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COMPUTER GAMES AND ELT: A PROSPECT OF A METHODOLOGY

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Abstract. *Continuous diversification of the language-intense media, specific to our recent timeframe, has engendered a positive outburst of unorthodox ELL as well as ELT (which is also true for all the foreign languages' learning and teaching, of course) methods. In order to keep up with the pace of the discourses at hand it is considered an issue of a paramount importance to present a fledgling undertaking of teaching English language via computer games.*

The article argues about the importance of computer (video) games for ELT as a teaching material, its ultimate purpose being accumulating a substantial background for utilizing computer (video) games as an ELT (or other language teaching) material.

The secondary goal is to get as much traction as possible in order to foster further development of the idea of using video games in ELT and to engender the discussion about its relevance in Ukrainian ELT professional circles.

It provides different insights into its practical application already implemented and the possibility for the usage in further ELT endeavours, mostly presented in a brief bullet-point manner.

The article also provides a plan of an extracurricular lesson on Translation Studies for advanced level students based on a computer (video) game series – The Elder Scrolls by Bethesda Softworks (disclaimer – no promotion intended) – with personal lesson plan, self-evaluation and an appendix containing the feedback of a student who was present at the lesson via Skype. The lesson plan also includes a text sample of in-game reading material with bookmarks made by the author in order to highlight the exact parts of text, which were given the most attention during the lesson.

Key words: *English language teaching, foreign language teaching, computer games, video games, translation studies, literary translation, game localization, extracurricular activity, extracurricular seminar.*

At International Association of Teachers of English as Foreign Language (IATEFL) 2011 annual conference in Brighton I announced my dedication to outlining possibilities for creating virtual English-speaking environment in non-native-speaking countries via various media like TV-shows and computer games. At IATEFL 2013 in Liverpool, MGIMO University 2013 conference «The Magic of Innovation: New Techniques and Technologies in Teaching Foreign Languages» in Moscow and IATEFL 2014 in Harrogate I took a liberty to expose my design (ever in progress) based on an outstanding work of my students who volunteered for an extracurricular practice of playing a computer game in order to develop their language skills through gaming experience.

It is the idea of sharing all of those developments and ideas with my colleagues in my *alma mater* that is the primary goal of this article. The secondary goal is to get as much traction as possible in order to foster further development of the idea of using video games in ELT and to engender the discussion about its relevance in Ukrainian ELT professional circles [4].

Nowadays computer games have evolved into something more than just a tool for wasting time. I dare say that they are developing into a new form of art.

As with literature and cinematography, there are certain pieces to consider and certain pieces to discard. That is why I feel compelled to share my ideas about how we should perceive computer games regarding ELT. Yet, in order to be concise and relevant prior to elaborating on a lesson plan of the abovementioned extracurricular endeavour, I believe I should provide a brief bullet-point overview of my initial ideas I presented at the IATEFL conferences and at the MGIMO conference.

Why computer games? [3].

- Literature and cinematography are both well-known for their educative capacity, but computer games are not so much. Which is a shame;

- Modern computer games are much more advanced in terms of their content (lexis, plot devices, thought-provoking potential of their narrative etc.) than the games of the past few decades;

- Therefore computer games provide something more than just language – they provide immersion.

- Game genres I would recommend for ELT:

- Role-playing games (RPG);

- Turn-based strategies (TBS).

- Underlying ELT reasoning:

- Extensive vocabulary and perfect semantic and pragmatic language training material;

- Virtual simulation of immersive environment for learning English;

- Possibility for CLIL and LA synergy.

- Game genres I would not recommend for ELT:

- Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG);

- Real-time strategies (RTS);

- First-person shooters (FPS).

- Underlying ELT reasoning:

- Very addictive nature of these games, which requires time as well as money to play;

- Poor lexis used in communication between players (Internet slang at the very least);

- Harmful for students' studying process.

That being outlined, I would like you to look at a brief list of ELT methods based on computer games I have been practicing so far as well as of the ones pending introduction or improvement:

- Tutorials (practiced);

- Gaming sessions followed by discussions (pending introduction);

- Separate discussion groups (practiced/pending improvement);

- Students' individual vocabulary construction (practiced);

- Critical analysis presented via creative writing (practiced/pending improvement);

- Discussions on metacognition aspects: metacomprehension and self-regulation (practiced).

