Micro-Paper 50: *Identity in Video Games*

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Defining the Term

Different social groups which people belong to play an important role in the process of building identities and they become a source of pride and self-esteem for individuals. Since birth, people ascribe to certain cultural and social groups (e.g. nationality, family, religion, social class), which will influence their early views about the world. Nonetheless, as people grow older, interaction serves as a way to give sense to world by choosing to join other social groups such as gaming communities. However, it is important to mention that identifying oneself as a gamer is not just linked to playing video games, but how oneself makes sense of the world through the experience of playing a videogame and interacting with other members of that community.

In this sense, identity in video games refers to the combination of the reality of the gamer, which includes their cultural background, emotions and views about the world; and the connections they make with certain characteristics of a video game (the design, characters, story, gameplay, etc.) and its community. Therefore, the identity of video games become the reflection of the identity of the gamer and this relationship is what keeps the players engaged.

On the other hand, the main target public for video games remained invariable for several years. Consequently, game developers used to pander to a specific audience, which resulted in the lack of representation for other groups or even worse, failed attempts of representation. This poses a problem because several studies have shown that people will likely play a game and identify themselves as gamers if they can see themselves reflected in the game. As a result, there have been huge efforts by recognized video game developer companies to analyze and consider the identity of their player base to offer them a more inclusive and diverse experience through different portrayals.

Connecting it to LSLP

At LSLP, specifically in our gaming literacies team, we have been analyzing the role that second languages, especially English, play when learning the basics for winning a game (Language-as-Victory). However, we have recognized that identity in video games is more than just obtaining victory, as most players look for representations of their own identity within video games by interacting with others and with the game. In that sense, the role of English changes and it becomes a bridge in a borderless world, in which people can interact with people from different cultures and realities, but who share a common interest (video games).

Expanding Second Language Research

Taking into account the fact that English serves as a mean to establish links between different cultures and people, it is fair to say that identity is built through language. Moreover, identity sets up the way each individual experiences, expresses and builds identity around video games. Namely, this personal approach to this experience may vary according to their particular characteristics such as gender, age, nationality, race and sexual orientation.

References

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