Micro-Paper 49: *Visual Literacy in Video Games*

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Defining the Term

People today are constantly receiving visual messages through different media (television, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet). Consequently, it has become a necessity to being able to understand, interpret and respond to those messages. In other words, people are learning to read their context and what is around them. It is a requirement to be visually literate in an always connected world.

Visual literacy describes the ability to make sense of visual images to foster the communication. Particularly, visual literacy refers to the process of creating meaning from a multimodal setting, which combines visual images, written text, sounds and other elements that give the observer important information about a certain context.

A visual medium by default, video games are not the exception and can offer its players a multimodal experience. Most video games, simple or not, include graphics and sounds. If you want to play them, you will have to understand, interpret, and respond to what is on your screen. In addition, video games often have their own symbol systems and indicators, which means that every new player will have to learn their meaning in order to master the game.

Game developers emphasize clarity, as the reliability that they can give to the players through visual messages. By just looking at the screen, every player should know what is happening in the game and that should give them enough time to react to it. Taking that into account, visual literacy is an important factor of being a gamer. For example, if players do not know how to clearly read a symbol that indicates that there is a danger nearby, they will probably not advance in the game as quick as someone who understands the different visual messages that appear on the screen.

Connecting it to LSLP

At LSLP, specifically in our gaming literacies team, we have been analyzing the links between English and the overall playing experience. The concept of Language-as-Victory, which was developed by the Phase One of the group, demonstrates that gamers are learning vocabulary in English to have a better performance in different games and, ultimately, win. Nevertheless, while this is a key factor when playing a game, it is important to recognize that learning how to communicate in another language with other players is just the first step to become a winner.

Most of the information in video games is presented in a visual way, thus, it is necessary to have a deeper understanding of how gamers are using their previous knowledge about the game to read all the information that is constantly being presented to them in the screen and which is also necessary to have a good game.

Expanding Second Language Research

As mentioned before, second languages, especially English, play an important role inside the gaming community. Language is the key to knowledge about video games. After gamers have learned the necessary vocabulary to communicate and play in a game, they will use that knowledge to make connections with the other factors necessary to be a good player in this case, the visual information about the game and how to make use of it to advance.

References

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