The Effect of Speech Acts Used in MMORPGs as an Educational Strategy to Improve Communicative Competence

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Abstract: Digital game-based learning tends to pedagogy and linguistic fields. Massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) contain beneficial strategies for EFL, and speech acts in MMORPGs refer to representative acts and assertive utterances. Although current research is too narrow and limited to confirm MMORPGs' practical value and educational strategy, other experimental studies indicate that digital game-based learning with multiple players has the potential on learning improve linguistic knowledge and communication competence. This study sums up relevant research about MMORPGs and digital game contexts to analyze their functions in language learning and social ability. Some discussions show that digital games for educational purposes provide diverse immersive English contexts, motivations, and sufficient practice opportunities for EFL learners. However, several studies also argue that young learners may be addicted to online games but not for complete learning. Thus, there shall be continuous experimental research and generative literature reviews to prove the utility of digital game-based learning for future studies. It is also expected that digital game-based learning will become one of the most useful education tools to promote language proficiency and strengthen EFL language skills and socialization.

Keywords: MMORPGs, computer-assisted language learning, learning strategy, speech acts, digital game-based learning

1. Introduction

Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) tend to be a useful tool for language learning through efficient interactions [1]. However, there is still minimal research for investigating how digital games assist with learning strategies and how they apply efficiently in language pragmatics.

MMORPGs belong to a special part of language learning for EFL and ESL. MMORPGs do not only include basic language knowledge such as technical vocabulary terms, but also commercial information, designs of game strategy, and classifications of roles in games. Ko, & Eslami used the method of a systematic summary of all types of digital game-based learning to propose that multiuser virtual environments contain some benefits for L2 pragmatic development, such as real-time conversation practice and in-time feedback of oral mistakes [2]. L2 learners can improve their reading

skills and enhance competency in speech comprehension through complicated text and direct speeches from other players.

Speech acts in mutual utterances are typically important to English learning. In foreign language contexts, learners obtain opportunities to communicate in a foreign language with others and strengthen their ability to understand conversational meanings through listening to English native speakers' instructions or requests. Speech acts with directive forces are most exerted in conversations because EFL or ESL people can only comprehend the meanings and take actions from bald statements. In virtual online games, language learners with different backgrounds desire to understand other players'

Digital game-based environments offer more comprehensible inputs such as texts, dialogues of non-player characters (NPCs), and interactions with other game players to practice using speech acts [3]. Frequent interactions tend to motivate learners to attempt to understand difficult meanings of game texts and existing unfamiliar vocabulary from speech acts spoken by other game partners.

This study aims to find out beneficial educational resources and advantageous strategies from MMORPGs. Firstly, the definition of MMORPGs and serious video games is given by previous studies. Secondly, speech acts as one of the most used utterances are worth classifying in digital game conversations and analyzing how meaningful speech acts influence learners' behaviors and their motivations in teamwork. Thirdly, some previous research can explain the educational functions of MMORPGs to provide some views of learning and teaching. Lastly, there is a recapitulative discussion of what kind of pedagogic points can be found, what speech acts influence most in a virtual gaming environment, implicit learning strategy, and some current issues about the difficult facility of digital game-based learning.

Three research questions are come up with in this study to analyze whether MMORPGs can be utilized as a pedagogic objective and offer some learning methods or not:

① What pedagogy implications can MMORPGs engage in language learning improvement?;
② What kinds of speech acts do ESL people use most frequently in MMORPGs?;
③ What kinds of learning strategies can MMORPGs give language learners?

2. Literature Reviews

2.1. MMORPGs

Shirazi, Ahmadi, and Mehrdad elaborated on the definitions of video games that they are electronic devices as serious games to lead language learners to explicit educational contexts and provide more influential cognitive identities [4]. Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) refer to computer-based, highly participatory, context-specific, multi-media the process of game player's virtual identifications [3], which aim to create a language immersion environment and support social connections among all players containing language learners for the objectives of language proficiency achievement.

