantial amount of language content due to their nature. The language content in these games includes vocabulary, reading comprehension from quests, problem-solving, multiple-choice dialogues with in-game non-player characters (NPCs), and interaction with other players. WoW and RuneScape both have only one language setting, English, making them excellent platforms for L2 learners. Additionally, both games boast a large population of native speakers and L2 speakers from various countries, interacting with each other solely for the purpose of playing and progressing in the game.

According to Reinhardt (2008: 31), commercial games are versatile in their application, as they can be utilized in both formal and informal settings for intentional or incidental learning. Formal contexts, such as classrooms, typically involve supervised instruction by a teacher, while informal contexts are typically outside of a classroom environment. Livingstone (1999: 51) defines informal learning as "any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs outside the curricula of educational institutions, or the courses or workshops offered by educational or social agencies". This definition is in line with Reinhardt; informal learning happens out of a person's free will without any educator's involvement. As mentioned above, video games can be very effective platform for informal learning. As Benson (2003) suggests, there are three forms of informal learning: self-directed, incidental and socialization. Self-directed learning involves intentional and conscious efforts by individuals or groups to acquire knowledge or skills. Incidental learning occurs when learning is not the primary focus of an activity, but rather happens "by accident" as the learner becomes aware of the learning experience during the activity. Socialization is a form of learning that is unintentional, and the learner may not be consciously aware of the learning process during the experience (Benson 2003, cited in Krans & Tuomainen 2021: 5). This is something that may happen quite often while communicating in video games.

 Prensky (2006) argues that the young people of today learn most effectively when using new computer or communication technologies. Prensky (2013: 35) also states that of these new technologies, video games especially have qualities that make them engaging and effective tools of learning. According to him (Prensky 2001: 117), when the game is fun, it puts the player into a relaxed state, which makes the player more receptive to learning. Moreover, it has been researched that video games can possibly help language learning by engagement or rewarding performance. Overall, game-

based learning environments are more engaging and motivating than traditional environments (Johnson et al., 2004).

In addition to video games providing a great platform for informal English learning, players are also typically motivated to progress in the game they are playing (Reinders 2012: 193). Motivation is often regarded as an important determinant of success in language learning, supported by numerous studies on L2 motivation (Rasti-Behbahani, 2021: 113). It is logical to think that video games are motivating to the players, since they are such a popular leisure time activity. Researchers have mentioned various different sources of motivation in video games. Elements such as control and confidence can increase one's motivation and as a result, improve English L2 learning (Rasti-Behbahani, 2021: 113). It has also been discussed that interactivity, goals, curiosity, and challenge in video games increase motivation and keep the players active (Rasti-Behbahani, 2021: 113).

2.2 Interaction with other players in vernacular video games

Chapter 2.1 touched on the research on game-enhanced second language learning and informal language learning in vernacular games such as World of Warcraft. Vernacular games are commercial, non-educational, digital games (Reinhardt 2019: 141) and this chapter discusses interaction in vernacular games in more detail. Vernacular games offer various language learning possibilities, and it has been discovered that vernacular games offer language learning possibilities that do not exist in games that are purposefully designed for education (Reinders 2012: 35). As a result, players interact with each other using English in various contexts just by participating in their everyday leisure activity.

In their Master's thesis Petri Autio and Jesse Takamaa (2020) conducted a study on Finnish EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners' views of how MMORPGs can help language learning. They found out that most MMORPGs make it possible to join various communities such as guilds or trading groups. According to them, these communities can provide an excellent platform for practicing one's English skills. Autio and Takamaa (2020) mention that the majority of participants in the study acknowledged the effectiveness of utilizing and producing language in social interaction with others. They also compared spoken and written communication through in-game chat or third-party voice chat such as *Discord* and *Skype.*

Autio and Takamaa (2020) found that written communication is more learner friendly compared to spoken communication, as the material can be reviewed. This result is similar to other chat studies. Voice chat is generally considered more demanding, and some people prefer written chat because it gives them more time to prepare their own responses and read others' text (Sykes, 2005; Sykes, Oskoz & Thorne, 2009, cited in Reinders 2012: 182). However, spoken communication is crucial for learning pronunciation and pacing in speech. All of the participants in Autio and Takamaa's (2020) study agreed that MMORPGs were useful for language learning in general, for different reasons. For example, voice chat resulted in interactions that were similar to face-to-face situations. This is most likely due to the environments that the games provide which are real-time in nature and create opportunities for authentic communicative situations (Reinders 2012: 182). In addition, since MMORPGs are not "serious" environments but instead anonymous, low anxiety and engaging but still require active language use to progress, the gamers are not afraid to use English even if their pronunciation or grammatical skills are not perfect. The goal is to simply get the meaning across (Reinders 2012: 104).

Games can be motivating and provide opportunities of interacting in a foreign language for those people who are more introverted (Richard-Amato, 1988; Silvers, 1982; Zdybiewska, 1994; Hansen, 1994, cited in Reinders 2012: 11). In addition to providing opportunities for introverted people to express themselves, games create informal opportunities similar to real life interactions for language use for those who have limited chances to interact with other people in English in face-to-face situations. Those interactions can boost social skills and language learning affordances. It is also important to note that players' identity outside the game is unknown in games such as WoW or RuneScape, so they can assume new identities while gaming and interacting, which could result in reduced anxiety when it comes to communicating with other players. In addition to boosting social skills and language learning affordances, interacting with other people online is also found to boost confidence in their L2 production (Zheng et al., 2009: 206), which is important for language acquisition.