The problematic aspects of introducing video games as an ELT material are few, yet substantial. They are as follows:

- Dependence on an advanced hardware and software;

- Dubious financial issues – who should fund the gaming material, i.e. educational institutions or students?

- Ousting the «Gaming over Learning Conundrum»;

- Parental control issues.

I should elaborate a bit on the term invented by myself – «Gaming over Learning Conundrum». It describes a relatively common dichotomy – education and/or entertainment – within the framework of videogaming. The obvious problem is – «When do I stop playing games just for fun and start learning from them?» But yet again, this is a matter of individual perception and personal choice. No teacher can coerce a student to learn from a book or a film. A teacher can only suggest a potentially beneficial learning material. By «ousting» the Conundrum I understand precisely that – suggesting the ways of using entertainment for educational purposes by shifting the arms of the balance towards the Learning.

However, I do believe that the main body of this article should be about the extracurricular lessons and how I actually practice what I preach.

I have been undertaking a personal project (endorsed by the Chair of Foreign Languages of our Institute) of an extracurricular weekly seminar based on computer games. The seminar is dedicated to translation studies, more specifically – literary translation and game localization.

This is a plan of one of the lessons (plus extra details):

LESSON PLAN [3]

Date: 18.04.15

Number of students: 8 (7 – students of the fifth year of studies, 1 – a student of the third year of studies).

Length of the lesson: 120 minutes.

Setting: informal – a cafe near the Institute (separate room, no distractions).

Lesson topic: Translation (localization) of an in-game text from the game series «*The Elder Scrolls*» – *Brief History of the Empire v. 3*.

The translation material is an in-game history book, volume 3. The full text thereof is provided hereunder:

The translation material (words, word combinations and phrases in bold made bold by the teacher for further study and translation-specific discussions, the underlined words, proper names and word combinations – hyper-references intended for game-specific background knowledge acquisition) [2]:

*«The first volume of this series told in brief the story of the succession of the first eight Emperors of the Septim Dynasty, from Tiber I to Kintyra II. The second volume described the War of the Red Diamond and the six Emperors that followed its aftermath, from Uriel III to Cassynder I. At the end of that volume, it was described how the Emperor Cassynder's **half-brother Uriel IV** assumed the throne of the Empire of Tamriel.*

***It will be recalled** that Uriel IV was not a Septim by birth. His mother, though she reigned as Empress for many years, was a Dark Elf married to a true Septim Emperor, Pelagius III. Uriel's father was actually Katariah I's consort after Pelagius' death, a Breton nobleman named Gallivere Lariat. Before taking the throne of Empire, Cassynder I had ruled the kingdom of Wayrest, but poor health had forced him **to retire**. Cassynder had no children, so he **legally adopted** his half-brother Uriel and **abdicated the kingdom**. Seven years later, Cassynder inherited the Empire at the death of his mother. Three years after that, Uriel once again **found himself the recipient of Cassynder's inheritance**.*

*Uriel IV's reign was a long and difficult one. Despite being a legally **adopted member of the Septim Family**, and despite the Lariat Family's high position – indeed, they were distant cousins of the Septims – few of the Elder Council could be persuaded to accept him fully as a blood descendant of Tiber. The Council had assumed much responsibility during Katariah I's long reign and Cassynder I's short one, **and a strong-willed «alien» monarch like Uriel IV found it impossible to command their unswerving fealty**. Time and again the Council and Emperor were*

at odds, and time and again the Council won the battles. Since the days of Pelagius II, the Elder Council had consisted of the wealthiest men and women in the Empire, and the power they wielded was conclusive.

The Council's last **victory** over Uriel IV **was posthumous**. Andorak, Uriel IV's son, **was disinherited by vote of Council**, and a cousin more closely related to the original Septim line was proclaimed Cephorus II in 3E 247. For the first nine years of Cephorus II's reign, those loyal to Andorak battled the Imperial forces. In an act that the Sage Eraintine called «**Tiber Septim's heart beating no more**», the Council granted Andorak the High Rock kingdom of Shornhelm to end the war, and Andorak's descendants still rule there.

