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CURSO DE LICENCIATURA EM LETRAS INGLÊS

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**VIDEO GAME USAGE IN THE ACQUISITION OF VOCABULARY FOR
ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

CAXIAS DO SUL
2020

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Monografia apresentada para obtenção
do título de Licenciado no Curso de
Letras-Inglês pela Universidade de
Caxias do Sul.

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CAXIAS DO SUL

2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my family, especially my mother, for always encouraging me to be better, and for being with me through the best and the toughest of times, and yet still believing and encouraging me.

Giovana, for being my emotional stone every step of the way of this research. You inspired me more than you can imagine, and I am so grateful for every minute of my existence since I've known you for. Thank you for sharing your good life with me.

To my friends, who offered me countless hours of entertainment in many video games, and for whom I have always being able to count upon, for whatever it may be, some even contributing with this very work (I won't mention names, but thanks John).

For my wonderful instructor Sabrina, I have nothing but good comments to make of our relationship. Thank you for helping me achieve this, even when I was difficult to work with, or late when responding your messages.

I extend this thanks to every professor who has passed their wisdom upon me. They helped make me who I am today.

And finally, my personal thanks to every game developer out there. From Nintendo, Gearbox, Hi-Rez, Adamgryu, Bethesda, Dodge Roll, Mojang, From Software or any gaming company, big or small, corporate or indie. Were it not for you, a lot of people would not have worlds to claim as their own, and characters in which they can see the reflection of their inner selves. You provide the world with so much story, magic and light, and were it not for video games, I would certainly be an incredibly dull and uncreative person.

*I think that inside every adult is the heart of a child.
We just gradually convince ourselves that
we have to act more like adults.*

Shigeru Miyamoto

ABSTRACT

The main focus of this research is to look through multiple video games to find possible uses for them as a means of vocabulary acquisition for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). Seeing as we live in a time of quick technological evolution, with an ever-expanding catalog of innovations which are becoming more readily available every day, it would make sense to utilize these technologies as a support in our learning. As such, interactive media, such as video games could be utilized with great benefit in language learning, more specifically, with the acquisition of vocabulary if the proper research and methodology is used. The methodology for this research consists of an analysis of the video games, utilizing the gathered literature review of previous research and methods as a basis for the games' assessment and analysis. With that in mind, three games were assessed, studied and the main vocabulary points of each were outlined, together with possible activities for each of them that could help in the acquisition of vocabulary. The games were selected based on their genre, the way in which English is presented (written, spoken, real-time conversations) and English level (A2, B2 and C1 or C2); all so that an autonomous learner or even a language teacher/tutor could possibly apply these games, basing themselves on these criteria. The analysis does bring forth many ways in which the selected games can be effectively worked with in the acquisition of vocabulary for EFL; with each of the video games bringing something important into light, such as the ability to study the language as much as necessary for the acquisition, systems of meaningful real-time communication, and a distinguished variety in vocabulary not only amongst each other, but in each of them.

Keywords: video games; vocabulary acquisition; assessment; EFL.

RESUMO

O principal foco nessa pesquisa foi a busca através de múltiplos vídeo games, para encontrar seus possíveis usos como um meio de aquisição de vocabulário para aprendizes de Inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL). Vendo que vivemos em uma época de rápida evolução tecnológica, com um catálogo expansivo de inovações que estão ficando mais imediatamente disponíveis a cada dia, faria sentido utilizar as mesmas como um suporte em nosso aprendizado. Assim, mídias interativas, como vídeo games podem ser utilizadas com grandes benefícios no aprendizado de línguas, mais especificamente, na aquisição de vocabulário se uma pesquisa e metodologia apropriadas forem usadas. A metodologia para esta pesquisa consiste em uma análise de vídeo games, utilizando-se da revisão literária de pesquisas e metodologias prévias como a base para a avaliação e análise dos jogos. Com isso em mente, Três jogos foram avaliados, estudados e os principais pontos de vocabulário de cada um foram delineados, junto com possíveis atividades para cada um deles que poderiam ajudar na aquisição de vocabulário. Estes jogos foram selecionados baseados em seu gênero, forma como o inglês é apresentado (escrita, fala, conversas em tempo real) e nível de Inglês (A2, B2 e C1 ou C2); tudo isso para que um aprendiz autônomo ou até mesmo um professor/tutor de linguagem pudesse possivelmente aplicar estes jogos, se baseando nesses critérios. A análise traz à tona muitas maneiras na qual os jogos selecionados podem ser efetivamente trabalhados para a aquisição de vocabulário para EFL; com cada um dos vídeo games mostrando algo importante, como a habilidade de estudar a língua o quanto for necessário até a aquisição, sistemas de comunicação significativos e em tempo real, e a variedade distinta em vocabulário não somente entre si, mas em cada um deles.

Palavras-chave: vídeo games; aquisição de vocabulário; avaliação; EFL.

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1 INTRODUCTION

We live in a time of quick technological evolution, with an ever-expanding catalog of innovations which are becoming more readily available every day. Yet some of these technologies, including but not limited to video games, may still be many times overlooked when it comes to using them as a different medium or approach in the learning and teaching of vocabulary of English as a foreign language.

That brings the question of, whether or not video games can be used as a means of vocabulary acquisition for English as a foreign language. In order to ascertain this, the main focus of this research shall be to analyze how video games can be effectively used to aid in the self-learning and/or teaching of English vocabulary in the EFL context; as well as correlating the interactive narrative of video games with its use as a meaningful complement in the vocabulary acquisition.

The specific objectives of this research are as follows:

- a. To review of existing literature regarding vocabulary acquisition by EFL learners.
- b. To elicit and correlate of studies on the topic of video game usage in EFL with the previously mentioned literature review.
- c. To suggest the application of different video games for EFL vocabulary acquisition, with some possible activities and pointers.

The main technology focused on this research will be, as previously stated, video games, seeing as each game has a singular way of presenting itself, and their own ways of using the English language. All of them also could work with certain characteristics of learning, not the least of which is the acquisition of vocabulary (GEE, 2009), and there are in fact multiple reasons why they should be investigated in the first place.

First and foremost, it is necessary to pinpoint the aforementioned “singularities” in presenting English through this media; each genre, and almost every different game has a unique way of presenting its language, and each could have great value in the teaching of English. For example, in some

video games the language can be mainly written as text on the screen, but it could also be read aloud by voice-actors in dialogue, and in many cases, words or even complete vocabularies are created for the plot, mechanics or even genre of the game. An example of this could be found on multiplayer online games, where words and acronyms such as *scrim*¹, *x1*², *camping*³, *clutch*⁴, *meta*⁵, *nerf*⁶, and *GG* or *GGWP*⁷ are used with great frequency; these words are natural to someone well versed in said games, but would be hard to understand for someone outside this sphere, seeing as they usually carry out different meanings than the word's original definition.

Secondly, the video games' versatility as a tool in language teaching is worth mentioning. There is a great amount of available video games, and most of them could be effectively used through multiple methodologies as a complement in teaching English vocabulary. I personally learned English through playing video games, in special the adventure, and role-playing game genres, be them *MMO's* - massive online multiplayer- or single player *campaigns*, and I found that more often than not these types of games have a more extensive use of written and spoken language; my experience suggests that having a source of English that was intrinsic to me - seeing as it was meant as a source of entertainment- that the learning of a foreign language became more natural, and seemed to be a mere consequence of experiencing those video games. Of course, this is not the case with all learners, including those that do not play video games and those who do not intend on learning a foreign language through gameplay. In this context, the games themselves would not be utilized solely for their entertainment purposes, but as a means of interaction with the English language.

¹ A training match between two teams of high skill and or professional players;

² A match with a single player against another, intended on settling disputes, finding out who is a better player, training, or even entertainment;

³ Standing on one particular place or area for a long period of time in order to kill off enemy players easily, or avoid conflict;

⁴ When a player wins against the odds, usually when they are alone against the entire, or most of the enemy team, and/or is at low or even a single hit point (health);

⁵ A selection of weapons, items, mechanics or characters that are considered strong, and therefore are used the most in any given period of the game;

⁶ To weaken a specific weapon, item, mechanic or character that is considered too strong or unbalanced; the name has its origins with the "Nerf" sponge dart guns;

⁷ Good game, and good game well played, respectively; Appraisals for the enemy team after a match ends.

The making of more in-depth studies of this media, should bring forth a great number of interesting new methodologies, and helpful insights for the EFL classroom teachers and students. The making of more in-depth studies of this media could bring forth a great number of interesting new methodologies, and helpful insights for the EFL classroom teachers and students.

Last but not least, in terms of research, many forms of it already exist on these media at a singular level, as is the case with Ebrahimzadeh and Alevi's 2017 work: *The effect of digital video games on EFL students' language learning motivation*; despite that, the topic of vocabulary acquisition has not been the focus on that same research. Such gaps in the themes of research, accompanied by a personal experience of learning English primarily through video games, served as motivation in investigating this subject, and will be elicited in the next section.

One study was also carried out regarding the incidental vocabulary acquisition through video games (LØKKE, 2016); however, this study is mainly focused on the learning of said vocabulary through a single video game - *Bastion*, released in 2011 by Supergiant Games. By itself this study presents some interesting pointers, such as the students' progression throughout the learning process, but even still, the addition of multiple different sources of research should benefit and enrich the result of the studies, even if said research is not quantitative in nature.