It has been found that actively interacting in a foreign language greatly contributes to language learning. For example, interacting with other people helps generate comprehensible input and also encourages output, both of which are essential for language acquisition. To develop competence in a foreign language, one must have opportunities to receive comprehensible input (Ellis, 1991: 1) but also have opportunities to produce language themselves in different types of situations during interactions with other people (Swain, 1985, cited in Reinders 2012: 159). Online multiplayer video games offer those opportunities in various ways. Some argue that games are beneficial for lowering

affective barriers and encourage players to interact in their L2. In terms of L2 acquisition, this claim has important implications since research has shown that exposure to L2 input affects L2 acquisition (Reinders 2012: 160).

Second language researchers agree that those who use their L2 more actively, have more potential in developing their language skills as a result of having more opportunities to communicate with others (MacIntyre et al., 2001). This does not necessarily mean that their grammatical accuracy improves, but overall communicative skills and fluency. Since games are often considered fun and entertaining, they can create optimal environments for language use. MMORPGs especially can provide various opportunities for authentic communication and increase exposure to L2 input and opportunities for L2 output (MacIntyre et al., 2001). In-game activities such as quests encourage players to interact with one another in the actual game but also via different types of chat (Discord, skype). Therefore, the game encourages both language output and language input.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

In this chapter, I will explain the aims of this study and my research questions as well as my data collection and analysis methods.

3.1 Research aim and questions

As mentioned earlier, this study focuses on investigating players' perceptions of written and spoken communication in online multiplayer video games and whether they consider it possible to improve in those aspects through gaming. In addition, I will compare the participants' perceptions of the two methods of communication and what kind of language learning occurs when one is partaking in either one.

My research questions are as follows:

1. Are online multiplayer video games helpful in improving one's ability to communicate in a foreign language?

2. What kinds of similarities and differences in language learning are there when comparing written and spoken communication?

The first question is straightforward. It aims to answer whether or not online multiplayer video games are useful in any way to improve one's ability to communicate using a foreign language. The first question will be answered through analyzing all of the answers from the interviewees and drawing a conclusion. The second question aims to find out what kind of similarities and differences there are in learning through written and spoken communication.

3.2 Data and participants

The current research utilizes a qualitative approach that primarily employs open-ended questions, but also includes some questions with multiple-choice options. The chosen method for data collection is one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interview is a type of interview that has open-ended questions and allows the interviewer to ask additional questions for clarification (Bernstein & Lysniak 2018). Semi-structured interview is the optimal method of data collection for this kind of study due to the nature of the questions, which require discussion and contexts for proper answers. Furthermore, semi-structured interview allows the participants to have more room to share their own thoughts on the topic. Participants can freely and openly describe their personal experiences and viewpoints regarding language learning through video games. Moreover, in a semi-structured interview the interviewer can ask for clarification during the discussions, which is important for the accuracy of the data. According to Galletta (2013: 82), asking for elaboration may result in more detailed answers and may offer additional insight.

For the interviews, 2 participants were chosen from different *Discord* servers dedicated to specific video games. Both participants were Finnish people, so the interviews were conducted in Finnish. Choosing the participants from *Discord* servers dedicated to specific video games assures that the participants are people who have spent a great amount of time learning the game they are playing and through that are invested in it. I chose to interview people who are very invested in the game they are

playing because they are more likely to learn while playing than casual gamers since it is a requirement for progression in the game. In online multiplayer video games, learning might happen through different online communities dedicated to the game as well as through communicating with other players.

Both interviews had a duration of approximately 30 minutes each. The interview questions comprised 19 questions, which helped me draw a conclusion to my two research questions. They revolve around participants' personal experiences on the video games they are playing. The interview questions can be found at the end of this study. The participants were asked to reflect on questions such as what kind of video games they play, what kind of communication is required to play the game and what types of situations written or spoken communication are mostly used in. The interviews were conducted through *Discord* since it allows one to record the phone calls. It is also optimal environment for the interviewee since they can answer the questions from their own home where they are comfortable. It allows the interview to feel more like a casual conversation which may lead to more detailed and rich answers from the interviewees.

3.3 Methods of analysis

After conducting and recording the interviews using *Discord*, I transcribed and translated the audio recordings. I analyzed the interview data across codes and themes which were English learning from digital games and written and verbal communication in video games.

The interview questions were put into three categories: general questions about gaming, learning English from gaming and comparing language learning from written communication and spoken communication. My aim was to find out whether online multiplayer video games are helpful in improving one's ability to communicate in a foreign language by discussing these topics. I also compared the answers to previous studies about learning English through gaming. Therefore, the results were interpretative and based on thematic content analysis which refers to searching repeated patterns and constructing themes that answer a research question from qualitative data (Kiger and Varpio 2020: 1-2).

4 ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I will present the analysis of the interview data. It follows the themes of the semi-structured interview. Chapter 4.1 focuses on the general questions about the participants' gaming habits and means of communication in the games they play. Chapter 4.2 focuses on the participants' thoughts on English learning from gaming. In addition, chapter 4.2 briefly discusses the participants' thoughts on learning English from school compared to learning from video games. Finally, chapter 4.3 focuses on the participants' experiences on using written communication and spoken communication while gaming. I use pseudonyms (Mikko and Joona) for the participants of this study to preserve their anonymity.

4.1 Gaming habits of the participants

Both interviewees had played video games extensively and they both had over 10 years of experience in playing video games. While Mikko seemed to have more overall experience in playing different types of video games than Joona, both of them mainly played online multiplayer video games. Mikko listed League of Legends as his most played video game at the moment, which is a MOBA game (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena). Joona mentioned three video games: Counter-Strike: Global offensive (First-Person Shooter), League of Legends and World of Warcraft (MMORPG). World of Warcraft was his most played game, in which he had around 15 years of gaming experience (See Examples 1, 2, and 3).