By and large, Cephorus II had foes that demanded more of his attention than Andorak. «**From out of a cimmerian nightmare**», in the words of Eraintine, a man who called himself the Camoran Usurper led an army of Daedra and undead warriors on a rampage through Valenwood, conquering kingdom after kingdom. **Few could resist his onslaughts**, and as month turned to bloody month in the year 3E249, even fewer tried. Cephorus II sent more and more mercenaries into Hammerfell to stop the Usurper's northward march, but they were bribed or slaughtered and raised as undead.

The story of the Camoran Usurper deserves a book of its own. (It is recommended that the reader find Palaux Illthre's «The Fall of the Usurper» for more detail). In short, however, the destruction of the forces of the Usurper had little to do with the efforts of the Emperor. **The result was a great regional victory and an increase in hostility toward the seemingly inefficacious Empire.**

Uriel V, Cephorus II's son and successor, swivelled opinion back toward the latent power of the Empire. Turning the attention of Tamriel away from internal strife, Uriel V embarked on a series of invasions beginning almost from the moment he took the throne in 3E268. Uriel V conquered Roscrea in 271, Cathnoquey in 276, Yneslea in 279, and Esroneit in 284. In 3E288, he embarked on his **most ambitious enterprise**, the invasion of the continent kingdom of Akavir. **This ultimately proved a failure**, for two years later Uriel V was killed in Akavir on the battlefield of Ionith. Nevertheless, Uriel V holds a reputation second only to Tiber as one of the two great Warrior Emperors of Tamriel.

The last four Emperors, beginning with Uriel V's infant son, are described in the fourth and final volume of this series.

Main aims:

1. Students will have obtained certain skills in literary translation/localization;
2. Based on the in-game content, students will have learnt the difference between the articles «a» and «the» [1, 5];
3. Students will have learnt the lexis in bold and have practiced it in real-life context (e.g. political, legal or economic discourse) by extrapolating it on the current news;
4. Students will have practiced their speaking skills while discussing their versions and renditions of translation.

Subsidiary aims:

1. To test the possibility of conducting a two-hour lesson while a student is present digitally via Skype (one of the students who attend the extracurricular seminars is now studying in Norway, yet expressed his desire to be virtually present at the lesson in Kyiv).

Technical support:

1. 2 laptops (teacher-provided)
2. Smartphones and tablets (optional)

PERSONAL EVALUATION

Positive aspects:

1. Students demonstrated great literary translation skills while working as a team on the translation (for instance, the phrase «**From out of a cimmerian nightmare**» was translated as «З непроглядного мороку» (ukr. «Out of the darkest gloom») with explanations as to why the noun «Cimmerian» is related to the adjective «dark» relating both semantics and pragmatics of the word taken from Ukrainian history, OED and Merriam-Webster dictionary);

2. Students learnt the way how the same word differs in meaning given a new context (like in «Catholic/catholic/universal»);

3. Students learnt the difference between the articles «a» and «the» and the additional meanings behind a capital letter through the abovementioned examples and other examples, related more closely to the real-life political contexts (*i.e.* «a holocaust» and «The Holocaust» translated into Ukrainian as «катастрофа, що призвела до загибелі великої кількості людей» (ukr. «a catastrophe that lead to the death of many people») and «Холокост») [1, 5];

4. Students were highly motivated to demonstrate the results of their *independent* (emphasis added on purpose) work. They never tried to shy away from answering, even if there were considerable faults in their versions. This enabled a very productive peer-correction and general discussions;

5. Even given the fact that the seminar took place on Saturday, students were enthusiastic to spare 2 hours of their time for an extracurricular event, which in no way effects the evaluation of their academic achievements;

6. The on-line distance learning experiment with using Skype for connecting a student in Norway proved to be as success – notwithstanding the distance he was an active part of the group (his own feedback on how it felt on the other side of the display is provided as the appendix hereto);

7. The informal setting of the seminar encouraged the students to use more creative approaches to literary translation and game localization.