Not to be outdone, other studies that served as a basis for the development of this research include Poštic's 2015 article: "Influence of Video Games on the Acquisition of the English Language", which provides good quantitative statistics regarding the correlation between video game playing and overall school grades, including as well some pointers regarding video game language practice, such as repetition, and guided narrative/language. A complement for the online games comes with the work of Cornillie et al. (2012), where the real-time interaction between players, that is, the instant communication to work towards resolving the in-game conflicts and objectives, gives the student an immediate feedback on their English, and the information acquired during their performance aids in the learning process, serving as a stimulant for language acquisition. It should also be noted that in

their 2013 paper, Lemos and Dalvi note the “[...] growing demand for the multi and transdisciplinary study of this media and that its area is expanding.” (LEMOS, DALVI, 2013. p. 23)

Based on these studies/research, and the ones that will be mentioned going forth, the methodology of this research will consist of an analysis of video games, based on the literature review that will be outlined in the next section. Three video games will be selected based on their vocabulary, proficiency required in English, genre variety and age restrictions.

A small portion of each game will be selected to be analyzed for time constraints and also to make sure that the activities are concise and effective. In the sections selected for each game, specific vocabulary points will be presented, including words, phrases and even the different forms in which English is brought up in each game (text, speech and their permutations). Throughout this analysis, basic activities and acquisition strategies will be pointed out with the main goal being how they fit into each of the games and their respective vocabularies.

In the following sections of this paper we will present:

- a. The literature review consisting of previous research that served as a basis for the analysis.
- b. An assessment of the games as a whole, based on their genre, age rating, level and presentation of English, and how each game will be worked.
- c. The individual video game analysis, as was previously stated, divided into a general overview of the games’ plot, mechanics and English and the in-depth analysis of the selected sections of each game.
- d. And finally, an overlook on the entire research, including the final remarks, and pros and cons found during the development of it.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In his 2013 paper, Jonathan Ostenson makes a compelling point in ascertaining the narrative in video games as a proper medium for teaching his students, connecting the stories in games to the more traditional storytelling media. He proposes multiple perspectives on the subject, from the basic narrative study of the stories, to in-depth analysis which takes in consideration some of the aspects original to video games, such as the branching plotlines centered on the choices of the player. This research brings forth interesting points to look at, when considering the role of a specific medium in the teaching of a language. For instance, we must consider that fictional and non-fictional storytelling has been around for a really long time, and although the more traditional methods of exposing these works are in fact acceptable for use in teaching, new approaches and methods for showing storytelling are always being created; they should, in fact, be used in education, instead of being still treated with the same stigmas of a couple of decades ago.

According to a quarterly report made by Newzoo's Tom Wijman in April of 2018, the video game market was expected to reach \$137.9 billion by the end of the year, amongst its estimated 2.3 billion consumers. These numbers alone should be enough evidence to show just how massive the gaming sphere actually is. Yet still, they are overlooked, or simply found difficult to be applied as a tool in the aid of teaching and learning. Both of these alternatives are addressed on Jackie Mader's (2012) interviews on the subject:

[...] she has struggled to find games that assess students as they play, so kids may spend time on a level that is too high or too low for them. Several of Sahadevan's colleagues have embraced technology and encourage students to bring their own devices to school to engage in online learning. (MADER, 2012)

In addition, storytelling is proved to be a viable method of vocabulary acquisition - as is indicated by Mason (2004) and Farizawati (2016) studies- which should further sustain the usage of video games, seeing as there are plenty of video games focused mainly on their story - such as visual novels

and role-playing games - but even when this is not the case, the English language is still very much present in this medium.

Word learning is a very extensive theoretical field in linguistics, with many authors contributing with their findings; it is sometimes hard to concisely organize such information, but a good job of neatly organizing and presenting the aspects required to know a word was done by Laufer (2008, p.141). She divided these aspects into six main topics: Its *form* - whether or not it is written or spoken, its form varies based on its spelling and pronunciation respectively; its *structure* centered around its morphemes, derivations and inflections; the *syntactic pattern* of the word in a phrase or a sentence; its *meaning*; its *lexical relationship* with other words - as in hyponyms and synonyms; and finally its *common collocations*. Looking at the focal point of language learning in this research through these aspects of vocabulary acquisition gives a good basis of what to look for and how to be better prepared in terms of vocabulary learning methods and strategies.

There are multiple available strategies to learn and retain new vocabulary. Prasshneel Goundar (2015, p.296) presents a graph which divides the strategies of vocabulary learning process through four different categories: metacognitive, cognitive, memory and activation. What strategy or combination of strategies is the most efficient varies from person to person, therefore planning a definitive vocabulary acquisition methodology for an EFL class or group could prove to be difficult, if not impossible. What should work as a more appropriate alternative in this context, is analyzing the language contained within the video games, and treat it similarly to how you would treat different texts or transmissions of language, such as books and other storytelling means. Of course, in order for this to be effectively applicable, the learners' background and interest must be taken into account; if they dislike or have never played a video game before, if they have difficulty accessing the material or any other reason should be mediated and accounted for by the teacher who applies this medium previously to its usage, and during its application, in order to ascertain a proper education.

Moreover, the interactive narrative built in video games could prove to be advantageous in maintaining a sense of uniqueness in the story; that is,

each learner would experience the games' story in their own way depending on when and how they interact with certain story elements.

In the subject of interaction, Douglas Brown (2001) lists principles that form the foundation for the structure of an interactive theory in English learning, with four of them fitting the interaction present in video games, with them being:

- **Automaticity** states that the focus on the meanings rather than the linguistic form or grammar is the best form of human interaction.
- **Intrinsic motivation:** as students fulfill acts of speech amongst one another they can build a system of self-reward.
- **Risk-taking:** In order to interact, one is required to risk failing to interpret or produce the intended meaning.
- **Communicative competence:** Encompasses grammar, discourse, sociolinguistics, pragmatics and strategic competences; and all of them must work in coordination in order to have a communication.

Given the interactive nature of video games, these principles are sure to appear in one way or another throughout games (even being considered as general characteristics of video games), but more importantly, their presence allows for a clear assessment tool in the upcoming analysis.

Even though at first glance, the language present in most video games may seem superficial, and seems to only work towards guiding the player into being able to play the game, it is certainly not the case. The language present in them is far more complex than just what is present in tutorials, and the plethora of different language terminologies, lexicons and vernaculars present within video games gives them a lot of potential for use in vocabulary acquisition, as stated in Chik's research: the learner will make an effort to understand the language in order to partake in the game, in other words they will "[...] overcome linguistic barriers for gaming purposes" (CHIK, 2011, p.41).

Not to mention the multiple interpretations and methodologies that would be able to be worked with, just with the manner in which a game's plot and story is presented. No matter if this plot is as simple and succinct as the Atari's 1983 *Crystal Castle's*: "*Get the gems Bentley Bear*", or if it is long and complex like Bioware's 2009 *Dragon Age: Origins'* 740,000 words script; the

storytelling present in video games could be used in just about the same way that the more conventional forms of literature and storytelling when working with English.

While discussing the language present in video games and their implication for vocabulary acquisition, the presence of *collocation* on video games must be mentioned. Simply put, collocation refers to the way in which two words or a short phrase are typically used together, and create a meaning that is impossible to be reached by looking at the words by themselves (an example coming from the aforementioned: *Get the gems Bentley Bear*); collocation is a skill that is well learned by users of videogame, since it provides real language usage in a specific context, facilitating memorization (MCCARTEN, 2007). Moreover, collocations can be extremely useful for helping with the context guessing aspects of vocabulary acquisition, whereby a learner extrapolates the meaning of words or sentences through context. By noticing how video games can make extensive use of words in conjunction (i.e. collocations) the learner can in-turn determine their meaning, and use it to find the meaning of other words, having a better chance of vocabulary acquisition in the process.

Let it be known that video games are not a universal media, or as Silva so eloquently puts it: “[...] the literacy in *games* is not something naturalized” (SILVA, 2019, p. 1230, our translation). So, it would be unreasonable to assume that the games and activities presented henceforth would work in any setting without disturbances. This research, and all contents herein, are intended on giving pointers and ideas to work with them that might help in the acquisition of vocabulary by EFL learners. These ideas are intended to contribute with the EFL learner’s learning and autonomy, and the games that are to be analyzed going forward will require some amount of the learner’s interest in order to be effective in its usage as a tool for vocabulary acquisition.

Efficient second language learning involves a timely movement of the control of a few language forms into the automatic processing of a relatively unlimited number of language forms. Overanalyzing language, thinking too much about its forms, and consciously lingering on rules of language all tend to impede this graduation to automaticity. (BROWN, 2001, p.56)

On the subject of autonomy, Dickinson (1994) gives the definition of autonomy as: “[...] meaning that the learner is involved in making the necessary decisions about his learning.” When a learner takes control of a video game character, they are tasked with actively commanding their every move, in the same way, when a learner plays a game in a different language, he is tasked with being active in his involvement with the target language. This nature of the learner brings about 5 main skills (DICKINSON, 1994) they are able to do:

1. Identify what they are learning: Awareness.
2. State and follow their own purpose.
3. Selecting and implementing appropriate learning strategies.
4. Monitoring and evaluating their own use of said learning strategies.
5. Monitor their own learning.

These skills reflect an autonomous learner, and as such, these attributes can be utilized as a focus, or a conduct for establishing the activities and methodologies chosen from this point on.

The main reasoning for the selection of the literature works and research mentioned, and the ones that will appear going forward was to not only have a better understanding on how vocabulary acquisition works, and ways of developing the skills necessary for a smooth and satisfactory learning experience, but also to create a different overall experience in the learning process with the games selected. Lastly, the variety of the game genre was also taken into account, as the different mechanics and presentations of each game bring forth their own challenges, benefits and ways to be worked with (SILVA, 2019).