> Example 1:
> Mikko: Oon pelannut oikeestaan kaikenlaista genrestä toiseen. Että, öö, adventure, öö, mitä kaikkea, tota, platformereita, oon pelannut multiplayeriä, singleplayeriä, että, aika laidasta laitaan että ei silleen oo mitään mistä olisi hirveen vähää kokemusta.
>
> Translation: Mikko: I have played games of pretty much every genre. So, basically, adventure games, platform games, I have played multiplayer games, single-player games. There isn't really anything that I don't have experience on.
>
> Example 2:

Mikko: Mm, no. Ainaki tän hetken pääpeli League of Legends on ollu peleissä varmaan kuudesta kahdeksan vuotta.. että, viis viiva kymmenen.

Translation: Mikko: Well, at the moment my main game is League of Legends and I have played it for 6 to 8 years, so 5 to 10 years of experience.

Example 3:
Joona: Hehe. Öö no tota, mä pelaan esimerkiksi wowia, lolia ja csgo:ta, joista wowi on varmasti eniten pelattu.

Translation: Hehe. Well, I play games such as World of Warcraft, League of Legends and Counter-Strike: Global offensive with World of Warcraft most likely being my most played video game.

Interviewer: Oukkidoukki Kauan sä oot pelannut noita pelejä?

Translation: Okay. How long have you played those games?)

Joona: Noin 15 vuotta

Translation: Around 15 years.

Both interviewees felt that communication is an integral part of the games they play but for different reasons. Both participants also played video games for fun and felt that they did not benefit in any way from gaming. However, as a result of playing video games and being exposed to English for years, they both felt that they had learned English from gaming (See example 4). Mikko mentioned that in the games he plays, spoken communication is the main way of communication, but written chat is sometimes used as well. He stressed that communication is an important part of the game if one wants to win (See examples 5 and 6).

Example 4:
Mikko: Pelaan oikeestaan vaan huvikseni, mutta sillee pitkällä juoksulla oon kyllä oppinu englantia aika hyvin varsinkin nuorempana pelien kautta.

Translation: I play for fun, but in the long run I have learned English from video games, especially when I was younger.

Example 5:
Mikko: Suurimmaks osaks suullista, mut jonkin verran myös kirjallista.

Translation: Mostly spoken communication, but also a bit of written communication.

Example 6:

Mikko: Öö, multiplayer peleis tottakai riippuen tota, tavoitteista. Että, jos voittaa haluaa nii yleisesti monessa pelissä täytyy kommunikoida muiden kanssa jollain tavalla.

Translation: Um, in multiplayer games it depends on the objectives of the game. If one wants to win, generally one has to communicate with other players in one way or another.

Joona also mentioned that both written chat and voice chat are important part of the game and both as the means of communication in the game he plays, which is World of Warcraft. While spoken communication is an important part of the game, World of Warcraft itself does not provide voice chat for the players, only in-game written chat. However, Joona mentioned that many World of Warcraft players take advantage of third-party voice chat applications such as Discord because spoken communication is an important part of World of Warcraft in the later stages of the game. While Mikko mentioned that communication is generally used in video games if one wants to win, Joona thought that communication with other players is useful if one finds themselves in a situation in the game where they need guidance (See example 7).

Example 7:
Joona: Koska, sanotaan nyt että sä oot esimerkkinä tilanteessa, jossa sä tarttet apua toiselta pelaajalta niin sun pitää kommunkoida sen pelaajan kanssa.

Translation: Because for example, let's say you're in a situation where you need help from other player, then you'll have to communicate with that player.

4.2 Participants' thoughts on English learning from video games

Both participants thought that video games can offer various language learning skills, depending on the game one is playing. When asked about possibilities of language learning from gaming in general, the participants had some similarities but also differences in their answers. Both participants agreed that communicating with other players is important for improving their language skills.

Mikko explained that depending on the type of the game, one can learn about the structure of English sentences and how to form English sentences. He also mentioned vocabulary in different contexts depending on the theme of the game. In addition, he thought that it is even possible to learn different kinds of accents due to the different backgrounds of the game characters or voice actors (See example 8)

Example 8:

Mikko: No, riippuen pelistä tottakai, voi tarjota. Että, englanninkielisissä peleissä voi hyvinkin tulla paljon rakenteellista oppia englannin lauseista ja lauseen muodostukseen. Tietenkin sanastoa eri konteksteissa riippuen vähän pelin teemasta ja sitten voi erilaisia aksentteja murteita kuulua näissä eri peleissä riippuen hahmon tai hahmojen taustasta tai ääninäyttelijöistä. Että, on siinä aika monta.

Translation: Well, it depends on the game, they can, yes. In games that are in English, one can learn a lot about structures of English sentences and how to form a sentence. Of course, one can learn different types of vocabulary depending on the themes of the game. One may also hear different accents in these games depending on the in-game characters' backgrounds or voice actors.

Joona also thought that one can expand their vocabulary by playing video games but also mentioned grammar, speech, listening comprehension, improved writing skills and reading comprehension as potential language learning possibilities through gaming (See example 9).

