GAMERS AS SECOND LANGUAGE USERS: L2 AS COMMUNICATIVE RESOURCES TO BUILD COMMUNITIES ON LEAGUE OF LEGENDS

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Resumen:

Este trabajo final de trabajo de grado hace parte del proyecto "A digital ethnography of gaming literacies: languaging, identity and design" dentro del semillero de investigación #TeamLaV en el grupo de investigación LSLP (Literacies in Second Languages Project). Debido a esto, este trabajo se enfoca en el uso de las segundas lenguas dentro de los videojuegos, con el objetivo de evidenciar las prácticas de literacidad en estos lugares y la posibilidad que tienen los miembros de estos grupos virtuales para construir comunidades en espacios de afinidad en línea.

Para hacer esto, se utilizó la etnografía digital con el propósito de recolectar datos que evidencian el uso de las segundas lenguas en los videojuegos, así como de pantallazos que muestran las creaciones y el contenido adicional con el que los gamers pueden interactuar para reflejar sus identidades. Igualmente, se utiliza la autoetnografia digital que da cuenta del papel del investigador como objeto de estudio de la comunidad digital en la que habita y juega. Por último, se encuentran las conclusiones a partir de lo encontrado en la recolección de datos y el rol del investigador como parte de la comunidad gamer.

Palabras clave: gamer, espacios online de afinidad, segundas lenguas e identidad.

Abstract:

This work is part of the "A digital ethnography of gaming literacies: languaging, identity and design" project in the #TeamLaV research student team, which is part of the LSLP research group (Literacies in Second Languages Project). Hence, this work focuses on second language use in video games, with the purpose of evidencing second languages literacy practices and the possibility gamers have to build communities in online affinity spaces.

To do this, digital ethnography was utilized in order to collect data that would evidence second language use in video games. Also, screenshots were collected to show gamer's creations and additional content they interact with to project their identities. Additionally, digital autoethnography is utilized as the researcher is also part of the community in which he frequently plays and interacts with others. Finally, conclusions are given as a result of the data analysis and the researcher's role as part of the gaming community.

Keywords: gamer, online affinity spaces, second languages and identity.

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Introduction

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Video games and other virtual and online platforms are well known for having content in different languages, especially English (Mora, 2014a) which lets gamers and other users communicate in different ways beyond the traditional notions of English as the most important language. In this line, people are finding possibilities to both understand and play video games and interact within online communities who share the same interests and identities in these affinity spaces.

Because of the previous reasons, this work looks at gamers setting up second languages as means of communication and learning within videogames. These affinity spaces give opportunities for second language use and learning and they also help to build communities based on what users are as people in the real world (relational identities) and what they do as gamers in online affinity spaces (activity based identities).

Statement of the Problem

The online world provides different spaces and opportunities to develop interaction and learning through video games. This aspect finds itself more strongly in the younger generations who carry out tasks that are beyond spending time playing. In this sense, managing videogames as an online space to enhance and develop second language learning, as well as the construction of virtual communities becomes a possibility to bridge language use through the use of video games.

Using second languages in video games is usually related to gameplay interests and personal advancements in the experience, which ultimately lead to winning. However, gamers seem to be constrained to develop additional tasks to participate in different issues that are related to the videogame such as developing communicative resources, which lead to using and learning a second language. For the previous reasons it can be considered that video games contribute to second language use and learning within gaming communities (Gaviria, 2018).

According to the previous ideas, gamers could be considered as second-language users and active learners or speakers who practice a different tongue. This provides a background in approaching the status of gamers in this issue. As stated by Gee (2007) games provide a space to learn and practice second languages in enjoyable spaces which provides success in learning experiences and the gamer's goal in victory. Additionally, this work also looks at literacy practices in virtual contexts where subjects are appropriating and transforming the language by consuming and enjoying video games. Namely, interaction, playing and developing communities are catalysts to transform language in context and give a new sense and perspective of language in the different contexts.

This work is also relevant in the study and recognition of literacy practice outside formal contexts and situations, specifically in classroom instructions. Consequently,

rethinking the role of video games as spaces where users, and students in this case, develop their own literacy practice is something teachers and professors are taking into consideration due to the technological impact it might have in their classrooms. Despite the skepticism about implementing gaming experiences in formal settings, the door for improvements and applications of video games in the school contexts is open, as they require commitment and time which is, sometimes, lacking in classroom in school activities.

Past research also considers videogames as a potential tool to impact the classroom in today's era Gee, 2005 & 2007; Adams, 2009; Alexander, 2009; Ramírez, 2018) for its interactive components and their potential to be an attractive learning tool among students of different levels. Since the issue that is tackled is this work consist of recognizing gamers as second languages users, the idea of considering gamers in second languages classes is also relevant, because it gives a wider perspective on academic performance in students who dedicate a considerable amount of time on gaming activities, and indirectly improve their learning abilities compared to those who are not involved in gaming communities or digital spaces.

Additionally, the importance of recognizing online communities as creators of their own experience and identity at playing. Gamers start building a sense of identity and belongingness, both with the game itself and the social group which represents it. Namely, they start making sense of the world by playing and interacting with others in online spaces (Ramírez, Gaviria, 2017). Because of the previous reasons, the identity is a combination of social components such as: customs, cultural background, views about the world and connections with the game (Shaw, 2012). All of these aspects come to live at playing and they have a role that facilitates, to some extent, literacy practices in the target language.

Taking this social reality into consideration gives another perspective in the understanding of the construction of identity which in this case happens to be in online platforms and digital spaces. The previous constructions are all mediated through second languages, as elements of games provide elements which create identity for gamers, based on their tastes and preferences. For instance, characters, gameplay, story or design are characteristics which involve the videogame aficionados into creating their own choices and interacting with peers and the game in a way that is more comfortable for them, compared to situations in real life.

This work does not seek to grant videogames a fulfilling role in which people from different cultures come to learn languages, interact and build identities in an intentional way. On the contrary, this usually happens overtime as the gamers evolve in a continuum through the different stages of the game and the relative commitment they develop with the gaming activity. These two factors provide a view which helps to understand gamers as people who build their own identities by playing and interacting with the game and second languages.

Ultimately, the consideration of the reasons enlisted in the previous paragraphs provide categories of study to evince aspects such as: language learning through video games, use of second languages in gaming communities, informal learning activities of second languages learning, and the construction of identity and sense of belongingness in online videogames. These issues help to understand the status of gamers as users of l2 languages and their relations with digital spaces.

Purpose and Question

This study aims to fulfill two main purposes. First, I intend to analyze second language literacy practices within gaming communities, specifically how second languages become learning tools and communicative resources in *League of Legends*. Second, I will describe the configuration of digital communities in video games through literacy practices. The following research question will address these purposes: *How do gamers set up second languages as means of communication and learning within videogames?*

Literature Review

Characterizing a social group, such as gamers, involves understanding some factors around its culture and ways of living and interacting. When referring to gaming communities, most of the research about this group focuses on highlighting consumption habits and video games' increasing economic rate. Various sources have researched the status of video games as violent practices and unhealthy habits (Young, 2009) (Cade, Gates, 2016). Conversely, there have been studies about the potential of video games in intellectual activities (Steinkuehler,2008b) which has led to considerations about applying videogames in formal school settings (Ramirez, 2018). Also, there are social and cultural aspects about gaming communities that have been taken into account to better understand this culture and the way their members interact in online spaces, which comprise both video games and platforms devoted to them. (Gee,2003). This means that digital societies have developed autonomous ways to interact and to use communicative resources.

People of social and cultural groups often share similar traits, depending of course, on their social background and interaction with their members. This leads me to consider the features that define what a gamer is, before actually tackling their status as second-language users. It is important to clarify that comprising a culture within certain standards excludes many individuals, as members can be quite diverse. However, my intention in the

following paragraphs is to point out some of the sources and their contributions to indicate some general features about the characterization of gamers.

Crawford (2011) suggests two perspectives which refer to gamers as a possible audience for media content. The first one, supported by cited scholars in his study, affirmed that gamers are not an audience, because videogames are made to be played by players, whereas films or books are actually targeted to specific audiences. However, the second position actually characterized gamers as an audience which is likely to consume game content, such as cut-scenes. Moreover, Crawford describes the more active role of gamers, as they have some control over the actions and performances they carry out within videogames, in comparison to book or film audiences which already have established limits for the interaction with the content that they consume.

The distinction between player and gamer should also be discussed in this part of the project, as the word "gamer" provides a particular meaning and it also implies digital, cultural and language dimensions. In this regard, Sánchez & Sanmartín-Arango (2020) have explained that gamer as a term could be used with non-clear consensus. Therefore, being a gamer does not only rely on the fact of playing video games, but to develop commitment and participation in online and non-online gaming communities. Because of this, gamers create a sense of identity and belongings by interacting, constructing and connecting with others. In this sense, the understanding of the gamer goes way beyond the word "player".

