English in video and online computer games
- Potential enhancement of players’ vocabulary

Anna Vidlund
ABSTRACT

The aim of this essay is to distinguish whether the activity of playing video and online computer games as a leisure activity could be considered to be a learning situation. With the focus on vocabulary, this study investigates the possibility that gamers could improve their language proficiency while playing video and online computer games. The methodology is based on qualitative observations (Patel & Davidson 2011) and on interviews with seven players of five different games. The observations mainly considered the vocabulary used in the games and how the players used the English language while playing. The interviews are constructed with the methodology mentioned by Kylén (2004). The interview questions aimed to answer if the players had been noticing an improvement of their vocabulary. The data are mainly acquired from the observations and interviews. The background sections build on studies relating to computer-based language learning and on the previous research on ELF, primarily from Barbara Seidlhofer (2011). Even though the data acquired from the observations and interviews are limited, it is apparent that video and online computer games have a noticeable impact on language development, regarding vocabulary. The main conclusion of this study is that the games do not influence the players’ language proficiency as considerably as the engaging in the functions in conjunction with the games.

Keywords: Computer-based language learning, English language learning, Online computer games, Video games, Vocabulary learning
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1. INTRODUCTION

Playing video and online computer games as a hobby has dramatically increased in popularity since the 1990’s (Berger 2002:3ff). The games differ from one another depending on the purpose of the game. The games’ difference in structure and utility places them in various genres, for example, the genre ‘first-person shooter’. However, most of the games have a common denominator, which is that they are mainly constructed with English as the primary language (Chik 2012:95f). Most video and online computer games have instructions, storylines, and chats that are written in English. People who engage in such activities every day will have a continuous interaction with the English language. It seems credible that such an incessant interaction could improve players’ English vocabulary by using English as a lingua franca.

A lingua franca can be defined as any spoken communication between people who have different mother tongues and the language spoken between them is a second language for both of them (Seidlhofer 2011:7). It could be argued that English is practiced as a lingua franca between gamers since many of them are non-native speakers communicating in English while playing. It is important that players understand English in order to understand the game and other players as well as using it as a strategy to become successful gamers. The use of English may possibly give players an opportunity to engage in a larger range of games on account of the individual comprehension of English.

English is the first lingua franca to penetrate continents through both language spread and the distribution of the Anglo-American culture (Seidlhofer 2011:7). Hence, non-native speakers of English could be aware of what constitutes, for instance, insulting language use in gaming. In some games players are required to communicate with each other in order to move forward in the game. Those who have good language proficiency could have an advantage since their language skills could affect the outcome of the game. Still, non-native speakers with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds may have different opinions of what is appropriate discourse while speaking English (Mauranen 2012:15). Seidlhofer (2011:98) mentions that the negotiation of meaning is essential for non-native speakers while communicating with each other. To use the strategy of negotiating meanings improves one’s language proficiency since the ability to notice associations of components in a language develops. The lack of language proficiency could lead to complications if non-native speakers do not understand each other. In games where people play together in teams, they might be required to describe what actions to carry out and which places to go in order to be successful.
in the game. Thus, it is essential that they do not misinterpret each other but if they do it may lead to consequences in the gaming reality, such as the death of the characters. When defining language proficiency the expression itself is ambiguous. However, while discussing language proficiency connected to video and online computer games one should draw attention to vocabulary since it stands for the main linguistic difference between the games. Therefore, this essay primarily focuses on vocabulary when referring to English language proficiency.

This topic is worth studying because the language used in video and online computer games may have a considerable impact on players’ language proficiency and, therefore, one would be able to argue the activity of playing video and online computer games to be a learning situation. As Chik (2012:96) concludes, teenagers practice language learning inevitably through activities which spark their interest. Therefore, it may be interesting to perceive video and online computer games as a source for English language learning since English can be seen as a lingua franca between gamers. Consequently, the players may be able to widen their English vocabulary while interacting with other non-native speakers. As mentioned, games consist of various types of vocabulary, a form of language that the players may not be exposed to in school. According to Gee (2007:215f), playing video games can be seen as a learning situation where players can deepen their knowledge of literacy. Moreover, players communicate with each other while playing, either within the game or through independent chat sites (Chandler & Chandler 2011:85ff). The use of this type of communication indicates that players are exposed to the English language continuously. Furthermore, many games are directed towards a wider audience consisting of non-native speakers, which makes gaming one of the arenas in today’s world where English is used as a lingua franca.

Playing video and online computer games is, as mentioned, a popular activity for many people in today’s society (Chik 2012:95). Thus, this investigation is considerably current and up to date. The investigation of such an up to date area will hopefully lead to interesting results; for instance, there is the possibility that players of these games have acquired high levels of English through playing video and online computer games rather than from their previous English education.

1.1 Aim, scope, and research questions

This essay will investigate the terms and expressions used in video and online computer games, considering the language of the instructions and storylines in the games. Moreover, it treats the issue of whether the language used in these games could affect non-native speakers’
vocabulary by playing such games. Possibly, the games may consist of a language that would not be exposed to the players through other activities where English is used, for example, in school or through the media. The investigation also includes the language used in the communication between players, mainly focusing on the possible improvements of vocabulary. The aim is to examine the types of vocabularies used in the games and by the players in order to see whether the games can be a source for widening players’ vocabulary. It is of interest to regard the players’ opinions of their improvements to gain information whether such games could be a factor for the widening of vocabularies. To answer the hypothesis if playing video and online computer games improves players’ vocabularies, these research questions have been constructed:

1. What varieties of vocabulary are players exposed to?
2. How do players use the English language, in terms of speaking and writing, while playing video and online computer games in English?
3. How does the language used in the games influence players’ English vocabulary?
4. What impact have players noticed of their English vocabulary from playing video and online computer games?

The research questions have to be answered in order to confirm that playing video and online computer games can improve players’ vocabulary by using English as a lingua franca.

Unfortunately, there was limited previous research primarily focusing on players broadening their English vocabulary through the use of video and online computer games. Therefore, associations were created between studies concerning non-native speakers’ language use and whether games are utilized in school environments in order to gain information if video and online computer games could be considered a learning device. To be able to receive proper information concerning this topic one has also considered previous research done on computer-based language learning as well as on the definition of English as a lingua franca. In order to distinguish if players improve their vocabulary by actively playing video and online computer games, computer games and learning are discussed in the next Section.

2. COMPUTER GAMES AND LEARNING

The interest for integrating video games with educational purposes was first formed in the 1980’s, when the so-called edutainment games were constructed (Whelchel 2007). However, there was still cynicism against video games, as it was believed that the games would
influence players in a damaging way (Whelchel 2007). In the 1990’s the gaming industry was prospering but the market changed. The video game companies began to focus on the production of entertainment games instead of edutainment games since they detected the possibility of making more money in that category (Whelchel 2007). Computer gaming has become a popular activity the last decade and today the interest of using such games in education has increased (Whelchel 2007). He makes a connection between popular culture and the use of computer games in learning environments (Whelchel 2007). This association may be based on the fact that computer games have become such a significant leisure activity for many people. Therefore, it is important to recognize those interests as people absorb information easier when interested rather than when they are not (Whelchel 2007).