Example 9:
Joona: Öö, videopelit tarjoaa tosi paljon mahdollisuuksia oppimiseen esimerkiksi jos pelaa jotain peliä, missä käytetään tätä voice chattiä niin siinähän sitten luonnollisesti sitte opitaan puheen tuottamista sekä kuullun ymmärtämistä ja sitte jos mietitään sitä in-game tota chättiä niin siinä sitten ainaki kirjottaminen ja luetun ymmärtäminen nousee usein esille… No, sanasto on ainaki sellanen mikä, tota, paranee pelates ja sitte kielioppi voi parantua.

Translation: Um, video games offer a great number of possibilities for language learning. For example, if one is playing a game where players use voice chat, it is only natural that one learns to produce speech and improves in listening comprehension and if we think about in-game written chat, then at least writing and reading comprehension usually comes up. Well, at least vocabulary and grammar improve while gaming.

In addition, Joona mentioned that one could also learn different types of sentences and potentially improve in problem solving. He explained that in World of Warcraft, there are in-game quests that a player can try to complete. They are usually missions that involve bringing an item to somewhere on the map or finding and killing an NPC. At the start of the game, those quests might be easy and simple but as the game progresses, the difficulty increases. In those later stages of the game, if one wants to complete the quest, problem solving is required and therefore, ability to understand the clues that the game provides for the player (See example 10).

Example 10:
Joona: Ne on käytännössä tällasii tehtäviä, mitä peli antaa sulle, sanotaan ny että sun pitää viedä vaikka joku tavara jonnekki tai sun pitää käydä tappamas jotakin elukoita yms. Se voi olla hyvinki vaihtelevaa… Yleensä siinä pelin alussa ne on silleen suhteellisen helppoja että niissä ei mitään ongelmanratkaisua tarvita mutta sitten pelin edetessä ne vaikenee huomattavasti että sitten myöhemmin joo vaaditaan ongelmanratkaisua.

Translation: They are missions that the game gives for the player. Let's say you have to bring an item to somewhere or if you have to go and kill some creatures etc. It varies a lot. Usually at the start of the game they are relatively easy so the player doesn't need any problem-solving skills, but as the game goes on they get harder and problem-solving skills becomes more important.

When asked about what language skills the interviewees themselves had learned by playing video games, both had quite similar answers. Increased vocabulary was the first thing that both of them mentioned, which is not surprising since the games they play are in English so they could potentially encounter a great number of unfamiliar words daily. In addition to vocabulary, Mikko mentioned that he improved in conversational skills and got a "bigger picture of English as a language" by playing single-player games that have a deep storyline.

Both participants felt that communicating with other players in online multiplayer video games helped them in improving in the language skills they mentioned. Mikko explained that by speaking to other players using voice chat in Call of Duty, his pronunciation and overall language use improved. He added that by communicating with other players, he learned how to communicate with other people in a social context and experienced authentic language use by having "realistic conversations and language use with native speakers" (See examples 11 and 12).

Example 11:
Mikko: Sanoisin että on. Muistan ainaki joskus ku pelasin Call of Dutya lapsena niin silloin puhuin aina voice chateissä että siinä kyllä lausumista vähintäänki oppii ja aikamoista kielenkäyttöö myös. Ja, öö, sen kautta myös oppii kommunikoimaan muiden ihmisten kanssa silleen sosiaalisessa kontekstissa.

Translation: I would say yes. I remember when I played Call of Duty as a kid, I always used to talk in voice chat, so I improved in pronunciation and general use of language. And, um, by talking in voice chat one learns to communicate with other people in social contexts.

Example 12:
Mikko: Kyllä. Joo, ja realistista keskustelua ja englannin käyttöä silleen, natiivipuhujien kanssa.

Translation: Yes. And realistic conversation and use of English with native speakers.

Joona echoed Mikko's statements about communicating with other players being helpful in improving the skills they mentioned. He talked about having limited vocabulary when he was

younger, so communicating with other players was difficult for him. However, by observing how other players communicate with each other, he was exposed to the English language on a regular basis and attempted to mimic it. Joona also explained that in his case, he lives in a situation where he has limited opportunities for English use in real life situations. However, communicating with other players online offers much more of those opportunities. That is why voice chat in video games has been very helpful to him when it comes to improving in listening comprehension and producing speech (See example 13).

> Example 13:
> Joona: Joo ilman muuta. Musta tuntuu että varsinki se puheen tuottamine ja kuullun ymmärtäminen koska oikea elämä ainaki ittellä tuo rajotettuja mahdollisuuksia päästä käyttämään englantia tai päästä kuulemaan sitä niinku face-to-face tilanteissa niin ehkä sen suhteen se voice chätti on ollu kyllä iso apu.
>
> Translation: Yes, of course. I feel like especially producing speech and listening comprehension because in real life, I have limited chances to use or hear English in face-to-face situations so in that regard, voice chat has been very helpful.

4.3 Participants' experiences on written and spoken communication in video games

During this part of the interview, my questions focused on comparing written and spoken communication in video games. While the answers of the interviewees were very similar during the previous parts of the interview, this time they differ quite a bit from each other. However, both interviewees felt that engaging in spoken communication is more effective for language learning than written communication for slightly different reasons, though this may vary depending on the person. Both participants thought that there are differences in language learning from written and spoken communication in video games. For example, written communication is more effective for learning vocabulary and proper grammar while spoken communication is more effective for learning pronunciation, listening comprehension and different accents.

Mikko focused more on communication in competitive-like environments in his answers, while Joona focused on MMORPG type of games: World of Warcraft, to be specific. Mikko emphasized that communication with teammates is important for winning in video games. He mostly uses English with other players to reach a common goal, which is usually winning the match.