Having discussed the theoretical basis for the analysis that will take place, in the following sections we will begin to look into the selected video games, and gathering some insights on them.

3 GAME ASSESSMENT – THE WHY AND HOW:

This section will start to outline the video games that have been selected, including some basic aspects of the games and how they will be worked with going forward.

First up, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, an adventure role playing game (RPG) released originally for the Nintendo 64 in 1999. The game, set in the fictional land of Hyrule, accompanies Link⁸, a Kokiri child who leaves the forest as commanded by the Great Deku Tree, who foresaw his destiny to save Hyrule from the demon king: Ganondorf. Through his adventures, he meets the princess of Hyrule, Zelda, who aids him in order to thwart Ganondorf's plans.

This fantasy story has many elements common to the famous template of the monomyth⁹, or hero's journey as its more commonly known, where the hero goes on an adventure, emerges victorious through a crisis, and returns home transformed. The main themes in the game narrative surrounds the power of being good, generous, and courageous through adversity. The game counts with several supporting characters and settings, including five separate and distinguished races of people, from fish persons to rock-eating mountain folk, all with their own views of the world and way of interacting with the protagonist.

Shigeru Miyamoto, Nintendo game designer, director and producer of *Ocarina of Time*, discussed how the game was not built from a story on an interview, but rather how the elements of the game interacted with that story. Quote:

There are people who wrote the story, and of course, if you have no story, you're in trouble. But, more than the story itself, I think the various character settings and other factors are what make the fundamentals of the game come to life. (MIYAMOTO, 2011)

The overall character dialogue, including written accents, mannerism,

⁸ Although the canonical name of the hero is Link, the player can freely choose his name at the start of the game; this gives the opportunity for the learners to immerse themselves in the story, and take the role of the protagonist for themselves, should they choose to name him after themselves.

⁹ Term coined by Joseph Campbell in his book: *The hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949); the book goes more in depth regarding the definition and characteristics of this concept.

catch phrases and distinction among different people are only a few of the particular ways the English language is present in this game. Combine it with many *puzzles*, villages and people to interact with throughout a fully compelling and interesting story, and you have a great game to be worked with.

The second game of choice is the *Hi-Rez Studios'* 2014 third person¹⁰ *multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA): Smite - Battleground of the Gods*. This game has the player take control of one of the, at the time of writing, one hundred and eleven¹¹ playable gods, deities and legends from different mythological pantheons, such as Greek, Roman, Japanese, Hindu, Norse, Polynesian, and others.

The settings of the game vary, with inspirations for the maps coming from the aforementioned pantheons. The game revolves around two teams fighting against each other towards accomplishing a main objective, such as killing the enemy “*titan*” while destroying *towers* and *phoenixes* to clear the path to said titan, or escorting a set number of ally *minions* through an enemy portal, whilst defending your own team’s portal. The game features many different ways of working with the language, such as having individual lore and *skill descriptions* for every god derived from their original mythos¹², in a clear and simple way, without diminishing the religiousness of some deities, and importance of said stories.

As well as having a narrator during matches and full voice acted characters, *Smite* also features an in-game system of communication called *Voice Guided System* or *VGS* for short. By using the *VGS*, players can tell their teammates an entire sentence, command, response or even a joke¹³, by pressing three or more keys on their keyboard; it is a great way to provide fast communication in the action packed matches this game provides.

Not only that, but from a relatively recent version of the game, you can

¹⁰ You control the character from a camera located behind him, also known as “over the shoulders” perspective; *Smite* was the first MOBA to introduce a third person perspective, putting the player closer to the action, and differing from the genre’s original top down view of the game.

¹¹ Full list available at: <https://www.smitegame.com/gods/>; new gods are added fairly regularly.

¹² Examples found at: <https://smite.gamepedia.com/Zeus#Lore> and <https://smite.gamepedia.com/Zeus#Abilities> for Zeus’ lore and abilities respectively.

¹³ A few examples of *VGS*: *I’m returning to the base*; *Be careful left*; *Help middle lane*; *Enemies behind us*; *Ok*, *No*, *Yes*, *Nice job*, *Good luck*; it should be noted that there are jokes or taunts that vary from god to god.

use your own microphone in order to talk to the other players on your team. This provides not only a chance to practice the language in real time with other EFL, ESL or even native speakers, but provides feedback for the language usage throughout the entire match; while also putting the learner's communicative competences in practice, including its discourse and pragmatic elements (BROWN, 2001, p. 166).

The final video game selection is *Borderlands 2*, a futuristic *first-person shooter* developed by *Gearbox Software* and published by *2K Games* in 2012. The game takes place on the planet *Pandora*, a faraway barren wasteland filled with dangerous creatures, bandits, and the rarest and most sought-after material in the universe: *Eridium*.

Your job as the player, is to stop the trillionaire dictator: *Handsome Jack* in his quest to find a *Vault* hidden beneath the planet that is said to house the most powerful weapon in the universe. The player controls a "*Vault-Hunter*" of his choosing (there are 6 available classes, which change some gameplay elements) and fights his way through the horrors of Pandora using an arsenal that is *looted* from the world, enemies or is bought through vendors.

While the gameplay may be as simple as *aim and shoot, move and drive*, the overall narrative of the game is not only rich in backstory and lore, but is also quite realistic. Characters have sense of humor, interests, and distinguishable personalities. The game also features something not usually addressed in English teaching, that is, the reality of different language uses. By using English, you may not always talk to people in a formal setting, in fact, if you go abroad to English speaking countries, that will seldom be the case. *Borderlands* features a variety of accents, humors and even crass language, innuendos, fast speaking in some cases, slang, puns, and so much more. This manner of interacting with the player makes it so that one of the most farfetched of premises and the unbelievable scenarios presented seem as grounded and real as it could be.

The proposition of working with these three games revolves around the learner's autonomy, that being, the vocabulary acquisition will be, for the most part, dependent on the learner's manner of approaching each game, as the strategies proposed tend to put him on the lead role of research, and seeking

understanding regarding the new vocabulary (DICKINSON, 1994). This also places the burden on the learner for their assessment, a method with many advantages and whose big disadvantage would lie in the subjectivity of the learner. (BROWN, 2001, p.415). It should be considered a viable method, all the same, the method applicator's discretion is advised when suggesting or working with it.

3.1 GAME ASSESSMENT – ANALYSIS POINTERS AND INDICATORS

Some of the reasoning for the choices of games has already been explained, nonetheless, it should be stated that for their English application, each game was picked not only for their vocabulary options, but also for their possible age recommendations and language skill groups usage:

Ocarina of Time, has an *ESRB*¹⁴ rating of *E (Everyone)* and its English can be read at the students' own pace, with some characters even asking if the player would like to read the dialogue once more.¹⁵ The language contained also is akin to a fairy tale, or epic adventure, with many of the language either in or in a small variation of formal English.

With an *ESRB* rating of *T (Teen)*, *Smite* should be reserved for intermediate learners of B1 or B2 levels, not only for the presence of more complex language and the *VGS* system also requires some amount of proficiency in order to properly understand some of the meanings. Also, the level of strategy and coordination could benefit from someone with more experience both in years as well as with language.

And finally, *Borderlands 2* has a rating of *M (Mature)*, and the language presented in this game is much different from the ones talked about before. Not only there is written and spoken dialogue, with a huge presence of humor, vulgarity, gore and colloquial language, but also the fact that many characters speak rather quickly, with accents or draws, and even fluent speakers can have

¹⁴ The Entertainment Software Rating Board rates games based on their content in order to help parents decide on the games they buy for their children. Additional information on ratings available at:

<https://www.esrb.org/ratings-guide/>; All ratings for the games worked here were taken from this website.

¹⁵ Example image from the character *Kaepora Gaebora* available at:

https://64.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_lzcv8ptKkN1r5kqjio2_500.png

a hard time understanding some of the dialogues. Fortunately, subtitles are available, and the sheer amount of variety of language and vocabulary present, even in the beginning sections of this game make up for the restrictiveness of its usage, be it because of age, fluency, or actual interest in the stylization of the game.

Furthermore, the choice of utilizing the ESRB ratings for the assessment of the games was done so as to ascertain that the learners are not exposed to materials inappropriate for their ages, seeing as some of the games suggested have the presence of violence and suggestive themes; although it should be stated that the teacher or applicator of these materials should de-brief and evaluate their students/learners prior to the use of these games, so as to ensure the possibility of meaningful acquisition.

With all that in mind, in the next chapter we will go over the selection process of specific portions of each game to be worked with, as well as pinpointing the main aspects to be focused on when devising the activities that should aid in the vocabulary acquisition for each of the utilized video games, highlighting sections of important English depiction and establishing projections of possible student difficulties.

4.1 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME – GAME OVERVIEW

In order to work with this game without taking up too much of the learners' time, the section of the game that was selected to be worked with is from the beginning of the game until about a third of the way through, when the player pulls an *item* called the *Master Sword* from its pedestal located inside the *Temple of Time*¹⁶. In doing so, the student should go through 8 of the main game locations where you can interact with people, with them being: *The Kokiri Forest, Castle Town, Lon-Lon Ranch, Kakariko Village, Death Mountain Trail, Goron City, Lake Hylia* and *Zora's Domain*. Intermixed with these locations are three *dungeons* filled with puzzles that the player must go through, in order to retrieve 3 *magical stones* that open the door inside the Temple of Time (located in Castle Town), where the Master Sword is located.