Similarly, Crawford further explains the idea of what a gamer is in the following chapter of his book, "Who plays videogames?". The author concluded on four approaches which define gamers as a group: first, stereotypes which characterize gamers as white males who are antisocial and addicted to playing in digital spaces. These common assumptions are associated with the idea of video games as an isolating activity (Padilla-

Walker, et al, 2008). Second, demographics which gather extensive information regarding the age, nationality, gender and ethnicity in order to place gamers and the amount of people who play video games in different markets and target audiences. Third, the idea of exclusion is also presented in the chapter. The author suggests that women are a social group which has been traditionally marginalized in video games, since gender roles, restrictions, unequal technology access and the lack of appropriate representation are factors which have stopped from participating in digital domains in previous decades. Finally, Crawford uses Bartle's (1996) categorization to describe "types of gamers" according to the activities they are likely to carry out on their gaming experience.

- "Achieving within the game context" – gamers interested in reaching in-game goals.
- "Exploration of the game" – gamers experimenting and exploring the digital domain.
- "Socializing with others" – gamers interested in role-playing and communicating with fellow gamers.
- "Imposing on others" – gamers interested in imposing aggressively on others or helping them.

Past research has considered videogames as means to develop second language and literacy practices. The previous elements provide users with spaces to establish literacy practices to continuously learn the language through gaming experiences and interacting with others in online environments. Although this study does not mainly propose language learning in schools through video games, it does take into consideration some research which points out the potential of virtual/online games in a variety of genres. They have been studied and eventually used as tools for L2 learning in the classroom. Similarly, studies which present evidence about second language learning through actual incorporation of videogames are also brought into perspective, because they provide a

general status of the inclusion of videogames as a learning tool and its potential to develop language and other skills in classrooms around the world.

For instance, as Thorne, Black, and Sykes (2009) explained, the information highlighted some previous research in which students of second languages where examined through interviews and ethnographic studies. Particularly, the case of the Confucius Institute Chinese School where the sponsorship allowed Zheng, Li, and Zhao (2008) to examine the role that *Second Life* can play in teaching Chinese language and culture. This provided perspectives to consider learning in video games where students are users of avatars and create opportunities for literacy practice in interactions between each other. The results confirmed that this kind of strategies actually engage students in learning activities and boost the potential of social and virtual spaces for L2 learning.

Steinkuehler (2008b) showed the educational value of video games for students who are gamers, but also for teachers which might use videogames as technological resources for their practice. Specifically, Steinkuehler's research delved into the MMO genre and its implications and opportunities in learning, which constitutes background and previous information that characterizes gamers as second language users. This study has utilized contemporary digital media literacy definitions to analyze and document gaming activities in online environments, in order to provide educational opportunities for afterschool clubs which comprise elements of the research. Ultimately, the fieldwork attempted to answer the question "What was the intellectual merit of playing in virtual worlds?" (which is pertinent for this study as it seeks to prove gamers' use of languages) The ethnographic methodology concluded various results after collecting data from gaming experiences in MMO video games, which highlighted the importance of the use of the language for intellectual activities and present, among other things, "novel literacy practices with forms of highly specialized forms of language for in-game social interactions and genres of story-telling,

fan fiction writing, and discursive argumentation on game-related forums" (Squire & Steinkhueler 2005; Steinkuehler, 2006c) The study concluded various social and intellectual activities which gamers carry out in-game and within digital spaces, however there is only one included as it is the most representative for the characterization of gamers as L2 users.

Similarly, Steinkuehler comprised a second phase where the MMO World of Warcraft was one of the contexts examined under the premise that designing informal learning activities based on virtual worlds need to argue the potential of virtual worlds for learning in specific skills. In the same way, the research was framed in digital media literacy practices and cultural mechanisms for learning. The results and topics were explained further in this second phase, where digital media literacy practices are recognized in World of Warcraft both in-game and outside the game, over virtual words such as forums, website and chat rooms. The amount of production derived from the game entitled gamers as creators of a reality through the use of languages with lots of multimodal media which included fan-fiction, fan-art, blogs, messaging and instant messages. Besides that, the author further explained the informal scientific reasoning gamers go through to win their matches. Individuals often collaborate to solve problems within virtual worlds with strategies and skill which allow them to go one step ahead in the gameplay. Also, the research remarked that knowledge of the game is also produced and mediated through language by developing fan-made manuals, databases and discussions.

As expressed before, the previous findings remarked various ways in which gaming activities are mediated through interaction between agents who use L2 languages, with an emphasis on educational potential and value of videogames as digital literacy tools for learning. However, there is very little research where the authors and researchers identify themselves as gamers who study their own field (e.g. Mora, S Castaño, Orrego, Hernandez,

& D Ramírez, 2016) whether it is for educational purposes or for understanding in socio-linguistic use of L2 in online spaces. One of the proposals for studying gaming literacies is the one presented at the Literacies in Second Languages Project Research Lab, particularly at #TeamLaV. Their study recognizes gamers as active participants and users of L2 languages, especially English. Because of that, the conceptual framework around #LaV (Language as Victory) holds a definition which emphasizes L2 learning and use through gaming activities to achieve victory. "[…] Our idea of Language-as-Victory, or LaV, intends to make sense of these new interactions and needs for English learning in the context of video games. LaV, therefore, refers in our particular context, to the use of English (and other second languages that have emerged in other games) as the key element to achieve victory […]" (Hernández & Castaño, 2015)

According to the previous ideas, second language use and learning are activities that gamers can carry out in video games. However, most gamers do not find themselves attracted to languages presented along their gaming activities, but to playing video games. This is a situation in which gamers are driven to learning languages by playing video games, as it is a requirement to develop connections and interactions with other users. (Gaviria, 2018). In this sense, the approach that is considered here does not set for a formal educational view, as gamers 'main intention is to achieve victory and advance through the game-play. As Mora and colleagues (2016) expressed, "gamers are learning very particular vocabulary in order to be successful in their games. Without the communication skills they are picking up while playing online, they would not be able to be victorious in their gameplay." Considering the previous reasons, it can be stated that being a language user is not only limited to the final stage of communicative competence, but it does apply to gamers who are still finding a space to learn and practice another tongue, as a secondary task from the videogame.

Rankin, Gold, and Gooch (2006) carried out a study about languages and development of literacy practices. It revealed the enhancement of vocabulary and language learning. They expressed that community tasking was facilitated through use of L2 languages, which enhanced gamers communicative competence and second language skills, even if they were not fully "proficient" in what could be considered "the target language". The MMORPG genre was their study field which yielded results in terms of vocabulary acquisition in English. MMORPG stands for massive multiplayer online role-playing game. In these online spaces, gamers are able to interact in a virtual world by creating a character with characteristics which reflect their identity. They are able to simultaneously communicate with other users in real time and develop a virtual life within a community.

The result of the previous research showed that L2 language use increased 40 percent as a result of chat intercalation in EverQuest ll. In this sense, the language output for L2 learners and gamers has proven to be sufficient in these cases, although gamers do not see themselves as high performers in the language, they claimed to have received sufficient L2 support in the game. As described by Chen (2014) in regards to the latter study: "[…] Through close examination of the in-game dialogues between 19 non-native speakers and eight native speakers of English, the authors found that MMORPG helped the non-native learners improve in their vocabulary tests significantly. […]" (p. 14).

Also, past research has shown the way in which second languages contribute to build communities and identities around video games. As expressed in the previous paragraphs, gamers actually develop their own products and multimedia around gameplays and the characters (Steinkuehler, 2008b), which sets the way for users to characterize their own communities and give a sense of belongingness to activities that are related to playing. This kind of view of gaming communities, gives members the possibility to create and transform different types of content through the videogame, which brings possibilities for

learning and interaction between users. Gee (2003) affirms that "gamers appropriate the gaming environment (or domain) to construct relations and interact with others, as well as to see themselves as learners" (p.59). In a similar note, Peterson (2010) considered that MMORPG video games provide opportunities for interaction due to the sense of community membership and collaborative tasks in and outside the game. In this view, video games have become online spaces where people share passions, common interests and develop connections.

Studies focusing on video game's learning possibilities and intellectual value, as well as gamer's learning in these spaces can build the idea of gamers as second users and building communities. In this view, Gee (2003) states a number of principles which can be found in video games. As stated in the book, there are a total of 36 principles. However, only five general principles will be listed to give an overview of what they mean and what they can contribute as previous information for this work. Because of this, only five are selected.

- **Active, Critical Principle:** the aspects of the learning environment (or semiotic domain, it was as mentioned in previous paragraphs) which foster learning.

- **Design Principle:** appreciating design for the learning experience of what it is played.

- **Semiotic Principle:** learning about and appreciating the ways in which signs, words, images and artifacts come together.

- **Committed Learning Principle:** participating with effort and practice in virtual and online spaces as an extension to the real world identity.

- **Identity Principle:** developing a virtual identity to mediate with real-world identity, the virtual identity and what they want to be or seen as (projective identity)

<center>**Conceptual Framework**</center>

A part of the conceptual framework stands on the ideas and discussions studied by the researcher and his fellow team members at LSLP, specifically at #TeamLaV group, where video games and its intersection with second languages is the primary focus. Therefore, the gaming literacies, language as victory and identity in video games concepts are a part of this work and build the basis for it.