In contrast to Mikko, Joona did not discuss about winning or fast-paced communication. Communication in World of Warcraft is generally more relaxed, with common situations requiring communication being trading items or seeking help from other players. However, late-game content in World of Warcraft, known as "raiding", involves more competitive-like communication as players work as a team to complete challenging PvE (Player versus environment) activities. Raids require strategies and clear directions for success, often involving players with different accents as raid groups are often international. As a result, Joona highlighted the importance of listening comprehension. Joona also mentioned that raid groups can lead to players forming personal connections with each other and as a result, players tend to sit in voice chat while playing and engaging in casual conversation which leads to more natural interactions in English.

When asked about similarities between written and spoken communication in video games when it comes to English learning, Mikko could not find any, most likely due to the nature of the games he plays. In games that are very competitive and fast-paced in nature, communication is very different when comparing written and spoken communication. He explained that in League of Legends for example, spoken communication is quite rare between the players and they mostly use written chat. However, players still need to communicate with each other by using in-game written chat. Since the game is very fast-paced and intensive, players tend to use very simple and short sentences instead of explaining something in detail. Whereas in spoken communication, players tend to communicate way more in detail to explain what is happening during the game to achieve victory (See example 14).

Example 14:
Mikko: Mm, riippuu ehkä aika paljon silleen, öö, pelistä, hyvinki, koska, peleissä kuten League of legends se tota ääneen puhumisen puoli on niin paljon vähäisempi ja koska se on niin tiukan pacingin peli niin siinä pitää tosi tehdä aktiivisesti nopeeta kirjotusta niin siinä aletaan pilkkomaan sanoja käytetään lyhennyksiä kun taas sitten kun sä käytät voice chatissa englantia niin sillon sä haluut kertoo mahdollisimman tarkasti myös että mitä tapahtuu ja mitä voidaan tehdä että saadaan esimerkiks voitto. Niin siinä on sellanen merk- ei välttämättä merkitysero mutta sellanen… niin, chatis… kirjottaessa koitetaan saada vaan nopeasti se teksti ulos kun taas ääneen puhuttaessa niin koitetaan kuvailla huomattavasti enemmän.

Translation: Well, it depends on the game. In games such as League of Legends one does not make use of spoken communication that often and since the game is fast paced, one has to actively write so fast that people start to use abbreviations. On the other hand, when you use English in voice chat, then you want to explain what is happening as detailed as possible and what can be done to accomplish victory, for example. When one is writing in chat, the aim is to produce the text as quickly as possible while in spoken communication, players try to describe what is happening much more.

Unlike Mikko, Joona thought that there are some similarities in English learning from written and spoken communication in video games. Most notably, he thought that one will learn new vocabulary and improve in general communication skills and conversational skills (See example 15).

Example 15:
Joona: Mm. Kyllä mä uskon että niistä molemmista tulee opittua ainakin erilaista sanastoa ja.. mm.. ehkä sellaiset yleiset kommunikoinnin taidot öö kehittyy molemmis. Sillee ehkä keskustelutaidot.

Translation: Mm. Yes, I think one can learn vocabulary from both written and spoken communication and.. mm, maybe general communication skills improve in both methods of communication. Maybe conversational skills.

When asked about differences in language learning from written and spoken communication in video games, the answers were again very similar between the participants. Both thought that while engaging in spoken communication, one might not learn proper grammar that effectively compared to written communication. Instead, while using voice that, the player improves in pronunciation, learns different types of accents and listening comprehension. In written communication, the focus is more on grammar and new vocabulary (See example 16 and 17).

Example 16:
Mikko: Öö, no tota, tälleen, tottakai kun sä kuulet sitä kieltä, niin sä et välttämättä opi mitään kirjoitusasuja että, tai oikeinkirjoitusta. Kun taas, silloin sä opit lausumista oli se sit eri murteella tai aksentilla kun taas kirjotetussa kielessä koitetaan olla silleen aika, tota.. Kirjotetussa kielessä tulee enemmän esille se itse peli- pelisanasto mitä käytetään.

Translation: Well, of course when you hear the language, you don't necessarily learn how to write correctly. However, when you engage in spoken communication, you can learn pronunciation in different accents whereas in written communication one can learn more about the game-related vocabulary.

Example 17:
Joona: No tässä on justiin se, että puhutussa kielessä tulee se oma puheen tuottaminen, mitä oppii, kuullun ymmärtäminen, ja sitten tota.. pelin omassa chätissä on sanastoa.. Molemmissa ehkä tulee kielioppia mutta mä väittäisin että ainaki itte oppisin sitä ehkä kirjotetusta ehkä enemmän verrattuna puhuttuun.

Translation: In spoken communication one learns to produce speech and improves in listening comprehension and well, there is vocabulary in the in-game chat. Both involve grammar but I argue that I would learn grammar better from written communication compared to spoken communication.

When we were discussing different types of situations, where one might communicate with other players in video games, the answers were very different between the participants. Like before, Mikko discussed more about competitive environments due to his gaming habits, which mostly revolved around competitive FPS or MOBA games. Mikko emphasized that the most typical situation where players communicate with each other is when they have a common goal, which is usually winning. He explained that if one wants to win in games such as Call of Duty or League of Legends, communication is very important due to them being five versus five team games. He added that there are usually two types of situations where players communicate: When they want to encourage their teammates or when they want to knowingly discourage them by letting them know about their mistakes (See example 18).

> Example 18:
> Mikko: Öö, tota, erilaiset kommunikointitilanteet on varmaan just joku että öö, positiivista et se niinku et tsempataa öö, mitä sä teet oikein pelissä ja sit on taas se negatiivinen mikä on sitä että koitetaan mollata toista tahallaan tai sit vaan ollaan ilkeitä toiselle.
> Translation: Umm, different types of situations where players communicate with each other are when they cheer for each other and let their teammates know that they are performing well. Then there are the negative situations where players try to make other players feel bad on purpose or just say something for the sole purpose of being mean.