Warcraft, a virtual multiplayer strategic game, has been famous for several years because of its freely participatory and motivating strategic interactions. Tse, Greenberg, Shen, and Forlines made an experiment by playing *Warcraft III* to summarize the behavioral foundations (e.g., gestures, speech, clouds, gaze awareness) of game players' teamwork: (1) sharing a common view, (2) direct input, (3) a monitor of players' access, and (4) a convenient way to observe people's talk methods and verbal utterances [5]. A variety of interactional signals in game playing is beneficial to not only create numerous useful language inputs but also link with the communications of learners. Meaningful speech acts in multiplayer settings impulse the continuous utterances and cooperative progress for EFL. Meaningful speech acts in multiplayer settings impulse the continuous utterances and cooperative progress for EFL.

Based on the data collection from investigation and game observations of video games, Chen declared that MMORPGs contain some components such as communication, interpersonal and intercultural interaction, and more linguistic interactions than other ordinary online games [1]. It is regarded as an advantageous element in games to utilize quests of mission completed, dialogues with non-player characteristics (NPCs), storyline with cinematics and sequences, goal-oriented cooperation in teamwork, social interaction, role-playing with virtual imaginations, and asynchronous chats among players.

Furthermore, in the situation of MMORPGs, one of the most frequently used strategies is an external voice chat to engage in effective communication instead of writing texts [1]. Learners and players can talk about some clues in games, the weakness of monsters, and make plans more directly and clearly. Ko and Eslami illustrated that digital games can provide opportunities for L2 learners to be exposed to authentic language interactions, exert the effect on learning patterns to practice language skills and create immersive language contexts [2].

2.2. Speech Acts

Speech acts are classified into three principal domains: locutionary acts which refer to narrative discourses, illocutionary acts to pragmatic usage for certain purposes, and perlocutionary acts to productive results [6]. Illocutionary acts are exerted in English classrooms and are easy to implement to reach learning purposes in classroom environments.

Thus, Illocutionary acts are discussed respectively in representatives, commissives, directives, declarations, and expressives. It is necessary to observe what kind of speech acts may be closely related to students' learning process and their learning strategies. Representatives belong to kinds of speech acts that confirm what speakers believe and explicitly express their intentions, for example, statements of fact, assertions, conclusions, and descriptions are used commonly in daily talks. Therefore, representative speech acts with an assertive force are universal expressions and language usages for EFL.

Speech acts are most relative to culture and language environments when learners have to adapt to foreign language conventions. Wierzbicka discussed the lexical differences between English and Polish languages through a comparison of diverse speech acts such as advice, requests, tags, exclamations, opinions, objectivism as a cultural value, cordiality as a cultural value, courtesy as a cultural value [7]. The findings generated that the presence in the lexicon of the word *privacy* and the word *compromise*, for example, spoken in both English and Polish languages seems to represent distinct expressions and contrary connotations. From the perspectives of different cultural backdrops, it is vital to link special language natures in interactions with exact cultural values. Thus, culture-specific speech acts shall be also emphasized in linguistic development for individual learning needs.

Taguchi stated the importance of cross-cultural adaptability in studying abroad and that pragmatic competence reflects the ability to understand and express appropriate socialization for Japanese English learners [8]. Speech acts used in social conditions can help learners perform themselves and get used to diverse communication techniques. Some unilateral results show that cross-cultural adaptability is significantly related to the development of speech act usages, however, learners may find it difficult to use correct speech style due to individual problems and complicated cultural influence. Moreover, it is indicated that adaptability training, culture knowledge training, and speech practice are key to promoting language skills and social competency in EFL.

There are some problems with exerting speech acts in an actual situation that people have difficulties in reacting to questions politely due to the limitation of time to consider proper words and organize reasonable behaviors [9]. Thus, contextual factors have a positive effect on the usage of speech acts that sufficient language contexts containing more stimulus and strategies can contribute to learners' second language learning and reduce anxiety due to some learning burdens. It is

worthwhile to observe how speech act is applied in massive online network games and its functions to impact language proficiency improvement.

2.3. Functions of Speech Acts Used in MMORPGs

MMORPGs are beneficial to second language learning, and speech acts used in interactions can be part of assistance for improving learner's comprehension of others' expressions or commands. They also support a platform of social interaction that virtual players online [10]. However, speech acts that appear in video games have sometimes more discrepancy of actual manipulations in games than other educational resources, for example, profanity is offensively spoken when players lose one round or are out of patience. With the removal of such factors, corrective and polite speech acts in MMORPGs shall lead EFL learners to cohesive teamwork for appropriate language learning.