Gaming Literacies

Literacy no longer refers just to the ability to read and write texts (Gee, 2003; Steinkuehler, 2007), as digital spaces and online communities have emerged with different ways to communicate, interact and make meaning through different languages. Because of this, video games, as digital spaces, are multimodal environments which are also used to carry out literacy practices in different ways. In this section the idea of gaming literacies and its components will be presented, in order to understand the possibilities which video games provide gamers with so that they can communicate, interact and use languages.

Literacy scholars have suggested different concepts and theories to understand the emerging literacies of the youth in digital spaces (Gee, 2005, 2007; Steinkuehler, 2007; Salen, 2007; Mora, S Castaño, Orrego, Hernandez, & D Ramírez, 2016; Lee, 2018; Lee, Park, Jang & Cho, 2019). Gaming literacies are no exception to understand new ways to communicate and interact with others, because online spaces, such as video games provide different ways to carry out literacy practices.

In a specific notion, gaming literacies refer to the ways in which people interact, make and understand meaning in online gaming spaces and online gaming communities (Salen, 2007, Jaramillo Villegas, 2014). The idea of gaming literacies describes comprehension of how video games transgress language learning and use based in play, interaction and use of resources like visuals, sounds, images and texts. In this view, video

games offer engagement to users and lead them to develop gaming literacy by addressing commitment and understanding of what they are playing.

Additionally, if gamers want to achieve success they will have to develop what Salen (2007) calls *"gamer attitude"* or commitment, as it was previously mentioned. The idea behind is to develop a sense of improvement in the video game by constantly wanting to upgrade performance. In order to achieve this goal, gamers should not only follow the standard sets proposed by the game, but they have to set up their own new strategies and customizations or find newer and more effective ways to become better at their gaming skills. This usually happens through the use of language, by interacting with others in the gaming community within forums, chats, comment sections and also by watching top-players develop and explaining different strategies and ways to learn about the video game's language and its resources.

Visual Literacy in Video Games in Relation to Gaming Literacies

For example, League of Legends (the MMORPG game featured in this study) makes meaning of gaming literacies by giving LoL gamers and players the possibility to use voice and text channels. However, the meaning of gaming literacies applied to this context can be much broader if we take into consideration the multimodal status of League of Legends as a videogame. To really grasp an understanding of the game and develop gaming literacy practices gamers are offered a set of resources which they have to learn how to use in their favor, such as visuals, sounds, symbols, colors, and pings.

Considering the previous information, visual literacy also makes a part of video games which helps to construct meaning and develop gaming literacy practices. The idea of visual messages makes it necessary for gamers to understand and respond to videogames and its multimodal ways to communicate. Specifically, visual literacy refers to making

sense of images, sounds, texts and symbols to get information and understand them in order to master the game (J Ramírez, 2017; Serafini, 2017).

Video game designers create multimodal experiences which indicate both communication in-game and also between other team members in the match (Serafini, 2017). This gives the possibility to designers to make the overall gameplay of the game clear, so that users are able to react and respond to it. For instance, in League of Legends pings work as indications that gamers give in the match through symbols like arrows, warnings and question marks. Usually, these resources are used to indicate your position in the map, the thread of an opponent either getting close or missing from the arena. Another example can be found in the health point bars of each character, which will usually be in red or yellow depending on the preference of the game, but it will start receiving reddish tones after taking damage from an opponent.

Video Games and Second Language Literacy Practices

After considering the ways in which video games are multimodal digital spaces in which gamers can develop different forms of interaction and language use, the possibilities to use second language literacy practices in video games will be presented. To start with this section, the fact that research suggests English is the most used language for international communication and other online purposes should be considered (Blommaert, 2010). In this regard, video games are no exception to this possibility, as they are the primary language resource (not the only one, whatsoever) to make meaning and create second language literacy practices.

Although the possibilities to create, learn and use second languages in video games are still debated, it can be said that there is also supportive research in this regard, as some authors have found benefits when it comes to second languages in video games and its possibilities for learning and use (Gee, 2003, 2007; Steinkuehler, 2007; Beavis, 2014;

Ramirez, 2018). For example, Mora, S Castaño, Orrego, Hernandez, & D Ramírez (2016) have emphasized the idea of gamers learning particular words and vocabulary in order to thrive in their gameplay. In this sense, it can be stated that gamers do not usually reach the highest proficiency in a second language in order to play the game, but they develop the necessary communicative tools to interact with others, and they will later be resources for second language literacy practices in digital spaces and gaming communities.

An additional factor to take into consideration should be that some video games require interaction in a second language for gamers to understand and commit to gaming activities. For example, the Western European League of Legends server includes users from France, Italy, Spain, etc. These users will need to communicate with others who do not speak their first or dominant language, so in the need for interaction and learning they will start using and practicing language, which confirms their status as second language users, even if they do not speak the additional tongue in a proficient way.

Translingual Literacy Practices in Video Games

Translingual literacy practices in video games take place when gamers develop communicative practices and interact with each other using language and expressions from the game. In this sense, the idea of translingual literacy practices does not fit the traditional bilingualism notion, because second language interaction does not occur in a traditional code-switching way (Canagarajah, 2013; Lee, 2018) nor in common school contexts where bilingualism usually refers to the student's dominant language and English. In comparison, code-switching occurs differently in online gaming communities, because their use of language does not follow the idea to speak each tongue depending on the place or the context. Instead, all of the languages used by the gamer and their interlocutor, as in the following examples:

"Aquí les traigo una partidita didáctica con Ezreal, que hace mucho que no lo traía en el canal y actualmente es uno de los campeones más fuertes del momento. De hecho, yo estoy ganando un montón de LP en mi ranked usando este tipo. [...] Ahora quiero que se fijen un poquito más en la partida, estamos jugando contra Ziggs y una Yuumi, que son campeones de pokeo, que te desgastan de lejos y yo también como Ezreal, un campéon de poke. […] como Ezreal se supone que tenemos que escalar, es un campeón más de mid game que de early. Ahí salió bien gracias al nivel dos, yo diría que el 80% de las botlanes se ganan a nivel dos." (Mechs, 2020)

The previous example is part of a guide/gameplay created by a high-skilled League of Legends gamer, which was uploaded on YouTube. In fact, the intention of the author's video is to help people learn and improve their performance with a specific character in the game, and that is the reason why he names the champion or character he will be explaining along with some advices to counter opponent's strategies and to enhance the probabilities to get a better result playing this character.

As for its structure, it is safe to say most of it is composed by Spanish words and expressions. However, there are a number of two languages appearing in the speaker's explanation. The words "LP" (a reference to league points), "ranked", "poke", "mid", "early" and "botlane" are all English, the rest of them are Spanish. However, the gamer does not switch codes while speaking. Instead he just expresses himself as if it were one single language (Lee, 2018). In this view, some of the second language literacy practices proposed and made by gamers do not follow standards or rules, but their expressions are created based on necessities to communicate and learn about the game. In the previous example the primary idea is to use language to learn how to play a character in the most efficient way.

The following example is made by a Reddit user who is interested to share a non-conventional strategy to win the game in the Brazilian subrredit page (https://www.reddit.com/r/leagueoflegendsbrazil/comments/f2c8r5/tenho_uma_idea_pra_uma_pess ima_estrategia_to/). In a similar tone this post does not follow strict language standards:

tenho uma idea pra uma pessima estrategia (to procurando um duo thresh)

thresh & senna no mesmo time é algo que to querendo testar faz tempo, a minha ideia mais recente é senna e thresh jg, thresh sem smite, senna farma os creeps grandes e thresh farma os pequenos e gasta cargas dos despojos de guerra (item de sup) nas lanes de tempo em tempo, senna tem 100% de chance de dropar alma dos monstros grandes quenela mata que ela mata, mas os monstros pequenos vai de 25% de chance se ela matar pra 1.67% (1 alma a cada 60 ao invez de 1 a cada 4) thresh builda bruiser ou sup, ainda tem que ver qual vai ser mais eficiente, e senna faz a build de adc dela. naturalmente o bot vai ficar solo nessa idea, entao tem que ser alguem que guente ficar sozinho, se alguem quiser testar essa ideia terrivel no normalgame add ai, prata4 btw, ent n espere siccplays ou algo assim. inclusive so tenho senna, entao to procurando um thresh.

The post is written in Portuguese, for the most part, but the words "jg (short form for jungle), "smite", "farm", "creeps", "supp", "lanes", "build", "bruiser", "adc", "siccplays" come from English and are conjugated in Portuguese to create meaning. The post above comes from the necessity to find other League of Legends gamers who want to join this person and follow their non-conventional strategy to try to achieve victory in the match. Overall, the previous examples do not feature standard forms of Spanish or Portuguese, but they emerge from interest and necessities gamers have to communicate to others (Lee, 2018) and it follows the norms made by users in these video games and

websites. In this view, it is possible to consider that meaning is created in translingual ways as part of second language literacy practices.