There have been many studies done on the subject of computer games integrated in language learning, for instance, Beatty (2003:7ff) mentions the term CALL, which stands for Computer Assisted Language Learning. CALL refers to the method of teaching language through different computer-based materials, which are purpose-made for that area. Computer games or other materials found on the Internet, such as videos and audio files, can be implemented in language learning (Beatty 2003:8). These computer-based materials are created for language learning in school. The games are pedagogical and contain research-based exercises, which, therefore, are conceived as ‘purpose-made’ (Beatty 2003:8f). Additionally, there have been inquiries done on how video games can affect players’ learning technique, explaining that it would be possible to obtain better strategies of learning through playing. Thus, players develop their skill of making associations and strategies of preparation for learning in the future (Gee 2007:23ff).

Sandford et al.’s (2006:6f) study deals with the use of computer games in school. They discuss the fact that pupils are less involved with their education, and that they are more involved with playing computer games as a leisure activity. Hence, the idea of using computer games in language learning would meet the pupils’ interests, and make them more involved in their education. Sandford et al. (2006:6f) point out that combining pupils’ interests outside school with what is expected of them in school would be ideal for language learning. Even though using computer games in language learning have indicated to increase pupils’ motivation in school, Sandford et al. (2006:50) maintain that it is essential that teachers choose appropriate games to be used in the classroom. That it is important to analyse the features of the game so that the use of games in the classroom will not become as familiar as playing games at home. If teachers do not pay attention to this dilemma it is possible for
pupils to use the game as a way of showing their skills of gaming, rather than using the game as an instrument of learning (Sandford et al. 2006:50).

Stanley (2012:2) claims that teachers should ask their pupils about the computer games they play at home, that it would be a good way of bonding with the pupils since the teacher shows interest in their interests. Furthermore, Stanley (2012:2) states that teachers should attempt to play the games that their pupils are playing, even though that is not a necessity for using games in the classroom. It would be an advantage to gain experience on how the games are composed in order to increase teachers’ awareness on pupils’ different interests (Stanley 2012:2). His statements imply that online computer gaming has become such an influential activity for young people and that teachers are exhorted to turn their attention to this phenomenon. Consequently, trying to capture pupils’ current interests and apply them in language teaching would seemingly give pupils the impression of being a part in the evolvement of the school system.

Linderoth (2007:28) presents the fact that playing computer games will help players develop various qualities, such as the ability of analysing, contemplating, and to become observant to details. The fact that such qualities would develop from the activity of playing computer games indicates that gaming has a positive effect on players. Moreover, Linderoth (2007:28) mentions that the industry of computer games is thriving and new technologies are constantly developing. Hence, it is difficult to distinguish which games will be of assistance in the learning process and which games will lead to a dangerously high consumption and affect players in a damaging way. Possibly, Linderoth (2007:28) refers to the fact that to invest too much time playing such games could have the effect of lacking social competence, as it could become an isolating activity in a worst-case scenario. However, one could assume that a high consumption of computer games that stimulates the learning process could be positive for pupils’ development. However, traditional teaching methods may not be applicable when using computer games associated with language learning for educational purposes (Whelchel 2007). Thus, it is essential that teachers are aware of how to adapt teaching methods in order to meet the technology used, that the teaching methods interact with the technology rather than being two separated procedures.

Computer games are used in learning environments at the present (Beatty 2003:7ff), indicating that teachers already have embraced this phenomenon as a possible way of learning. Therefore, it is feasible to consider video and online computer games that are played on leisure time as learning instruments, not only for language development but for the development of other qualities as well (Linderoth 2007:28). Moreover, Chik (2012:95ff)
discusses the fact that non-native speakers have a tendency to play video and computer games that are in English. Furthermore, she mentions that learning does not solely exist in schools, and also that everything people do during their spare time can be considered as a learning situation. Thus, it seems possible to acknowledge video and online computer games as learning devices, not only as useful tools for education but also as instruments for developing different abilities of value in everyday life.

In order to understand how the English language influence non-native speakers it is preferable to examine how the English language has developed into a lingua franca. In addition, it seems relevant to discuss how non-native speakers use the language for the purpose of understanding the usage of vocabulary.

3. ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA (ELF)

English as a lingua franca (ELF) takes place when non-native speakers with different mother tongues communicate by using English (Seidlhofer 2011:7). Thus, one could argue that ELF is practiced when non-native speakers play video games or online computer games with other non-native speakers. When players do not share the same mother tongue they communicate in English in order to understand each other while playing.

The English language is used globally and through the spread of the language numerous uses have developed (Seidlhofer 2011:3f). It seems inevitable that the language would not change since such a huge number of non-native speakers, who are able to convey new uses of the language, use it.

3.1 The development of ELF

The English language is the first lingua franca to penetrate countries globally, both through its spread to different continents and through diffusion of values into social groups (Seidlhofer 2011:7). Moreover, Seidlhofer (2011:3) suggests that English has become an international language partly by the expansion of the British colonies in the past, and partly since non-native speakers have chosen to learn the language because of its usefulness. She also explains that there are more non-native speakers than native speakers of English, which indicates that the English language has reached a kind of globalization that no former lingua franca reached before (Seidlhofer 2011:3). Therefore, it seems reasonable to argue that the globalization of ELF includes the gaming world.

To define ELF one can investigate Kachru’s (1992:356ff) ‘Concentric Circles’, where various uses of English are divided into groups. There are three circles, the ‘Inner Circle’, the
‘Outer Circle’, and the ‘Expanding Circle’. In the ‘Inner Circle’ one can find countries where the majority of the population uses English as a first language, as in the UK or the USA. Countries, such as India or Nigeria, etcetera, where English is an additional language, are located in the ‘Outer Circle’. Moreover, countries where they teach English as a foreign language in school, such as Sweden or Denmark, are put in the third circle, the ‘Expanding Circle’ (Kachru 1992:356ff). Seidlhofer (2011:4) concludes that English becomes a lingua franca from these three different ways of language use. Since the use of English within the expanding circle is increasing it is also one of the main reasons why the English language is constantly changing. The changes of the language are predominantly made through electronic communication, such as the Internet and mobile phones, etcetera, and through improved mobility and possibilities of travel between countries (Seidlhofer 2011:4). It seems convenient to incorporate the activity of playing video and online computer games in the category of electronic communication since gamers communicate electronically through chat sites (Berger 2002:3ff).

Seidlhofer (2011:95f) argues that ELF characterized as ‘variety’, ‘community’, and ‘competence’ makes it a part of an operating process since the language is constantly developing. Still, non-native speakers’ linguistic errors often disturb the opponents of ELF. However, she declares that it is crucial to disregard linguistic features, and focus on communicative components when discussing ELF (Seidlhofer 2011:95f). Furthermore, it could be fair to claim that it is only possible to understand ELF as a language in motion by valuing communication rather than linguistics, as it is through communication that languages develop (Seidlhofer 2011:95f). Since many video and online computer games require communication between players it seems reasonable to argue that the statements made above are applicable to this activity as well.

According to Mauranen (2012:243), the English language is constantly changing but native speakers are not the single responsible source of the changes. Mauranen (2012:243) states that those who are influencing the English language are international speakers of English in combination with native speakers. Hence, it appears that both non-native speakers and native speakers affect the language changes. Languages are variable not static since they are continuously developing and changing when speakers and writers use them. The language used correlates with the developments of today’s society. The Internet is an important component of society’s changes (Chik 2012:95ff) and, thus, connecting language use with the Internet seems appropriate. The Internet stimulates users through many domains, by newspaper articles, social networking sites, and gaming sites, etcetera. Since these forms of
media require variation of vocabulary it seems unavoidable not to become influenced by the exposure of different language uses. In addition to this, people are influenced by language use around them, not only through the Internet but also through listening to music and reading instructions, etcetera.