While it may seem extensive, the playable area of the game is quite small, and going through these locations is the only way to ensure the learner makes contact with almost all of the people present in the game. The importance of this contact is in the various nuances shown in the presentation and dialogue of the different races found in Hyrule.



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¹⁶ This should take anywhere from 6 to 10 hours total, depending on the students' pace;

¹⁷ From left to right in the picture, we see: A Goron, a Hylian, a Zora and a Kokiri. Image available at <http://www.angelfire.com/games/link40/encyclopedia.html>

4.2 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA OCARINA OF TIME – A TOUR OF HYRULE

In this section the different people present in Ocarina of Time will be presented, as well as their speech differences and some notable methods and activities to work with them.

As its name might suggest, the Kokiri live in the Kokiri Forest, and they consist of children created and protected by the *Great Deku Tree*, they never grow old, nor do they leave the forest, they are joyful and playful, and each kid has a companion *fairy* that follows them around. Their dialogue is marked by many uses of interjections and jovial words like “*Tee hee*”¹⁸ and “*meanie*”¹⁹.

Castle Town, Lon Lon Ranch and Kakariko village are home to the *Hylians*, people with pointy *elven-like* ears that are as diverse in size and gender as humans. They speak rather normally; in a way you would expect to see in literature books. However, due to the player’s character being young, some adults may speak to him as such, with some characters calling him *little boy, kid, punk, young man*, etc.

Death Mountain, and subsequently Goron City, is the home of the *Gorons*, the mountain people with dim wits, great resilience, and an appetite for rocks. They show a great sense of brotherhood, calling their leader *Big Brother*, and any other Goron or *kin* brother as well. Some of the Gorons speak with a noticeable “dullness”, that is, a simplified speech, much akin to a beginner (A2 level) in the English language.

Finally, the *Zoras*, aquatic beings that live near the lake and rivers of the land, with their home being the fountain of all the water in Hyrule. The Zoras are proud and speak in reverence towards their king and deity. They also speak utilizing many adjectives, perhaps not a staple for their kind, but it should be noted nevertheless.

As an extra challenge to the learner, this game contains puzzles required for the progression of the story; be that as it may, many learners might find difficulties in going through this aspect of the video game, which is completely acceptable, and for those that either want to go through the plot

¹⁸ An exclamation or representation of laughter – amusement or derision.

¹⁹ A mean or selfish person. A villain.

more quickly, are not good at puzzles, want to find everything possible in the game, or even just need some aid, there are innumerable *walkthroughs*²⁰ available online that should help them through every step-of the way, which serve as a great source of vocabulary all on their own.

One of the aspects that sticks out in this game in terms of English, is the overabundance of descriptors. Since the game puts you on an unfamiliar land, with many unnatural places, enemies and even people, it makes sense from a story development perspective, that all characters would be very descriptive in terms of myths, past or present events and other characters. Furthermore, the game uses these descriptors to teach the player how to play, including how to control the character, use items and how to beat enemies; Laufer (2008) states that vocabulary acquisition occurs best when inserted into meaningful contexts, which is exactly what the game does.

Finally, in order to prepare the students to undertake significant vocabulary acquisition whilst playing Ocarina of Time, the learners are encouraged to not only talk to any *non-playable characters (NPCs)*, as well as taking notes of the story and the explanations given. Nation (2005) proposes an exercise where students use dictionaries to gather the meaning of reoccurring words, which is a completely acceptable way for many learners to understand new words. Another mean cited is to seek the context of the words. Here is an example of what this approach could imply for the learner:

In the upcoming example image, we see a dialogue that takes place close to the beginning of the game, spoken by the Great Deku Tree. Two descriptive adjectives and an uncommon noun could be noted here, whose meaning can be extrapolated from the context of the sentence they are present in: *wicked*²¹, *dreadful*²² and *curse*²³. If the learner finds, or already knows the meaning of one of these words, they can guess the meaning or at the very least,

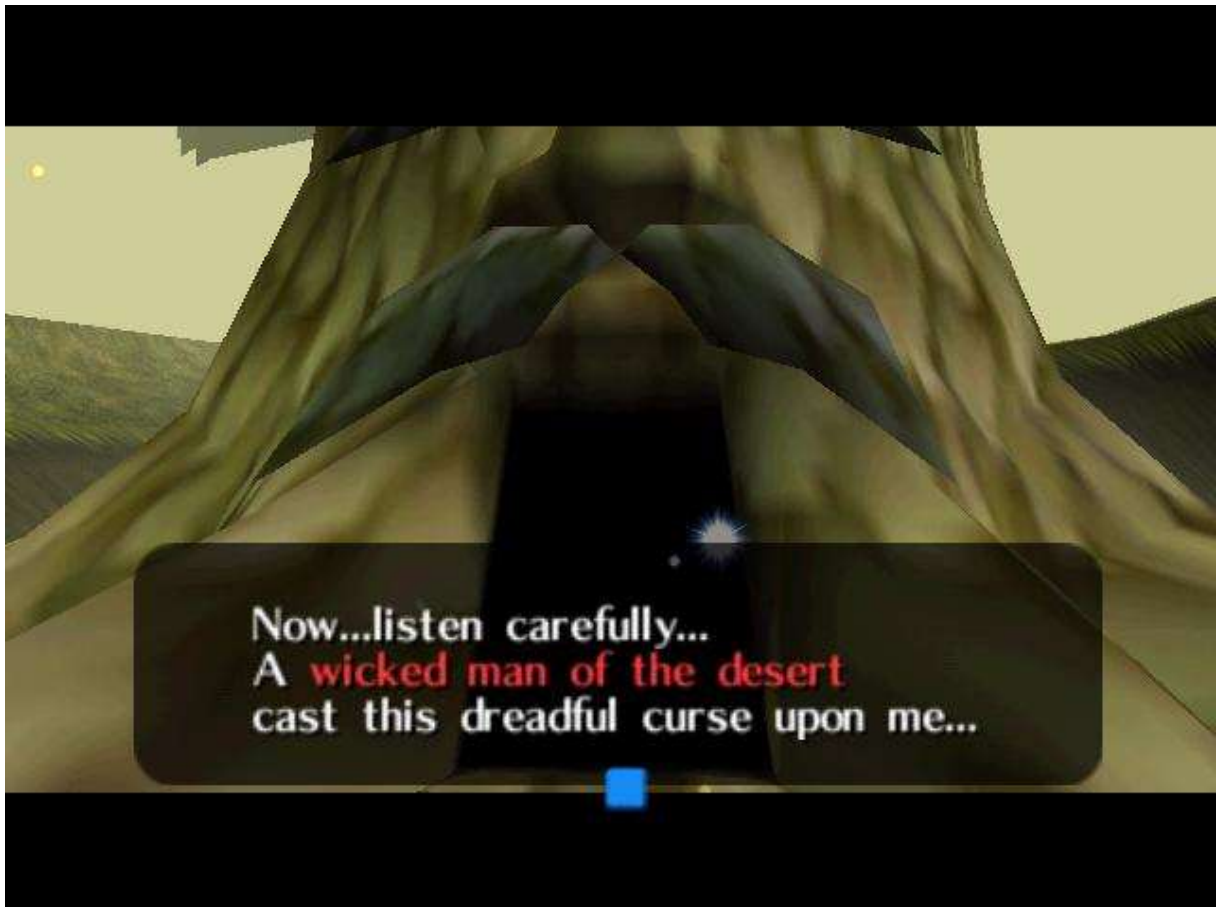
²⁰ Guides built to help a player to beat a game in its entirety or in sections. Usually consistent of step-by-step guides of different sections, tutorials on how to acquire certain items or how to find certain secrets, and user reviews on difficult parts or enemies. Full walkthroughs for The Legend of Zelda series are available at: <https://www.zeldadungeon.net/>

²¹ Adj. evil or morally wrong.

²² Adj. causing or involving great suffering, fear or unhappiness.

²³ N. a solemn utterance intended to invoke a supernatural power to inflict harm or punishment on someone or something.

an approximation of the meaning of the other words, through their relation with each other. If they know the meaning of wicked, they can assume that something cast by said wicked person would be bad by nature, thus they can infer that dreadful is an adjective meaning something bad or unpleasant, and that the action it is describing must mean something that would be bad for the one it was cast upon.



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The same logic applies for the other two words, and in fact all dialogue the learner may encounter throughout his experience. This method requires some amount of grammatical knowledge, namely with the order of the sentence elements, nevertheless, it is beneficial for Ocarina of Time specifically, because of the game's written dialogue that progresses at the players' request; there is no rush when dealing with the contextualization of vocabulary and pacing of the overall understanding.

Another exercise available, would be for the learner to actively describe both the story of the game, and the characters they encounter. The teacher

²⁴ The *Great Deku Tree*, tells the player about his curse. Image available at <https://www.zeldadungeon.net/>

would allow the learners to play the game on their own free time (such as homework) and give them a few pointers for there to be little to no doubts, such as referring them to a walkthrough, or giving specific tasks such as talking with five different NPCs, then, in class, the teacher would work alongside the students in elaborating and improving their summaries and descriptions.

In the first exercise, it will help consolidate many of the descriptors they have already seen being used by the game characters, but with their own point of view. A summary can be a good way for the learner to show their understanding of not only the story, but the elements used to describe it, and can be an evaluation as to whether or not the learner truly understands the meaning, collocations and grammatical functions of a word, aspects integral to the learning of a new word (ÁDÁM, 2013).