Gamers as Second Language Users in "Zero Gravity"

As the examples provided before have illustrated, the idea of literacy practices and language use in conventional ways have transcended digital spaces, such as video games, because the roles of gamers as second language users have contributed to re-shape these traditional notions (Gaviria, 2018). In this sense, the idea of zero gravity in video games, digital spaces and gaming communities comes from people use language and interact with each other.

Second languages are being used in online affinity spaces to connect members (or gamers in this case) from all places in the world. Hence, the nature of digital spaces to develop literacy practices beyond just the use of English as a dominant tongue is a prevalent characteristic of how the digital world is in zero gravity. According to Mora, Lee & Gaviria:

> "We are using the metaphor of zero-gravity spaces as places where the body is not bound to the laws of gravity and is therefore capable of moving in ways we traditionally cannot. Imagine those videos on YouTube where folx get to experiment motion in zero-gravity environments: their bodies float, they move in other directions, they are capable of jumping and turning, and so on." (Mora, Lee & Gaviria, 2019)

In the digital spaces the traditional ideas about language use and language learning do not fit. This is because people in these environments use languages as communicative resources (whether they are English, Spanish, Korean or Portuguese) and reinvent their meaning by interacting and communicating with others who share their same passions and interests. In this view, the notion of "standard", "rules" or "conventional" language usage is

reinvented to make room for new expressions, words and different possibilities for literacy practices.

Online Affinity Spaces

Past researchers have agreed that affinity spaces are places where participants connect and share information with people who have similar interests (Agudelo-Lopera, 2020). In the words of Gee "people with a shared interest or passion can move back and forth to develop into and be a certain kind of person, such as a gamer, a Catholic, or a physicist can be identified as affinity spaces." (Gee, 2017, p.11). It is relevant to mention that affinity spaces do not have to be digital, but video games and online communities devoted to them fall into the affinity space category due to its nature. From this perspective, one could consider that every affinity space has a reason of interest for every user/gamer to visit it (Lee, 2018). For example, a League of Legends gamer would visit Amino communities devoted to the game, Reddit forums, streaming broadcasting or videos on Twitch and YouTube.

The Internet has made affinity spaces available for anyone around the world, so people with different backgrounds, ideas and identities can come together, despite their differences. Because of the activities they carry out in online spaces, in this case League of Legends and sites devoted to the game, diverse people overlap and collaborate with knowledge and discussions about video games. This comes through the literacy practices developed through interaction in online affinity spaces. In this view, the activities of their interest is what makes these people gather. In the words of Gee (2017), this is an activity-based identity, because members in the affinity space are linked through the activities and learning they are interested to make and discuss together. According to Lee, 2018 Due to that connection, every affinity space is deeply related to each person's activity-based

identity. Of course, in the case of global online affinity spaces, much more diverse people gather together than in general social groups or affinity spaces (Lee, 2018, p.42)

According to the previous information, one can say that affinity spaces are where several people with diverse backgrounds, languages, ideas and identities get together to make literacy practices. Their identities overlap, because the availability on the Internet and the possibilities videogames bring make this possible. For example, a gamer girl who plays the ADC role in League of Legends and speaks Spanish might go on a duo ranked game with a gamer girl from Italy who is in charge of fulfilling the supporting role.

Activities people share makes two them overlap in an affinity space both in-game and outside the game (in forums, gaming communities or streaming services). Because of this, members from really diverse social groups show interest in learning the standard language created in the community as well as a second language which allows them to interact and communicate. These kinds of activities are named activity-based identities, and will be explained in the following lines by also considering all of the identities emerging in video games and online affinity spaces.

Identity in Video Games

Identity is constructed through interaction in any affinity space created by a social group**.** Since birth, people ascribe to certain cultural and social groups (e.g. nationality, family, religion, social class), which will influence their early views about the world (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Tajfel, 1974) (Ramírez & Gaviria, 2017). However, it should be taken into consideration that identity does not describe static or permanent characteristics. Instead, it is very likely to be reinvented due to factors such as age, interests as people grow older and the choice to join a social group.

In this regard, a person has multiple identities and they cannot choose from a single one to use. Hence, activity-based identity comes to play a role, as people gather in online

affinity spaces because of things they do which they share in common. For example, I am a League of Legends gamer, a Pokémon gamer, a Japanese animation fan and a K-pop listener. These are activities I do which drive me towards meeting with people who identify with doing the same activities. Activity-based are linked to what people do in online affinity spaces.

In a complementary sense, relational identities describe what someone is as a person (Lee, 2018). For example, I am a Colombian person, a son, a brother and a homosexual person. These are relational identities because they refer to me as an individual. As it was expressed in the previous paragraph, they are always multiple and they cannot be chosen one over the other. In this view, they both act together and reflect the ways in which players interact and use the game.

Identity in video games refers to the combination of the reality of the gamer, which includes their cultural background, emotions and views about the world; and the connections they make with certain characteristics of a video game (the design, characters, story, gameplay, etc.) and its community. Therefore, the identity of video games become the reflection of the identity of the gamer and this relationship is what keeps the players engaged (Ramirez & Gaviria, 2017). In today's world diverse people with different activity-based identities and relational identities get together in different online affinity spaces (Lee, 2018).

These different types of identities also describe gamers in online affinity spaces, especially when it comes to playing with identity in important ways. According to Gee, 2003 When one plays Arcanum, and role-playing games like it, three different identities are at stake. All are aspects of the relationship: "A real person (here James Paul Gee) as a virtual character (here Bead Bead). They operate all together, at once, as a larger whole." (Gee, 2003, p.53). Although Arcanum is not the video game which was chosen for the

study, the idea of three non-static identities in League of Legends also applies. The reason for this is because gamers combine their real persons (relational identity), virtual characters (activity-based identity) and their projective identity, which is a combination of both because it embodies the things people do and what makes them as a person extrapolated in a virtual character.

Gee (2003) proposed a series of identities in his book "What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy." They will be put in context with what is possible to find in League of Legends and the identity of the gamers. In this case, I will use my own identity descriptions as a gamer.

Virtual identity. It refers to one's identity in a digital space, such as League of Legends. In my case, my virtual character has a summoner name which is Killua Zoldyck. My virtual identity is indicated through the icons I use as profile identifications, the characters or champions I play with, the way I customize my profile and the rewards I have gotten. From these aspects, I could safely say my virtual character is Killua Zoldyck, a gamer who likes to play with mages and supporting roles. I am constantly developing this identity by updating and transforming the ways my own profile and favorite characters look like. As a virtual identity I would usually get together with people who compliment the roles I like to play and the champions I am most excited to use. This is where the virtual identity is connected to activity-based identities.

Real World Identity. It refers to one's self identity as an individual. In my real world identity, I identify as Carlos Andrés Gaviria. In this sense, the real world identity is connected to the relational identity because it represents what I am as a person: an undergraduate student, a researcher, a Colombian man. They get stronger as they delve into my activities as a gamer in League of Legends.

Projective Identity. It refers to the ways in which I want to build my own experience as a gamer. This includes characters, avatars and customizations. Their idea is to have a virtual identity which projects my own values, ideas, interests and likes as if it was my real world identity.

Methodology

This study is part of a larger research project on gaming literacy, so far spanning two phases. The first one concluded that gamers played with second languages as a resource to engage with the linguistic dimensions of a video game. The researchers used digital ethnography to carry out the study and expressed that second languages are resources to obtain victory in gaming activities (Mora, S Castaño, Orrego, Hernandez, & D Ramírez, 2016). The second phase of the project had a transition due to the researchers background and their interests. Consequently, #LaV delved into a conceptual framework beyond the linguistic dimension, adding the semiotic and aesthetic perspectives.

The previous information is relevant because it shapes the approach and research methods for my work, as it is part of a larger project. Hence, this is a qualitative study which also draws elements from digital ethnography and digital autoethnography. In this line, immersion in online affinity spaces, such as video games and gaming communities, provides possibilities to understand the issues and situations people live in these spaces. Additionally, digital autoethnography recognizes me as a researcher who is also a gamer and as a person who interacts with other gamers on a daily basis.

According to #TeamLaV (2020) digital ethnography is considered as the study of 21st century communities and their interactions in the Internet and other technologies related to their lives. This provides a better understanding of nuances in technological mediated social practices and the ways in which gamers and users interact with each other and use languages in online affinity spaces. Most gaming communities not only devote

their time to playing the game, but they also seek to improve their performance, to have a better match or learning experience or they just delve into competitive scenes. In order to do this, they must interact with others outside the game, in online affinity spaces like web pages, forums or streaming services.

Online and digital communities are relying on the use of language and interaction in very specific ways which go beyond the notion of a "most important language" for communication or the hierarchical and predominant use of English in social groups where video games gather users from all around the world in their servers. For example, the Western European server of League of Legends includes: Spain, France, Portugal, United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Poland, Chezch Republic, Slovakia and more. In these situations, diverse gamers with different mother tongues are gathered and start sharing their own created languages and possibilities to communicate. This is also similar in Latin America - North, and Latin America South (as named by Riot Games). Even though most countries in the previous servers are predominantly Spanish speaking nations. they use words, vocabulary and expressions created in their own League of Legends standard language, meeting their own needs and expectations.