Chen showed some samples of the conversations recorded in-game chats from one of the gamers named Ryth and his teamwork [1]. From the transcripts of gamers' talks shown in Table 1, assertive declarations make others more clear about actions and team plans, for instance, "…*it blocked my vision when I got behind it. So I couldn't really kick…like in zoom, you know…*" is spoken to explain the individual problems to cause game failure and operation mistake in teamwork, and repeated statements of excuses do work efficiently because team partners are willing to accept what Ryth explained and continue the game for next game missions.

Table 1: Example Transcripts as spoken on TeamSpeak [1].

- 1. Ryth: so I'll kick the turtles this time, unless somebody else wants to do it. So if I fail, you are allowed to blame me. I've never done it before, but I'll try my best.
- [After the fight]
- 2. Teammate 1: What was wrong with your turtle?
- 3. Ryth: I had no turtle. Only one that I got was the one in the corner. And it blocked my vision when I got behind it. So I couldn't really kick.
- 4. Teammate 1: ah, you couldn't aim for it.
- 5. Ryth: yes, I couldn't aim for it. If I went behind this…like zoom in you know, so I couldn't see anything except for the wall.
- 6. Teammate 1: I see.
- 7. Teammate 5: are we done soon
- 8. Ryth: lol why
- 9. Teammate 5: don't feel like doing anything…just wanna lay in bed but im not gonna leave
- 10. Ryth: just chill
- 11. Teammate 5: Im just sad and pissed off sorry
- 12. Ryth: ahw why? Wanna talk
- 13. Teammate 5: Guess -_-
- 14. Ryth: Karl?
- 15. Teammate 5: Nah :/mhm
- 16. Ryth: why then? Period?
- 17. Teammate 5:KARRLLL
- [The team wiped at boss Megaera]
- 18. Teammate 5: that was my fault…sorry
- 19. Ryth: Sorry sweety that it takes so long
- 20. Teammate 5: I said karl btw. You said no
- 21. Ryth: why are you sad from karl

Table 1: (continued).

•   22. Teammate 5: He is just fucking stupid…
•   23. Ryth: I know lol. You found out now :P
•   24. Teammate 5: …
•   25. Ryth: What did he do?
•   26. Teammate 5: he just can't understand that i'm depressed
•   27. Ryth: ahw and why are you depressed then
•   28. Teammate 5: Because…dhwehfkhfhhfklhfl
•   29. Ryth: hehe wanna talk later about this cause im streaming
•   30. Teammate 5: I know
[Second wipe at boss Megaera]
•   31. Ryth: if you wanna leave just leave. You okay?
•   32. Teammate 5: I don't wanna talk
•   33. Ryth: okay i'm always here if you need me. If you wanna leave, leave sweety. Don't wanna keep you here if you feel shit
•   34. Teammate 5: its fine. So am I doing little birds? This time
•   35. Ryth: no, you're not doing the birds, [name of the teammate], just stay here and dps the boss
•   36. Teammate: okaaayyy

It is an interesting finding that speech acts applied in virtual digital games are accepted smoothly and reasonably. Learners who are set in a massive game may not notice other identifications and social manners so they can speak English more naturally and spontaneously. It is also how first language acquisition is produced by native English speakers from a young age, which implies that L2 people or EFL shall need an immersive or stimulated situation to know about foreign language learning.

Shirazi, Ahmadi, & Mehrdad researched the situations of EFL learners' acquisition of speech acts (apology and request) by video games [4]. Their results pointed out that playing video games in the classroom has an advantageous effect on acquiring speech acts of apologizing and requesting. Serious video games tend to become a convenient tool to assist in acquiring language speech acts and teach learners to speak language efficiently.

Regarding the experimental studies by Rankin, Mcneal, Shute, and Gooch, there were coded 525 chat messages to categorize four forces of speech acts: 1. request for specific information; 2. assertive expressions to demonstrate knowledge in game, self, or world; 3. conversational openings & closings; 4. player's attempts to influence on other gamer's future actions in a virtual world [10]. Rankin, Morrison, Mcneal, Gooch, & Shute used Cohen's Kappa tool including 600 chat collections to identify the speech acts that appeared in most in-game conversations in MMORPGs, in which learners' dialogues tend to involve similar categories mentioned in the previous research including player character's commitment to forthcoming actions in digital games [11].