These methods described here are ones common in many educational systems, mainly with task-based language teaching methods, whereas, the focus throughout the gameplay relies solely on meaning, with the formal aspects coming before or after said gameplay in the form of (de)-briefings by an instructor (CORNILIE et al, 2012). In the case of this research, it should be stated that while the games selected and their activities were conceived with the thought of minimal assistance necessary in the learner's acquisition journey; the idea coming from maintaining and developing their autonomy as well as a mostly incidental vocabulary acquisition, the presence of a professional in the field to provide aid, guidance and overall support throughout the entire process is not discouraged, and in fact, could prove beneficial, providing the learner with a more adequate and straightforward acquisition.

In this case, it would be the teacher's job to check the students progress, making sure they are talking to NPCs, taking notes on the story and even taking breaks throughout the game. Afterwards, the correction of the materials provided by the learners alongside the feedback on their acquisition may prove to be more than sufficient for the meaningful acquisition of vocabulary.

Ocarina of Time's setup/payoff mechanics are very interesting from a

pedagogical point of view, where the game teaches a player how to play, and rewards him for remembering said teachings. This setup/payoff can be seen any time the player remembers an item that might affect an enemy or a puzzle. An example of this could lie in the enemy description of *Beamos*, a common enemy found from the second dungeon onwards. If the player asks his fairy companion, *Navi*, to identify a weakness of this enemy, she states: “Watch out for its searching beam! I bet it doesn't like smoke to get in its eye!”²⁵. When you first encounter this enemy, you have no means of producing smoke on your own, yet later in the same dungeon, you come across a *bag full of bombs*. When the player tosses a bomb, they may notice that upon explosion, a large cloud of smoke appears; if they then try to toss a bomb at a *Beamos*, they will manage to blow it up, offering a chance to get a free bomb as loot, or at the very least, an easier time exploring the room they are in.

The implications such mechanics have on the acquisition of vocabulary are uncertain, however this does share a connection with one of the Interactive principles as laid forth by Douglas Brown (2001, p.166): the principle of Intrinsic motivation, where, as a student becomes engaged in acts of fulfilment and the more they appreciate their own competence in using the language, the more they are likely to pursue their learning, in a system of self-reward.

In light of this, should the learner realize that the payoff of learning how to play a game could also be directly related to them learning a language, at the very least vocabulary-wise, they may find themselves more willing to further invest their time in this activity, with the goal to better themselves and their language skills. A branch of this reflection is noted by Marc Prensky in his work: *Digital Game-Based Learning*:

One of the biggest lessons the Games Generation learned from growing up with video games is that if you put in the hours and master the game, you will be rewarded—with the next level, with a win, with a place on the high scorers' list. What you do determines what you get, and what you get is worth the effort you put in. (PRENSKY, 2001, p.22)

The final point to be made in relation to *Ocarina of Time*, is that the lack of spoken language could also be seen as a negative side of this game as

²⁵ Dialogue extracted from:

https://transcripts.fandom.com/wiki/The_Legend_of_Zelda:_Ocarina_of_Time

an English language presenter, as well as the lack of immediate feedback for the memorization and practice of the language itself, points that could be considered as less impactful on the overall experience, due to the rich textual presence throughout the entirety of the game's dialogue.

5.1 SMITE – BATTLEGROUND OF THE GODS – GAME OVERVIEW

Since its official release in March of 2014, Smite has received critical acclaim not only for its innovation on the MOBA genre’s mechanics and gameplay, but also for its “quirky and lighthearted take on classic mythology”²⁶. The usage of deities from many different pantheons²⁷ gives the game a huge cultural and historical overlook on mythology from around the globe. As it was previously mentioned, Smite enables to not only choose which god they would like to play as, but also fills the player in on the lore of said god.



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Each god’s lore is a summary of his/her original mythos, explaining their origin, feats and powers to the players; in the same way, all *abilities* at the god’s disposal draw references from their mythos. This gives the player a

²⁶ Game informer’s review of the game. Posted on March 25, 2014. Available at: <https://www.metacritic.com/game/pc/smite>

²⁷ Arthurian, Celtic, Chinese, Egyptian, Great Old Ones, Greek, Hindu, Japanese, Mayan, Norse, Polynesian, Roman, Slavic, Voodoo and Yoruba. List available at: <https://smite.gamepedia.com/Gods>

²⁸ Example image from the in-game god lore for Zeus; Lore available at: <https://smite.gamepedia.com/Zeus#Lore>

great way of getting to know more about myths they may already know, but more importantly, discover new stories and beings. What this also entails, is that there are over one hundred different short texts the learner may go through in order to search for new vocabulary, learn or review aspects of mythology, and even choosing a playable character based on their story and abilities, all whilst practicing their own reading and interpretation skills.

This practice can be further improved upon, if the learner is to write reviews on the gods based on their lore, skills and their own opinion on it; it should be noted that all elements presented up until now are available to the learner prior to even playing a single *match* of the game; the learner has the chance to experience the language and also to immerse themselves into the game's world prior to actually entering it; not to mention the variety of reports that may come from it, based on the number of gods alone, an exercise that should prove effective both in self-study, as in big group classes.

After the learner has experienced this aspect of the game, they may enter any of the available *game modes*²⁹, such as *Arena* or *Conquest* (the two most common modes). Inside a match, the available opportunities for experiencing language are vast and diverse: From *item descriptions*, to *narrators* that call-out important happenings in a match, to the player's god talking in reaction to events, and even a *voice chat*, where the player can talk with their team throughout the match. In spite of all of these available means, for this research's purpose the method that sticks out the most, due to its versatility and ingenuity and the one that is to be considered the main strategy for vocabulary acquisition in Smite, is the Voice Guided System. That being said, it is necessary to review all language elements present in the game's matches in order to see through every angle this game can be approached in a language learning perspective.

²⁹ Full list and descriptions available at: https://smite.gamepedia.com/Game_Modes

5.2 SMITE – FROM TEXT TO SPEECH IN A WAR OF GODS

In a Smite match, the learner has many tools at his disposal in order to both experience the English language and to communicate with their teammates. Starting from the *lobby* of the game, the player can talk to their teammates in a written chat in order to pick a balanced team prior to the match starting. It is common in this space for players to claim a specific *role*³⁰ in the team composition or even a specific god, and request the same from their teammates; it is also pretty common for there to be resolutions for conflicts, i.e. multiple people who want to play in the same role or with the same character, and there can be some amount of conversation in the limited time available before the game begins.

It should be briefly mentioned that in-game items present in every game mode have brief descriptions regarding the *status* they give the player should he purchase them, or an ability description if the item has a *passive ability*³¹ in it. There are many items, but their descriptions are limited to short words and numbers, with the occasional passive abilities.

While actually in the match itself, the player still has the ability to utilize the text chat whenever he wants via the *Enter* key, but there are other means of verbal communication available for the learner to partake in the English language. First off, the presence of an in-game *voice chat*, where players utilize their microphone to talk to their teammates. This gives the chance for the learner to not only listen to people with English as their official, second or even foreign language, but also to practice their own English with these people. This true-to-life communication gives the learner the most meaningful form of language experience (KOCH & ELIAS, 2009, p.74), and is in fact ideal for the learner to become experienced in real dialogue.

It is a great way to practice the intelligibility of the speech, with real time corrective feedback made by the learner's teammates (CORNILIE, 2012,

³⁰ There are 5 main roles in a match: Support, Attack-Damage Carry, Jungler, Solo Laner, Mid laner. Descriptions and an extensive guide for beginners built by the community available at:

<https://www.smitefire.com/smite/guide/a-beginners-guide-to-the-roles-and-etiquette-of-smite-conquest-4401>

³¹ Passive ability refers to any effect that is present on the playable character without the need for it to be activated. Descriptions example available at: https://smite.gamepedia.com/Boots#Talaria_Boots

p.50); and could also be a great way to put the vocabulary acquired into a functional practice, an acquisition strategy which has proven to be worthwhile to pursue, quote: “[...] using more active and communicative strategies and relying less on our native language is a way to achieve better results (ÁDÁM, 2013, p.33).

Speaking to someone using nothing but a foreign language is no easy task, and some learners may experience a good amount of difficulty expressing themselves, or may even feel embarrassed when speaking to strangers in a different tongue. Going further, one could discuss the negativity of this exercise in that there is no guarantee that the other communication members (i.e. the teammates) could not present a good form of English, with someone possibly making grammatical mistakes or even themselves mispronouncing words or using them inappropriately. But the fact that the language in said communications would be relatively simple (consisting mostly of commands, requests and information giving), the presence of this communication could be seen as mostly beneficial, seeing as even if the learner does not feel up to the task, still, listening to other people talking is a good enough exposition to language, and possibly even to new vocabulary.

In all of Smite matches and game modes, three other main forms of spoken language are present, with these forms varying on certain levels from one another. Key points of the match are announced by an invisible virtual narrator. Many pre-recorded voice clips play out whenever certain things happen at any point in the match (which may include enemies or allies dying, an enemy or ally killing multiple enemies in quick succession or without dying, an objective being completed by either team³²). These short clips appear with frequency throughout each match, and can help players to organize themselves, should their team communication be lacking at any moment. In addition, the repetitive nature of these announcements makes it a good resource for training the learner's understanding of specific vocabulary (ÁDÁM, 2013), such as slain, ally, enemy, tower, double, triple, unstoppable and destroyed.

