

# **Video Games in Informal Language Learning : A Learner Perspective**

Bachelor's Thesis

Hanna Honkanen

University of Jyväskylä  
Department of Language and Communication Studies  
English  
Spring 2024

Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellinen tiedekunta	Laitos – Department Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos
Tekijä – Author Hanna Honkanen	
Työn nimi – Title Video Games in Informal Language Learning : A Learner Perspective	
Oppiaine – Subject Englanti	Työn laji – Level Kandidaatintutkielma
Aika – Month and year Maaliskuu 2024	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 18
<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Videopeliharrastukset ovat suuressa suosiossa kaikenikäisten kesken. Opetuksessa hyödynnetään usein opetuskäyttöön tehtyjä pelejä, kuten <i>Kahoot!</i>, mutta myös kaupallisia pelejä voidaan käyttää kielenoppimisen tukena. Videopelien on tutkittu auttavan kielenoppimisessa informaalisti, eli koulun ulkopuolella, esimerkiksi lisäämällä motivaatiota oppia.</p> <p>Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää videopelien käytön mahdollisuuksista kielenopetuksessa ja -oppimisessa. Tutkimusta varten koehenkilöt pelasivat viihhteellistä digitaalista <i>Blather 'Round</i> -peliä, joka on yksi Jackbox Party Pack 7 peleistä, ja vastasivat haastattelukysymyksiin pelikokemuksen pohjalta.</p> <p>Tutkimukseen osallistui 6 yliopisto-opiskelijaa. Tutkimuksen analyysi suoritettiin laadullisen sisällönanalyysin menetelmin. Tutkimukseen osallistujien mukaan peliä voisi mahdollisesti käyttää kielenoppimisen apuna esimerkiksi hauskana osana opetusta ja oppituntia esimerkiksi yläkoulukäisille.</p>	
<p>Asiasanat – Keywords</p> <p>video games, language learning, computer-assisted language learning, digital game-based learning</p>	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository JYX	
Muita tietoja – Additional information	

## Table of Contents

<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Video games in language learning</b> .....	<b>2</b>
2.1 Informal learning.....	2
2.2 Gaming and language learning (CALL and DGBL).....	3
2.3 Previous research on using games as an informal language learning tool .....	4
<b>3 Present study</b> .....	<b>6</b>
3.1 Aims and research questions .....	6
3.2 <i>Blather 'Round</i> .....	6
3.3 The data and participants.....	7
3.4 Methods of analysis.....	8
<b>4 Results and discussion</b> .....	<b>9</b>
4.1 Game features.....	9
4.2 Language learning experience.....	11
4.3 Other language learning features.....	12
<b>5 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>17</b>

## 1 Introduction

According to the most recent Finnish Player Barometer (Kinnunen, Tuomela, Mäyrä 2022: 15) 98.3% of Finnish people between the ages 10 and 75 sometimes play at least some sort of game. This includes all types of games such as board games, gambling, and card games. 80.3% play digital games at least sometimes and 65.1% of people play digital games actively, at least once a month. The average age of a digital game player is around 40 years, which indicates that “gaming” is not only a hobby for young people. The most popular device for playing digital games was mobile devices (Kinnunen et al. 2022: 25). Some of the most popular digital games include the gambling games from Veikkaus, the mobile game *Candy Crush* and a notable mention of the language learning app *Duolingo*, which was the 14<sup>th</sup> most popular digital game mentioned in the barometer (Kinnunen et al. 2022: 36). Different digital games can be and are already being used in teaching, for example, in Finnish schools now some popular options are *Blooket*, *Kahoot* and *Quizlet*.

In this study I am interested in finding out how commercial video games could be used to help with language learning and teaching. There has been previous research on the use of different games as language learning tools: there are case studies conducted with test subjects as well as analyses of different games and their affordances for language learning. My focus is specifically on the game *Blather 'Round* from Jackbox Party Pack 7 and whether it could be useful as an informal language learning tool.

In this report, I will begin by presenting relevant background data for using video games in language learning. I will explain about informal learning and how it relates to using video games in language learning and some key theories behind using video games in language learning. After that I will present the methodology of the present study as well as introduce the game used in the study. I will conclude by discussing the main findings of the study and the possibility for further research.

## 2 Video games in language learning

Before exploring how video games can be used in language learning, I will first introduce what it means to learn language informally. Additionally, I will present some main theories in using video games in language learning and some previous research on the subject.

### 2.1 Informal learning

Formal language learning is generally defined as using textbooks and structured curriculums as ways of teaching language, which try to make the language as authentic as possible while keeping within the formal context of language teaching (Dressman 2020: 2). Informal learning would then be defined as the opposite, as learning outside of the academic environment. Dressman (2020: 3) points out that in the past, authentic language experiences were more difficult to reach, and the current popularity of different media platforms help language learning even though they were not inherently meant for it. He also mentions the difference in acquiring language by consuming media and actively studying it and whether they have any difference or significance in language learning and teaching.