Issues for improvement:

1. Sometimes it was problematic to comment on the translation of the student in Norway due to occasional malfunctions of the soundsystem of my laptop;

2. The limited space in which we were conducting the seminar provided some problems with visual representation via Skype;

3. Along with the informal setting it would be very beneficial to have the ability to conduct such lessons in an academic setting – namely in the classrooms fully equipped with a decent IT. The gaming-related topics and its obvious informal charms should well be balanced with a certain academic component, even given all the benefits of informal and communicational approaches;

4. The teacher should optimize time-management in order to provide balanced timing for all the tasks at hand. In this case – very little time was spent on discussing the use of the in-game lexis given the modern political context.

Conclusion. Yet again, I strongly believe that a bullet-point presentation is the most relevant one. Hence, the conclusions are as follows:

1. Computer (or video) games are surely a valid resource for ELT since they provide very educational and aesthetically appealing material despite the common myth of it being just a waste of time;

2. Game localization is obviously a very lucrative and creative industry for literary translators to be engaged in;

3. Using computer games as a material for ELT is problematic since it requires certain technological savvy as well as software and hardware of both – the teacher and the student;

4. It is imperative for the ELT community (especially in Ukraine) to pay more attention to this field in order to keep up with the flow of the modern English language and its applications. Even more so – in order to keep up with the interests of the-now young generation utilizing it.

Appendix.

Student's feedback on the abovementioned on-line lesson. Original text by Oleksandr Isaenko (The Institute of International Relations, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, International Business, fifth year of studies):

This was the first time I have ever attended classes via Skype. Frankly, I was slightly nervous in the beginning: I hadn't seen the other students for 4 months and now I was going to meet them all at the same time, sitting on one side of the screen, watching and talking to me. We were going to dispute, make jokes and speak all at a time! It required real digital presence, I would say. I did feel like an outsider a bit and, hence, feared that bad audio and video, in addition to constant disconnections, would spoil the thing, and we would never achieve that full-scale integration we were seeking.

But! Surprisingly, everything went just fine. My colleagues found a good Wi-Fi spot and the connection never broke. Moreover, I guess, I could see at least 6 people all the time (others had to move closer to the camera for me to see them, that's true) and hear 2-3 people speaking simultaneously, making out what they said. It was very good even without headphones. They tried to speak one after another (more than usually) and those, who were sitting at the far end of the table, spoke up for me to clearly hear them. This helped a lot; however, I don't know how much inconvenience it caused to them. Apart from this, I think, they acted quite naturally and the whole meeting went the way I remembered. Of course, they must have felt a bit strange. Sometimes I caught curious glimpses and smiles. Still I can't say that someone of them felt uneasy in the way it could hamper the class. It was just... unusual.

I felt quite okay too. Not odd one out, but one of the company. When I attracted their attention, they would listen to my variants of translation, my objections and even jokes. Yes, here I should mention a difficulty I experienced: sometimes it was not that easy to attract their attention. Raising your hand did not help all the time, because from time to time everyone had his or her nose in the writings. Speaking wasn't heard all the time either. Because when a dispute happened and I tried to join it, my voice was weaker than the other ones. Hence, I couldn't get in a word and get across an idea when I wanted to. I had to wait for the appropriate time because only then could I express my thought. This really made me feel a bit disadvantaged. But how disciplined I was!

My friends were polite and helpful, which is also important in this regard. When they saw that I was trying to say something, they allowed me to speak first, encouraging my participation. When they say that I had become distracted, they called me, involving me in the discussion. I think we would achieve nothing but for their assistance.

To sum up, this Skype class was a very nice experience. Except for some drawbacks, it provided for a very good interaction between my group of 7-8 people and me. I managed to follow all the things they discussed and, what is more important, participate with them. Skype is really handy when it comes to classes in such format: when students sit around a table and speak to each other. Then adding one more participant through Skype is easy and he can enjoy the meeting himself. I look forward to further meetings like this. It seems to be the only good way to participate in the classes when I am absent, so I am truly happy we have discovered it.

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КОМП'ЮТЕРНІ ІГРИ ТА ВИКЛАДАННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ: ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ МЕТОДОЛОГІЇ

Нощенко М. О.

Викладач кафедри іноземних мов Інституту міжнародних відносин Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка.