Due to the nature of World of Warcraft, Joona had more variation in his answers regarding the different types of situations where players communicate with each other. World of Warcraft is very different from League of Legends or Call of Duty because it is a role-playing game. It is not as competitive and attracts more casual players because players do not compete against each other in World of Warcraft. Joona explained that the most common situations where communication with other players is required are situations such as trading items with other players or needing help with something game related (See example 19).

> Example 19:
> Joona: Yleisin tilanne missä wowissa tulee kommunikoituu on se, että tarvit apua jonku asian suhteen tai sitten jos sä haluat tehdä vaihtokauppaa jostain tavarasta, esimerkkinä. Yleensä se on silleen että sä tarvit joltain pelaajalta apua tai palvelusta.
>
> Translation: The most common situation where one communicates in WoW is when you either need help with something or you want to trade items with other players, for example. Usually when you need help from other players.

Judging from Joona's answers, the communication in World of Warcraft generally seems to be more relaxed than in Call of Duty. However, there are also more competitive situations in World of

Warcraft where communication is an integral part of the game. We discussed the late-game content of WoW, which is "raiding". The terms "raid" and "raiding" refer to WoW group activity, where a group of players (usually around 25) engage in PvE activities. Raids are designed to be the most challenging PvE content available in the game. In raiding, the communication is different from the rest of the game since they are performed as a team, so it resembles competitive environments. Joona explained that in raids, players discuss strategies on how to complete the raid. In addition, there are hierarchies in raid groups, meaning that there are typically a few players that lead the groups and give directions to other players in the group on what to do. If one player does not understand the directions, it can ruin the whole groups' performance and usually means that the group fails to complete the raid (See examples 20 and 21).

Example 20:
Joona: Ja sitten tietysti jos mietitään sitä pelin loppukontenttia niin siel on tällasii raideja, joita sitten tehdään 10-25 pelaajalla ja siellä tulee kommunikoitua sitten erilaisia taktiikoita esimerkiksi.
Translation: When we think about late-game content, there are so-called raids, that can be performed in groups of 10-25 players and players tend to communicate different strategies for example.

Example 21:
Joona: Jooo no jos mietitään esimerkiks sitä raidaamista niin itte en oo niin sanotusti ollu yleensä vetämäs niitä eli mä oon yleensä se tyyppi joka antaa.. antaa sen jonku tai sen muutaman tyypin vetää sitä hommaa ja mä oon lähinnä vaan kuuntelijan roolis. Mä kuuntelen niiden ohjeita et mitenkä me toimitaan siinä ympäristössä ja siinä tulee sitä kuullun ymmärtämistä tosi paljo.

Translation: Yeah, well if we think about raiding, usually I'm not the guy leading the group. I'm usually the guy who lets others lead the raid and I'm usually just listening. I'm listening to the instructions on how to proceed in the raid and it involves a lot of listening comprehension.

Giving clear and logical directions and understanding them are both important skills in raid groups. In addition, the groups might be international due to the WoW servers being in Europe, so there can be different accents in the same group communicating through voice chat. Moreover, the raids can be quite hectic due to their high difficulty, so the ability to understand English and communicate in English is important while participating in raids (See examples 22 and 23).

Example 22:
Joona: No, sanotaan nyt näin, että sieltä on annettu ohjeet kaikille ja mullon esimerkiks joku tärkee rooli mikä mun pitää jonku taistelun aikana niinku siinä tehä ja mä en jostain syystä oo vaikka kuunnellu ohjeita tai mä oon ymmärtäny ne väärin niin se saattaa helpostikkin merkitä sitä, että me ei tulla pääsemään siitä taistelusta läpi ja

joudutaan yrittämään uudestaan.

Translation: Well, let's just say that someone has given the instructions and if I have an important role in a battle and I haven't listened the instructions or I have misunderstood them, then it can easily lead to losing the battle and then we have to start over.

Example 23:
Joona: Joo, se on eurooppalainen serveri mikä meinaa sitä, että siel on kaikennäköistä euroopan kansalaista että sielä tulee törmättyä aika monenlaisiin puhujiin.

Translation: Yeah, it's an European server which means there are players from different European countries and you tend to run into many kinds of English speakers.

However, we also discussed a different type of communicative situation that involves raiding. Since raids are always performed with a group of players, those same players tend to form permanent raiding groups. That leads to a situation where they get to know each other on a more personal level through chatting with each other in voice chat. It is common for players to sit in voice chat while playing and engaging in casual conversation, similar to chatting with a friend (See example 24).

Example 24:
Joona: Mutta sitten tällasten raidien vastakohtana sitten jotka on hyvin sillee organisoitua ja siel on muutamalla pelaajalla se prioriteetti kenelle annetaan puheenvuoroa, niin sitten tulee myös jauhettua, heh, silleen ihan.. normaaleita asioita mitä sä saattaisit sitten niinkun ihan face to face keskustelussa jutella. Että ihan niinku yleisesti saatetaan Discordissa puhuta kuulumisia, ja tällä lailla.

Translation: But in contrast to these raids that are very organized and there are few players that take priority when it comes to speaking, we also engage in casual conversations which resemble face-to-face conversations. Like, just catch up in Discord and stuff like that.