Due to the previous reasons, digital ethnography helps me conduct the research, data collection and analysis by doing first-hand observation about the League of Legends gaming community as an affinity space, their social features and language cues. Additionally, digital ethnography lets me understand how second and created languages evolve in these spaces and how users make sense of their identity as gamers through their own gaming performances, likes, interests and learning in the game.

Digital autoethnography also takes part in this work because I identify myself as a gamer and video games as online affinity spaces are a frequent place for me to be at. I also understand and make part of the different language, semiotic and aesthetic interactions

gamers make between themselves and the game. Thus, digital ethnography gives possibilities to better understand myself as a "digital being" who is a gamer, a researcher and a pre-service teacher at the moment. In this line, my interaction as a researcher with the object of study is also taken into consideration (O Riordan, 2014) Because of this, I am able to reflect on my personal experience and how it relates to what other gamers go through in the same spaces we inhabit.

As it was previously mentioned, my own experience and subjectivity is also part of this work as a member of the community which is part of the object of study. Hence, my idea is to use my own experiences, thoughts and background as an ethnographic example. In the words of O'Riordan (2014) "this is particularly useful when investigating new forms of digital being". This provides a different understanding of new technological mediated or digital issues that both the community I am part of and myself as a researcher go through as gamers and users of language.

Techniques and Instruments

Participant Observation

This technique is based on the premise that learning is possible through the interplay of watching and doing (Salvador, 1999). Hence, this strategy has the researcher doing fieldwork both in and with the culture and social group they are studying. In this way, they participate in their daily-life interactions to better understand and make sense of these groups. This technique is utilized in this work to collect data regarding the interactions, communications and the use of language within League of Legends gaming communities.

Instrument. Screenshots with uncovered nicknames (except when the researcher or other members of #TeamLaV are shown) of language use in League of Legends and Amino and gameplays / guides.

Object of study - Population

League of Legends Gamers and Users

Riot Games, the creator and owner of League of Legends has not given any recent update about the number of players they have in total, as the latest communication about this issue was given back in 2011. Additionally, keeping a record and a detailed list of users is not always available, because user count lists are not made public, sometimes they are not reliable and they are complex matters to update. However, in general terms, League of Legends usually stands at the top 20 of the most played online games, and it is the most played video game in the MOBA genre, with 111 million players from China (Sue, 2018)

Under normal circumstances, League of Legends' most played mode "The Summoner's Rift" includes 10 players in total, where they have to fight to break into the opponent's Nexus and win the match. Matches are expected to have a 20 to 25 minutes duration. However, this average is possible to be changed, as there are surrender options at 15 minutes of the game. There are also matches which take more time, around 30 to 60 minutes depending on decision making within each team, character selection or game knowledge. They are divided into teams of five each having a different role. The predominant ones are the following:

- ADC. (Attack Damage Carry)

- Supports (Healers, Uitility)

- Mid Carry. (Mage, Assasins)

- Jungler.

- Top Carry (Tanks, Bruisers)

In regards to the population, this game has a diverse player base in all of their servers, with different ages (adolescents, young adults or adults are the predominant ones)

with different nationalities according to their servers, gender identities and backgrounds. Because they are able to personalize their nicknames and personalities (their projective and virtual identities) it is not safe to assume their ages and gender identities. As for their nationalities, it is safe to assume that most of them would be Latin American gamers or users who live in countries where Spanish is the predominant or official language, although people from other places and speakers of other tongues could also have access to the North Latin American servers, where the data collection takes place. The North Latin American server includes the following countries: Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, and Puerto Rico. The server's official language is Spanish.

Amino

This is a social media application available for PC and mobile devices. It includes a network of communities devoted to diverse interests, topics and fandoms. In the case of this work, the chosen community is the public "League of Legends en Español" community in Amino which has around 155.000 members. The purpose to study the population presented here is to understand different literacy practices, communication and interaction related to League of Legends outside the game, in communities which are bounded by this interest. In this place users can upload gameplay guides, fan arts, fan fiction stories and different creations they produce about the game. Additionally, since this community is created by Spanish speaking people to devote League of Legends' content in that language, most members in the Amino group are from Spanish speaking countries in Latin America and from Spain.

Data Analysis: Polyangulation

In order to analyze the data obtained through screenshots, the interactions in Amino and the gameplays are categorized into: first, language and communication use data, as that

one where users devote their time to interact and have literacy practices that have to do with their understanding of the game using their mother language (usually Spanish, due to the server the data is gathered from) and the social League of Legends language. second, identity and community building. This is related to the ways people use their virtual and projective identities in online affinity spaces inside League of Legends or the Amino community.

Finally, polyangulation is the chosen method for the data analysis due to the nature of qualitative research and the studies that have used this method within #TeamLaV and LSLP (a research team and group which I am part of). According to Mora (2014) polyangulation is an alternative to the traditional idea of "triangulation" in qualitative research. It recognizes the existence of multiple realities, but it also acknowledges the existence of multiple layers and dimensions of analysis for these realities. In this view, polyangulation deals with data from the vantage point of those who collected it (Mora, Salazar Patiño, Chiquito & Orrego, 2016). This possibility for data analysis allows the recognition of different gaming identities, backgrounds and knowledge about the game which come together both in a match or in online affinity spaces devoted to League of Legends.

Findings

Digital communities build themselves in relation to the ways their members interact and communicate with each other in order to learn, share similar interests and explore their personalities in their online affinity spaces. (Lee, 2018) This situation occurs in similar ways within gaming environments, due to the fact that they also are online affinity spaces, as it was stated in previous paragraphs of this project. In this way, gamers find possibilities to share their likes, stories and express their identity in the game (J Ramirez & Gaviria, 2017).

For the previous reason, this part of the findings focuses on how character selection and usage in the video games is part of community building and identity expression in video games. To this end, screenshots about character playing, gaming guides for gameplays and gamers creations about characters of League of Legends are featured in the findings. Each screenshot will analyze the projective identity, the virtual identity, the activity based identity and the relational identity. However, I do not include any information about gamers or users' real identity, since all screenshots are covered, except for my nickname in video games or online affinity spaces.

Additionally, findings include screenshots were gamers communicate using expressions, words and ways of interaction which are part of League of Legends' social language and the idea of gamers being second language users, even though the server were the data was collected, most speakers and gamers are from countries where Spanish is the predominant or official language. The reason for this is that gamers in League of Legends use their language to refer to specific actions or moments of the game, which due to their high usage in other servers, they have been adopted as the common terms, even if there are standard ways to name objects, actions or characters in their own language.

Finally, I include my own experience in the game as part of the digital ethnography mentioned in previous pages. Since I am also a part of the League of Legends gaming community and I consider myself a part of the object of study, screenshots of my own profile and an analysis on how League of Legends' thematic events have overlapped with my different identities are part of this work.
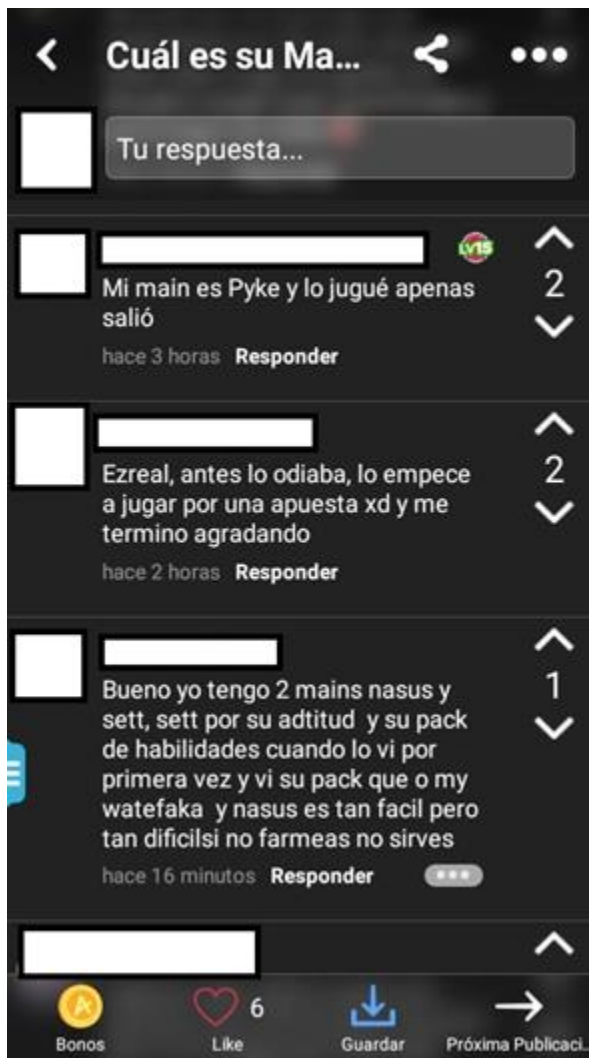
Screenshot 1
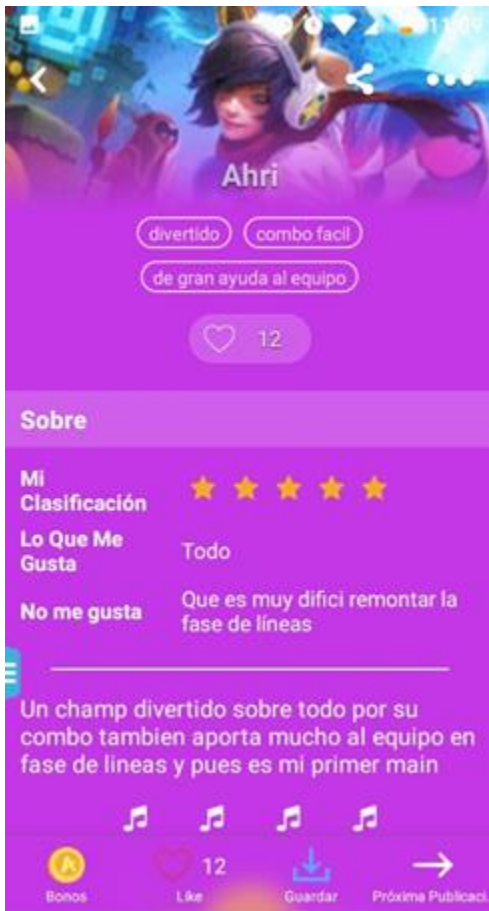
This post was created by one of the League of Legends gamers in the "League of Legends en Español" Amino server. In this case, the virtual identity of the creator is not featured in this screenshot, so no nicknames or profile avatars and pictures are covered. In this case, this post is devoted to one of League of Legends' most popular characters, Ahri. This champion is based on Asia's magical stories which have variations and nuances across the countries in that part of the world. It is based on a nine-tailed fox who could change their appearance into a woman to lure men (Bananabandit, 2017). Since its release around the launch of the Official South Korean server, Ahri has become one of the signature champions in the game and gets different aspects and additional customizations every year.