Анотація. *Постійний швидкий розвиток та урізноманітнення сучасних носіїв інформації та якості мови, що ними використовується, є однією з визначних рис нинішнього етапу новітньої історії світу. Саме це призвело до розквіту нестандартних методів як викладання, так і вивчення англійської (та й загалом будь-якої іноземної) мови. Відповідаючи цим вимогам сучасності, автор вважає за необхідне продемонструвати власні дослідження у викладанні англійської мови за допомогою комп'ютерних ігор, хоч вони, безумовно, є лише початком довгого академічного шляху.*

Головною метою цієї статті є надання комплексної аргументації стосовно значущості комп'ютерних (або відео) ігор як дидактичних матеріалів у викладанні англійської та інших іноземних мов.

Іншою метою цієї статті є звернення якомога більшої уваги на це питання задля стимулювання подальшого розвитку ідеї застосування комп'ютерних (або відео) ігор у викладанні англійської мови та заохочення виникнення академічних дискусій стосовно важливості цієї теми в українських професійних колах викладачів англійської мови.

У статті подається лаконічне наведенням окремих прикладів практичного застосування комп'ютерних (або відео) ігор у навчанні англійської мови та думок щодо перспективи їх застосування в педагогічних цілях в інших форматах.

*У статті також наведено план заняття-факультативу з дисципліни «Теорія та практика перекладу» для студентів старших курсів, заснованого на матеріалах серії комп'ютерних ігор (а саме – *The Elder Scrolls*, розроблена Bethesda Softworks. Слід зазначити, що стаття не має на меті рекламу цього програмного продукту). До плану додається власна оцінка проведеного заняття, відгук студента, що відвідував заняття дистанційно через *Skype* та зразок ігрового тексту з виділеними частинами тексту, яким приділялася особлива увага протягом заняття, з окремими поясненнями стосовно того, як саме розглядалися ті чи інші такі проблемні чи цікаві моменти.*

Ключові слова: Викладання англійської мови, викладання іноземної мови, комп'ютерні ігри, відео ігри, теорія та практика перекладу, літературний переклад, локалізація, позааудиторні заняття, факультатив.

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КОМПЬЮТЕРНЫЕ ИГРЫ И ПРЕПОДАВАНИЕ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА: ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ МЕТОДОЛОГИИ

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Аннотация. *Постоянное стремительное развитие и диверсификация современных носителей информации и качество используемой ими речи является одной из основных черт нынешнего этапа новейшей истории мира. Именно это привело к расцвету нестандартных методов как преподавания, так и изучения английского (да и, безусловно, любого иностранного) языка. Соответствуя этим требованиям современности, автор считает необходимым поделиться своими, пускай и незначительными, достижениями на поприще преподавания английского языка с помощью компьютерных игр.*

Целью данной статьи является демонстрация комплексной аргументации относительно значимости компьютерных (или видео) игр в качестве дидактических материалов в преподавании английского и других иностранных языков.

Еще одной целью этой статьи является обращение внимания на данный вопрос ради стимулирования дальнейшего развития идеи использования компьютерных (или видео) игр в преподавании английского языка. Также, безусловной целью этой статьи является спровоцировать возникновение академических дискуссий касательно значимости этой темы в украинских профессиональных кругах преподавателей английского языка.

В статье подается лаконичный список отдельных примеров использования компьютерных (или видео) игр в преподавании английского языка, а также размышления по поводу их дальнейшего использования в других педагогических целях.

Статья также содержит план занятия-факультатива по дисциплине «Теория и практика перевода» для старших курсов, построенного на материалах серии компьютерных игр (а именно – The Elder Scrolls, разработанной Bethesda Softworks. Стоит отметить, что реклама этого программного продукта не является целью этой статьи). Помимо плана, статья содержит собственную оценку проведенного занятия, отзыв студента, присутствовавшего на занятии дистанционно через Skype а также образец игрового текста с выделенными фрагментами, которым уделялось особое внимание во время занятия, с отдельными пояснениями касательно того, как именно рассматривались те или иные проблемные или интересные моменты из списка.

Ключевые слова: преподавание английского языка, преподавание иностранного языка, компьютерные игры, видео игры, теория и практика перевода, литературный перевод, локализация, неаудиторные занятия, факультатив.