Motivation is an important aspect of learning in general. Chik (2020: 15) gives examples that a learner may be interested in learning the lyrics of their favorite foreign language song, but they are not at all motivated to continue learning in a formal context, or vice versa; a learner may be motivated to learn in school but not outside it. She points out that motivation to learn is dependent on the learner and not the teacher, therefore difficult to control or recreate in a formal learning environment. For many, video games, for example, can be fun and motivating, which can then lead to learning unintentionally. Gee (2007) points out that “success without effort is not rewarding; and effort with little success is equally unrewarding” (Gee 2007: 58). He states that video games are good at motivating the player, and by extension a learner, because they make the player want to at least try, make effort, and achieve success. When games, or anything, are challenging enough, the outcome for motivation and learning is the best. If they are too easy or too difficult, this affects the learner’s motivation negatively and therefore learning. Prensky (2001: 107) mentions that because the nature of games at best is to be interactive and social, this also makes them more fun. He also points out that not all games are good or have the previously mentioned elements of being, for example, fun, engaging and interactive. Consequently, not all games are suitable to be used in language learning and teaching.

Knight, Marean and Sykes (2020: 102) explain that gaming can happen in spaces that are either formal or informal. They state: “informal gaming spaces are gaming environments whose contexts of use are

not directly and explicitly tied to achievement measures in the classroom” (Knight et al. 2020: 102). They explain that formal gaming spaces are then, in contrast, connected to a classroom environment and receiving grades or other academic gain. The gaming related to the present study is therefore conducted in a formal gaming space, even though the game itself is not directly related to learning languages, since it is the researcher who tells the participants to play in order to learn and the participants have not had any say in the process.

## **2.2 Gaming and language learning (CALL and DGBL)**

Computer assisted language learning (CALL) is the use of computers in learning or teaching a language and is an essential field related to using games in language learning, however, it does not focus specifically on games. CALL includes all kinds of computer use for learning, such as dictionaries and videoconferencing, as well as computer games (Peterson 2013). CALL has been researched for a long time and the earliest studies Peterson (2010) mentions are from around the 1980s. With recent technological advances, the use of CALL with commercial games has increased (Peterson 2010).

Another essential field is digital game-based learning (DGBL). DGBL is the use of any online or computer game for learning purposes (Prensky 2001). Non-digital gaming, such as board games and role-playing, are often used in classrooms for, for example, simulations for oral exercises, and similarly, digital games could be beneficial in class. According to Prensky (2001: 106-107) games are engaging and interactive, which sets them apart from, for example, movies and books. He says that in addition to being fun and thus motivating, they have rules, clear goals, and provide feedback, which helps in learning. Reinhardt and Sykes (2012: 33) define game-enhanced and game-based language learning as separate. They propose that game-enhanced learning is using vernacular games as an aid in teaching and game-based is using educational games. According to Reinhardt (2019: 9) “game-enhanced pedagogy involves understanding how L2 learning dynamics emerge from gameplay, and identifying and evaluating the mechanics in vernacular games that afford them”. While playing casually can result in unintentional learning, understanding pedagogical objectives and using them purposefully while designing activities for vernacular, non-educational games could be a beneficial way of teaching L2.

A key term when discussing language learning through games is affordance. Affordance is exemplified by Reinhardt (2019: 111-112) as: “For example, given the right ecological conditions, the design of a button affords pressing by a finger, and a pencil affords writing (and erasing if it has an eraser) by a hand”. In the perspective of gameful learning, this means that game mechanics allow

certain kinds of actions in the right circumstances and can therefore be utilized in learning. However, because the circumstances and actors, in this case the player or learner, vary, the affordances are not exactly the same every time (Reinhardt 2019: 112). Reinhardt (2019: 114-115) demonstrates different affordances and how they can be applied for L2 learning, such as time and space, goal-oriented learning, and contextualizing language learning, as well as how they can appear in games and how they are related to pedagogical practices. Reinhardt and Sykes (2012: 35) point out that not all vernacular games are suited for game-enhanced pedagogy, and it depends on the features of the games themselves.

One thing to keep in mind when thinking about using games in teaching and learning is gaming literacy. The term “game literacy” was first introduced by Gee (2007). Gaming literacy is similar to any kind of literacy in the sense that it can be learned and is essential in order to be able to navigate gaming. Gee (2007: 18) points out that even reading different traditional texts, such as newspapers, poetry or legal texts, require that the reader possess different types of reading skills. Similarly, gaming literacy is needed to understand game mechanics and playing, but it might not be applicable to every type of game there is. It is not self-evident that all learners have equally good literacies, and this should be kept in mind when considering using games in language learning.