Finally, when I asked both of the participants, which method of communication in video games, written or spoken, is more effective in terms of general English language learning in video games, they both mentioned spoken communication but for slightly different reasons. Both interviewees thought that it depends on the person and both methods have different strengths and weaknesses.

Mikko explained that spoken communication is more effective because to him, multi-tasking, listening and understanding several people speaking to him simultaneously is easy. However, when he is reading text from in-game chat, he has to actively focus and make sure that he understands the text correctly. When producing language himself, he also felt that speaking is more efficient when it comes to learning because he feels like his brain works faster while speaking instead of writing. In

general, he thought that the two methods are both equal in potential of improving one's communication skills. He explained that written and spoken communication are both on the same level communication-wise, but it depends on the game. Some games require more fast-paced communication than others so spoken communication is more useful. However, in games where there is more time to focus on writing, it does not matter whether you are speaking or writing (See examples 25 and 26).

Example 25:
Mikko: Öö, ku mä kuulen puhetta nii musta tuntuu että mä pystyn kuulla tosi monta asiaa samaan aikaa kun taas kun mä luen niin mun pitää oikeesti keskittyä ja silleen aktiivisesti pitää huoli siitä että mä luen oikein ja tälleen että se on ehkä enemmän vaan sitä että mä oon parempi tälläsessa kuulemisen oppimisessa.

Translation: Um, when I hear speech I feel that I can hear many things simultaneously but when I read, I really have to concentrate and actively make sure that I am reading correctly. Maybe it's more like I am better in listening comprehension.

Example 26:
Mikko: Mä sanoisin että aika tasavertasii, koska ne on kummatki sillee about samalla tasolla kommunikatiivisesti samaa tasoa, mutta, se on vaan peleissä riippuen tottakai pelistä ja tilanteesta, niin kirjottaminen vaatii enemmän aikaa kun se että sä puhut. Ottaen huomioon esimerkiks Overwatchi, niin siinä on tosi vaikee kirjottaa samaan aikaan koska sä liikut WASD:llä, niin sun liikkuminen pysähtyy kun sä kirjotat jolloin se ei oo vaan yhtä tehokas metodina kommunikaatiossa.

Translation: I would say pretty much equal because they are both on the same level communication-wise, but it depends on the game and situation. Writing requires more time than talking. If we consider Overwatch, it is very difficult to write while moving since movement happens using the keys W, A, S and D from the keyboard, so your movement stops when you write making it less effective as a method of communication.

Joona also felt that engaging in spoken communication while gaming was more effective to him when it comes to language learning. He thought that using voice chat is better for learning how to communicate in real-life situations. However, he stressed that it depends on the person which way of communication in video games is more effective in English learning. Joona explained that if one has to engage in written communication often due to school or work, then using in-game written chat might be more useful for developing one's communication skills. Still, he felt that overall, spoken

communication is more effective in terms of improving one's communication skills (See examples 27 and 28).

Example 27:
Joona: Mm, no niillä on molemmilla omat vahvuutensa varmastikkin mutta ehkä henkilökohtasesti tykkään enemmän tästä voice chatin käytöstä koska se sitten valmistaa oikean elämän tilanteisiin paremmin ku tää kirjotettu, ku tää pelin sisäinen kirjotettu chatti.

Translation: Mm, well, both have their strengths for sure, but personally I prefer using voice chat since it prepares me for real-life situations better than in-game written chat.

Example 28:
Joona: Se riippuu aivan siitä että minkälaista sä joudut käyttämään että jos sä esimerkiksi sanotaan nyt että sä koulun tai töiden tai jonku puolesta joudut kirjottamaan paljo nii sitte ehkä siinä tapauksessa se pelin sisäinen kirjotettu chätti kehittää sun kommunikointitaitoja sulle paremmalla tavalla. Mutta, sitten mä väittäisin kuitenki että se voice chätti olis kuitenki se parempi.

Translation: It depends on what type of method of communication you have to use because for example, let's say you have to write a lot because of school or work, then the written in-game chat is better for improvement for you specifically. However, I would argue that voice chat is the better option.

5 CONCLUSION

The present study examined whether online multiplayer video games are useful in improving one's ability to communicate in English. The main focus of the study was to compare the two participants' interview answers to the previous studies in this field of language learning. The interviews conducted were semi-structured because they allow clarifying questions that help get more in-depth answers from the interviewees. The results of the present study were quite similar to the previous studies for the most part and also in line with my hypothesis, which was that video games offer various opportunities for language learning, including the potential for improving one's communication skills in an L2.

As was found out in many previous studies, including the study conducted by Rankin et al. (2006), both participants felt that they had acquired new vocabulary from gaming and communicating with

other players. This was not surprising because as was mentioned earlier in the present study, video games offer genre-specific vocabulary making it possible that one does not encounter similar vocabulary without gaming. In addition, both of the participants mentioned that they have always played video games for fun but learned English as a result of being exposed to it while gaming. This is in line with Prensky (2001), who argues that since the game is fun, it puts the player into a relaxed state, which makes the player more receptive to learning. Moreover, both of them were active in communicating with other players while gaming, helping them improve in English in general. This also corresponds to previous studies, where it was found that online multiplayer video games can provide various opportunities for authentic communication and increase exposure to L2 input and opportunities for L2 output, resulting in increased L2 learning (MacIntyre et al., 2001).