³² Full list of sentences available at: https://smite.gamepedia.com/Default_Announcer_pack

The second form comes from the playable character the learner has chosen for any given match. Each of the available gods has specific lines of dialogue that he/she/it utters throughout the match. These may be simple grunts, some personalized jokes, reactions to happenings of the match or even reactions to what kind of items the player buys. Even though this form may not be as noticeable or as active as the other communication methods, it still is a very present display of language (in every match) that nonetheless, could have an impact on the learner's incidental vocabulary acquisition.

And for the last one, we have perhaps the most influential point on vocabulary acquisition for the learners, the Voice Guided System.

5.3 SMITE'S VOICE GUIDED SYSTEM (VGS) - A TOOL FOR EFFICIENT COMMUNICATION

Smite's gameplay revolves around strategy, quick thinking/reflexes and teamwork. Communication is key in deciding the winning team in any given match. Though, given the action packed and fast-paced gameplay of the MOBA genre, stopping to write messages to your teammates in the middle of the match could prove to be a difficult task, as it leaves you open for attacks, and prevents you from fulfilling your goal for a few seconds at a time; seconds that would build up to minutes as the match went on. At the time of launch, the game could not support a voice chat (this mechanic was added in 2017), so in order to circumvent that barrier, the developers employed the VGS.

This system may appear complicated due to its large list of available commands, yet it becomes very intuitive once you get used to it. Simply put, the VGS is a library of premade *voice commands* that is accessible through various keyboard commands, thus allowing communication between teammates, without having to type in the writing-based virtual chat. By pressing the V key on their keyboard (by default on computer), the player opens a list of categories all related to gameplay elements.



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³³ VGS window example (left side) in-game with chat behind it.

By pressing the key correspondent to a certain category, specific options appear related to that category. After you select a proper command, the game will automatically say the premade voice command out loud for all your teammates, as well as writing it in the game's chat log. This, in addition to a present "*auto-run*"³⁴ key accessible in game means that a player is able to communicate while moving and attacking.

Listed below are some examples of the phrases available through the VGS, their categories and activation commands (in brackets).



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The contents of the VGS were already mentioned in previous sections

³⁴ By pressing a specific button (NumLock by default) the player moves forward continuously, without requiring the player's inputs.

³⁵ VGS lines map, made by Getsukei. Available at: <http://forums.smitegame.com/showthread.php?3272> - Additions-to-VGS

and lists are available at Smite's *gamepedia*³⁶, nonetheless, it is important to observe what these contents entail for a learner's vocabulary acquisition: We have short sentences that express commands, requests, notifications, agreement and disagreement, and even emotive expressions such as jokes, laughter, appraisals, taunts and cheering. With a very short input requirement, learners are able to listen to, and respond to dialogue in real time with other players of the game, and not to be outdone, most of these sentences are useful in day-to-day life and conversation; giving directions to someone, requesting assistance, praising someone's efforts, warning people. More than that, the presence of the emotes in the VGS, gives the communication feel more personal, and you can see the other player's personalities through which emotes they use, and how they use the communication systems.

The uncomplicated nature of this system makes it easy to use repeatedly, without fear of misspelling or mispronouncing a word, or being misunderstood, making it possibly one of the easier vocabulary to memorize, despite having in total 156 commands; by having the focus of the learner be on the meaning of the commands in the VGS, the learner also works with the Automaticity principle, as stated by Brown (2001, p.166).

This repetition, be it by the learner listening to their teammates or being the one putting forth the sentences, is one of the key elements to the development of an adequate acquisition of vocabulary, as Ádám's research could suggest, seeing that 58% of the respondents in his survey state that they memorize words through repetition (ÁDÁM, 2013); furthermore, the relative shortness of matches (from 10-20 minutes in the arena game mode) can make the repetition not feel as daunting as it could be on a longer game, since every match can be considered a succinct and cohesive language lesson. As a final note related to the assessment of the learning, the teacher throughout these matches, should maintain close observation and correct the learners. They may note if the learners are utilizing the systems properly or at all, and incentivize their communication throughout the matches.

³⁶ https://smite.gamepedia.com/Voice_Guided_System

6.1 BORDERLANDS 2 – GAME OVERVIEW

The proposed initial playing of Borderlands 2 consists of the beginning game, up until the player reaches the *hub*³⁷ town of *Sanctuary* and interact with some of its most important citizens; this task could take anywhere from one hour to up to four, depending on a number of factors that include, but are not limited to, experience in *the first-person shooting (FPS) genre*, *side quests* and *map exploration*. Some of the basic activities for testing the vocabulary apply from Ocarina of Time, with them being the plot descriptions and summaries.

Borderlands has the added benefit of counting with both written and spoken language with the extra benefit of subtitles for the spoken dialogue. Taking from Lajtai Ádám's research (2013), we see that a great portion of learners (69%) learn English vocabulary by reading for pleasure and that 62% of the respondents, learn it by talking or listening to native speakers (ÁDÁM, 2013); these numbers seem to suggest that the presence of both reading in an entertainment setting, and listening to native speakers (through voice acting) would be an even bigger advantage and should ascertain a better acquisition of vocabulary.

With all that being said, let us analyze Borderlands 2, starting with the plot. The game starts after a brief video *cutscene*³⁸ in which a group of *Vault-Hunters* (the main characters the player can choose to play as) are attacked on a train by the order of the main antagonist, *Handsome Jack* (pictured next page). From the get-go, the player notices that the planet they are on, *Pandora*, is a hostile land, where allies are few and far between and the main rule everyone follows is to kill or be killed.

³⁷ A place that serves as the main point of return and departure for the entirety of a game. Usually consists of a town with shops, NPCs that give quests, some form of entertainment and places for character customization.

³⁸ Pre-made video cinematic or in-game rendition, where the player has no control over the character and a scene plays out.



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Regarding the main plot, after being the sole survivor of the train attack, the player is awakened by a talking robot, *Claptrap*, who sees in the surviving human a potential *minion* who will help him escape the freezing glacier they are in. Along the way, they meet a handful of kind inhabitants belonging to the Handsome Jack resistance movement: *The Crimson Raiders*. The player is guided to their base city of *Sanctuary* by the dim-witted annoying robot nobody in the world likes (*Claptrap*), a British hunter with no less than two bionic limbs (*Sir Hammerlock*), an all-knowing A.I. which blurts out curse words on occasion (*Angel*), and a stout soldier, a protagonist from the first game turned leader of the rebellion (*Roland*); along the way the player will also come across many *psychos* who want nothing more than to ramble loudly and a lot of senseless killing.

Each character present in the game has its own speech patterns, with many having very distinct accents, mannerisms and even overblown acting, making the dialogue in the game distinct and varied. As it was previously

³⁹ Image from a poster based off an in-game texture. Available at: <https://etsy.me/2IceVYh>

mentioned, *Borderlands* language is filled with a very true-to-life dialogue, with the presence of many collocations, foul language, dirty and or clever jokes, innuendos and dark humor. It may sound bad, however the game is aware of its contents, and it never tries to approach the dark aspects of the world it builds without some form of humor behind it; a small side character later on begs the player to shoot him in the face, and after he does, he says “thank you” and completes his side quest⁴⁰. It is a style of humor that might not resonate with every learner, however there is enough variety present in the game to make it a decent learning tool.

It is true that *Borderlands* stands as an outlier in respect of the other two games analyzed, and in fact the very nature of these themes of violence and distasteful jokes in the game could be a matter of concern, however the teacher should be the one to give context to all themes in game, as will be explained in the sessions going forward, and the mature rating as given by the ESRB should serve as an indicator that this game should be used primarily for learners of an older age (17+ as is recommended), so the themes present shouldn’t pose as much of a hinderance on the vocabulary acquisition.

Moreover, the game possesses its fair share of wholesome moments, such as when you help a kid come to terms with her friend’s death, a love story where one of the participants is too dull to notice he is being “*hit on*”, and Claptrap’s “birthday” party, where the player is the only person to show up for the event, for which Claptrap still claims everyone must be busy, or that their invites got lost, yet he claims it was the best birthday party ever; one of the supporting characters, *Mr. Torgue*, even states: “NOTHING IS MORE BADASS THAN TREATING A WOMAN WITH RESPECT.”⁴¹

And while yes, much of the comedy in the game may be considered distasteful to some, it should nonetheless be judged by what it is, comedy, a subversive subject by nature, but overall beneficial for an absolute understanding of a language, as there is no other communication mean that tasks the user with as much of a domain of the language as comedy, quote:

⁴⁰ Video example of the side quest available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVpg0vws10Y>

⁴¹ Mr. Torgue in “Mr. Torgue’s Campaign of Carnage. Available at: https://borderlands.fandom.com/wiki/Mr._Torgue/Quotes

Overall, the data suggest that humorous verbalizations in an L2 learning environment can function as devices for constructing and broadening L2 learners' knowledge of language form, meaning, and cultural understanding. (ZIYAEMEHR, KUMAR, 2014, p.11)

One can associate the problems with working with humor, such as failing to understand or misunderstanding the meaning behind certain dialogues as something entirely negative. However, Brown (2001, p.166) does mention this aspect as one of the founding principles in interactive language teaching, where failing to produce or interpret intended meaning are just as big of a part in English learning as a whole, as any other.

Overall, more so than any of the reasons listed by now, what makes *Borderlands 2* a truly unique game, are its characters, of which there are plenty, and that without, the game would be no more than a simple run and shoot game with a stylized *cell-shaded* aesthetic. For the purpose of developing this research, the main characters⁴² selected for their English presentation will consist of: Claptrap, Handsome Jack, Sir Hammerlock, *Scooter* and *Patricia Tannis*.

