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ON SOME CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF VIDEO GAME DISCOURSE

During the last decade the internet and the development of gaming consoles like Nintendo, Sony PlayStation and Xbox extended the number of worldwide video game players. Games and gaming culture have become a significant part of our everyday life. They are mostly used as entertainment activity. However, they have a significant role in educational and professional fields as well. Video games are both tools and objects of learning, cross-cultural communication and the promotion of values. The main aim of the paper is to study the video game language from an EFL perspective, attempting to identify some peculiarities of the given type of discourse.

Key words: *video game discourse, video game culture, cross-cultural communication, ludology, computer and console games, educational games, game applications, conversational discourse, ellipsis, derogatory word, vulgarisms*

At the very start of their emergence in the 1980s the games were neglected by scholars, but in the last 15 years they established themselves as a separate field of multidisciplinary studies by computer science, psychology, physiology, art, design, cultural studies, business, marketing, education and ludology, which is the discipline studying games and playing in general. Ludology is constructed upon the latin word *ludus* (game). The term has historically been used to describe the study of games and particularly of board games. Ludology includes videogame theory, but it goes beyond it to include all games and forms of play /www.ludology.org/. It is perhaps surprising in this context that little comprehensive work has been carried out on video games as objects and tools of language studies, with the exception of solid work done by James Paul Gee /Gee, 2007/ and Astrid Ensslin /Ensslin, 2012/.

Taking into account the huge impact of various video games on the lives of millions of people all over the world, it is not surprising, that video game discourse is a new field of research for applied linguistics. The latter mainly examines how video games give rise to new vocabularies and discourse practices, as well as how they may serve as vehicles for language learning and intercultural communication. Like any form of popular new media, video games are generally associated with new subcultural movements and tend to evoke a lot of criticism on the part of educators, teachers and parents due to assumed negative effects on young people. But as game culture or gaming has become an integral part of our reality, scholars and scientists across different disciplines no longer can overlook its significance.

The main purpose of this paper is to emphasize the educational role of video game as a powerful tool for foreign language acquisition. In the recent years the language of mass media has been comprehensively studied. Media discourses such as language of newspapers, radio, advertising, TV commercials, as well as the

Internet, have been the subject of numerous research, whereas the gaming discourse is a relatively new field of study to be filled by communication analysts, linguists, psychologists and philologists. Video games present a complex media, which combine both written and spoken language, music, sound, animated and still images. According to A. Ensslin, it is “a multi-faceted media which are highly explorative and non-linear, offering virtual worlds, or landscapes, inviting players to explore and navigate using diverse audio-visual and haptic resources”. All the above mentioned elements that constitute the video game interact through a computer interface and various software and hardware. For the given research we need to distinguish the main types of popular technology games:

- Arcade games
- Computer games
- Console games
- Handheld games
- Mobile games

Computer and console games can further be classified according to different genre into more than a dozen subtypes. However, here we will focus on some of them, which are considered to be the most efficient in terms of educating and providing a lot of vocabulary and grammar for foreign language learning. The following subtypes are described below:

1. Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) games that are played over a LAN (local area network) or via the Internet. Players use a network and interact with other players in the virtual game room. You can play against people from all over the world. The creation of these games involves thousands of hours of programming, giving you, the player, the most amazing gaming experience possible.

2. Adventure – These are usually single player games, and are often set in fantasy or adventure worlds. You complete puzzles to advance levels. The game generally starts with a back story of your character, and let you know what your mission is. You have to figure out how to complete the mission.

3. Real-Time Strategy (RTS) – For these games, you usually need to build up your inventory of items, armies, etc. Similar to a strategy game, RTS games move in real-time, and players can play simultaneously without taking turns so you can play together at the same time.

4. Action – Fast-paced games for which you need to have excellent reflexes. Complete challenges by fighting with enemies, and use a character of your choice to represent yourself and jump into the action.

5. Sports – Play real-world sports like baseball, basketball, soccer, and more. As you work up through the various skill levels, your game will involve mimicking

real professional athletes and how they move. The most popular sports games are usually based around specific popular sporting events.