Video and online computer games may be a very influential part of language use since players spend many hours playing and are introduced to different vocabularies through the games (Chik 2012:95ff). New uses of a language develop through the lack of words for new trends and inventions (Seidlhofer 2011:101f). Seidlhofer (2011:101f) brings up various examples of newly created words, such as ‘googling’ and ‘spam’. Today, most new words originate from innovations in technology. Thus, computer games can be argued to be a source for new word-formations, as the expression ‘e-sport’

1. However, such developments of the language do not necessarily have connections to non-native speakers. Coining is an inevitable process of language and all speakers of the language are responsible for the changes, both native and non-native (Seidlhofer 2011:101).

3.2 English used by non-native speakers

According to Mauranen (2012:243), it is beneficial to be a non-native speaker when communicating in English since non-native speakers possess a better understanding of how to communicate with someone who does not share the same linguistic background. The reason is that non-native speakers have been forced to be tolerant towards people from other linguistic backgrounds. Speakers with English as their mother tongue merely focus on their own linguistic background while communicating with non-native speakers, since that linguistic competence is what both speakers strive for. Consequently, native speakers preferably turn their attention to linguistic errors produced by non-native speakers since native speakers are in possession of the proper accuracy. Non-native speakers are possibly more tolerant of each other’s (language) cultures, which can affect their use of the language, while native speakers automatically lose that experience as they are not as exposed to the potential differences (Mauranen 2012:243).

Seidlhofer (2011:33f) states that languages change through the interaction between people of different backgrounds, ethnicities, and cultures influencing each other by using the language diversely. That fact could also be applied to interaction between people who play video and online computer games since players derive from various backgrounds. English is

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1 When playing an online computer game professionally, and competing in tournaments, it is called an e-sport.
practiced variously during the activity of playing video and online computer games, which may influence the language as well as the players’ language use. Moreover, it is to be expected that players influence each other’s language use through their communication while playing, which may have a huge impact on the language development since the majority of English speakers are non-native speakers who use the language diversely (Seidlhofer 2011:2).

To establish if the hypothesis that playing video and online computer games could widen non-native speakers’ English vocabulary is correct, it is essential to examine the games as well as the players while they are playing.

4. METHOD AND MATERIAL

To gather the data needed to support the thesis this study uses qualitative observations of the games and players, and interviews with players of the games. The observations are done to establish the vocabulary used in the games’ instructions and storylines, etcetera. They also concentrate on how players use the English language while they are playing. Additional information on what was seen in the observations and the players’ own opinion on how their vocabulary has developed by playing the games was collected through interviewing the players. These two methods were used to gather as much data as possible (Patel & Davidson 2011:107).

The focus is put on male players located in Kalmar, Sweden. The observations and interviews are carried out with players of the video games ‘FIFA’ and ‘NHL’. Additionally, three online computer games such as ‘League of Legends’ (‘LoL’), ‘World of Warcraft’ (‘WoW’), and Counter-Strike’ (‘CS’) are included in the investigation. Information about the observed and interviewed players is shown in the following table (Table 1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Game</th>
<th>Active player</th>
<th>Method for gathering data</th>
<th>Mother tongue</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Extent of English Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P-1</td>
<td>‘FIFA’</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>Observation, Interview</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-2</td>
<td>‘NHL’</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>Observation, Interview</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-3</td>
<td>‘LoL’</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>Observation, Interview</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-4</td>
<td>‘WoW’</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-5</td>
<td>‘CS’</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Information about the players
All players have Swedish as their mother tongue, and they have studied English as a foreign language in school for at least eight years. Yet, none of these players have studied English at University level and could, by estimation, be placed within the spectra of the levels B1 and B2 on the CEFR-scale (Council of Europe [www]). The players are between 20 to 27 years old and have been active players of the games for at least 1.5 years. The players P-1, P-2, and P-3 are observed and interviewed, P-4 and P-5 are merely observed, while P-6 and P-7 are only interviewed. The reason why some players are only observed is that those players did not want to be a part of an interview, and therefore two other players were interviewed to gain further data.

Since the activity of playing video and online computer games is common among young people (Berger 2002:3ff), it was not particularly problematic to perform the observations and interviews. However, there have only been seven players included in the investigation. Hence, the results are not able to provide precise measures of the impact video and online computer games have on players’ language development. Thus, the analysis has to be thorough to be able to support the hypothesis.

4.1 Introducing the games

‘FIFA’ is a video game where one plays football. The player controls all the characters in the team. Teams are chosen before the game. It is possible to choose between a range of teams from different countries, either a national team or a club team. If the player chooses to represent a team from a club, he or she can choose club teams deriving from different countries as well. All sorts of teams can play a game against each other; a national team, such as Brazil, can play against a club team, as FC Barcelona. The player can play online with other players across the globe, as well as with someone that is physically next to him or her.

‘NHL’ is a sports video game where the sport executed is ice hockey. The player is responsible for steering every character in the team, and the main goal is to win the Stanley Cup. In ‘NHL’ one can choose from a variety of teams as well, both club teams and national teams, such as Detroit Red Wings and Finland, for example. As in ‘FIFA’ the player can play together with a friend or online.
The purpose of the action real-time strategy game ‘LoL’ is to fight a war against another team of players. The team includes various types of avatars\(^2\). The team is supposed to fight their way forward on a map, which has divergent lanes leading to a river. At these paths there are numerous tasks to perform. When approaching the other side of the river there is a similar landscape where there are also three lanes that belong to the opposite team. The task is to fight their way through these lanes as well, and at the end of the path there is a huge crystal-like tower called a ‘Nexus’. The team is supposed to destroy the other team’s ‘Nexus’ in order to win the game. Since it is such a long journey towards the other team’s ‘Nexus’, because of the various tasks required solving on the way, this game can become time consuming. Consequently, the players of this game spend many hours playing.

The role-playing game ‘WoW’ is based on the player steering an avatar and forming an alliance by assembling a group of other players. Then these players work together as a team to kill monsters. The game requires the players to discuss tactics in order to move forward, which obligate them to communicate orally through Skype or Ventrilo. Hence, the game involves abundant teamwork. However, it is not only killing monsters that help the players to move forward in the game. One is also obliged to gather ‘gear’, which is acquired through the killings of monsters. Such gear could include clothes and weapons, etcetera, but the game has no ending since there are always new quests to complete and new ‘gear’ to cease.

‘CS’ is a first-person shooter game constructed with one terrorist team and one counter-terrorist team playing against each other. There are five players in each team who are responsible for one of the avatars. The counter-terrorist team is supposed to stop the terrorists before they detonate a bomb, either through disarming the bomb or killing all the terrorists. The game is executed through playing various rounds and one round can be finished quickly; therefore, the players play many rounds in one sitting.

**4.2 Observations and interviews**

There are five observations done to support the thesis, one for each game. The observations are done in an unstructured manner, meaning that the investigator examines any possible situations and events during the observation; thus, the investigator does not use an observation scheme (Patel & Davidson 2011:97f). During the observations, the investigator takes notes of words and expressions seen in the games and said by the players to find significant key words to the thesis (Patel & Davidson 2011:98). The investigator does not take any part of the events

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\(^2\) The avatars are equipped with different weapons, and have individual qualities and abilities. They have certain assignments in the war, which are based on their capabilities.
observed, but sits in the back and witnesses since it is essential that the players act as usual while playing (Patel & Davidson 2011:98f). During the observations of ‘FIFA’ and ‘NHL’ the investigator observed (1) the terminology in the game, (2) the commentators’ use of English, and (3) the lyrics of the background music. When observing ‘LoL’, ‘WoW’, and ‘CS’ the investigator observed (1) the terminology in the game, (2) the players’ use of English while chatting, and (3) other utterances of English in the game³.