The previous screenshot is devoted to Ahri and was created by one of their frequent players. In terms of language, one of the words used in the screenshot is "main". This term

is used to describe the most used champion by a League of Legends' gamer. It Is usually a character they have experience with, know their combinations and possible strategies. The user states that the champion "is fun to use", "it has an easy combination" (meaning their move kit and abilities is easy to use for them) and "it provides great utility for the team composition". However, this user expresses that going through the early phase of the match is difficult if you start losing with this champion.

In regards to the projective and activity-based identity it can be stated that the creator and people who commented on this post are League of Legends gamers and they are "Ahri mains" or have experienced playing with the character. In this sense, LoL gamers project their own identities as players of Ahri into their own gameplay, meaning they project their own goals as gamers, likes, interests and background into what they play (Gee, 2003). In this sense, they start customizing and getting additional content into their gaming experience. For example, they screenshot does not have a regular Ahri picture as the default art produced by the game. Instead, this person chose to use an Ahri Arcade Skin, which is inspired by retro video games. This kind of skins can be purchased in the game and they constitute additional content for gamers to personalize and match their characters to their background and experience.

Screenshot 2
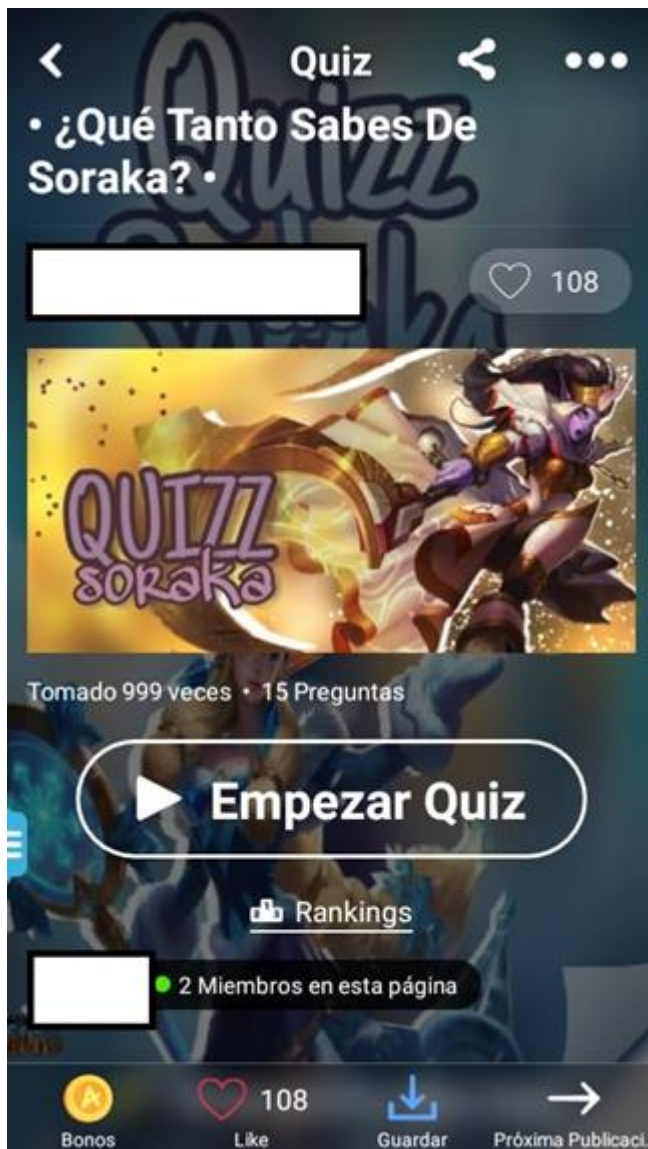
Screenshot 3
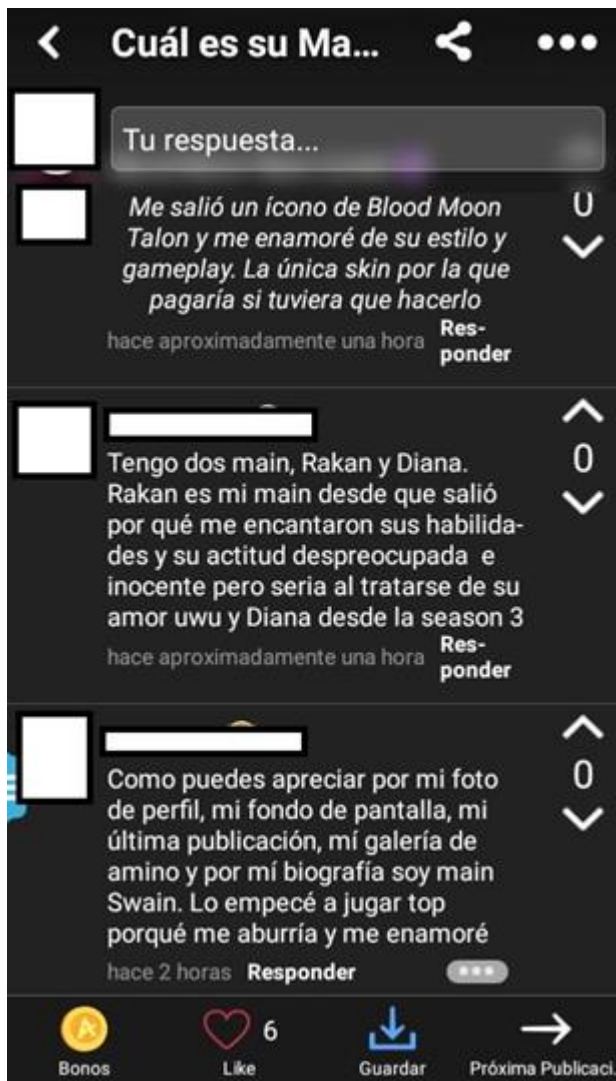
Screenshot one, two and three are similar in the sense that they are all related to

gamers' favorite or "main" characters in League of Legends. In this case, the focus is not

on the creator of the post, but on the Amino users of the group who answered the question.

It is remarkable to say that three out of the six comments presented in the screenshots

provide gameplay and ability kit as reasons to choose a character in the game as "their

main". For example, one of the commenters says both Nasus and Sett (prominent tank

characters in the game) are their favorites because of their ability, capabilities and

limitations. Additionally, one of the commenters states Talon (one of the game's assassins)

is their favorite because of his gameplay. Finally, the last comment is about Rakan (a character in the supporting role) and the user talks about his ability kit as one of the reasons for it to be its "main."