6. Role-Playing (RPG) – If you love fantasy, you will love role-playing games. You get to act out the part of the main character, be the hero, make decisions that go along with the games’ story lines. Many of these games have narrative guides.

7. Educational – While many parents and teachers complain about video games, there are some great educational games out there that can help with the learning process, train in a variety of subjects, using games to make learning fun instead of boring activity. There are testing functions, where you can answer multiple choice questions. The most common types of education games are for math, science, languages /<http://thoughtcatalog.com/jane-hurst/types-of-computer-games/>.

Linguistic analysis of video games can be carried out from different angles depending on particular object and purpose of studies. Thus, it is possible to differentiate language of games used by industry professionals, designers, gamers and between the gamers for interaction, language used by journalists to refer to those games, *techspeak* or *chatspeak* and other types of discourse. As games are applications that are made for corresponding hardware and software they are very dynamic and can change, develop in one or two years. Accordingly, new releases of games appear, the latest version software become obsolete over the period of few years. This in its turn requires a more dynamic approach to the study of gaming language /<http://libraryoferana.wordpress.com/>.

According to A. Ensslin, most experts, discourse analysts look at both spoken and written language and the knowledge beyond the word, phrase, clause or sentence level. They tend to look at the bigger picture and the way meaning arises from the textual and extratextual context /Ensslin, 2012: 14/. Some of them investigate ludological jargon or gamer slang (ludolect), which are characteristic of the given type of discourse. However, the bigger picture cannot exist without its smaller constituents.

This paper is an attempt to analyse the video game language from an EFL perspective and hence, it is a purely linguistic research. It is part of a wider research of one particular video game, on the basis of which we identify some lexical, morphological, syntactic units and stylistic devices that compose the discourse of that game and can be acquired by the players for whom English is a foreign language. For this purpose a well-known and widely-played game was chosen – *Assassin’s Creed Unity by Ubisoft*. The choice of the video game is accounted for by the following factors: it contains huge material about history, architecture and design, it is very picturesque, has a wonderfully performed graphic design and is very obsessive. *Assassin’s Creed* is an award-winning adventure-action game that consists of nine main series and supporting materials. The games are set in

a fictional history of real world events and follow the centuries-old struggle between the Assassins, who fight for peace with free will, and the Templars, who desire peace through control. To play and progress through the game, players should accomplish different tasks or missions, reach new objectives, reveal various options, obtain new skills and move to a higher level of mastery and proficiency. The series have been well received by the public and critics /<https://www.speaker.com/user/westaries/assassins-creed/>.

Linguistic research was carried out, extracting huge word stock, collocations, grammatical forms, constructions and patterns used. One of our main aims was to find out which language learning skills may be developed through the game, also language material that it provides for non-native speakers.

The term “discourse” has different meanings depending on its use in cultural studies, semiotics and discourse analysis: J. P. Gee distinguishes between Discourse and discourse (minuscule). According to Gee, discourse minuscule is defined as usage of common language, while Discourse refers to the combination of language with other social practices (behavior, values, ways of thinking, clothes, customs, perspectives) within a specific group /Gee, 2002: 5/.

Assassin’s Creed is an adventure game, accordingly the language of the game represents conversational discourse with all its characteristic features. Conversations in video games exist as the foremost way to instruct and guide the player through the game. Conversations exhibit a very wide range of styles, nuances and linguistic strategies. These conversations take the form of quests, dialogues, monologues and hints that introduce players to new missions, characters, locations or objects. The script of all linguistic elements spoken and written during the game was extracted /Assassin’s Creed Unity by Ubisoft, Mission one, 2014/. On the basis of these dialogues the following findings were identified.