Regarding communication, there was one surprising result: Both Mikko and Joona felt that spoken communication was more effective for themselves when it comes to language learning but also in general. This is in contrast to many previous studies where it was found that spoken communication is not as learner friendly as written communication because the material is not easily reviewable. Voice chat is generally considered more demanding and that some people prefer written chat because it gives them more time to prepare their own responses and read others' text (Sykes, 2005; Sykes, Oskoz & Thorne, 2009, cited in Reinders 2012: 182). However, it is important to note that what the participants feel like does not necessarily mean that they actually learn better by engaging in written communication. As Mikko explained, he feels that he can produce language faster while talking, since he has to actively focus on written text. It is interesting that Mikko felt that he learns better by engaging in spoken communication, since he also mentioned that written communication requires him to actively focus on his language output. Studies suggest that written communication is more effective for language learning than spoken communication, because it allows the player to prepare more for their responses to other players. For Joona, he simply prefers spoken communication since he does not have many opportunities to speak in English in his everyday life, but online video games provide those opportunities for him.

Both of the participants' answers in general are in line with my own hypothesis as well as previous studies. The interviewees felt that by engaging in written and spoken communication in online multiplayer video games, they improved in their overall communicative skills. Constant interaction with other players helped them with second language acquisition. Also, both of them reported that one learns vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension while engaging in written communication and spoken communication improved their listening comprehension and language

output. This result is similar to Rankin et al. (2009), where students who took part in video game-based interaction ranked higher in listening, reading, and writing tasks than students who undertook regular face-to-face classroom instruction. In addition, as mentioned in chapter 2.2, those who use L2 more actively, have more potential in developing their language skills as a result of having more opportunities to communicate with others (MacIntyre et al., 2001). Both of the participants felt that constant interaction with other players has significantly helped them improve in their English communicative skills.

It is important to note that while the results of this study are similar to previous studies conducted about language learning and video games, this study had two participants, so the sample size is limited. In addition, their answers were based on their feelings and experiences, not supported by test results, for example. Both of the participants stated that they learned a great amount of vocabulary, grammar and generally improved their English fluency from communicating in video games. While believable, it is difficult to prove. However, most of their answers, such as vernacular games being helpful in learning L2 vocabulary (Ranalli, 2008) and improving in communicative skills (De Haan et al., 2010; Piirainen-Marsh & Tainio, 2009, cited in Reinders et al, 2022: 131) do correspond to similar studies in this field.

As stated by Godwin-Jones (2014: 11), "language learning through gameplay can happen in a wide variety of ways, from a planned learning activity in an instructional environment to an incidental by-product of a gamer's interactions with the game and its associated online activities". Further research on incidental language learning from vernacular games, such as observing a group of people's online gaming habits for extended period of time and comparing their English test results with a group of non-gamers, is warranted as there is a limited number of studies in this field of language learning.

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APPENDIX
INTERVIEW BASE

Haastattelurunko

1. **Yleisiä kysymyksiä videopelaamisesta**

   1. Millaisia videopelejä pelaat?

   2. Kuinka kauan olet pelannut pelaamiasi videopelejä? esim. 1-5 vuotta, 5-10 vuotta.

   3. Millaisia kommunikoinnin keinoja pelaamissasi peleissä käytetään pääosin: kirjallista vai suullista kommunikointia?

   4. Onko muiden pelaajien kanssa kommunikointi tärkeä osa pelaamaasi peliä?

   5. Pelaaatko yleisesti ottaen videopelejä huviksesi vai koetko hyötyväsi jotenkin videopelien pelaamisesta?

2. **Englannin oppiminen peleistä:**

   6. Tarjoavatko videopelit mielestäsi kielenoppimismahdollisuuksia? Millaisia mahdollisuuksia?

   7. Mitä kielenoppimistaitoja olet oppinut videopeleistä? (esim. kielioppia, sanastoa, kommunikointitaitoja…)

   8. Eroaako videopeleistä oppiminen koulussa oppimisesta? Kuinka?

9. Mainitsemistasi taidoista, joita opit videopelien kautta: Uskotko kommunikoinnilla muiden pelaajien kanssa olevan osuutta mainitsemiesi taitojen kehittymisessä? Miten?

3. Kielenoppimisen vertailu puhutussa viestinnässä vs. kirjallisessa viestinnässä

10. Millaisia yhtäläisyyksiä kielen oppimisessa on, kun verrataan kirjoitettua ja puhuttua viestintää videopeleissä?

11. Millaisia eroja kielen oppimisessa on, kun verrataan kirjoitettua ja puhuttua viestintää?

12. Onko videopelien avulla tapahtuvassa vieraan kielen viestinnän oppimisessa etuja/haittoja kouluihin verrattuna? Millaisia etuja/haittoja?

13. Millaisissa tilanteissa kommunikoidaan muiden pelaajien kanssa pelattaessa moninpelivideopelejä verkossa? (kirjallinen/puheviestintä).

14. Entä niissä peleissä, joita itse pelaat? Millaisissa tilanteissa yleensä kommunikoit muiden pelaajien kanssa?

15. Luuletko, että oppimisen kannalta on merkitystä sillä, millaisessa tilanteessa kommunikoit muiden pelaajien kanssa? Miten? (Esimerkiksi: tunnetko, että opit erilaisia viestinnän osa-alueita erityyppisissä kommunikointitilanteissa pelatessasi?)

16. Kumpi viestintäkeino on mielestäsi tehokkaampi kielenoppimisessa videopeleissä: kirjallinen vai suullinen? Miksi?

17. Kumpi näistä kahdesta mielestäsi parantaa kykyä kommunikoida englanniksi paremmin vai ovatko ne siinä suhteessa tasavertaisia? Miksi?

18. Millaista kielen oppimista mielestäsi tapahtuu, kun pelatessasi osallistut kirjalliseen viestintään?

19. Entä osallistuessasi puhuttuun viestintään?