

Video games as a tool for acquiring grammatical competence in language class

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ABSTRACT

Video games have the potential to provide foreign language immersion and, incidentally or voluntarily, develop language skills. Thorne, Fisher and Lu (2012, p.297) show, for example, that video games are a rich and multimodal "semiotic ecology" for language learning. Peterson (2013) indicates that the players in his study engage in L2 interaction in an active and enthusiastic way when gaming. From an educational point of view, the use of video games in language classes is therefore a definite attraction, especially when the teacher is looking for a way to motivate their students to practice the target language (Sykes and Reinhardt, 2013). In France, some studies focus on the integration of games in the classroom by questioning teachers' practices and feelings about the contributions and limits of their pedagogical worth (Wastiau, 2009; Wix, 2012). However, little research has been done on the potential added value of video games in terms of language acquisition, particularly when used in a school context.

This proposal focuses on the following question: do video games designed for leisure enable adolescents in French as a Second Language learning situations in schools to better understand and appropriate grammatical competence? This study thus aims to contribute to a better understanding of the language appropriation process through video games.

The pedagogical proposal is inspired by Campos, Oliveira, and Brawerman-Albini (2013) and consists in having students in UPE2A structure (a structure inside a secondary school dedicated to learners of French as a Second Language) review the conjugation and use of the imperative through the use of the game Wario Ware Minigame Mania (Nintendo, 2003). Our hypothesis is that video games can offer as much input and output as traditional revision exercises (gap-fill exercises, transformation exercises, etc.). However, the use of language in gameplay, as well as the engaging and collaborative nature of the game itself, are likely to produce superior mnemonics. The playful situation makes it possible to create a group dynamic where the use of the targeted verbal forms makes more sense (Charaudeau, 2002). It adds a social dimension, which is very important in the context of language learning (Atkinson, 2002). Learners are also likely to become more involved by experiencing emotions related to entertainment (Krashen, 1985).

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The research protocol compares two sample groups: a first group of students who revise the imperative with traditional exercises only and a second group who revise the imperative with video games. An introductory session is planned, as well as two revision sessions. Students are tested in three ways: a diagnostic test to assess their skills in combining the imperative before entering the revision period, a control test between the two scheduled revision sessions and a final test to see if students were able to transfer the skills developed during the play sessions to another context. At the end of the experiment, students are also invited to answer a questionnaire concerning their feelings about the sessions. The research method is therefore comparative and mainly quantitative. A few open-ended questions will shed qualitative light on the results.

As the experiment takes place in June 2019, no results are available at the time of writing.

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