These are some of the most of the important characters that appear in the selected chunk of the game to be played, and each present some aspect of language that should be experienced by the learners; both the reasoning for each character, as well as their specificities will be further discussed in the upcoming session.

⁴² Full list available at: https://borderlands.fandom.com/wiki/Borderlands_2#NPCs

6.2 BORDERLANDS 2 - LONG AND HARD WORDS OF REMARKABLE CHARACTERS



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The first line of dialogue in the game comes from Claptrap (pictured above), the small unaware robot that has become the main mascot for the games and is considered to be a fan favorite. From the beginning, he has the important task of not only setting up the backstory and tutorials for players who are new to the game, but also to serve as a comic relief for the remainder of the game. Taking a look at his dialogue in the first couple of minutes of gameplay gives us a general idea of just how much Claptrap contributes to:

1. Great - another dead Vault Hunter. Handsome Jack's been busy.
2. Wait a minute - you're not dead! YES! Now I can get off this glacier! Claptrap, your metaphorical ship has finally come in!
3. Allow me to introduce myself - I am a CL4P-TP steward bot, but my friends call me Claptrap!
4. Or they would, if any of them were still alive. Or had existed in the first place! Oh - I've got something for you.

⁴³ Image available at: <https://borderlands.fandom.com/wiki/Claptrap>

5. Here - take this ECHO communicator that I totally didn't loot from one of these corpses! It comes with a class-twelve heads-up display, complete with a minimap! Now - come, come, friend. Let's get you inside.
6. Man, this is great! Now that I've met a mighty Vault Hunter, I can finally join the resistance in Sanctuary, take vengeance against Jack for killing my product line, and repair my central processor so I stop thinking out loud! I wonder what it's like to have a belly button.
7. Well done! Your ability to walk short distances without dying will surely be Handsome Jack's downfall!
8. Aaaaaand open!
9. Just a little added security. Gotta keep those Bullymong's at bay, or they'll rip your eyes out! (A Bullymong proceeds to rip Claptrap's "Eye" out)⁴⁴

From the start of the game, in just under 5 minutes we already have the main antagonist introduced and his ruthlessness established (1,6); some amount of backstory (3,4,6); a sense of humor present all around (especially in 4,6,7 and 9); the presence of collocations such as been busy and take vengeance (1,6); and some possible new vocabulary for the learner (such as vault, hunter, steward, communicator, display, product line and downfall).

Claptrap, being a goofy likeable character can also prove to work towards the intrinsic desires of the learner; by finding a character they are fond of, the learner may be more inclined to pursue the learning of the language; moreover, his jokes are one of the easiest to understand via contextual clues, and his dialogue is pretty clear both in enunciation and in descriptiveness, which makes him a good reference point to go back to for language understanding.

⁴⁴ Transcript of the game available at: https://borderlands.fandom.com/wiki/My_First_Gun/Transcript



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The main antagonist - Handsome Jack - does not make a physical appearance until much later in the game, however, throughout the game he utilizes the player's "ECHO Communicator" to antagonize, insult and berate them as much as he can, e.g.:

1. Hey, kiddo. Jack here - President of Hyperion. Lemme explain how things work here: Vault Hunter shows up. Vault Hunter looks for the new vault. Vault Hunter gets killed. By ME. You see-seeing the problem here?
2. Hey, you think you'll freeze to death out there? Nah, probably not. The bandits'll get you first. My day? It's been pretty good. Just bought a pony made of diamonds, because I'm rich. So, you know. That's cool. Kay, bye.
3. I'm rackin' my brain trying to think of a name for that diamond pony I bought. I was gonna call it 'piss-for-brains' in honor of you, but that just feels immature.
4. Petty vandalism? Are you serious? That's how far you've fallen? It's just sad.
5. I will pay you to kill yourself.
6. The moral is, you're a bitch.

Overall, his dialogue is written and spoken in a very casual tone (as exemplified before by his usage of "Kay"); Jack presents himself with the air

⁴⁵ Image available at: https://borderlands.fandom.com/wiki/Handsome_Jack

of superiority that matches a lot of his dialogue's vocabulary choices. It is common to hear demeaning adjectives and insults in his speech (some examples being: *petty*, *kiddo* and *bitch*), words that could be useful for experienced learners that want to know more about informal usage of language, and even if they pretend on talking to friends in a provoking manner.

His character stands as one of the finest examples on just how realistic and colloquial the dialogue on the game is portrayed. He corrects himself when he makes a mistake mid-sentence (*You see-seeing the problem here?*), he uses slang (*lemme*, *kay*) and he curses when angry, surprised or against people he dislikes (*piss-for-brains*, *crap*). Comparing his speech with other characters such as Sir Hammerlock and Patricia Tannis (who will be covered soon) could show the learner how much some words and collocations can alter the tone and the formality of the speech, which in turn can be utilized in the learners own future communications.

In a final note related to Jack, throughout the game he calls himself a hero (even in his final moments), even though he himself admits to some pretty heinous actions (e.g. he sends assassins to kill his own grandmother midway through the game), making him a very complicated and deep character throughout the story, a point that could impact the learner's interest in the game's story. It should be noted as well the fact that despite all that was mentioned, most if not all his taunts and threats are humorous and clever; to quote Paul Tassi in his Forbes Magazine article related to Jack's insults: "It's supposed to upset you, but he's just too funny not to enjoy all his taunts" (TASSI, 2012). Furthermore, his deranged nature also makes the player unsure of whatever he will do next, as exemplified by his interaction with Dr. Helena Pierce below, and you have one of the most memorable villains in video game history:

- **Handsome Jack:** Oh. You know what? I am so sorry. I - I just... Forgive me. Where's your husband now?"
- **Helena Pierce:** He's dead.
- **Handsome Jack:** That is a heartbreaker, but.[gunshot, followed by death scream] you got something in common with him now at least!

- **Handsome Jack:** Hohohoho... holy crap! Did you see her head? It was like - PBBLLT! Wilhelm? Kill these savages.⁴⁶

The next character on the list is Sir Hammerlock, described by his in-game intro (pictured below) as a “hunter, scholar and gentleman”.



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He is the first friendly human the player meets, and proceeds to give them quests related to hunting and exploring. He speaks with a strong British accent and his dialogue is strong and formal throughout his appearances.

Sir Hammerlock’s dialogue is full of small mannerisms, including phrases common in British cockney dialogue, such as *go-getter*, *I say/see*, and *tally-ho* (exemplified below).

1. Spectacular -- first Captain Flynt’s bandits attack, then Claptrap shows up! I must have horrifyingly cruel to puppies in a previous life to deserve this kind of treatment. I say, Vault Hunter -- could you kill Flynt’s men for me?
2. I see our fearless leader Jack is looking for you. Charming fellow, isn’t

⁴⁶ Transcript of the game available at: https://borderlands.fandom.com/wiki/Handsome_Jack_Here!/Transcript

⁴⁷ Image available at: https://borderlands.fandom.com/wiki/Sir_Hammerlock

he? Spouts drivel about bringing peace to the frontier, then shoots unarmed men, women and children like it was going out of style. Bah – I’m spouting exposition again, aren’t I? Apologies!

3. Now that Liar’s Berg is clear, I might as well turn on the main power -- this town’s full of things that may be of use to a go-getting slayer of men like yourself.
4. I must say, you Vault Hunters are of considerable interest of me. I shall have to write a book on you one day. *Hunting with the Vault Hunters* I shall call it, *by Sir Hammerlock*. And beneath that will be an image of you and I high-fiving over Handsome Jack's corpse. It'll be lovely.
5. This may be the most raucous public house I've ever been to.
6. There are an awful lot of bosoms around here.

As we can see from the examples above, the rather formal dialogue of Hammerlock distinguishes him from the rest of characters, who usually talk in an informal manner. The character also goes far and beyond in order to not appear crass, speaking no foul language, such as curse words (replacing crap with feces) and even utilizing some uncommon words instead of more mundane ones such as raucous, to describe a rough looking bar, bosoms to refer to the skimpily dressed ladies on said bar, and drivel instead of gibberish or nonsense. This gives the learner a particularly good selection of new and “classy” vocabulary, words that may be of use when writing or speaking formally.



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In stark contrast with Hammerlock's speech, we have Scooter, a brilliant mechanic with a not so brilliant mind. Scooter speaks in an exaggerated southern American "redneck" accent and divulges almost constantly.

1. Oh, crap, is you *Hyperion*? I heard all of you are robots and you eat metal out of the garbage and stuff -- knew you wired death machines would be coming for me once Roland went missing. If you're here to kill me you should probably know... You'll never take me alive, you robotic *sumbitch*!
2. Roland told me if he ever disappeared, I was supposed to initiate Plan B -- or, as I like to call it, Plan Turn-this-city-into-a-floatin'-ass-fortress-of-airborne-awesomeness. B. I got some *fuel cells* around here. You'll need those -- oh, and you'll need this here Eridium, too.
3. Thanks for cyclin' all that stuff for me. Third degree burns are best taken in shifts. Now, to see the fruits of your loins -- this city's gonna FLY!
4. You been off the Echo fer hours, thought you mighta got brained or something. But you ain't, so yay...and stuff.
5. Okay, if we cycle the ignition primers, it'll get us somewhere!