Additionally, customization and personalization of characters appears to also be a reason for choosing a champion in the game as the favorite one. For instance, one of the Amino users responding to this question considers that one of Talon's skins in the game (Blood Moon Talon) is a purchasable skin this gamer considers worth spending money on. Additionally, he mentions other customization elements such as icons to justify their interest and bias on a champion like Talon.
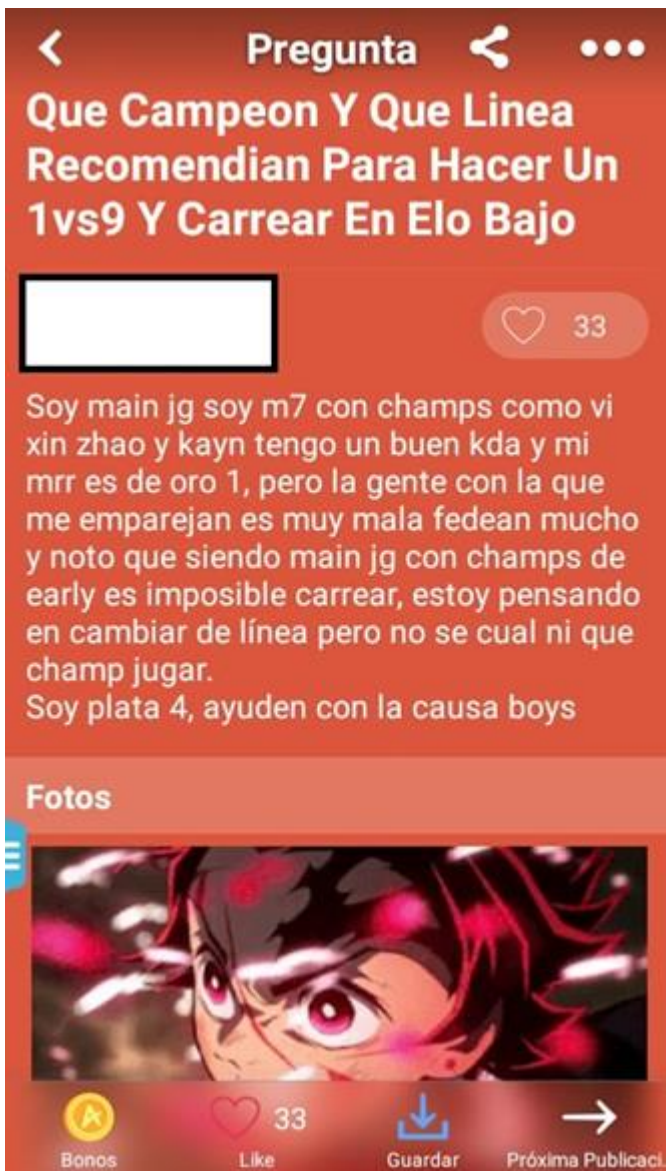
Screenshot 4

Screenshot 5
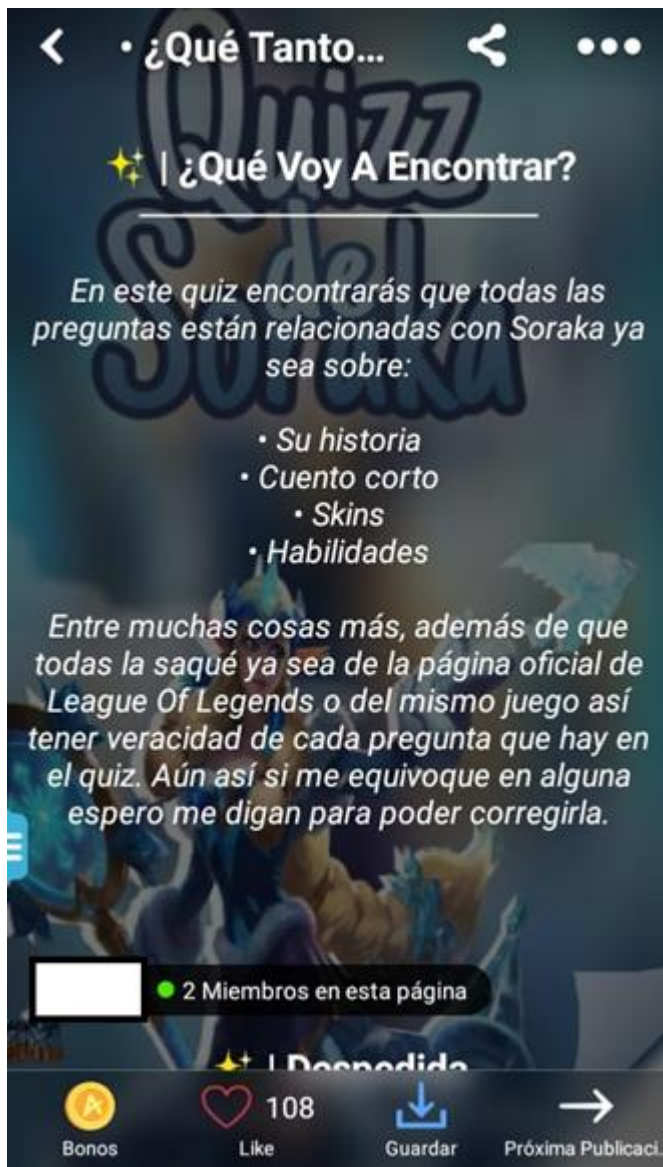
Screenshots four and five present a fan made quiz about one of the supporting characters in the game, Soraka. This champion is known for healing her allies in the game and being one of the champions who is able to keep her team alive for a long time. In this case, the quiz addresses questions related to Sorakas' stories, skins or customizations and her ability kit or gameplay. Because of this, the challenge is open to this character's frequent players to review what they know about her. In terms of identity, this screenshots reflect how gamers start creating their own content based on the experiences they have had in League of Legends. Namely, their activity-based identity comes at play because the things they do

inside the game influence how they produce and invent their own gaming or interactive material in different online affinity spaces.

This type of interactive or multimodal content created by gamers outside League of Legends is not official nor does it have any type of certification as a main player of Soraka as a champion. However, this type of fan-made creations are a result of a combination which includes the videogame, the virtual and the projective identity of the gamer and the inherent relation the user has developed with its "main" character over the years. An example of this situation can be found when gamers start creating fan art in online affinity spaces, which drives the video game creators to listen to what has been getting popular amongst the community. As a result, many customization and additional content is produced based on fan-requested or fan-demanded material, as an attempt to have their identity reflected in the game.
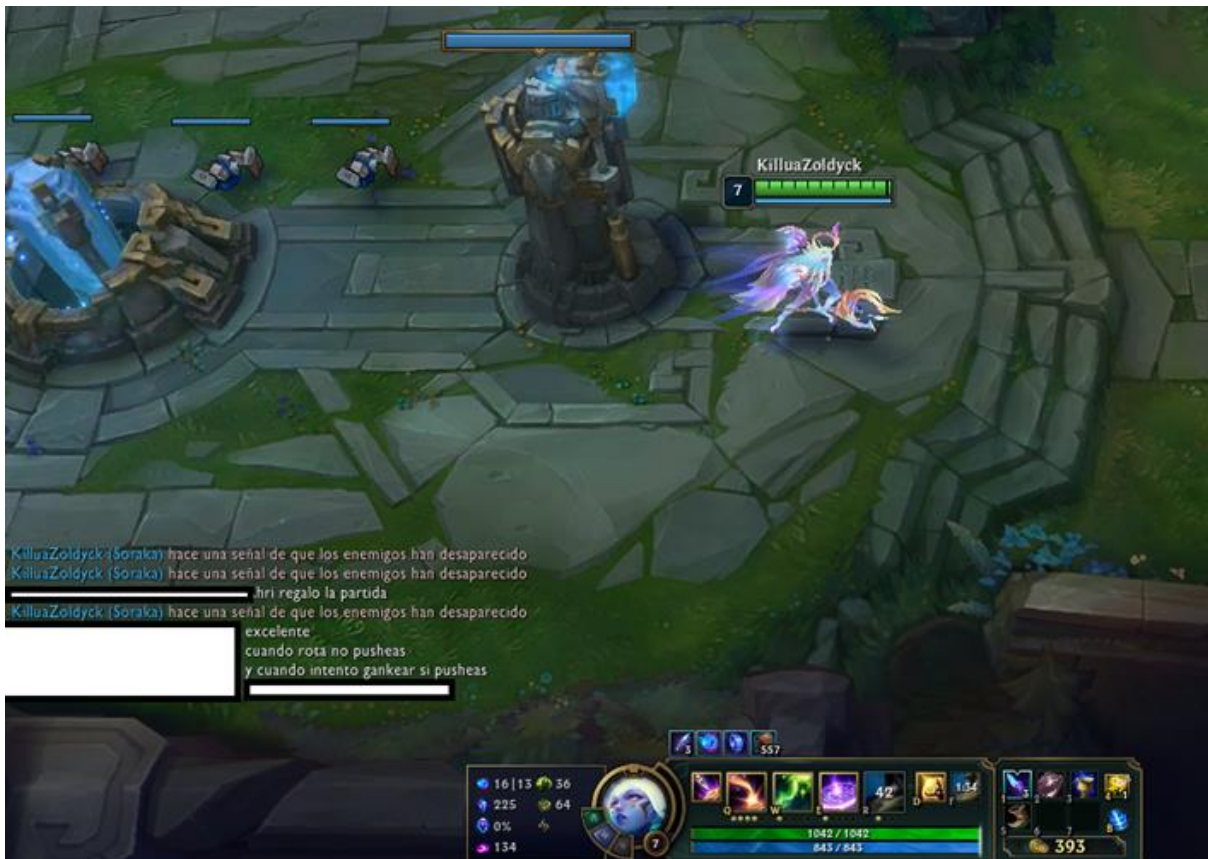
Screenshot 6

Although identities are at play in every interaction gamers have, this screenshot aims to focus more on gaming performance. As it can be seen in the picture, the person is requesting information about how to improve and win more games on their own. It should be mentioned that League of Legends is inherently a game of five against five, but some users consider they have to perform at their best because they do not believe in the potential their team has to win. Instead, they want to have a leading role and get their team to victory with their own actions.