According to the outcomes of numerous experiments above, it is assumed that EFL learners use more frequently assertive statements under the condition of MMORPGs; moreover, advanced English learners are encouraged to promote their communicative competence while there is minimal influence of being unaware of digital game rules or manipulations.

2.4. Educational Implications of MMORPGs

There is an inclining positive impact of educational applications with video games on young generations and their pedagogy objectives by using games [12]. Digital games or MMORPGs are

discussed as serious games, especially for pedagogic properties and language acquisition research. Such serious digital games are also designed to fill up a deficiency of learning enthusiasm and cover the shortage of practice drills and knowledge retention enhancement.

Prensky [13] clarified six main structural elements of computer games including rules, goals and objectives, outcomes and feedback, conflict/competition/challenge/opposition, interaction, and representation or story. All evidence from analysis of digital games shows that computer games as well as provide a complete, sophisticated, and interactive system for exposing foreign language knowledge and multiform conversation patterns.

Rankin, Mcneal, Shute, & Gooch concluded through collecting the results from original experiments in online *EQ2* games that MMORPGs sustain L2 learning purposes by serving as educational instruments of vocabulary acquisition, comprehension skills, and conversation fluency [10].

Rankin, Morrison, Mcneal, Gooch, & Shute developed a temporal visualization tool named *ClockWerk*© to draw conveniently a framework and make a category about social interactions among all speakers who play *EQ2* [11]. The results from *ClockWerk*© indicate that multiplayer conditions can have a positive impact on EFL learners on their communicative competency, collaborative responsibility, and improvement of unfamiliar vocabulary acquisition. Communicative learning from digital game chats is also considered one of the motivating strategies for language acquisition and social ability promotion.

Ko and Eslami pointed out the potential of massively multiplayer games to benefit L2 pragmatic development that digital games tend to promote the second language learners' pragmatic competency, provide individual demanding experiences and immediate feedback, strengthen performance and evaluation skills as well as the acquisition of unfamiliar vocabulary [2].

Furthermore, comprehensible speech acts happen in multiverse digital games to assist learners in understanding a few unfamiliar words in chats with other native English speakers [12]. Speech acts produced by game players such as assertive dialogues can always help EFL make some meaningful actions in games and give instructions about how to learn difficult words from their game partners. From the perspective of SLA, digital game-based learning is conducive to enhancing vocabulary knowledge, communicative performance, and interaction ability; meanwhile, it is significant to apply MMORPGs in instructing learning strategy and practice of language's appropriate utilization.

3.   Discussions

Regarding a fraction of literature reviews of digital game-based learning, results of previous research value the important role of digital games in educational instructions, learning strategies such as motivation and practice methods, and other fields of to answer three research questions: 1. What pedagogy implications can MMORPGs engage in language learning improvement?; 2. What kinds of speech acts do ESL people use most frequently in MMORPGs?; 3. What kinds of learning strategies can MMORPGs give language learners?