Five players of the same games observed were interviewed. Even though the interviews are regimented to some extent, the players have been given a chance to speak freely about their experiences. The players of the games are interviewed by using Kylén’s (2004:95ff) model, which is based on the metaphor of a funnel. In the beginning of the interview, the interviewee can speak without restrictions, which refers to the larger part of Kylén’s (2004:95ff) funnel. As the interview continues, the funnel becomes narrower and so do the demands of more exact answers to the questions (Kylén 2004:95ff).

The reason why the observations and interviews are made on seven players who play different types of games is to manage to collect diverse experiences and opinions. It is possible to compare the vocabulary by examining a selection of video and online computer games, and possibly detect patterns of how the games are composed. Since the games differ from one another, the observations and interviews may contribute with contrasting results concerning the use of vocabulary.

The vocabulary of the game is considered during the observations. In the sports games there could be terms as ‘free-kick’ and ‘icing’ found, and in the battle games terms for equipment and warfare, such as ‘sword’, ‘shield’, and ‘grenade’ are possible discoveries. The expressions used in the games are in focus, and the aim is to form an opinion of what vocabulary the players are exposed to. Is it a terminology within the game ‘WoW’ that may be similar to the vocabulary of the Middle Ages, such as ‘realm’ or ‘castle’, or how does such vocabulary influence the players’ language proficiency of English? When the observations started, the players began to play the game as usual. The investigator sat in the background and took notes of all possible events occurring in the game, as well as writing down words that seemed interesting. Difficulties with observing was to not influence the players since the investigator had to sit close to the computer or the TV in order to see the events and read the written words in the games. However, the players did not seem disturbed by the investigator’s presence since the games required their full attention. While doing the observations of ‘FIFA’

³ The games may possibly have voices uttering phrases similar to commentators’, but not as recurring.
and ‘NHL’, the first thing noticed was that the games were similar in the way they were composed. They are actually released by the same distributor EA sports, which could be a factor for their resemblances. Despite their similarities, it was evident that the games had considerable differences of vocabulary.

When observing ‘LoL’, ‘WoW’, and ‘CS’ there were two additional chat-programs used supplementary to the games’ chats, which were Ventrilo or Skype. Both Ventrilo and Skype have a microphone-function. The players spoke with each other rather than wrote, which was beneficial for developing their listening and speaking abilities. These programs seemed to be used because the players could communicate at a faster rate by speaking instead of writing. In games where one has to make fast decisions, concerning directions or tactics, the communication between players needs to have a certain flow.

Furthermore, the games ‘LoL’ and ‘WoW’ were comparable. Both games can be put in the genre of fantasy, which explains the similar terminology of the games, including words as ‘demon’ or ‘dragon’. ‘CS’ could not be associated with these games since the environment differed in large amounts, and the game was fundamentally different in the execution of it.

The interviewees were given a guide that contains an overview of some of the questions that are to be brought up, so that they have an impression of how the interview is performed and what questions are supposed to be raised. They are given a short description of the execution of the interview and how the interview is to be used. The interviews are carried out for approximately 10-15 minutes, which seems to be a reasonable time considering the number of questions (see Appendix 1). During the interviews, the investigator takes notes and records the interviewee to secure a larger collection of data. Afterwards, the interviewee is asked if there is a possibility to contact him for further questions since new questions or angles can be considered while analysing the interview.

There have been additional questions raised during some of the interviews, depending on answers from the interviewees. Also, there are additional questions meant for specific interviewees, which, therefore, are discussed with that person exclusively. Those questions will be mentioned in the Section 5 and not in Appendix 1.

5. RESULTS

In this section the observations and interviews are discussed. Every sub-heading to this heading will be connected to a certain game. The observations of the games are firstly revealed, and then the interviews will be presented. The players are referred to as P-1, P-2, and P-3, etcetera. P-1, P-2, and P-3 are both observed and interviewed. P-1 is the player of
‘FIFA’, P-2 is the player of ‘NHL’, and P-3 is the player of ‘LoL’. P-4 and P-5 are merely observed. P-4 is the observed player of ‘WoW’ and P-5 is the observed player of ‘CS’. P-6 and P-7 are only interviewed. P-6 is the interviewed player of ‘WoW’ and P-7 is the interviewed player of ‘CS’ (further information about the players is found in Table 1).

5.1 Observing and interviewing a player of ‘FIFA’

During the observation of ‘FIFA’, it became evident that the vocabulary in the game mostly consisted of sports expressions. There were terms that might not be recognized or understood in other contexts. The game had menus for deciding the squad’s starting players and tactics, such as formations. The words used in these menus could be ‘player-biography’, ‘home kit’ and ‘formations’; these are words that seemed more difficult. Still, P-1 had no difficulty navigating through the menus. While preparing for the game the background music had English lyrics. Thus, P-1 would be exposed to spoken English from listening to the music. It should be mentioned that in the new editions of this game it is possible to change the language in the menus into many different languages, hence, the exposure of English could be less distinctive.

When the game started the commentators were speaking English with a British accent. They spoke in a fast rate, which occasionally made it difficult to perceive their dialogues. However, P-1 did not seem to take note of this since he was engaged in the game. Nevertheless, he was still exposed to the English language, by unintentionally listening while playing. The commentators used expressions as ‘keep possession’ and ‘one-touch football’, which would probably not be used in everyday language or school.

During the interview, P-1 mentioned that he played the game three times a month, and for approximately three to five hours each time. He continued with discussing the language in the game, and according to him it was not challenging to understand words and phrases. Nonetheless, he continued by stating:

(P-1) “I probably learned some words about football from playing the game, like ‘tournaments’ I would never say that word in school.” [my translation].

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4 Examples of songs played in ‘FIFA’ could be: On Top Of The World by Imagine Dragons and Feud by Band of Horses.

5 Example: British pronunciation of “caught” with diaphoneme: /ɔː/ (pronounced kaut).
“I have become better at the listening part of English from hearing the commentators talking. In the beginning, I didn’t understand them, but now I do.” [my translation].

As some words and phrases, used by the commentators, were recurring it resulted in the development of his listening ability. He mentioned that it was similar to practicing vocabulary in school. Inquiries show that video games can affect players’ learning technique (Gee 2007:23ff). However, it seems as P-1 has done the opposite since he has taken strategies of vocabulary learning in school and applied it to video gaming.

When answering the question whether he had started to use the English language differently since he started playing, P-1 said that he probably had not. Although, it is imaginable that he is using some of the phrases while watching a football game on TV, or in reality. Moreover, he thought that he possibly would have a wider vocabulary than others of the same age concerning sports phrases. However, he did not recognize any advantages regarding general English.

5.2 Observing and interviewing a player of ‘NHL’

This game was similar to ‘FIFA’ with reference to the menus; one chooses a team and forms tactics in preparation for the game. ‘NHL’ also had music playing with English lyrics. In the menus one could find terms as ‘line-ups’ and ‘play-offs’, which could be difficult words to understand from merely learning English in school. It was possible to choose Swedish as the default language, although, the commentators were still speaking English.