The game discourse is mostly characterized by the abundance of contracted forms, ellipsis, jargon and vulgar words:

1) As the structure of the game language is mostly presented in form of dialogues, it is explicable that they are built on adjacency pairs. The adjacency pair is composed of two turns (sometimes more than two) produced by different speakers, which are placed adjacently, where the second utterance is dependent on and identified as related to the first. In the material under study these pairs mostly include exchanges of question/answer, challenge/rejection, accusation/denial, offer/accept, and others. The following extract from the dialogue between the main characters represent adjacency pairs, including question/answer and offer/decline /<https://www.thoughtco.com/adjacency-pair-conversation-analysis/>:

- What is this? The sixth time? The seventh? Perhaps a new hobby might be better for your health?
- Well, I find playing cards affords many opportunities for fresh air and exercise.

- We’ll talk about this later. I have business in town, and must collect Elise before I can attend to it.
- Elise is here?
- Only for the night. She returns to Paris first thing tomorrow.
- She’ll need an escort, won’t she? With you so preoccupied? I can collect her.
- One of you running amok is quite enough. Remain here and see if Olivier has any chores for you. I’m sure he does.

2) With regard to syntax it is worth mentioning that grammar is simplified and rules are sometimes violated. The great majority of sentences are simple sentences, with tendency towards coordinated rather than subordinated clauses. There are a lot of incomplete sentences, adverbial intensifiers or discourse markers. Common ones in the dialogues are: **well, ah, so, now then, right, quite, rather, only, just**. They are all little persuaders in one way or another and you are not likely to have any difficulty imagining a tone of voice for each of them. Here are some examples:

- **Just** had a nice chat with your brother...
- With you **so** preoccupied?
- **Well**, in a just world, Victor, I would agree with you. But this is not a just word.
- One of you running amok is **quite** enough.

3) Colloquial ellipsis is abundant in the conversations, whereas passive is rare. Here are some examples of elliptical sentences in dialogues:

- A: I’m Arno.
 B: Elise.
 A: Your master is harboring a common criminal. In broad daylight he broke into my home and stole my watch!
 B: Did he indeed?
 A: He robbed me.
 B: Of what precisely.

4) Dialogues are full of interrogative, imperative sentences and interjections, especially during the fight scenes:

- Draw your swords, men! Defend the Temple!
- Hold the bridge! Hold!
- Go to the tower! Take the Sword and the book! Hide them!
- Who goes there?
- Elise is here?
- Ah... no, – RRagh!, – Hah! Got you now. – Hmm.

5) Use of contractions such as – *can't, that's, I'm, don't, I've, you're, it's, we'll, they'll*.

6) A lot of phrasal verbs maintain the style of spoken discourse in the dialogues: *look for, look at, calm down, hold on, break into, sort out, leave off, let through, shove off*:

- *Calm down* Victor! I've only come for my watch.
- *Hold on* a minute...
- In broad daylight he *broke into* my home and stole my watch.
- *Shove off!*

7) Game discourse is rich with *figurative language, metaphors*. Here is an example of a figurative use of the word *hand* in different contexts denoting different things:

A: King Philip's moving faster than we expected.

B: Mm, another *hand* is at work here (denoting someone's involvement in something).

– They must not fall into the Assassin's *hands* (meaning they should not be caught or captivated by them).

– You wait just here. I will return when this *hand* reaches the top ('hand' denoting the pointer of the clock).

– Thickheaded blacksmith like you probably can't *read a watch* ('read a watch' meaning be able to use, understand or tell the time by a watch).

The following literary device exemplifies the use of *simile* in one of the dialogues:

– The Assassins are far older than Masyaf, my friend. Their *anarchic delusions are virulent as the plague*, and less easily eradicated.

Another example of a *metaphor* where a young boy is compared with a piglet, as the expression "suckling pig" denotes a young piglet fed on its mother's milk:

– My *suckling pig!* Guards, guards, stop them!

8) Taking into account the nature of the game and the mission of the main characters to avenge for all the inflicted injustice, it is not surprising that the main characteristic of the analysed linguistic material is the frequent use of colloquial language, clichés, pejorative (derogatory) words, vulgarisms, and swear words. These words and expressions appear mostly in fight scenes in imperative forms, threats and even curses. Here are some words having negative connotations (pejoratives or derogatory words) that have been extracted from the first mission:

assassin, anarchic, plague, hell, hijack, frighten, steal, thief, penalty, criminal, crime, thieving, rob, cheat, conflict, barbarians.