⁴⁸ Image available at: <https://borderlands.fandom.com/wiki/Scooter>

What we get from Scooter's dialogue is fairly different from many of the other characters precisely for his manner of speech. His dialogue is full of slangs (*gonna, brained, sumbitch, cyclin* [3,4,1,3]) and mixtures of mannerisms from many southern states from the US, the most noteworthy examples being the use of the auxiliary verb *is* with *you* or even lack of auxiliary at all (*you been*), some lack of subject in some sentences (1- *knew you wired* [...]) and shortening *you are not* into *ain't*. What could come as a great surprise, is the eloquence the character displays when speaking about the specific aspects and parts in mechanical or engineer works. Scooter's vocabulary in relation to mechanics is pretty well versed, with words like *fuel cells, ignition primers*, and the *wired death machines/robots*; it is definitively a welcome change of pace from the other characters.

The final member of our analysis roster is Dr. Patricia Tannis, a researcher that is just as smart as she is crazy (as indicated by her title card below).



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⁴⁹ Image available at: https://borderlands.fandom.com/wiki/Patricia_Tannis/

Tannis, much like Hammerlock and Scooter, brings forth many varied vocabularies due to her position as an *Eridium researcher* and her archeology doctorate degree.

1. Also, I require a new ventilator – this lab smells of bacon. Bacon is for sycophants and products of incest.
2. Wait, you're not Roland, or even of close facial symmetry. However, you've brought Eridium, and thus I can feel my loins skitter forth from retirement. Oh, don't give me that *overshare* face!
3. After hours of scientific insanity you could only imagine in your dreams -- or in my bed, standing offer -- I have deduced that Jack, the Vault Key, and the Eridium are all connected on a deeper level.
4. My research is going swimmingly, my psychoses notwithstanding. Your help is not required.
5. Oh hello, Vault Hunter. If you wouldn't mind taking a break from smashing creatures into goopy collections of bone marrow and sadness, I have a job for you back in Sanctuary. This isn't a date.
6. Some people, who are not me, might consider *slag* experimentation immoral.
7. You are doing moderately well. I require one more ECHO recording, at which point I will have all the data I need.

Starting with the more outstanding vocabulary, we could remark words such as *sycophant* (1), *symmetry*, *skitter*, *overshare* (2), *deduce* (3), *psychoses*, *notwithstanding* (4), *goopy*, *bone marrow* (5), *experimentation*, *immoral* (6) and *moderately* (7) as some of the more uncommon specific words we can extract from her dialogue, and the learner may by either curiosity or wanting to fully understand a sentence, search for the meanings of said words, and potentially use them themselves throughout their English dialogues. Some collocations to also be mentioned are: *Standing offer* (3); *taking a break* (5); *have a job* (5).

These are but a few of the characters present throughout the selected game chunk, and many more appear in the game as a whole, yet the diversity

and depth of the characters, dialogue and English is already seen and noteworthy.

Furthermore, and this applies to every character mentioned so far, the language knowledge of the learner both inside and outside of the game is the main point of assessment this game provides. The intertextual nature of the game's dialogue (jokes, slang, innuendos and pop-culture references) forces the learner to seek out the main ideas of the dialogue, if he already does not know them, and it would be the teacher's main focus throughout working with this game to provide the learners with both the meanings behind these words and phrases, as well as their context; not only would it be necessary to de-brief the learners on the content of this material, its dark humor and the types of jokes they make, but also to show the learners how the difference in speech from each character impacts the formality and perception of their dialogues, such as the overabundance of slangs by Handsome Jack compared to the nigh impeccable speech of Sir Hammerlock. The importance of this is the enrichment of both the reading and future production of English material by the hands of the learner (LINHARES, 2010).

6.3 BORDERLANDS 2 – CHOOSING YOUR OWN SPACE-ADVENTURE

In order to leave no stone unturned, first, the other means in which English is presented throughout Borderlands 2 should be addressed. The game does possess many items with specific descriptions, most of which appear as mission requirements throughout the game (e.g. “*An Eridium shard, freshly yinked from the chest of a Hyperion soldier.*”⁵⁰), and every weapon, shield and other items used by the player also possess descriptors related to their statistics, meaning, their damage, health or shield provided, random effects, accuracy and critical rate, ammunition consumption etc.

These descriptions are self-explanatory, and the game even instructs the player on the different random effects present in the game in a mission early on, so it should offer little to no trouble to the learner. Borderlands also possesses 6 different playable characters (referred in-game as *classes*), each one with their own dialogue, skills and playstyles. We shall discuss the playstyle further, however the skills need further clarification, as each skill possesses specific status benefits, as well as some skills activating under certain circumstances, or giving certain effects to the player, which implies a great amount of description present in each character’s *Skill Trees*⁵¹. Let us look at the *Rising Shot*’s skill description from the character Zer0 as an example:

Each successful ranged or melee attack gives you a Damage bonus for a short time. This bonus can stack up to 5 times. Faster weapons can gain stacks more quickly, but slower weapons retain stacks for a longer period of time.

If we break down this description into its three sentences, we can see that each sentence connects with the previous one in one aspect, while introducing a new aspect. In terms of vocabulary, words like bonus, stack, and retain should be a few of the new words available for the learner. Moreover, the amount of different aspects of English brought by these descriptions may

⁵⁰ Item: Eridium Shard’s description from the mission *Do No Harm*. Description available at: https://borderlands.fandom.com/wiki/Do_No_Harm

⁵¹ A map of all available skills for any given character. Example for the character Zer0 available at: https://borderlands.fandom.com/wiki/Zer0/Skill_tree

help the learner fixate the learning of new words, since it shows the many different aspects associated with the learning burden of a word (ÁDÁM, 2013).

On a side note related to skills, with each character having anywhere from 30 to 36 skills (totaling 196 skills across all 6), the learner has a plethora of possible new words for acquisition and understanding.

Borderlands also counts with a cooperative gameplay (co-op), where up to four players go through the game at the same time whilst working together to beat the game and its enemies. This game mode counts with an in-game voice-chat, much like Smite, where the players can talk freely to each other, once again evoking the communicative competence, as given by Brown (2001, p.166).

This game-mode is in general dedicated to be played by friends, with the player being able to invite theirs from a list to quickly join a session at any point, however the player also has the choice to create a public lobby, where anyone can freely join their game and vice-versa. This gives the learner another opportunity to communicate with speakers of English, be them natives or foreign/second language, once again taking into account the active interaction and communication in order to attain a better acquisition (ÁDÁM, 2013, p.33).

Another aspect of Borderlands 2 to be taken into account is its open-world mechanics. While the story progression follows a set path through different locations in the planet of pandora, all of which are unlocked sequentially, while in a specific area of the map, the player is free to choose where to go in that area's boundaries.

The trajectory a player takes through a game—the virtual-real story—can, in certain circumstances, give space a special sort of deep meaning in a game. (GEE, 2009, p. 22)

In a final note regarding the English presented in the game, one might argue that the foul language of Borderlands is inappropriate in an educational setting, and while yes, learners of a certain age or group should not be exposed to certain aspects of language as they might not be ready to interpret them in a positive manner, with the proper mindset and or instruction, the learner can learn these words in an appropriate way, not only by truly understanding their

meaning, but by knowing when it is or is not appropriate to use them, and in what way they add to or take away from the English language.

If the teacher gives the proper context to the use and meaning of these words, the context being of humor that should not be taken personally or literally in any case and is in fact just related to the aesthetics of both the game and its characters, the learner can achieve a better understanding of the language and its functions, without a feeling of being patronized.

7 FINAL REMARKS AND CONCLUSION

After establishing a strong literature review, with many works and research that complemented to the assessment of the video games, and also the development and proposal of the methods and activities for each of the games, an assessment of each game was made, which brought forth interesting results. Three games were selected not only because of their differences, but more importantly their similarities, where all games can build on each other to make for a better learning tool.

By taking a look at these three different video games and various ways in which the English vocabulary is present throughout them, be it by Ocarina of Time's dialogue that progresses at the player's pace, Smite's communication systems that allow for easy repetition and understanding in a fast-paced setting, or by Borderlands 2's overabundance of variety and realism in its dialogue, accents and humor, we can see many ways in which they could be successfully used in the vocabulary acquisition of English as a foreign language. The activities proposed may be simple in nature, however their overall applicability and previous data related to them seems to suggest they would be efficient for the proposed method, and furthermore, a teacher (or learner) may opt to change any and all activities to better fit their target group, selecting different sections of the games, or different ways to work with them based on their own knowledge and the learner's proficiency with both the language and video games themselves.

Such research should be considered far from over, seeing as there still is a plethora of available video games to be suggested, analyzed and applied with vocabulary acquisition in mind; with future researches possibly emphasizing different game genre's and vocabulary. Anyhow, the specific pointers indicated, such as paying attention to the different presentations of the English language throughout each game, the overall level of English required for the games (remembering to pay attention to their respective ESRB ratings when divulging in the adequacy of utilizing the games) and how the learner may approach each game, in other words, what techniques he may use

to ensure a better acquisition, may all be utilized in an easy and conceivable manner by teachers and learners alike in the future.

This method of working with the language through digital media is obviously not something that will work with everyone, and the autonomy required for a learner to pursue the learning on their own can certainly present a heavy toll on them. However, through the nature of video games of recurring challenges that must be overcome by the players, the goal of language learning and vocabulary acquisition may as well be another challenge the player, the learner wants to overcome. It is not a challenge they must undertake alone however, which is why the presence of a teacher to assist in the difficult aspects of the acquisition and accompany them throughout the entire process is beneficial, if not outright necessary.

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