In terms of language use, the person who posted this message has a central word in their post such as "carrear". This comes from "carry" in English and it means to win at the gamer's own terms and action, without requesting much team work or communication. Additionally, some other words like "jg", "champs", and "early" come from English and are included in a Spanish speaker post. They mean "jungler", "champions" and "first phase of the match" respectively. At that point, the writer of the post is describing the role he plays most frequently and the phase of the game they struggle with. As a said note, it has to be mentioned that even though this person looks for advice on how to "carry the game on their own", most recommendations and suggestions will come from other people in the community, which inherently speaks about the fact that gamers request for help of other gamers in their own online affinity spaces.

Screenshot 7 (The researcher was part of this match)

League of Legends can be a heated video game depending on the circumstances. In this case, a screenshot was one of the gamers is asking the other one about their decision making and gameplay, due to the very high chances of losing the match thanks to this person's performance. Aside from the odds of victory, the use of League of Legends' social language (which comes from a mixture of English and Spanish in the server where the match was carried out) is remarkable. The gamer uses the word "pusheas" conjugated in singular with an English root (push) and a Spanish suffix (as), as well as the word "gankear" which has an English root in (gank) and a Spanish suffix in ar.

The previous interaction differences from code switching in the sense that it cannot be stated that they are speakers of two different languages, yet they have been able to

acquire these words and expressions through communicating with the rest of the community. In this sense, there is a possibility to understand and use this kind of vocabulary through getting experience and playing the game. Additionally, it has to be stated that even though written forms are a part of gaming communication, semiotic and non-verbal or written expressions are common through signs, pings and images. Because of this, it cannot be said that gamers in a match are possibly proficient or fluent in a second language besides the predominant one (Spanish in the case of the server were the data was collected). Instead, they have interactions through a social language that is used to designate specific actions and situations related to gaming performance such as "gankear" and "pushear".

Screenshot 8

Similarly, to the previous screenshot, this one illustrates use of language to communicate gaming performance or gameplay plans to the team. In this case, one of the gamers writes in the chat that the opponent mid-laner in the game had wasted one of their summoner spells, which would make them more vulnerable to offensive pressure from our team. It should be mentioned that, again, the choice of words in the game comes from English, despite the fact that gamers in this match use Spanish as their predominant language. Even though there are terms and expressions for the previous utterance in the screenshot in standard Spanish language, such as:"el carrilero central no tiene destello", the choice of words is "mid sin flash" is more common in League of Legends' social language.

Autoethnographic Analysis

In the previous paragraphs of the data analysis, screenshots regarding League of Legends' gamers interests, likes, identities and language use in written forms were featured. Now, in this part of the analysis, I include my own experiences and identities related to League of Legends. As it was mentioned in the research methodology, digital autoethnography recognizes the researcher as part of the population and object of study for the data analysis, given the increasing online and digital interactions we have nowadays (O Riordan, 2014; Dunn & Myers, 2020) Hence, I recognize myself as a League of Legends gamer and I include some screenshots to explain how my identities have been reflected by the game and my interactions with the community.

First, I start by expressing how my identity was reflected in the game during some League of Legends' event. During this kind of special matches, additional content and customizations are released. For example, skins, icons, emotes and gaming passes are used to attract gamers to these new thematic events and obtain purchasable material. It is important to mention that these elements are not mandatory to be bought nor give any additional achievements in the gameplay. However, they are ways in which user personalize their own experience, by addressing their identity and looking for parts that let them show off their personality in these additional content. Having said this, I will express how my experience was during the "League of Legends Worlds 2018" event.

Screenshot 9 - League of Legends Worlds 2018

This screenshot was taken from the researcher's League of Legends summoner profile. It features an image with one of his "main" champions Ahri, and an icon dedicated to the new line of skins and additional content League of Legends released during October 2018.

October 2018 was a relevant time for League of Legends. The reason for this is that the Worlds tournament had begun and the promotion around it included a k-pop song, due to the fact that the finals were going to be held in Incheon, South Korea. K-pop is one of the musical genres I listen to the most. It has also driven me towards doing research about pop culture and literacies with Kewman Lee. Having said this, the fact that the game included something that was so close to my context and my passions made me be interested in the

final tournament and also in getting the additional content that was purchasable during that time.

Even though League of Legends decided to release more thematic additional content related to their Final Championship, their main premise was to promote it through a song that was created by them. They used inspiration from Korean pop elements, American pop and Urban music into their mix. This deeply caught my attention, because it was the first time this game would give a predominant role to a song for their tournament promotion. They did this by using five female champions with new thematic k-pop skins to create a gaming or virtual group inspired by the mainstream music that is created in South Korea. The group was named KDA (which stands for kills, deaths and assistances in the game) and it became the opening act in the ceremony, by combining a real time performance, where the original singers shared the stage with the computer-generated characters from the game. In this sense, spectators and gamers in the event were able to see both the original singers of the song as well as the League of Legends' k-pop created group.

Screenshot 10 – League of Legends Worlds 2018

This is the official League of Legends art for the KDA group. It features five of their female champions using k-pop like aspects which resemble female pop groups from South Korea. As expressed before, they released a song and promoted League of Legends' 2017 worlds with their image.

Now, from an identity perspective it is safe to say that different social groups from diverse fandoms and online affinity spaces gathered together around League of Legends' KDA group. For example, k-pop fans were attracted to the idea of having some of their artists featured in the original song signing and rapping in Korean. Additionally, the cosplay community would produce their own creations, outfits and material resembling the skins line of KDA. Finally, the League of Legends' gaming community would be expecting the Final Tournament and would try to purchase the additional content made to promote the event.

From a personal perspective, this KDA and League of Legends Worlds event was interesting for me both as a gamer and a k-pop fan. The reason for this is that I did not expect the game to use a song to promote their game, especially k-pop since I did not see it as a genre that would fit the game. However, it made me realize how music can be diverse, and I recognized the possibility of having a k-pop song that was related to the gameplay, by addressing things like KDA (kills, deaths and assistances), the skin line and promoting through material and music that meets my identity outside the game.

Additionally, I participated in this event because one of the champions included for the promotion was my main. As it was expressed before, "main" is a term coined to refer to a gamers' favorite and most utilized champion. This decision is made based on the amount of time the person has played with the character, their story or lore, their ability kit and their skin line or additional content. In my case, I was interested in purchasing the customizations and the newly created material because they fit the personality of Ahri, my favorite champion in the game. She was transformed into a k-pop performer and this reflected my activity-based and real world identity in the game.

According to the previous ideas, the terms "real, projective, and virtual identities" also came together in this situation, as it happens in most gaming environments. In my real world identity, I am a male student who is a k-pop and anime fan. In my virtual identity I am Killua Zoldyck, a League of Legends gamer who usually plays ranked games in the Summoner Rift and It is placed in the Gold division. In this case, both identities overlapped with my projective identity, as my love for k-pop music was met with the release of the KDA song, and their additional content in the game. In this sense, I found a moment where what I am as a person and what I do as a gamer (relational identity and activity-based identity, respectively) were factors projected in an online affinity space through music, videogames and additional multimodal content.

Conclusion

Video games and the online affinity spaces which have emerged from them have proposed diverse ways to communicate and interact with other people (Gee & Hayes, 2010; Lee, 2018) especially for the case gaming case, where users of these virtual spaces have come up with a wide range of vocabulary and expressions to achieve victory in their matches (Mora, S Castaño, Orrego, Hernandez, & D Ramírez, 2016). In consequence, these interactions occurring in online affinity spaces are engaging gamers in literacy practices which meet their gaming goals and interests.

Even tough gamers' primary focus is not on learning or using second languages, they are able to do so by getting knowledge about the game and achieving victory. Hence, the possibility of using languages and connecting with other gamers comes with the act of playing. In this line, it should also be considered that second languages are used as means to participate in different issues beyond interacting in-game. Because gamers are constantly using non-traditional or standard ways of language, it cannot be said they are communicating with standard forms of Spanish and English (in the case of this work).

Additionally, online affinity spaces are places where gamers can show their personalities by displaying what is named in this work as projective identity. In this sense, they project what they are in their real world identity onto the virtual identity of their characters and summoner profiles. This can be seen in forums and applications where they participate creating their own material and interacting with other users. This is also noticeable when they purchase additional content or customization in the game to reflect their identity with their interests in passions.

To conclude, video games as online affinity spaces must be recognized as places where gamers communicate and interact using second languages. Besides that, they have been building numerous and diverse communities all through the Internet with the purpose

of improving their gaming performance as well as to share their creations and project their identities and personal interests with users who have similar hobbies and likes in the online world.

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