When the game started the commentators spoke rapidly, as in ‘FIFA’. However, in this game one of the commentators spoke with a Canadian accent. The commentators’ use of English was a combination of everyday language and a language specific for ice hockey. Some opposing utterances by the commentators could be:

(Example 1) “Why go after that guy? He might as well have hauled down a fan!!?”

(Example 2) “[Name of player] gets called for Interference. They’ll be short one player.”

The first part of the first utterance is general English and suitable in most contexts. However, the second expression is ice hockey related since the word ‘interference’ is included.

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6 Examples of songs played in ‘NHL’ could be: Broken Bones by Anti-Flag and I Want More by The Hives (which actually is a band originated from Sweden).

7 Example: Canadian pronunciation of “caught” with diaphoneme: /ɑːn/ (pronounced kot).
Other terms found when the game was in motion were ‘forecheck’, ‘icing’, ‘break-away’, and ‘shoot-out’. All these words are specific for ice hockey and would not necessarily be discussed in school. Therefore, one can argue that those terms are acquired through playing the game.

Interviewing P-2 was not as comparable to interviewing P-1 as expected. They seemed to have different opinions of how the games influence their language proficiency, even though the games are similar. During the interview, P-2 said that he played the game two times a week and for approximately two hours per occasion. He did not think that the games’ vocabulary was difficult to understand; still, there were words and phrases one would not be taught in school. When asking what he does when he encounters difficult words, he said:

(P-2) “When I see a word I don’t understand, I usually connect it to the situation to understand it, which only seems logical to me.” [my translation].

P-2 believes that using the strategy of connecting words to contexts is a common phenomenon, which all non-native speakers do when encountering difficult words. Linderoth (2007:28) expresses that playing computer games assists players to develop the ability of analysing, contemplating, and the ability of being observant to details. One could argue that P-2 has developed such skills since he clearly is using negotiation of meanings as a strategy to understand vocabulary (Seidhlofer 2011:98). P-2 continued by stating that his English had developed by gaining a wider vocabulary, saying:

(P-2) “I have learned many new terms related to ice hockey, but not that many used in everyday English.” [my translation].

P-2 has learned terms connected to ice hockey, but not as many useful for other contexts. He believed to have acquired general English from other areas of English use, as school or the media.

He also mentioned that he had developed his listening abilities. Listening to the commentators and spending a lot of time playing the game made his developments possible according to him. As mentioned in the beginning of this Section, the terminology concerned ice hockey; hence, he did not use it much on other occasions than playing the game. However, P-2 also said that he would use such words while watching ice hockey on TV or in reality.

5.3 Observing and interviewing a player of ‘LoL’

This game had an unusual vocabulary in the menus as one could find words like ‘minions’, ‘jungler’, and ‘gank’. ‘Minions’ are enemies who attack players in groups, the ‘jungler’ is an
enemy hidden in the jungle, and to ‘gank’ is when one traps the enemies with the assistance of other players. These words are created exclusively for this game since they are not actual words of the English vocabulary. ‘Minions’ is an exception, but it has a unique meaning for the game. However, players who speak with each other through the various chats speak an everyday language with some abbreviations and words from the game and one example of that could be:

(P-3) “I am being ‘ganked’!”

This phrase was uttered when P-3 was trapped by a group of players from the opposing team. During the observation, P-3’s team was a combination of Swedish and British players. Therefore, they spoke English throughout the game. They used Skype to communicate, making the communication mainly oral. The players seemed to understand each other, and the investigator never heard anyone ask someone to repeat themselves. There was a chat available within the game that was in English, but it was not many players chatting there.

Also, there was a built in female voice in the game, which said some recurring phrases during the fights, such as:

(Example 1) “An enemy has been slain”

(Example 2) “The enemy is on a killingspree”.

The above utterances were repeatedly said on different occasions. The female voice spoke with an American accent and with a voice resembling a robot. The investigator knew the phrase ‘killingspree’ but not ‘slain’. At first the investigator thought that the voice said ‘slayed’, which would also have been an appropriate word for the situation. It was when the expression was shown in writing that the investigator identified it, and found it interesting since it seemed rare. The investigator noticed another word that appeared as unusual, although, several minutes passed until the investigator understood the meaning of the term. The voice said:

(Example 3) “Your turret [my emphasis] has been destroyed”

The voice was referring to the tower, ‘Nexus’, which had been demolished.

There were words in the game that could be related to the language of the Middle Ages, such as ‘veil’, ‘gauntlet’, and ‘Emblem of Valor’. However, most words were connected to the fantasy genre and referred to magic, as ‘potion’, ‘spell’, and ‘epic monster’, etcetera.

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8 Example: American pronunciation of “caught” with diaphoneme: /ɔɪ searchBar/ (pronounced kawt).
P-3 mostly plays the game seven days a week, and for two hours a day. The language used in the game is English, but he thought it would be possible to switch to other languages in the menus. However, there were not many choices and Swedish was not available yet. P-3 stated that more languages would become available in the near future since ‘LoL’ is the most popular online computer game in the world at the moment. The chats were constructed with English and players used English there. If someone wrote in a language that the other players did not understand they could report this person, resulting in him or her being ‘banned’ and consequently prohibited to continue the round.

When asking P-3 what he thought was difficult concerning the language in the game, he said that there was nothing in particular that he had trouble understanding. He continued:

(P-3) “For beginners it is difficult to understand some of the terms since some terms are unique for this game. It was difficult to understand some words and abbreviations in the beginning, but after some time playing I understood them, maybe not the exact meaning of them, but I could understand why they were used.” [my translation].

P-3 is referring to the beginners of such games in general, not merely beginners of ‘LoL’. For beginners of ‘LoL’, it would be of assistance to have played similar games before because of the similarities of vocabularies. The investigator asked how P-3 approached challenging words and phrases and he said that he usually asked the other players online or friends who play ‘LoL’ about them.

To questions about how his language proficiency had developed from playing the game, he answered:

(P-3) “I’m noticing new words when I chat with other players. The writing part of the game helps me to keep up with the English language. I don’t use English when I’m not playing, and since I write a lot in the game I develop that skill of the language.” [my translation].

P-3 believes that he is detecting new words and uses of the language from chatting with other players. The chatting is also assisting him when developing his skill of writing in English.

Furthermore, he mentioned that it is not only on account of ‘LoL’ that his language proficiency has developed. Formerly played games, such as ‘WoW’ and ‘Tibia’, have also facilitated the development. P-3 claimed that those games require more conversation than ‘LoL’. ‘LoL’ is a fast moving game that can become stressful if one loses focus by talking and, therefore, there is not as much conversation transpiring in ‘LoL’ as in the other games.

P-3 stated that he had developed a better fluency when writing in English, and acquired a broader vocabulary through playing these types of games. He said:
“Since I speak with people from other countries we have to understand each other. The level of written English in the chat is high, maybe not the Russian players’, but I often talk with players that are better English speakers than me. That helps me to learn new words and to see how I’m supposed to build better sentences.” [my translation].

P-3 claims that the chatting players of ‘LoL’ are using a high level of English when writing. Consequently, this results in players affecting each other’s proficiencies by displaying new words and phrases to each other. According to Mauranen (2012:243), non-native speakers are more tolerant towards people from other linguistic backgrounds. However, P-3 makes a comment on Russian players’ poor language proficiency in this quote. His opinion could indicate that non-native speakers of the ‘Expanding Circle’ may have higher expectations on other non-native speakers’ proficiency since they have been taught proper accuracy in school.