### **2.3 Previous research on using games as an informal language learning tool**

There are plenty of previous studies for different types of games, mainly focusing on the affordances of these games and some taking into account the learner perspective as well. Most notably the research about games and language learning seems to be centered around MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online role-playing games), the biggest of which is probably the game World of Warcraft. The game Jackbox has been mentioned in some studies (e.g., Zhang 2018), but I have not found studies where it was studied in relation to language learning.

One study is by Rama et al. (2012) where they studied the affordances of the MMORPG World of Warcraft for learning Spanish. Their main focus was on the socialization aspect of playing an online multiplayer game and what affordances it has for language learning. The results show that the participants were able to socialize with other players online and were thus exposed to authentic language situations. The game offered the affordance for communication within the gaming environment by having the participants be able to immerse themselves in the target language immediately when they started playing.

Similarly, in his study Ibrahim (2019) studied three native English speakers and their experiences learning Arabic by playing the single-player simulation-management game *Baalty*. The data was

gathered by having the participants write a gaming journal, play in an observed session, and be interviewed by the researcher, as well as screen recordings of the foreign language discourse the participants came across during gameplay. He discusses that the challenging nature of the gameplay motivated and engaged the players to participate in meaningful interactions and rewarded them with communicative practice. Even though the game is single player, it functions as immersive foreign language practice.

James and Mayer (2019) studied a group of beginner Italian learners, half of them learning Italian through the online language learning app Duolingo and the other half through a slideshow consisting of similar content. They studied the possible differences their learning methods may have. Their results showed that both groups learned the material equally, but the group playing Duolingo reported enjoying the lessons more and a higher motivation to continue their lessons than the slideshow group.

Eskelinen's (2012) BA thesis takes into account the learner perspective of gaming, where the participants answered a questionnaire and were interviewed after playing an online game. The participants reported having learned vocabulary, some specific to the game and some more general, as well as that their reading skills had improved. In her MA thesis, Eskelinen (2019) focuses on video games as a way for informal language learning, with the emphasis on motivation, game features and language and learning strategies. Her findings showed that the participants diversely utilized the language learning opportunities in games and that English is the dominant language choice with gaming.



### 3 Present study

In this section, I will present the aim and research questions of the present study. Additionally, I will describe the methods for research and analysis.

#### 3.1 Aims and research questions

According to previous research, video games can be used as a motivating way of learning foreign languages. Due to the engaging nature of most video games, authentic language learning situations can be created or emulated.

Although there have been many studies for various vernacular games that consider the learner perspective as well, none, to my knowledge, have been made about Jackbox Party Games. The Jackbox Party Games are unique in the sense that they are meant to be played socially. The aim of the present study is to find out if one of the Jackbox games, *Blather 'Round*, has useful features for it to be used as a language learning tool.

The present study aims to study how informal learning could be implemented in formal settings with using video games in a formal classroom setting. The study will be a qualitative one and not meant to generalize the results to all Finnish EFL learners.

The present study aims to answer the following questions:

1. Which features of the game make it useful for L2 learning?
2. Could the game *Blather 'Round* be used as a language learning tool in a classroom setting?

#### 3.2 *Blather 'Round*

The game used in the present study is *Blather 'Round* from *Jackbox Party Pack 7*. The game is what Reinhardt and Sykes (2012: 32) define as a 'vernacular' game, meaning that it is a commercial game not made for the purposes of language learning.

The game is a "party game", where a group of players (2-6 players) use their phones or other devices to play the game. The game can be played locally or remotely; only one person needs to own the game and can share their screen with the other players. The game begins with instructions on how to play and this part can be skipped by the players. The game is a guessing game where players take turns describing a popular culture prompt using the limited vocabulary given. The players get to choose their prompt from a list of six possible prompts. The other players will try to guess the prompt. The game lasts for two rounds and the players each have two minutes to explain their prompts using the words given. Players are awarded points for correctly guessing and explaining the prompts as well

as how fast they can guess the prompt. On the Jackbox website the game is described as such: “Blather ‘Round is a guessing game full of blundering, stumbling, and—yes!—blathering. You write sentences to describe pop culture phenomena to your friends, but you never get quiiiiite the right words. If you did, it wouldn’t be a game! It would just be describing things.” (Jackbox Games)

The language of the game is English, but the players can communicate with each other during the game in any language, if they play locally or have access to a voice chat. The game itself does not have a voice chat function. There is a function to turn off USA-centric prompts, which was turned off during the study.