3.1.   Pedagogy Implications

Both teaching instruction and serious game design must concentrate on the learner's demands and the game user's goals, both of which share the same views of learning inputs and their efficient productions. Figure 1 demonstrates through assessments of designing in gameplay that user-centered games shall be designed through more accurate manipulations and more repetitive evaluations for educational achievements.
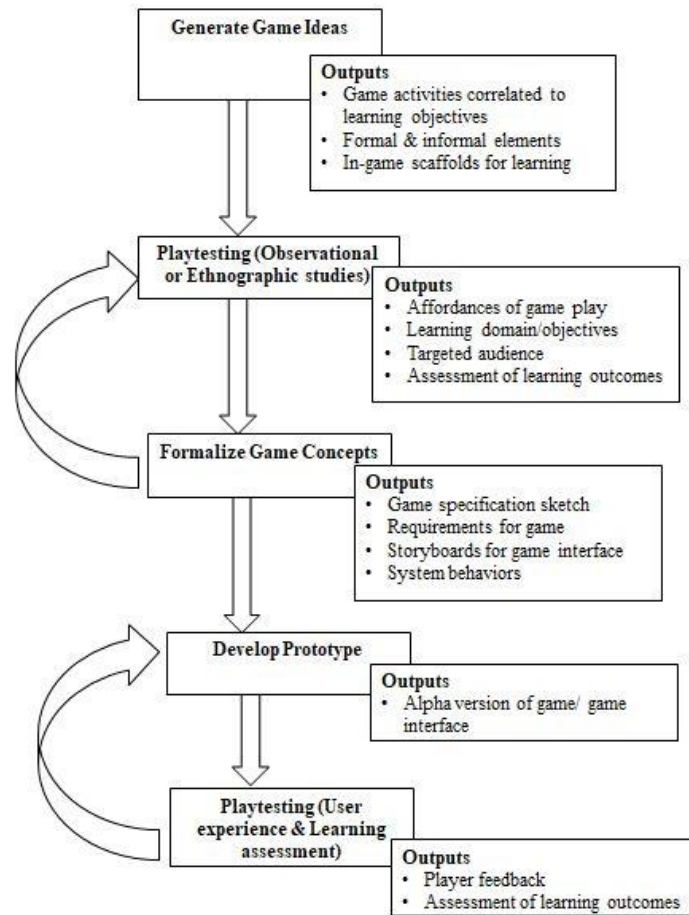
Figure 1: *User-centered game design emphasizes integrated assessment* [3].

Based on the same design concepts in both educational goals and entertainment aims, MMORPGs contain seductive features that increase motivational participation and create immersive learning gamification first. Secondly, goal orientation is multiply generated in a simulated society so that learners can obtain more explicit information and acquire language skills implicitly. Thirdly, online games supply language learning opportunities for repeated practice and boost self-confidence with low-anxiety situations. Lastly, in-time feedback shall be used to evaluate learners' behaviors and immediately correct one's mistakes in teamwork.

3.2.   Frequent Usages of Speech Acts in MMORPGs

Speech acts are relevant to learners' attitude and their consciousness in cooperative game tasks about what they are speaking, how they are leading, and why they are planning. Representatives or assertive statements are coded frequently regarding several previous studies' experimental results.

However, speech acts in MMORPGs are too complicated to make a clear position of how language learners and game players produce some proper utterances. Appropriate and perfect speech acts may not always happen in a one-time game mission. Moreover, the English proficiency of gamers shall be ranked as different occasions, and at the same time, their politeness of language communication is noticed [14].

3.3. Learning Strategy from MMORPGs

Some apparent learning strategies are discussed above that vocabulary acquisition, motivation, and learning contexts are vital for EFL students to set their new orientations and engage themselves in higher efficiency of learning language knowledge. Gamifications have plenty of explicit components and motivational factors to encourage them to complete their language goals, such as attractive treasure exploration, the war of beating monsters, and bonuses from missions.

Therefore, the availability of serious games indicates a learning strategy that can offer encouragement for achieving learning goals, create interactional contexts for language drills construct confidence, and perfect the individualization for studying improvement.

3.4. Current Issues of Developing Educational Games

Language learning shall be closely relevant to human discourses in society, and video games can only offer a limited circle for some specific and minimal groups. Sadlo came up with some concerns that MMORPGs may influence people's speech acts in daily life and make them divorce from reality [15]. It also informed that language learning in virtual games may have difficulties in connecting with ordinary talks and academic knowledge, and teenagers may be influenced by words including impoliteness and rudeness [16].

Including learners' less curiosity about educational games, teachers find it complex to design digital games for classroom instructions and have a rare experience of combining dull drills with entertainment together. There are also some concerns that comprehensive applications of digital games are laboriously implemented for all proficient English learners.

4. Conclusion

MMORPGs have proved their efficiency and socialization by increasing previous research. To cater to more pedagogic orientations and individual demands, they are better chosen to refine learning strategy and supply enough language circumstances. Speech acts in digital games can lead to a direction about how to push EFL students to communicate more mutually and more meaningfully after proper educational instructions. In addition, language drills in digital games are thought to be more inspiring than traditional classroom instructions.

However, it is a still challenging issue that the broad implementation of digital game-based learning will be focused on a variety of fields not only in education designs but also in psychology, neuroscience, and economics. The study expects that more digital serious games can be introduced to educational instructions; meanwhile, digital serious games will have a positive tendency of applications on strategic designs and schooling curriculums.

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