P-3 was asked if he had started to use the English language in a different way since he started playing the game. He answered that his English language skills were questionable before he started playing ‘LoL’ and the other games. However, now he had acquired a better fluency in writing, and also gained a larger vocabulary. When asked if he had noticed if his English vocabulary differed from others’ at his age, he answered:

“That depends, the other players have the same type of vocabulary. I think that it could be an advantage to have that vocabulary, and be good at writing when talking to people who do not play the game” [my translation].

This vague statement says that he has gained a vocabulary useful for other situations than playing, despite the fact that the vocabulary is different from general English.

However, some of the words and phrases in the game would not be useful on other occasions than playing, as with the terminology in ‘FIFA’ and ‘NHL’. Moreover, P-3 said that there are many words and abbreviations, which originally derive from these games that have reached the rest of society. Some terms have developed into universally used expressions, even for those who do not play these types of games. These terms are examples of coining, as Seidlhofer (2011:101f) discusses, newly created words mostly derive from innovations of technology today.

5.4 Observing and interviewing players of ‘WoW’

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9 An example could be: ‘GLHF’, which stands for ‘Good Luck, Have Fun’.
During the observation of ‘WoW’ P-4 and his team also used Skype to communicate with each other, as P-3 did in ‘LoL’. P-4’s team was discussing the game while playing. However, they also discussed issues that were not related to the game, such as:

(P-4) “You should come and join me at the Chamber of Masters, I’m waiting here. Where did you buy your headphones by the way?” [my translation].

First they discussed tactics for the game and then they continued by discussing computer equipment for actuality.

All of the players from P-4’s alliance were from Sweden; hence, they spoke Swedish with each other. However, there was a chat within the game where they wrote in English, mostly to players of other alliances who were their enemies. This game had expressions connected to the fantasy genre, such as ‘livid magic’, ‘demon’, ‘orch’, ‘potion’, ‘warlock’, ‘critter’, and ‘spell’. In addition to the fantasy expressions, the game was constructed with words associated with the Middle Ages. The investigator found words as ‘chamber’, ‘burning wrath’, ‘oath’, and ‘realm’. Several of the terms appeared challenging. Numerous expressions in the game were connected to warfare, for example, ‘leaving combat’, ‘enemies spotted’, ‘high threat’, and ‘vanquisher’. The word ‘vanquisher’ seemed most problematic and unusual. There were some words that could be used in general English, but also appeared to be difficult and some of those words were ‘riptide’, ‘ancestral’, and ‘unyielding’.

P-6 said that he usually plays ‘WoW’ every day, for approximately four hours a day. However, while he went to upper secondary school he occasionally would call in sick and play for a whole day. When discussing the language in the game, P-6 said that the language was quite challenging. Players discuss a lot of tactics that require the ability of describing places to go and necessary actions to perform. Although the language is problematic, it is beneficial to have experience of playing similar games before since the terminology is comparable. The main difficulty was to comprehend the abbreviations found in ‘WoW’, but one would eventually learn their meaning. The abbreviation ‘LFG’ for example, stands for ‘looking for group’ and is often seen in the chat, while ‘SMC’, meaning ‘Silvermoon City’, describes a city in the game. P-6 explained that he had learned the abbreviations by using Google or asked his team about them.

When talking about how his English language proficiency had developed from playing ‘WoW’, P-6 said that he solely spoke English while playing and all the instructions and

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10 ‘critter’ are creatures which do not attack the player nor provide the player with any awards when killed.
menus were written in English, which consequently improved his proficiency. On account of playing the game he used the English language as frequently as he used the Swedish language. P-6 chatted with other players through Ventrilo, and they only communicated in English. Since ELF values communication rather than linguistics (Seidlhofer 2011:95f), it is believable that the lingua franca in ‘WoW’ has helped P-6 to develop his proficiency in English. P-6 presumed that by playing ‘WoW’ he received better grades in the subject of English in school. Sandford et al. (2006:6f) argue that to combine pupils’ leisure interests and educational exercises is ideal for language learning. P-6 continued by discussing the developments he had noticed:

(P-6) “All areas of English, from understanding speaking, listening, writing and reading.”
[my translation].

Thus, he stated that he has developed all the skills of the English language by playing. Furthermore, he believed these improvements to be possible because:

(P-6) “I was so interested in the game and, therefore, I had to learn English to become a good player.” [my translation],

The latter statement shows that language proficiency became a requirement in order to succeed in the game. Additionally, P-6 mentioned that he did not use the English language differently since this vocabulary is only used in the context of playing the game. However, he argued that his proficiency was better, and as a consequence he had gained a stronger vocabulary than others of the same age.

5.5 Observing and interviewing players of ‘CS’

The observation of ‘CS’ did not give the investigator much information of how P-5 and his team use the English language since they spoke Swedish while playing. The team was representing the counter-terrorists. They used Ventrilo to communicate, making the communication purely oral. There was a chat available within this game as well, but the usage was limited, and when used, they mostly wrote abbreviations.

As in ‘LoL’, there was a built-in voice uttering short phrases, but they seemed insignificant. The vocabulary was related to warfare, finding expressions like ‘Fire in the hole!’, ‘neutralizing the enemy’, and words like ‘flashbang’11 and ‘knife’. An interesting event occurred during this observation; in the game’s chat the computer, and not a player, produced the expression ‘everything is up to date’. When this occurred, P-5 asked the others:

11 ‘Flashbang’ is a sort of grenade.
(P-5) “What do they mean with ‘everything is up to date’?” [my translation]

They answered that they had no idea. In this scenario, it was unclear whether P-5 did not understand the expression, or if he had trouble linking the expression to the situation. The players did not take time to solve this problem, instead they continued playing. Another interesting phenomenon seen through this observation was that, unlike the other games, ‘CS’ was played at a remarkably fast pace. It was stressful to watch. Every act had to be done speedily since otherwise one risked being killed by one of the terrorists.

The player interviewed about ‘CS’ was a former professional player of the game; he is referred to as P-7 in this section. P-7 played ‘CS’ five times a week, and for 5 hours per session. During tournaments, he played for approximately six to nine hours.

P-7’s thoughts of the development of his English language proficiency by playing the game were that he had a good proficiency before he started playing. He had never considered studying English in school to be a challenge. However, he also said:

(P-7) “The game itself does not require a high level of English. The terms are pretty simple; there are hardly any dialogues within the game. There is a chat available, but it is not based on dialogues. There are short, trivial expressions like ‘Fire in the hole!’ If one is playing with friends one can use the chat to talk, but the game is not based on chatting. We use Skype or Ventrilo instead.” [my translation].

P-7 believes that playing the game does not require a high level of proficiency since the terms are uncomplicated. He continued by stating that he had developed his speaking abilities enormously since he orally communicated with people from different countries. Concerning Skype and Ventrilo he said:

(P-7) “When I played together with foreign players I deepened my knowledge of English. It was very good for developing my speaking and listening skills. I learned a lot of English, not only words and phrases but how to describe certain places, etcetera. I learned the most from the small-talk between rounds.” [my translation].

According to P-7, the discussions between rounds were both connected to the game and could involve conversations about the players’ interests in reality. Therefore, those discussions were educational because of the variety of language use.