### **3.3 The data and participants**

The target group for the present study was Finnish university students who have studied English as a foreign language. The participants were gathered by asking for volunteers at Jyväskylä University. The participants of the study were six university students, who volunteered for the study. There were two groups of three participants who first played the game and were interviewed after as a group. The interviews were conducted as a semi-structured group interview immediately after the participants had played the game. The interviews were conducted in Finnish.

Dufva (2011: 132-133) describes a structured interview as an interview where the questions are predetermined and asked from all the participants, which the interviewer then writes down for them. She mentions that a structured interview is a type of a questionnaire, with the difference being that usually the participants answer the questionnaire themselves. Additionally, she describes an unstructured interview as the opposite of a structured interview, where there are little to no formal questions and the interview flows freely. Denscombe (2010: 175) describes that a semi-structure interview is an adaptable way for the researcher to conduct an interview. The method gives the participants more opportunities to state their opinions.

All the participants had studied English in school but are studying in non-linguistic fields in university. The game used is owned by the researcher and the participants played on their own mobile devices. The researcher was present during the playing of the game but did not participate in the game or any discussions the participants may have had during the playing of the game, but observed the situation and made some notes. No prior instructions related to the game itself were given, so the participants had to rely on the instructions from the game. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for later analysis.

The participants had varying backgrounds in gaming. All participants reported as having played some video games in the past, but some had more experience than others. Two of the participants had

played other *Jackbox* games, but none had previously played *Blather 'Round*. During the interviews, the participants mentioned *Kahoot* as an example of a game used often in school, as well as *Quizlet*. They reported as having used *Kahoot* in language classes, but in other subjects as well.

### **3.4 Methods of analysis**

The data was analyzed through qualitative content analysis. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009: 103-104) describe the aim of content analysis as examining meanings in written text, which could be traditional writing in the form of books or transcriptions of interviews. They also say that the aim of content analysis is to sort the data without losing the information it has. This method is a way of quantifying qualitative data by, for example, categorizing or organizing patterns in the text for analysis (Denscombe 2010: 281-282). Any mentions of the interview will be made so that the participants cannot be identified by using pseudonyms for the participants (Kalaja et al. 2011: 23). In the present study, numbered acronyms will be used to differentiate the participants from each other.

## 4 Results and discussion

In this section, the results of the study will be presented and organized by themes. The participants will be referred to by numbered acronyms (participant 1=P1, participant 2=P2, etc.).

During the observed gameplay and subsequent interview about the gaming experience, the participants noted several features of the game and its gameplay that could be useful in a learning experience and some that might hinder learning.

### 4.1 Game features

One of the main features the participants reported was that the game's instructions were difficult to follow. The game starts with a brief explanation of what the players are meant to do in the game. The players can choose to skip the instructions, however, both groups decided to listen to the game's instructions. The participants in the first group explain how they felt about the instructions of the game:

P2: Mä en ainakaa heti iha niinku päässy jyvälle tai tavallaa arvannu, et miten se homma pelittää iha nitte ohjeitten jälkeen et se enemmän tuli ilmi siin kyl se aika nopeesti sen oppi mut se tuli ilmi ehkä siin vasta tehdessä et en heti sen alkuspiikin jälkeen viel tajunnu

P3: Joo sama juttu et mä siin ekakierroksen aikana vasta tajusin siinä ku laitoin niitä vihjeitä sinne et hetkonen

P1: Mun mielestä, no mie en ny oikein kuunnellu et mie menin tämmösellä asenteella et ”kyllä minä sen älyän sitten” mut tota joo kyllä sen siinä sitten kun teki mut musta tuntuu et näissä peleissä on aina vähän se et sitä pitää tehdä se yks kierros vähä sillee harjotteluna ja sit se lähtee niinku vauhtiin

P2: Mä viel yritin kuunnella kyllä ne ohjeet et mä panostin ihan tiekkö ajattelin semmosta kieliaspektia siinä tietysti pelatessanikin ni et tota mut et siitä huolimattaki en siinä kohtaa heti saanu sitä saanu kiinni ideasta

*P2: I didn't get in the game at first or like guessed how it works just after the instructions so it became clearer, well I learned pretty quickly but it became clearer when playing, I didn't figure it out right away after the beginning speech*

*P3: Yeah same thing, I figured it out only during the first round when I started putting the hints I was like hold up*

*P1: I think, well I didn't really listen and I had an attitude of “I'll figure it out then” but yeah it became clearer once you do it, but I think that with these games you always kind of have to play one round as practice and then you can play*

*P2: I actually tried to listen to the instructions, like I put effort in the language aspect as well like while playing too but despite that I couldn't immediately grasp the idea*

The participants in group 1, except for P2, admitted they did not really listen to the game's instructions before playing, even though they were not skipped.