Some other examples of swear words and threats:

- *Damn you* man. *Hell!*
- Oh, *you're a dead man!*
- You're not welcome here.
- Get back here! Stop him, **thief!** *I'm going to smash your skull into paste!*
- Why you're not rotting in a cell at this moment, I cannot fathom.
- Pope Clement, here me. Before this year is out, *you will answer for your crimes before – God almighty.* And you, King Philip, no punishment is too heinous for the great evil you have inflicted upon the Temple. *I curse you! Curse you to the thirteenth generation of your blood!*

Most of us – English teachers do not fully realize how video games influence the children's foreign language acquisition. Meanwhile, we are often surprised how children learn English or acquire information on their own from YouTube, videos, films, cartoons and games with hi-tech gadgets, without any intervention or guidance of a teacher. If in the past learning a foreign language was a conscious, targeted activity comprising long hours of efforts put in reading, retelling, translating, today it is undeniable that high-tech devices have greatly affected and changed the learning process and methods of teaching. Video games are extremely inspirational and attractive for people of all ages.

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Լ. ԲԱՐՍԵՂՅԱՆ – Վիդեո խաղերի լեզվի որոշ առանձնահատկությունների մասին. – Վերջին տասնամյակում համացանցի, Nintendo, Sony PlayStation և Xbox խաղային վահանակների (կոնսոլների) կատարելագործմանը զուգընթաց ողջ աշխարհում կտրուկ աճել է վիդեո խաղեր խաղացողների թիվը: Խաղերն ու խաղային մշակույթը դարձել են մեր առօրյայի անբաժանելի մասը: Դրանք հիմնականում ժամանցի տեսակ են: Սակայն, վիդեո խաղերն ունեն նաև նշանակալի դեր կրթական և մասնագիտական ոլորտներում: Ավելին, խաղերը ծառայում են որպես միջմշակութային հաղորդակցության, արժեքների խթանման, ուսուցման թե՛ գործիք, թե՛ առարկա: Տվյալ հոդվածի հիմնական նպատակն է ուսումնասիրել վիդեո խաղերի լեզուն՝ փորձելով լայն տարածում ունեցող վիդեո խաղի լեզվական նյութի հիման վրա բացահայտել դիսկուրսի տվյալ տեսակի որոշ առանձնահատկություններ և դրանց դերը օտար լեզու (անգլերեն) ուսումնասիրելիս:

Բանալի բառեր. վիդեո խաղերի լեզու (դիսկուրս), վիդեո խաղերի մշակույթ, միջմշակութային հաղորդակցություն, լոկալիզացիա (խաղերի ուսումնասիրություն), համակարգչային և կոնսոլային խաղեր, կրթական խաղեր, խաղային հավելվածներ, խոսակցական լեզու, զեղչում, նսեմացուցիչ բառեր, գոեհիկ բառեր (գոեհիկաբանություններ)

Լ. БАРСЕГЯН – О некоторых особенностях языка видеоигр. – За последнее десятилетие, благодаря распространению Интернета и игровых консолей Nintendo, Sony PlayStation и Xbox, во всем мире резко возросло число людей, играющих в видеоигры. Видеоигры и игровая культура стали неотъемлемой частью нашей повседневной жизни. Являясь в основном формой развлечения, видеоигры вместе с тем играют важную роль в образовательной и профессиональной сфере. Кроме того, они способствуют межкультурной коммуникации, продвижению ценностей, а также служат инструментом и предметом обучения. Основная цель данной статьи заключается в изучении языка видеоигр с точки зрения обучения иностранного (английского) языка. В статье, на основе языкового материала конкретной игры, выявляются некоторые особенности данного вида дискурса, а также подчеркивается роль видеоигр в изучении английского.

Ключевые слова: дискурс видеоигр, культура видеоигр, межкультурная коммуникация, людология (исследование игр), компьютерные и консольные игры, развивающие игры, игровые приложения, разговорный язык, эллипсис, уничижительные слова, вульгарные слова (вульгаризмы)