He had been traveling to various parts of the world to play tournaments. During the tournaments he gained new friends, both native and non-native speakers of English. He said that all of these aspects of language use had helped him improve his English speaking skills. His fluency of speaking became better from the continuous interaction with other players.
His opinions of how these improvements were possible were described with the statement that the use of discourse develops into a social act adjacent to the game, by chatting with that many people. This leads to improving the English skills of speaking and writing. He then compared ‘CS’ to role-playing games:

(P-7) “It is not comparable with role-playing games as WoW, for example, where one is more guided. Therefore, chatting in Skype is very important while playing ‘CS’.”

[my translation].

P-7 states that ‘CS’ does not have any guidelines available for players during the rounds and, therefore, players have to guide each other, making the chatting a vital part of playing. He also mentioned:

(P-7) “I have gotten a broader vocabulary; earlier I only used simple words when speaking English. Also, now I have learned to articulate words better, with more advanced English, from chatting.” [my translation].

P-7 refers to advanced English in this quote, meaning that he has developed his language proficiency so that his English is more appropriate to use in other contexts than playing.

He was asked whether his English vocabulary differed from others of the same age, he believed that it was a possibility. He has had a continuous interaction with native speakers who speak at a fast rate and use idiomatic expressions, which one who is not exposed to the language as abundantly may not comprehend. From talking with native speakers, he has begun to speak faster and started using idiomatic expressions.

6. DISCUSSION

The vocabularies the players of these games are exposed to can be argued to differ depending on the game. In ‘FIFA’ and ‘NHL’ the vocabulary that P-1 and P-2 were subjected to was a combination between everyday language and sports expressions. It was targeted to a sports audience and one who is not interested or well grounded in that area could have trouble understanding the terminology. ‘LoL’ and ‘WoW’ had a similar dilemma with fantasy expressions and words specific to Middle Age warfare since words like ‘sword’ and ‘shield’ were seen. ‘CS’ on the other hand had a vocabulary consisting of modern words connected to warfare, as ‘grenade’. In the game ‘LoL’ words such as ‘slain’ and ‘killingspree’ were expressed. Those words can be suggested to be difficult and would not be acquired in school. Chik (2012:95ff) states that learning does not exist solely in schools; therefore, these players could be considered as learners when discovering new expressions while playing.
Additionally, the investigator found the word ‘turret’ in ‘LoL’ interesting. The word is a synonym for ‘tower’, and this word seemed unusual and challenging. It could be argued that this word would not be taught in a school environment either. On the other hand that word may not be of use in other contexts than playing.

During the observation of ‘CS’, P-5 had problems understanding the phrase:

(P-5) “What do they mean with ‘everything is up to date’?” [my translation].

The investigator had difficulties recognizing whether P-5 and his team had problem understanding the expression, or if the circumstances in the game did not fit the use of the phrase. It is debatable whether the phrase ‘everything is up to date’ was understood since that idiomatic expression is often used in general English. Hence, the players should have understood the phrase, although possibly not the relevance of its usage in that situation. Also, since the players seemed indifferent to why the expression arose it could indicate that they knew its meaning, but did not see the importance of knowing why it came up while playing. Assuming that the players understood the phrase and were merely questioning why it was written could indicate that they normally use active strategies to understand the language. When Seidlhofer (2011:98) discusses negotiation of meaning, she points out that non-native speakers try to understand the context of what is said, thus distinguishing the meaning of challenging words. Also, Gee (2007:23ff) mentions that such games can improve players’ learning technique. Thus, it seems that players attain learning strategies.

This method of learning was also seen in other contexts during the interviews. The players were asked what they did when they detected a challenging word or phrase. This question was asked to discover whether they engaged in a negotiation of meaning. P-2 was clearly using such strategies when he detected difficult expressions. However, P-3 and P-6 said that they asked others to explain challenging terms. These answers were disappointing since the games ‘LoL’ and ‘WoW’ are the most communicative among these games, and presumably have a larger impact on players’ vocabulary.

6.1 ELF in online computer games

When observing ‘LoL’ P-3 and his team were using Skype to communicate with each other. As Seidlhofer (2011:7) mentioned, communication is a vital part regarding the use of ELF. However, since some of these players were from Sweden and some from the UK, their communication would not be considered as use of a lingua franca (Seidlhofer (2011:7), as both native and non-native speakers were interacting. However, since the players had to speak
English to be able to understand each other, it is possible that the language proficiency of the Swedish players would be improved.

It is likely that the vocabulary of the games would not be useful outside gaming, for instance, while speaking to those who do not play such games. Still, during the interviews it appeared as the players of these games thought to have improved their language proficiency of English. They clearly used both certain words and longer expressions from the games, when speaking and writing to other players in the chat. As Chik (2012:95f) states, the language used in many games today is English, and it was interesting that the vocabulary was primarily related to a particular game as well as included general English.

In ‘FIFA’, ‘NHL’, and ‘LoL’ the players were exposed to different English accents. In ‘FIFA’ and ‘NHL’ the accents were uttered by the commentators, which in ‘FIFA’ spoke with a British accent and in ‘NHL’ with a Canadian accent. In ‘LoL’, the players were subjected to a robot-sounding female voice with an American accent. The display of such a variety of English accents may possibly improve the players’ listening skills. Furthermore, P-1, P-2, P-3, and P-6 believed to have developed better fluency in all the language skills; listening, reading, writing, and speaking. P-3, P-6, and P-7 mentioned that they have started to use “advanced English” due to the exposure of the language through both the games themselves and through communicating with other players. When referring to “advanced English” one would allude to the notion as use of a wider vocabulary. P-3 stated that his language proficiency was comparable to a native speaker’s. Despite the fact that the statement may be an exaggeration, it could be equivalent to a native speaker’s in some areas. Moreover, P-6 discussed the fact that language proficiency was a requirement in order to succeed in the game. He learned the language because of his interest for the game. As Whelchel (2007) concludes, it is more manageable to learn when the interest for the activity is apparent. Stanley (2012:2) mentions that if teachers show interest in pupils’ interests it would motivate them to learn.

6.2 How computer games affect language proficiency

How the players actually used the English language depended on the game. In ‘FIFA’ and ‘NHL’ P-1 and P-2 did not use the English language in a communicative manner since English was only visible in the menus and audible through the commentators’ dialogues. Hence, the emphasis was on reading and listening skills. Even though the games offered the players improvement of these language skills, the players could have learned the commands in the menus by clicking to see the outcome and, thus, forming a strategy for understanding
the words. Therefore, they were not learning the meaning of the words, but purely the commands. Also, the menus may not have a huge impact on the acquisition of English vocabulary since it was possible to change the default language into Swedish.

However, while writing and speaking in the chats for ‘LoL’, ‘WoW’, and ‘CS’, all the four language skills were used. P-3, P-6, and P-7 used communicative English when playing, and they would argue that these games had a great impact on their level of proficiency. These games may be better in terms of developing language proficiency since players are forced to speak and write in English when using the chats. Gee (2007:215f) argues that playing video games can be considered to be a learning situation. Even though he primarily refers to video games, these players believe to have developed their skills of communicating in English by playing these online computer games, contemplating the collected data from the observations and interviews.

7. CONCLUSION

The aim of this essay was to establish whether video and online computer games could widen players’ vocabulary by using English as a lingua franca and, therefore, argue that such leisure activities are learning situations. While doing the observations and interviews one could see that the English vocabulary used in the different games was dissimilar from the language taught in school. In addition, Chik (2012:95ff) stated that learning does not solely occur in educational environments and, hence, players acquiring vocabulary are learners. It was evident that the terminology in the games was addressed to a certain audience and that such language is not usually practiced when speaking English.