The participants of group 2 had similar experiences with the instructions:

P5: Aluks tos ehk vähä vaikee mut sit ku pääs paremmi sisälle ni sit se helpottu

P4: Joo, tai ohjeet tuli ehkä turhan nopeesti siihe ruudulle ja pikkuse ehkä selkeemmi ois voinu mut sit ku siihe pääs mukaa ni oke, et seuraava kerta menis varmaa jo rutiinil

P6: Sama homma. Hauskaa ku pääs sisälle mut heti ei tajunnu niitä ohjeita

*P5: It was a little difficult at first but once I could get in the game better it became easier*

*P4: Yeah, the instructions were a little too fast and could have been a little clearer but once I could get into it I was like okay, so I think the next time would already be routine*

*P6: Same. It was fun when I got into it but I didn't understand the instructions right away*

Both groups had the similar opinion that the game became easier to play after the first round. During the gameplay, the participants in both groups also helped each other figure out what to do in the game. It is clear that the instructions the game provides are not sufficient enough for first time players, especially if the players have no previous experience in gaming.

Reinhardt (2019: 114-115) mentions “extramural, autonomous learning” as one affordance for a game, which means that the game designs afford the learner for independent learning without outside help. However, in the present study, it is clear that for language learning purposes, it would be beneficial to have separate instructions before the game, so that all players know what they need to do in the game and can more easily focus on the game itself, rather than having to spend time figuring out rules while playing. As previously mentioned in chapter 2.2, gaming literacy is a tool needed in order for the players to be fully able to play the game as it is intended. For someone who has rarely or never played video games, clear instructions are vital when it comes to understanding what to do, as illustrated here, where none of the participants had played the game before.

Both groups made note of the time restriction the game has; however, they had differing opinions on it:

Group 1:

P1: Mun mielest se aikaraja oli aika pitkä, mut tietysti jos se on joku nuorempi joka ei osaa englantia nii hyvin

P3: No oliha siinä hyvä että siinä on iha reilusti ehkä aikaa

P2: Joo munki mielestä se tuntu pitkältä se aika, toisaalta jos kuvittelis et pelais jollai et tavallaa se ois sellanen kieli mitä ei osais nii hyvin nii sit en tiedä voisko se sillon ehkä aiheuttaa

*P1: I thought the time restriction was kind of long, but of course if there's someone younger who doesn't know English that well*

*P3: Yeah well it was good that there was plenty of time*

*P2: Yeah I also thought the time felt long, but if you imagine it is a language you don't know that well it could help*

Group 2:

P5: Ehkä toi just aluks ku ei ehk pääse mukaan ni se aika on tosi pieni et siihenki vois käyttää enemmän aikaa toho arvailuu

P4: Ni jos miettii sovelluskehityksellisesti ni jos vaikka sais valita niitä aikoja tai sillä tavalla, mutta niinku ehkä toi kaks minuuttii ni voi olla aika lyhyt aika ainaki aluks

*P5: Maybe at first when you're not really in the game yet the time is not long enough, so you could spend some more time guessing*

*P4: If you think about development, if you could choose the times or such, but like maybe two minutes can be too short at least in the beginning*

Group 1 felt that the two-minute time for explaining and guessing was long, but that it was a good thing. Group 2 said that two minutes may not be enough. From observing the gameplay, it appeared that both groups could have benefited from having more time, especially during the first round of the game when they were not quite sure of what they had to do yet. The time restriction for each player each round is always two minutes and cannot be changed in the game's settings.

The issues with the game's time restrictions could be solved the same way the lack of proper instructions can be solved, by having clear, separate instructions before playing the game. This would give the players time to prepare for the allotted time limit and they can focus on playing the game more efficiently.

## 4.2 Language learning experience

Both groups pointed out that one of the main positive things about the game is the vocabulary and the fact that the words to explain the prompts are already given and the player must combine them to get the other players to guess the correct prompt:

Group 1:

P1: Ehkä ne valmiiks annetut sanat ja ehkä se et ne piti laittaa siihe lauseeseen, mut sit kieltämättä jotkut niistä sanoista oli vähä semmoset, vaikka ite mielestäni osaan englantia aika hyvin, ni siel oli vähä semmosia mikä tuo adjektiivi on en oo ikinä kuullukaa. Mut vähä ku siinä pääs, tai on pakko käyttää sitä englantia niin kyllähän siinä oppii tai ei voi olla oppimatta

P3: No varmaan se just ku on pakko käyttää sitä kieltä ni se jotain opettaa, ainaki ku sä niinku ajattelet sillä kielellä enemmän ni se niinku

P2: Joo se on totta, varsinki jos sit vielä siinä vastatessakin ikäänku koko ajan käyttäis englantia, ainaki jossai kohtaa mä sit aloin niitäki sit kirjoittelee englanniks jostain syystä sillee sitä enempää miettimättä, ehkä siinäki tulee sit sitä kielenkäyttöä lisää siihen mukaan

*P1: Maybe the words that are already given and maybe that we had to put them in a sentence, but admittedly some of the words were like, even though I think I know English pretty well, there*

*were some like what is that adjective I have never even heard. But when we got to, or had to use English so you have to learn, or like you can't not learn*

*P3: Probably because you have to use the language so it teaches something, or at least you think in the language more so that*

*P2: Yeah that's true, especially if you use English all the time answering as well, at least I started to write them in English without giving it much thought, maybe that's where you get some of the language use*

Group 2:

*P5: Tos ainaki sanavarasto varmasti kasvaa, ku se antaa niit tiettyjä ehdotuksia, ni siel ois varmasti semmosii mitä ei ehkä tuu perustunneilla, vaikka just se 'eccentric', nii ni se ei oo ehkä semmone mitä niinku perus kielentunneilla saattaa tulla nii usein esii, ni se saattaa auttaa yhistelee niit uusii sanoj ja käyttää niitä tiettyssä kontekstissa ni se ehkä saattaa helpommi jäädä sit päähän ku sä käytät niitä ja mietit ja sitte katot mitä sielt tulee*

*P4: Jep, mut just että varmasti sanavaraston ja erilaisen, sanavaraston rikastuttamismerkitykseen varmasti ihan hyvä*

*P5: At least your vocabulary will get bigger, when it gives you the specific suggestions, there's probably ones that you don't really see in basic classes, for example 'eccentric', like that might not be one that you use in basic language classes that much so it might help to combine new words and use them in specific contexts so you can remember it easier when you use them and think and then see what you can do*

*P4: Yeah and for vocabulary and different, for the enrichment of vocabulary it's probably really good*

The participants pointed out that having to use the language of the game, in this case English, it helps them use the language without having to think about it. Because the game is in English and the players need to answer in English as well, they use the language almost passively.

### 4.3 Other language learning features

As previously mentioned in chapter 2.1, motivation is a key element in informal learning. Group 2 mentioned that playing games during class time is motivating, because it is fun:

*P4: Kyl mä näkisin et varmasti niinku, ainaki jos ite sytyin näin paljo ni miksei se niinku oppilaitaki sytyttäis et varmasti ja just niinku aina yleensä ku näillä kännyköillä ruvetaan niinku pelaamaan ni se on aina yleensä kivempaa ku se kirjan lukeminen ainaki omasta kokemuksesta*

*P5: Ja sit kummiski vähä semmone hausk- tai erilainen tekeminen on aina hauskempaa ku just se että vaa katotaa niit kirjoja ja opetellaa sillee normaalisti ja sit varsinki ku jos saa kavereitten kaa tehdä ni yhdessä sillee et se opettaja ei oo nii sanotusti ehkä koko aja siin puuttumassa tai se ei oo nii ohjattuu ja strukturoituu ni sit se on varmasti hauskempaa tehdä sitä kans*

*P4: I would see it like, at least if I find this to be this much fun, why wouldn't it be fun for students, at least usually when they get to play on their phones it's more fun than reading the book, at least in my experience*

*P5: And then kind of like fun- or different activities are more fun than just that they look at the books and teach normally and especially if they get to do it with friends so that the teacher is not involved all of the time or like it's not as structured, so it's definitely more fun to do*

The participants mentioned that compared to a more formalistic language learning approach, such as learning from books, a game like this would be fun and different. A game like this could help students for self-directional learning by motivating them to learn without the guidance of a teacher. Reinhardt (2019: 115; 126-129) lists “opportunities for languaging and social collaboration” as one of his gameful affordances for L2 learning, where the game itself is designed that it cannot be completed without collaborating with other players. With *Blather 'Round*, the game is by design a ‘party game’ and cannot be played alone. The game mechanics themselves promote collaboration between the players by, for example, encouraging the players to talk between themselves during the gameplay and showing everyone’s guesses to all of the players. P5 suggested it may be beneficial to have students play the game with people they know, so they can have some clues about the prompts based on what they know their friends might know. This could also help the players work together more.

*P5: Joo varsinki jos saa tehdä jotai omii ryhmii ni ehkä tietää myös mitä siin kaveriporukassa saattaa tietää ni sitä voi sillee vähä valita ja valikoida niitä tota aiheita siellä sen mukaa että ei ota tai voi haastaa tai sitte et voi löytää semmosii niinku aiheita tietää mistä ehkä porukka tietää ni voi sen mukaa sit iteki sitä haastetasoo nostaa tai laskee*

*P5: Yeah and definitely if they can make their own groups so they'll know what their friends might know so they can choose the topics based on that, so they won't take some or they'll challenge or pick topics they know others know about, so they can lower or increase the challenge level*

The participants were asked which grade they think the game would be suitable for, if it was to be used in a classroom setting. All participants agreed that the game could be suitable for students who are a little older.

Group 2:

*P4: Mäki niinku, yläaste lukio joo, että ei ehkä iha seiskalle mut sanotaa joku kasiysiluokka lukio ni semmone*

*P6: Lukiossa varmasti semmone tietämys noista mitä tuolla on noi personit ja sarjat ja muut ni sitte tietää enemmän*

*P4: Me too, like lower and upper secondary school, maybe not like seventh grade but let's say eight ninth or upper secondary school or something*



*P6: In upper secondary school they definitely have knowledge of the persons and series and such so they know more*

Group 1:

P2: Ehkä jonneki, jos ite aattelis nii jonneki niinku toiselle asteelle ehkä ja en tiä oisko sitte niinku yläkouluunki jo, en tiä et kuinka paljo se taso vaihtelee just sitte et kuinka hyvin osataan

P1: Varmaa joku semmone niinku yläaste, joku yheksäs luokka tai semmone

P3: Kyl varmaa yläkoulu vois olla, lukios ny olettais et jotai muutaki pitäs tehdä, tietenki johonki vieraampaan kieleen vois soveltuu paremmin, ku englantii kaikki osaa nii hyvin, että lukios onko tää liian helppoo

P2: Nii vois aatella et siinä ei sit nii paljo ois enää mitää opittavaa

*P2: Maybe somewhere, I think like upper secondary level maybe and I don't know if like for lower secondary school as well, I don't know how much the level varies so how much they know*

*P1: Probably like lower secondary school, ninth grade or something*

*P3: Yeah probably lower secondary school, I imagine in upper secondary school they have to do other things, although it could be good for like some other foreign language, because everyone knows English so well, maybe this would be too easy for upper secondary school*

*P2: Yeah you could imagine they don't have much more to learn*

Group 1 discussed whether the game would be too easy for upper secondary school students and added:

P1: Nii kuitenkin se sanasto oli siellä sillee aika tuttu, et sit ehkä jolleki lukiolaiselle sillee nimenomaan kielenoppimisen kannalta ni ehkei välttämättä tai varmaa saattais olla just sillee liian helppo, mut varmaa jossaki yläasteella, mut emmie kyllä toisaalta nää miksei vois myös lukiossa ku siinä kuitenkin pääsee käyttää sitä kieltä ja se on hauskaa. Oppiminen on kivempaa ku se on hauskaa

P2: Nii se on vähä kevennyksenä. Mut vaikee miettiä jos ite pitäs ny, vaikka jos toi sama peli ois vaikka saksaks ni pystyiskö sitä pelaamaan tuolla yliopiston kurssilla, ni en kyllä tiä sillee kuinka, oisko se niinku mikä se tavallaa just se niinku se kielitaso millä sit niinku pystyis jo pelaamaan

*P1: Yeah anyway the vocabulary is kind of familiar, maybe for like upper secondary school it may not be good for language learning purposes or it may be too easy, but for lower secondary school, but I don't see why this couldn't also be in upper secondary school because you can still use the language and it's fun. Learning is nicer when it's fun*

*P2: Yeah like as a light activity. But it's difficult to think if I had to now, like if that same game was in German for example, could I play it in my university course, I don't know how, what would the language level be where you could actually play*

P2 contemplated playing the game in a different language than English. They were not sure what level of language skills would be needed for the game. P1 thought the vocabulary may be too easy for upper secondary school students and they might not necessarily learn new vocabulary from the

game. However, as pointed out in the earlier example, P1 said the game had some unfamiliar vocabulary for them as well, but they did not think it to be a hindering factor for learning or gameplay.

The main reason the participants seem to find the game too easy and maybe not suitable for language learning purposes is because they feel learners may already have good knowledge of English and this game may not afford them new learning experiences. Nevertheless, the participants have mentioned that even just using the language helps learning, so while the players may not necessarily learn anything new while playing, they may get help with confidence and consistency in using the language.

This is again in connection to motivation, as stated in chapter 2.1 with a quote from Gee (2007: 58): “success without effort is not rewarding; and effort with little success is equally unrewarding”. If a video game is too challenging or not challenging enough, the players lose motivation. As a small classroom activity, the game *Blather 'Round* might be challenging enough for even more advanced students.

## 5 Conclusion

The study of using video games in informal learning and playing video games in general has increased in recent years. Playing can increase motivation to learn almost passively because it is fun. Previous studies, as mentioned in chapter 2.3, have supported these claims. However, the field of studying the use of video games in language learning is rapidly evolving and further study will be needed continuously.

The purpose of this study was to find out whether the game *Blather 'Round* is suitable to use in language learning. The study was conducted by interview to let the participants talk freely about the gaming situation and their opinions on the game. For further study, it may be beneficial to conduct the interviews one-on-one instead of as a group, so that all the participants may express their opinion without the influence of other participants. It could also be useful to broaden the target group to other age groups for more varied results.

There have not been studies on the Jackbox games specifically, but other vernacular games have been studied extensively. The findings of the presents study are similar to these other previously done studies. In general, using the target language helps with learning and motivation, because the game itself is entirely in English. Some of the game's features themselves help in language learning, in particular, the relevant topics of the game combined with the fun aspect of playing. However, the participants found that the game's rules were confusing and a hindrance for learning. According to the participants the game *Blather 'Round* could be a useful tool in language learning and teaching when used in a classroom setting.

## Bibliography

- Chik, A. (2020). Motivation and Informal Language Learning. In M. Dressman and R.W. Sadler (eds.), *The Handbook of Informal Language Learning*. Wiley-Blackwell, 15-26.
- Denscombe, M. (2010). *The good research guide: For small-scale social research projects*. Open University Press.
- Dressman, M. (2020). Introduction. In M. Dressman and R.W. Sadler (eds.), *The Handbook of Informal Language Learning*. Wiley-Blackwell. 1-12.
- Dufva, H. (2011). Ei kysyvä tieltä eksy: kuinka tutkia kielten oppimista ja opettamista haastattelun avulla. In P. Kalaja, R. Alanen and H. Dufva (eds.), *Kieltä tutkimassa. Tutkielman laatijan opas*. Helsinki: Finn Lectura, 131-145.
- Eskelinen, S. (2012). *Applying video games in language learning and teaching: The learner perspective: a case study*. Unpublished Bachelor's thesis. University of Jyväskylä, Department of languages. <https://jyx.jyu.fi/handle/123456789/38299>
- Eskelinen, S. (2019). *Single-player video games as an informal language learning environment: views and experiences of gaming young adults*. Unpublished Master's thesis. University of Jyväskylä, Department of languages. <https://jyx.jyu.fi/handle/123456789/64245>
- Gee, J.P. (2007). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ibrahim, K. (2019). Foreign language practice in simulation video games: An analysis of game-based FL use dynamics. *Foreign language annals*, 52(2), 335-357. <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12388>
- James, K. and Mayer, R. (2019). Learning a second language by playing a game. *Appl Cognit Psychol*. 33: 669– 674. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.3492>.
- Jackbox Games: Blather 'Round. <https://www.jackboxgames.com/blather-round/> (3 April, 2023).
- Kalaja, P., Alanen, R. and Dufva, H. (2011). Minustako tutkija? Johdattelua tutkimuksen tekoon. In P. Kalaja, R. Alanen and H. Dufva (eds.), *Kieltä tutkimassa. Tutkielman laatijan opas*. Helsinki: Finn Lectura, 8-32.
- Kinnunen, J., Tuomela, M. and Mäyrä, F. (2022). *Pelaajabarometri 2022 : Kohti uutta normaalia*. [online] Tampere: University of Tampere. <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-03-2732-3> (17 March, 2023).
- Knight, S.W.P., Marean, L. and Sykes, J.M. (2020). Gaming and Informal Language Learning. In M. Dressman and R.W. Sadler (eds.), *The Handbook of Informal Language Learning*. Wiley-Blackwell, 101-115.
- Peterson, M. (2010) Computerized Games and Simulations in Computer-Assisted Language Learning: A Meta-Analysis of Research. *Simulation & Gaming*, 41(1), 72–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046878109355684>
- Peterson, M. (2013). *Computer games and language learning*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Prensky, M. (2001). *Digital game-based learning*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Rama, P., Black, R., Van Es, E., and Warschauer, M. (2012). Affordances for second language learning in World of Warcraft. *ReCALL*, 24(3), 322-338. doi:10.1017/S0958344012000171
- Reinhardt, J. (2019). *Gameful Second and Foreign Language Teaching and Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Reinhardt, J. and Sykes, J.M. (2012). Conceptualizing Digital Game-Mediated L2 Learning and Pedagogy: Game-Enhanced and Game-Based Research and Practice. In H. Reinders (ed.), *Digital games in language learning and teaching*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 32– 49.
- Tuomi, J., and Sarajarvi, A. (2009). *Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi*. Tammi.
- Zhang, F. (2018). Intergenerational Play Between Young People and Old Family Members: Patterns, Benefits, and Challenges. In J. Zhou and G. Salvendy (eds.), *Human Aspects of IT for the Aged Population. Acceptance, Communication and Participation*. Cham: Springer, 581-593.