When looking at the first research question (the different words the players are exposed to), the results showed various conclusions. P-3, P-4, and P-6 were exposed to a language associated with the Middle Ages, and consequently they would acquire a vocabulary that would not be applicable while speaking general English. However, such vocabulary could still be useful in other contexts, such as understanding movies of that genre; thus, it would not be unnecessary to learn such vocabulary. Also, any improvement of language proficiency should be seen as positive. In ‘FIFA’, ‘NHL’, and ‘CS’ the vocabularies seemed more useful in other contexts than playing the games since the terms were more up to date.

While going through the data P-3, P-6, and P-7 believed themselves to have acquired a higher level of language proficiency since their communication was mostly in English. The vocabularies in these games were more demanding and considerably different from vocabulary focused on in school. P-1 and P-2 acquired some words and expressions from
listening to the commentators, which were a combination between football and ice hockey terms as well as general English. Even though it appeared as they had learned new words from playing the games, it seems that the sports video games do not influence the players’ language development as much as the other three games. Regardless of the fact that these players have extended their vocabulary, according to themselves, Seidlhofer (2011:95) mentions that it is communication that is important while gaining the comprehension of a language. Hence, ‘FIFA’ and ‘NHL’ would not be the ideal games to play if focusing on developing the language. Also, they would not be applicable to the use of ELF since they are not communicatively constructed. Moreover, P-6 discussed that he was forced to learn the language in order to be successful in the game. Hence, his interest for the game assisted his learning. According to Whelchel (2007), the interest for the activity is of aid when learning. Additionally, Stanley (2012:2) found that showing interest in pupils interests motivate their learning, also connecting interests with learning.

Seemingly the vocabulary used in the games is not the main source for the developments of the players’ proficiency. The second research question concerned the players’ usage of language while playing (in terms of speaking and writing) and concluded to the fact that it, in truth, could be the usage of chats adjacent to the games that are the main cause for the expansion of vocabulary. While using Skype or Ventrilo the players used English in a communicative manner and the language was spoken during the whole time playing. Therefore, one can state that the actual games do not have a huge impact on players’ language proficiency because it is the activities which players are forced to practice alongside the game that determines their development.

The communicative use of English developed several of the players’ language skills, according to themselves, which answers the third and the fourth research questions of how the language in the games affects the players’ vocabulary, and what improvements the players noticed on their vocabulary. As Seidlhofer (2011:95) concluded, ELF is used through communication and, therefore, these players use English as a lingua franca by using Skype or Ventrilo. According to themselves, the exposure to a demanding terminology facilitated the players’ to broaden their vocabulary, as well as providing development of the language skills of speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Seidlhofer (2011:98) concluded that the negotiation of meaning improves language proficiency, which has been used by some of the players and especially P-2. Sandford et al. (2006:50) are regarding computer games as an instrument of learning. As both the communicational activities and the games’ vocabulary had such an impact on the players video and online computer games can be regarded as a source
to language learning. In the players own opinion they had attained better learning strategies from playing the games and as Gee (2007:23ff) stated, playing video games can improve players’ learning methods. If one considers the players’ opinions these games seem to have a huge impact on the widening of vocabularies. Because of the shortage of previous research in this particular area, one had to create links between studies connected to ELF and the use of educational games in school. Consequently, the investigation began merely with theories concerning the hypothesis, which made the results particularly interesting since it verified many of the suppositions.

The outcome of the investigation was relatively expected, even if there were unexpected events occurring. The overall idea, concerning the players’ opinions about the possibility that the use of ELF in video and online computer games has widened their vocabulary, was met. Also, the notion, that a divergent terminology would be apparent in these video and online computer games, was accurate. Additionally, it was established that such variety of language could be a factor for broadening the players’ vocabulary as well.

This study has detected language differences in video and online computer games. The results have shown tendencies for communicative development in such games, as well as how this form of activity could be argued to be a learning situation. Thus, the indications of this study could serve as an introduction for further research concerning language development through playing video and online computer games. Potential continuation of research in such areas should be conducted in a more detailed and thorough manner and, henceforward, reaching a wider conclusion on the matter. The variation of language has been revealed to influence the players’ language proficiency in their opinion, both by broadening their vocabularies and improving their communicative skills.

The results presented here suggest that video and online computer games can be key elements leading players to a range of paths where they are able to deepen their knowledge of English.
REFERENCES

Books


Journals


**Webpages**

<http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE1_EN.asp>
APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview questions

1. How often do you play this game?
2. Usually, how many hours per occasion do you spend playing this game?
3. What is the game about? (The story)
4. What is the purpose of this game? (The goal)
5. What do you think about the language of the game?
6. When you started playing this game, what did you think was easy, looking at the language?
7. What was difficult?
8. How did you manage to understand the things that were difficult?
9. How do you think this game has affected your English language skills?
10. Have you noticed any progress of your English language skills since you started playing this game?
11. What kind of progress did you notice?
12. Why do you think this progress was possible?
13. Have you begun to use English in a different way since you started playing this game e.g. a different vocabulary?
14. Have you noticed whether your vocabulary of English is different than other people of the same age?
15. Additional questions.
INTERVJUGUIDE

A. Hur mycket tid spenderar du vid det här spelet?

B. Vad handlar spelet om?

C. Vad tycker du om språket i spelet?

D. Vad var lätt/svårt att förstå i spelet, språkmässigt?

E. Hur har dina språkkunskaper i Engelska förändrats av spelet?
**Appendix 3: Interview documentation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Intervjudokumentation</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speltyp:</strong> ____________</td>
<td>Starttid:</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervju deltagare (nr): ________________</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Datum av intervjun: _____________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intervjun börjar: ________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intervjun slutar: _________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intervjuns varaktighet : _____________ min</td>
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**Kort introduktion om undersökningen:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Huvudfråga:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Svar:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Hur ofta spelar du det här spelet?</td>
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**Följdfrågor:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Svar:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Ungefär hur många timmar lägger du per gång?</td>
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| 3. Vad handlar spelet om? Historien. | |

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Huvudfråga:</th>
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<tr>
<td>5. Vad tycker du om språket i spelet?</td>
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<th>Huvudfråga:</th>
<th>Svar:</th>
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<tr>
<td>6. När du började spela det här spelet, vad tyckte du var lätt språkmässigt?</td>
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<th>Följdfrågor:</th>
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<td>7. Vad var svårt?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Hur gick du tillväga för att förstå det som var svårt?</td>
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<td>Huvudfråga:</td>
<td>Svar:</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Hur tror du att det här spelet har utvecklat dina kunskaper i Engelska?</td>
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<th>Följfrågor:</th>
<th>Svar:</th>
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<tr>
<td>10. Har du märkt en utveckling av dina kunskaper i Engelska sedan du började spela det här spelet?</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Vilka typer av förbättringar har du upptäckt?</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Varför tror du att dessa förbättringar var möjliga?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Huvudfråga:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Svar:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Har du börjat använda det Engelska språket på ett annorlunda sätt sedan du började spela det här spelet som t ex genom vokabulär?</td>
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<th><strong>Földfrågor:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Svar:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>14. Har du märkt om ditt engelska vokabulär skiljer sig från andra i din ålders vokabulär?</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Övriga frågor:</strong></th>
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Ending time: