

Second Language Socialization in Stronghold Kingdoms: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

The present study investigates second language socialization (SLS) in a massively multi-player online game (MMOG) called *Stronghold Kingdoms*. SLS explores how second language learners become members of the target language social groups. Using 3 data sources including records, interview, and focus group, this narrative inquiry provides evidence for SLS affordances in MMOG play. Furthermore, focusing on the SLS journey of one non-native English speaker, this study reveals that the participant developed a working English proficiency through collaborative group activities by participating in and assuming social roles in the game. Moreover, as the game was about the collaborative efforts around a communal goal, the results suggested that the gamers prioritized action over linguistic skills, allowing the participant to take risks and contribute to the discourse while apprenticing to the linguistic norms of the community. These findings suggest that MMOGs have the potential to support SLS and, hence, be considered for language education.

Keywords: Computer assisted language learning (CALL), second language socialization (SLS), multiplayer online games (MMOG), narrative inquiry

Introduction

Using MMOGs in language education has received widespread attention in recent years (Shen & Williams, 2010; Squire, 2007; Young, 2009; Zhang et al., 2017). These network-based games can be considered a shift from information delivery to human development paradigms which emphasize social dynamics, collaboration, and designed experiences (Squire, 2008), providing a graphically rich immersive simulated environment supportive of language learning elements such as engagement, social interaction, just-in-time feedback, and collaboration (Peterson, 2016; Sykes, Reinhardt, & Thorne, 2010). However, many studies (e.g., Rankin, Gold, & Gooch, 2006; Rankin, McNeal, Shute, & Gooch, 2008; Reinders, & Wattana, 2011, 2014; Suh, Kim, & Kim, 2010) in computer assisted language learning (CALL) have investigated the potential of MMOGs for language learning from a cognitivist perspective (Chapelle, 2003, 2009; Palmer, 2010; Watson-Gegeo, 2004). This practice, resulting naturally from of a transition of second language acquisition (SLA) approaches from behavioral to cognitivist and sociocultural theories (Canfield, 2016; Garrett, 2009; Zheng & Newgarden, 2012), necessitates

the employment of sociocultural theories in SLA research to explore the social dimensions of MMOGs and their affordances for language learning.

As an approach to SLA, second language socialization (SLS) aims to understand “how persons become competent members of social groups and the role of language in this process” (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986, p. 167). In fact, SLS is essentially a first language (L1) acquisition theory that explores how children socialize into the norms of their cultures (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Likewise, in SLA research, SLS research explores the process by which a second language (L2) learner socializes into the norms of the L2 community, gaining linguistic competence, membership, and legitimacy (Duff & Talmy, 2011). This approach challenges the cognitivist view of language (Watson-Gegeo, 2004) by adhering to broader social theories revolving around the core concept of community, such as sociocultural (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Lantolf, Thorne, & Poehner, 2015), ecological (van Lier, 2004), and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) perspectives. As language learning involves participation in the target linguistic community (Duff & Talmy, 2011), SLS could be a useful theoretical framework for SLA research (Ellis, 2008; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Watson-Gegeo, 2004; Watson-Gegeo & Nielson, 2003), which has been scarcely investigated in CALL research.

Moreover, many studies employing SLS in online settings, such as chatrooms, have focused on the macro-level analysis of social contexts, with the micro-level analysis of the social dynamics largely unexplored (Zuengler & Cole, 2005). The purpose of this study, thus, was exploring social aspects of SLS from a micro-level perspective, collecting the narratives of and around a non-native English speaker (NNES) gamer’s lived experiences in an MMOG. The main question this study focused on was: *What can be learned about SLS from the stories of participants in an MMOG?* With this main question, the following sub-questions led the inquiry:

1. What are the sociocultural norms and practices of an MMOG community which can afford the SLS process?
2. How can an MMOG community support the NNES gamers’ language development?

Accordingly, this study explores the process of SLS in an MMOG by collecting and analyzing the gameplay narratives in and around the lives of a NNES gamer and his other faction members. This study is important, as it attempts to provide a sociocultural and microanalytic account of SLS in the MMOG, *Stronghold Kingdoms*, under investigation.

Review of Literature

In this paper, the term SLS refers to an approach to SLA which “has as its goal the understanding of how persons become competent members of social groups and the role of language in this process” (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986, p. 167). SLS is essentially an first language acquisition theory investigating how children, as novices to the language and sociocultural norms of the communities into which they are born, become competent members of their societies (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). In this approach, language facilitates the individuals’ socialization and, simultaneously, develops through the individuals’ integration into the community.

Some studies have investigated SLS in online chatroom and forum communities. Discourse analysis of exchanged messages in these environments have shown that participants developed identities as respected members of the community (Black, 2005, 2006; Lam, 2004), leading to their increased confidence, enabling them to compensate for their communicative problems in face-to-face classes (Nguyen & Kellogg, 2005). Black (2006) examined the process

of SLS in an online fanfiction community, which captured the story of a teenage Chinese immigrant girl who, lacking the required English proficiency to socialize into the new community, struggled in school subjects and making friends. However, after joining an online fanfiction community, she enthusiastically read and wrote English anime stories and was recognized as a successful multilingual Asian writer. In this process, the feedback that the community provided had an important role in her socialization.

A seminal study by Lam (2004) showed that group affiliation and dynamics led to language development. In an eight-month study on SLS in a bilingual chatroom, the researcher had two Chinese immigrant girls, who felt isolated and marginalized in face-to-face English-speaking contexts, participate in a Chinese-English bilingual chatroom. Although the participants were initially afraid to speak English in the chatroom, they eventually decided to participate in the discourse to make friends and practice English. The results showed that the two participants formed identities of respected members of the community, being able to switch codes between Cantonese and English at the same time. Moreover, the chat experience allowed the participants to compensate for their face-to-face communication failures, as their newly-found confidence transferred to offline contexts.

Some studies have investigated SLS in virtual world (VW) communities. VWs are online communities where participants can interact with each other and create/modify objects in computer-based simulated environments (Bishop, 2009), engaging in social activities through computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools such as multimodal chat. Regardless of space type, whether MMOGs (e.g., World of Warcraft), social virtualities (e.g., Second Life), or educational campaigns (e.g., Quest Atlantis), there is a sociocultural thread linking the users (Barker, 2016; Huvila, Ek & Widden, 2014; Yilmaz, Baydas, Karakus & Goktas, 2015), gathering them in guilds, setting them off on quests, or having them hang out in a virtual coffee shop. Research shows that VWs can help language identity development (Zheng, Young, Wagner & Brewer, 2009), vocabulary learning (Bytheway, 2011, 2014), acculturation (Sykes, Oskoz, & Thorne, 2008; Rankin, Morrison, McNeal, Gooch, & Shute, 2009; Thorne, 2008), language socialization (Rama, Black, Es, & Warschauer, 2012), and interlanguage pragmatic development (Palmer, 2010). For instance, Zheng et al. (2009) showed that the affordances of Quest Atlantis, a problem-solving VW, facilitated language learning for participants at both utterance and discourse levels as they engaged in “negotiations for action” (p. 489), a reference to Long’s (1996) negotiation for meaning. Likewise, Rama et al. (2012) found that the affordances of World of Warcraft (WoW) enabled the participants, one being a low-level Spanish learner with advanced gaming skills, and the other being a low-level gamer with high Spanish proficiency, to further their skills in the areas they were weak at, moving from a beginner’s guild to a more advanced one. The study also showed that the community provided a safe and engaging environment for SLS.

Almost all studies investigating SLS have employed ethnographic methods, allowing the incorporation of “relevant macro- and micro-dimensions of context” (Watson-Gegeo, 2004, p. 341). In an MMOG context, Palmer (2010) conducted a study on second language pragmatic socialization in WoW. Focusing on general speech acts and pragmatic moves in a Spanish game world, the researcher entered the world as a participant-researcher. Being a professional gamer in an English-speaking world, she designated herself as a valued member of the new community and managed to appropriate several speech acts and pragmatic moves required to be known as a competent player. Likewise, Lee and Gerber (2013) conducted an ethnographic case study on language socialization in WoW, investigating a Korean low-level EFL learner’s language proficiency over the course of the game. The results suggested a progressive development of the learner’s language proficiency from initial non-game beginner uses to game-acquired brief expressions, and finally, complex expressions acquired by apprenticing to the interactions of other gamers.

The employment of ethnography in research on VW communities is well justified, as, according to Boellstorff (2008, p. 61), VWs are “legitimate sites of culture,” which represent a dynamic whole in its entire social integrity, not being less real than the so-called real-life (Kolo & Baur, 2004). However, little is known about the narratives of individual participants engaged in social dynamics. Therefore, this study attempts to explore the stories and artifacts of an MMOG with a specific focus on a skilled NNES gamer who gained the status of a valued member in an English-speaking community. This narrative inquiry is important because it can yield information on first-hand accounts of the actual participants who experience the SLS process. Furthermore, the sociocultural nature of SLS research diversifies SLA acquisition research in MMOG settings. Finally, this study answers calls by Lam (2004) for more globalized research on SLS in virtual social spaces, Palmer (2010) for more studies on SLS in MMOGs, Chappelle (2009) for diversifying the theoretical base of SLA research through sociocultural approaches, and Reinhardt and Sykes (2012) and Peterson (2016) for further sociocultural research on the affordances of MMOGs.

Theoretical Framework

This study is framed in a tradition of research in SLS (e.g., Duff & Talmy, 2011; Ochs & Schieffelin, 2009; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986) with a community of practice (CoP) orientation. SLS investigates how second language learners become competent members of the target community, accommodating, apprenticing to, and resisting the linguistic and sociocultural norms of the target community (Duff & Talmy, 2011) through interaction with community members. SLS constitutes a useful approach to investigating the multifaceted relationship between social behavior and language learning (Ellis, 2008; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Watson-Gegeo, 2004; Watson-Gegeo & Nielson, 2003). An orientation to SLS is Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice (CoP) where individuals interested in a domain (e.g., gaming) form a community and engage in shared practices, investing in that domain. For instance, within an MMOG, there may be several CoPs where players from groups and collaborate and compete in a challenging environment, apprenticing to the norms and strategies to survive and becoming competent members of the community, a principle called legitimate peripheral participation (LPP). Therefore, this study used SLS with a CoP orientation to look at the social dynamics at work in an MMOG called *Stronghold Kingdoms*.

Method

The present study situates its methods and interpretive lens within a qualitative narrative inquiry methodology (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Duff & Bell, 2002; Norton & Early, 2011). As humans are story-telling beings (Hatch, 2002), a narrative inquiry has as its goal the uncovering of participants’ lived experiences through the stories they tell (Glesne, 2015). To this end, researchers using narrative inquiry often collect the story of one individual participant through conducting interviews, observations, and analysis of diaries, personal letters, and other archives. Insights emerging from narrative inquiry can make readers reflect on their own lives and “re-story” themselves (Clandinin, 2013, p. 34). Through stories, we “learn something essentially human by understanding an actual life or community as lived” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 8). Therefore, in this study, the archives/records of an MMOG faction forum comprising the messages exchanged between the faction members were collected and analyzed for themes. Furthermore, the personal accounts of the faction leader throughout his gaming journey as well as those of three faction members were collected and

analyzed. These sources, it was assumed, told the story of the game community in a broader sense, and the faction leader's socialization journey into the norms of this community.

Setting

This study was conducted in the context of an MMOG called *Stronghold Kingdoms* (SK). SK features a 2/3D representation of medieval castle life, with gamers spawned in the game as lowest-rank gamers in control of an unpopulated village. This sleepy setting calls for economic and military campaigns. First, the gamers need to set up civil industries for food, wood, stone, and iron production to help populate and develop the village, requiring them to research special areas of castle life: industry, farming, education, and military. With strategic development in these areas, the gamers can place different civil and military buildings in the village, resulting in their popularity (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. A typical fully-built village

Having stabilized the situation, the gamers are then presented with another task—defeating computerized enemies (AIs) (see Figure 2) which destabilize the parish by attacking it sporadically, causing negative popularity. Besides this crucial activity, gamers need to perform quests to harness their gaming skills. Through these undertakings, gamers rise through the ranks from "Village Idiot (1)" to "Crown Prince (23)."



Figure 2. Attacking an AI

However, this description only reflects the personal face of the game—the map is marked with thousands of villages in communal relationships—trading, scouting, reinforcing, attacking, defending, etc.



Figure 3. Part of the UK world map

Each gamer has a modifiable personal avatar and coat of arms which can be displayed by clicking on each village on the map. Through the *more info* button under the avatar image, specific information on the gamers' achievements, completed quests, and location of their villages is displayed. Moreover, the profile contains information on their affiliation to factions and houses, if any. The mail button on this window also provides a textual communication channel for all the gamers to interact.



Figure 4. The first author's profile

The social dimension of the game involves gamers banding together by forming factions of 5-40 members, participating in a parish, county, or country elections, serving as liege lords or vassals, and joining the 20 competing houses struggling to dominate the world. As the goal is conquering the world, the coordinated play of community members is inevitable. Therefore, through in-game textual mails and chats, parish noticeboards, and third-party audio chat applications, gamers coordinate movements and strategies.

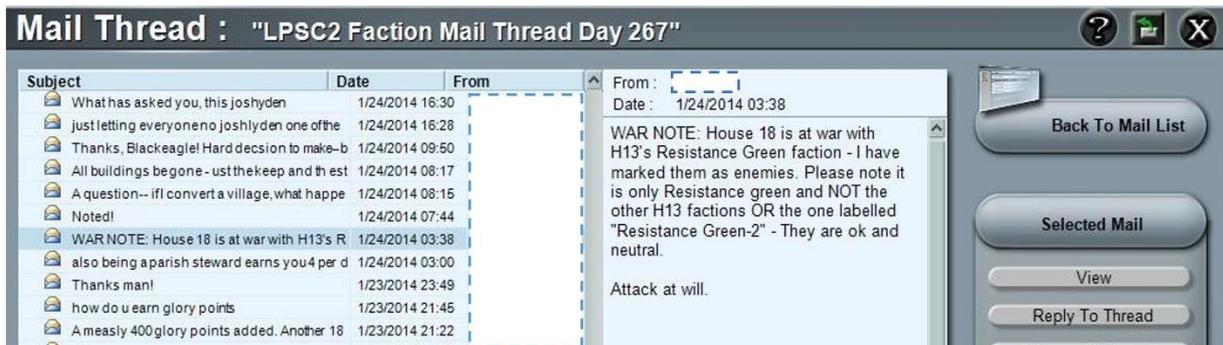


Figure 5. In-game mail from a faction leader to the members advising them of strategies (IDs covered for privacy)

More importantly, the community elects its leader. Likewise, as lower-rank gamers grow, they assume social responsibilities formerly belonging to higher-rank gamers, attending to the needs of the group under their command regularly, providing them with resources, instructions, and feedback on their performance.



Figure 6. Parish wall (IDs covered for privacy)

Participants

We were interested in learning about the lived experiences of an NNES who had already established him/herself as a competent member of the gaming community. This person, we thought, would be a suitable case to collect whose story as someone who had experienced the SLS process. To this end, following a purposive sampling strategy, we posted a recruitment message to the social forum of SK. An English native speaker, whom the first author knew through his past gameplay, wrote and introduced a player who met the criteria. The target player was in a different world (server); therefore, upon this referral, we contacted him and he agreed to participate in the study. He was a 34-year-old male Serbian player, Emil (pseudonym), who had played in an English-speaking game world for over five years. He ranked 16 in a population of 1,183 active gamers. He had the maximum number of villages, 40; was in the highest game rank, Crown Prince (CP); was a House General (HG), a faction leader (FL), the steward of 33 parishes, and sheriff of 2 counties. In addition, he had completed 196 quests and received 218 awards for the excellence he had shown.

In addition to the NNES of the study, there were two male CPs and one female Crown Princess (CPes) in Emil's faction who volunteered to participate in the study. One of the male participants (Eric) was a 34-year-old male from the UK with a game experience of two and a half years. The other male participant, Jack, was a 24-year-old male CP from the US with a game experience of three years. The CPes, Jen, was a 24-year-old female gamer from the US

with a game experience of three years. All participants expressed willingness to participate in the study by reacting to the message posted on the faction thread, where gamers communicated game-related strategies and tactics.

Table 1
Participants

Name	Designation	Rank	Awards	Quests	Villages	Roles	Country	Experience
Emil	Faction leader	16/CP	218	196	40	HG; FL Sheriff Steward	Serbia	5 years
Eric	Faction Member	172/CP	122	86	23	Steward Sheriff	UK	2.5 years
Jen	Faction Member	182/CP	140	183	20	Steward	US	4 years
Jack	Faction Member	227/CP	82	87	16	Steward	US	3 years

Note: The participants were all part of the same faction and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. They were all considered competent players.

Data Sources

We relied upon three data collection measures: *records*, *interviews*, and a *focus group*. Through these sources, we tried to collect the story of the game community in shaping the process of SLS.

Records. In SK, gamers interact over forums to coordinate their actions. The forum posts are saved and stored as long as the game is played. These records provided a valuable repertoire for investigating the process of SLS, as they told the story of gamers over a long period of time. Therefore, we started our research by analyzing the messages exchanged between faction members, including the messages posted at different times during the game: starting the game, peace, and war, social interactions, supports, etc. This analysis would familiarize us with the field we aimed to enter. Although we were generally familiar with the discourse, we tried to formally assess such archival data, looking for patterns related to group dynamics and dominant linguistic norms. This phase also helped the design process of the interview protocols.

Interview. The interview was the main method we used to collect the story of the NNE participant in the study. We relied on a semi-structured protocol format (Glesne, 2015), consisting of some guiding questions based on the analysis of records and the theoretical framework so that we could allow the NNE to share his story without interruption (see Appendix A).

Focus group. A focus group (Glesne, 2015) was conducted with the three NES faction members. During this phase, the gamers' opinions about their gameplay under the NNE

gamer's leadership were investigated. The focus group was conducted in a private faction channel in the textual mode of *Discord*—a gaming chat client. Five general questions were asked (see Appendix B).

Credibility

This study employed certain credibility measures. First, the first author's gaming experience was very important. He had been playing the game for about three years and was familiar with the setting. This familiarity and gaming experience positioned him as a high-ranking player who was trusted by the community and could enter closed circles. Therefore, it was possible for him to be both a “fly on the wall” (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990) and a participant-researcher. Furthermore, to address bias, we conducted member checks and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1994) throughout the study. We also asked an impartial colleague to code 10% of our data to make sure we were not biased in our interpretation. Moreover, we presented the participants with our data analysis to ascertain that our accounts did not differ from theirs. Second, we relied on the triangulation of data sources to arrive at a representative picture of SLS in SK, and throughout each phase, we relied on inter-coder checks to ascertain the accuracy of the data we were coding. Finally, in writing the report, we used our experiences in understanding what was taking place and strove for clarity in our thick description, allowing the readers to relate the findings to their own settings and judge the credibility of the findings.

Data Analysis and Results

The data collected were analyzed through two levels of coding—open and axial (Saldaña, 2015). First, open coding of 232 in-game forum threads including 1,241 exchanged messages was conducted. The transcripts of the data were read and color-coded twice. Later, the relationships among the codes were identified and concepts and categories were formed. For instance, if the participants frequently mentioned an issue, such as certain behaviors expected of group members, we considered it a concept and placed other related issues, such as *cleaning the parish of disease points*, as categories under that concept. The focus of this phase was discovering the norms of the faction/house CoPs by summarizing the data into concepts and categories.

Table 2 shows the results of the analysis of records. As can be seen, 5 major concepts and 13 categories emerged from the analysis. Of 1,241 messages analyzed, 409 (32.95%) referred to *communication and coordination*, 284 (22.88%) to issues related to *gaming skills*, 182 (14.66%) to *dedication*, 206 (16.59%) to *conduct*, and 160 (12.89%) to *real-life*. Accordingly, calls for communication and coordination were the first concept mentioned in forum posts; however, communication was implied in other concepts as well. For instance, in order to master gaming skills, gamers needed to follow instructions provided by the community, either through the gamers' requests for help or scaffolding by other competent gamers. Likewise, the role of language in learning about the game code of conduct, dedication, and real-life issues was essential. Real-life issues were the lowest important concept in the game, as the participants were mostly involved in gaming.

Table 2
Major Categories of Faction Sociocultural Norms

Concepts	Categories
Communication/Coordination (32.95%)	Different peace/wartime channels (social, activity, supply, monk support, proclamations, negotiations, mass-invitations, recruitment, strategies), third-party text/audio chat applications (TeamSpeak, Discord, RaidCall), high-profile communication/coordination efforts (faction leaders, house generals, parish stewards, county sheriffs, province governors, country kings, alliances).
Skills (22.88%)	Leaderboard position (points, achievements, rank, villages, quests), peacetime actions (economy, fortifications, research, defensive technologies, troop buildups, tax, popularity, trade, vassalage, AIs), being a warrior (timed attacks, breaker, supplier, monker, combo-player, resisting timed attacks, pillage, ransack, capture, raze, flip parish/county/country, strategy cards).
Dedication (14.66%)	Being active (donating goods to the parish, war-time active coordinated efforts, voting, receiving new comers, sharing strategies, collaborating on communication threads, protecting other players' assets in their absence, cleaning the parish of disease, dealing with rogues).
Conduct (16.59%)	Being honest (having no alternative accounts), respecting the leadership decisions (allocation of loots, capturing villages, notifying liege lords (LL) of captures, responding to the activity checks, participation in elections, supporting the members).
Real-life (12.89%)	Non-game issues (daily life, relationships, politics, pets, music, technologies, etc.)

Note: The observance of these five areas constituted a “competent” player.

In addition to the themes and categories developed from the analysis of records, there was a further finding which was related to the linguistic norms of the community. Both NES and NNEs were not completely accurate in their writing, with NES being more accurate. The faction conversations were replete with spelling (e.g., million, stewards, suggest), punctuation (e.g., non-observance of sentence case), and grammatical (e.g., incomplete sentences) errors. Furthermore, the interactions among the faction members were shorter while the leader was more elaborate and authoritative in his analysis of the situations. Likewise, while Emil's messages contained grammatical mistakes, they served as a valuable resource for other members. There were times when Emil issued proclamations informing the new faction members of the norms of the community and warning against non-observance. For instance, at the same time that he welcomed the newcomers into the faction, he drew red lines as well (Appendix C, Quote 1). Many players or factions, of course, “go rogue,” as they cannot follow the rules set by leaders. For example, we found a proclamation about a previous war between

Emil's faction, *Swords*, and a rogue faction, *Aura*, who had not pledged allegiance to Emil (Appendix C, Quote 2). Consequently, *Aura*'s members had become targeted with multiple attacks, losing assets and being forced to leave. Informed of the *Aura*'s joint activation of vocation mode (VM), which allows members to leave the game while their assets are protected against attacks, Emil had issued a victory message (Appendix C, Quote 3). This constitutes another norm of the community—observance and violation of rules. Often, disobedience is not only welcome by gamers, but also a necessity to keep the game going (Appendix C, Quote 4). Linguistically, war-related activities are challenging because they require observance of all the concepts shown in Table 2.

Accordingly, addressing the first research question, the results suggested that the socio-cultural norms and practices of the game CoP highlighted four main themes: *communication and coordination* (32.95%), *gaming skills* (22.88%), *dedication* (14.66%), *conduct* (16.59%), and *real-life* (12.89%) issues. In addition, the results suggested the gamers were so focused on the gameplay that they did not fully observe the grammatical norms of written English. Finally, the community had certain rules to follow, leading to harmonious play.

Interview

To answer the second research question, an eight-item interview protocol was constructed based on the analysis of records. The purpose of this protocol was to shape the discourse around the life journey of Emil. The interview was conducted via the game forum per Emil's request, as he felt more confident in his writing. We first attempted to tap what "competent" meant in the game. Emil's story confirmed the importance of the concepts emerged from the analysis of records. He enumerated some characteristics of competence. First, he believed that FLs should not only have mastered gaming skills, but they also needed to have a good reputation among other gamers. Furthermore, he stated that a competent player needed to be balanced in his strategies, carefully speculating the consequences of his actions and avoiding unnecessary animosities (Appendix C, Quote 5). Likewise, we found a forum message by Eric (Appendix C Quote 6) confirming Emil's words. To Eric, an important quality in being a good FL was having good communication skills to represent the faction/house appropriately. One can assume these qualities as being a function of duration (the time) of gameplay and the gamer's affiliation (maintaining membership).

Emil had joined the game after receiving a friend's invitation. As he mentioned, SK was his first online game, and he developed a growing interest in the game when the war started, which led to his meeting people from all over the world (Appendix C, Quote 7). To Emil, the motivating factor to play was the feeling he had when communicating with other gamers. This enthusiasm had led him to join the faction's *TeamSpeak* channel, engaging in audio chat with other members for a better understanding of their feelings and ways of thinking. He, for instance, had learned from one of his faction members that their review of gaming tactics was like "war veterans" briefing and debriefing sessions before and after an operation (Appendix C, Quote 8).

As to communication skills, Emil believed he was able to communicate effectively despite his apparent language errors; however, what was important to him was looking at the "bigger picture" when he did not understand individual words or slang forms (Appendix C, Quote 9). He also believed that the game had helped him develop his language skills to a certain extent, with his writing skill being mostly affected, as, to him, working proficiency of English was required to communicate with other gamers. He also mentioned using *Google Translate* as a resource when writing (Appendix C, Quote 10).

As to his activeness, Emil expressed that his activity level depended on the atmosphere of the game, playing more in wartime. He also stated that he played more actively at the beginning of his gaming journey (Appendix C, Quote 11).

When asked to share a memory, Emil told the story of one of his wartime experiences when 12 armies attacked an ally's village. The player's village was so far away that they could not send him support, so they all watched anxiously as the armies approached the village. The player's village had also been excommunicated, making him unable to use the church power to prevent attacks. All the faction members waited uneasily for "the moment of truth," gazing at the screen, following the twelve fast-moving army icons on the map to see when they would reach the target and when they did, whether they would be successful. Finally, the armies arrived at the village, but the castle stood firm and the player survived. Emil concluded that such moments in the game made gamers more seasoned (Appendix C, Quote 12).

Emil believed that the game had drastically helped him develop his social skills. At first, he was very hesitant to communicate with other gamers, worried that he would be misunderstood or unable to effectively contribute to the exchange. In time, he joined many communication channels, being active in 15 forum threads and audio chat channels at the time of the interview. Despite his real-life commitments, and feeling somehow guilty about not fully devoting his time to his family, he regularly communicated with his gaming friends (Appendix C, Quote 13).

Emil felt that he was part of a community of gamers. One of the reasons he was still playing the game was that he wanted to be present when the game ended, seeing the game server as his own space. Another reason was his friends, as he wanted to finish the game with them and then, probably, leave (Appendix C, Quote 14).

Focus group

To further inquire about the second research question, a focus group was conducted with the four faction members, asking them about Emil's leadership. Generally, all gamers were satisfied with Emil's leadership, considering him a "wise" player who "had connections to all big heads" in the game. For instance, Jack said that "being friends with the 16th player is an honor in itself." In addition, Jen stated she had found Emil an "open-minded" player from whom she had constantly learned, and one who had allowed her to rise (Appendix C, Quote 15).

As to English proficiency, all NES participants contended that gamers needed to have a working English proficiency to be able to play as part of a group (Appendix C, Quote 16). As to whether Emil's English proficiency led to miscommunication, they agreed that there were many grammatical mistakes in Emil's in-game mails, but that these did not lead to misunderstanding (Appendix C, Quote 17). Emil was communicative but inaccurate, and in this virtual world, that was not an impediment to his success as a leader.

As to their feelings about playing the game, the participants generally felt very connected to each other and did not have any plans to quit, expressing sadness over the ending of the game (Appendix C, Quote 18). For instance, speaking about the strong bonds between the gamers, Jen shared that she had had "lasting friendships that have spanned nearly 10 years, one resulting in a mid-long term relationship of a different caliber."

To conclude, the findings of both the interview and focus group revealed interesting insights into the affordances of the community for language learning. The results suggested that gaming was an interdependent relationship, making Emil join a faction, apprentice to the norms, integrate into the community, and be a competent player to whom others turned for advice. Table 3 summarizes the findings of both individual and focus group interviews.

Table 3
Interview summaries

Interview with Emil	Focus Group Interview
1. The concepts (communication and coordination (32.95%), gaming skills (22.88%), dedication (14.66%), conduct (16.59%), and real-life (12.89%) emerged from the analysis of records were key in one's competence.	1. Satisfied with Emil's leadership.
2. FLs need to have a good reputation.	2. Proud of him.
3. FLs need to have balanced strategies	3. Wise and resourceful.
4. Good communication skills are important.	4. Having many connections.
5. Meeting people from all over the world after the war started.	5. A working English proficiency is what is important.
6. Communicating with people from around the world motivated his gameplay.	6. Group work is important.
7. He had joined audio-chat servers to have a better understanding of players' feelings.	7. Inaccurate language was not an impediment to Emil's leadership
8. He could communicate effectively, but he was not concerned about the details (errors).	8. No plans to quit.
9. The game helped him develop language skills to a certain extent.	9. An inter-dependent community.
10. Activity depended on the atmosphere of the game; wars called for more activity.	
11. Tense moments in the game made gamers more experienced.	
12. Game had helped developed Emil's social skills.	
13. He considered the game his personal space.	
14. His friends were the reason he did not leave.	
15. He wanted to see the end of the game before he quit.	

Discussion

Building upon the research that many studies in the field have addressed SLA from a cognitivist perspective (Chappelle, 2009; Palmer, 2010; Watson-Gegeo, 2004), this narrative inquiry employed Schieffelin and Ochs's (1986) SLS and Wenger's (1998) CoP to examine how an MMOG faction could afford an NNES socialization into the socio-cultural and linguistic norms of the community. The findings of the study largely aligned with the tenets of the theoretical framework. The results showed that Emil participated in the shared group activities (see Table

2) and apprenticed to the communicative norms of the game, adopting different strategies to communicate with other co-gamers while relying on his gaming skills to compensate for weaknesses in his linguistic skills. Through participation in the community and struggle to achieve shared goals (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), Emil became a competent player and, in time, more sociable and verbal when performing game-related social responsibilities. Likewise, the results, like those of Rama et al.'s (2012), suggested that the community discarded the leader's ill-formed linguistic constructions, focusing on the gameplay and general picture behind conversations, creating a safe environment for him to develop his linguistic skills. Further, it was found that both written and audio-chat conversations were preferred means of communication for all group activities, extending bonds to even non-game situations (Yee, 2006).

This study has some important implications for practice. As the results suggest, language learners, when participating in social interactions with peers as part of an MMOG, may apprentice to the norms of community and develop into legitimate members (Black, 2005, 2006; Lam, 2004) through the group dynamics encouraging negotiation of action (Zheng et al., 2009), feedback provision (Levy & Stockwell, 2006), authenticity and connection (Beatty, 2015; Nunan, 1988; Widdowson, 2012), and pursuit of shared goals in the face of communal psychologically balanced challenges (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). While this study assessed the affordances of a specific MMOG, these elements were found to be important in the SLS process and, hence, important to inform the design of educational games. Accordingly, educational MMOGs can encourage the process of SLS by gathering students around educational goals manifested in the forms of quests and challenges to be solved through group dynamics. Through this shift from information delivery to human development, social dynamics, collaboration, situated learning (Squire, 2008), and flow (Cornillie, Clarebout, & Desmet, 2012; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), the students will be able to explore a "much broader range of knowledge" (Squire & Jenkins, 2003, p. 29).

Suggestions for further research. This study has some implications for future research. Although the findings of this study emerged mostly from the lived experiences of one NNES gamer, the language analyzed was the product of a five-year-long gaming experience to whose process we did not have access. Analyzing the long-term records of an NNES gamer's linguistic development will certainly provide us with more information on the process of SLS. Furthermore, although Emil stated that he had access to learning resources outside the game, this study did not investigate how those resources could have potentially shaped his linguistic proficiency. In addition, this study did not investigate the transference of game-related communication skills to non-game settings. Likewise, this study did not investigate the issue of gender and power relations in developing a gamer identity while socializing into the norms of the community. Finally, this study did not delve into the process of speech act acquisition. All these areas require further research.

As the findings of this study suggest, in MMOGs, NNES gamers can develop a functional linguistic proficiency through coordinated gameplay. Although it might be argued that the language of gaming is limited to the situations in which it is adopted, such as the language of pillaging in a medieval strategy MMOG like SK, we argue that it is the social interactions built around these shared goals and practices which are of particular importance in SLS. Through social interactions within this CoP, the NNES gamers tend to learn a semiotic domain, proceed through an ongoing learning process without psychosocial moratoriums, acquire cultural models, and develop a game/language identity (Gee, 2003); therefore, an MMOG is not only about the set language options that gather gamers in the community but about the input and creative constructions emerging from this dynamic setting that Gee (2003) calls an affinity

space. As a final comment, the choice of this MMOG resulted from a search among most downloaded MMOGs.

Conclusion

This qualitative study investigated the process of SLS in an MMOG called *Stronghold Kingdoms*. The findings suggested that participation in the game CoP enabled the NNES participant of the study to socialize into the community by apprenticing to the norms. The participant developed functional language proficiency, allowing him to serve social responsibilities. The NES gamers, likewise, provided a safe environment for him to lead while taking advantage of his gaming experience. Therefore, the participatory nature of the game and the gamers' shared endeavors, as well as coordinated actions, benefitted both NES and NNES gamers in a way that both groups ultimately became competent members of the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). While providing evidence on the affordances of MMOGs for SLS using *Stronghold Kingdoms* as a tool, this study suggested further research, especially longitudinal data collection and analysis, on the SLS process in MMOGs

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Appendix A. Interview Protocol

1. Would you kindly tell me more about yourself and your gaming journey? When did you start the game? How long have you been playing? What do you like about the game? Or anything you would like to say?
2. As a non-native English speaker who is playing an English world, how can you communicate with other players? How was your English proficiency at the beginning of your game play?
3. Some people say that playing multiplayer online games can help players practice/learn English. What do you say to that? Did your English proficiency develop as you were playing? If you want to rate your language skills (from 0 to 10, 0 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) development since the beginning of your gameplay, how would you do that? Can you also tell me why it is so?
4. How many hours do you play everyday? Does your activity change when assume different roles (e.g., governor, officer, etc.)?
5. Can you share one of your most exciting in-game experiences with me?
6. How do you think the game has affected your social skills? Making friends, socializing, etc.? Has playing the game affected your life at all?
7. What has kept you here for over 5 years? Has there been times you have decided to quit?
8. Is there any linguistic norms and practices that one needs to observe while playing (e.g., greeting in a special way) in the game? Who is a competent player?

Appendix B. Focus Group Interview Protocol

1. Tell me a little about yourselves.
2. How do you evaluate Emil's leadership skills?
3. How do you evaluate Emil's language skills?
4. How do you generally feel playing under his command?
5. How do you feel about playing this game?

Appendix C. Quotes

Quote 1

Eric: he very rarely does much of anything - it is surprising to see him drop house. the only exception being when we're at war with him. then he LOVES to attack us

Jack: Oh okay, do we have often wars?

Eric: But he is by far the nicest guy in h5. 1-2 per year big wars

Emil: We had some troll attack in Argyll last night! The main problem, beside inactivity of some people, was in fact there was too much gold in parishes (in some more then 3 milion)! If we want to prevent future attacking, we need to react fast...please all stevards contact me so I can see you are active! Tell me in what parishes you are stevard and how much gold you have!

If you have more then 50k, you must burn it! I sugest you kill Wolf AI or similar! I would like to get fast answer!

Jack: Roger that!

Eric: Will do.

(Faction conversation, 2017)

Quote 2

It is unreasonable. Most world's I have played do not hold that standard as a basis. Why gamers come into other worlds and expect things to be different is beyond me.

(Faction conversation, 2015)

Quote 3

Dear Citizens of Cornwall

Look at the Might MorningDestroyer and his men now. There dare raze our friends. But now can not stand the heat in the kitchen! We will be ready for when the come back. Just with more troops to pounce. You actions Aura will not be forgotten. You land will be annex by us. and you time will come.

To all of you who have been working together I congratulate you. It has been a spectacular team effort. Jack & Eric on my team made me especially proud.

So like I said we will wait for these guys to come back. Do not lower your guard. They are just snakes in the grass now. Trying to do what they can on the way out.

Emil

swords/H1

sheriff

(Faction proclamation, 2015)

Quote 4

Jack: I'm looking forward to a war here :)

Jen: I hope there won't be anymore wars here

Jack: No more wars? :(

Jen: I hope that we have peace I can not play war :(

Eric: Agree. I don't have time anymore like I used to before. I like farming

(Faction conversation, 2016)

Quote 5

Experiance in the workings of this world is a good starting point. A good reputation would probably be a close second. Its also important to understand limits. How far you can push and when you should stop pushing. Too many wars start because people dont understand this one.

(Interview, 2017)

Quote 6

FL's should have some leadership skills, that know how to communicate with other people and can represent their house and it's members to other gamers. if you see Lilith (pseudonym, another player) being FL, then you know it's not good

(Interview, 2017)

Quote 7

Well, started back at the begining of the 2012...so it would be 5 years theese days!

I like in general game ``stronghold`` or ``stronghold crusaiders`` for PC! When a friend of mine send me mail of invitation to play game I was thinking it is the same thing and joined...never

played ``on-line`` game before! But, after some time, when things started to boil with wars and stuff I become more and more interested...soon I met people in here, that are round the world...
(Interview, 2017)

Quote 8

I think the most interesting part was a feeling that I comunicat and play with people that are all over the world but in game at the same time with me! I also start to participate in TS activities, I was communication with people from USA, G Britain, China, Holand, France...I was talking to these people, getting to know them, see how they react and think about situations in game and problems in game...one player told me on TS that when we talk about some things from past, how we make war back in past that he feels like ``war veteran``...well, probably is the close filing must say

(Interview, 2017)

Quote 9

My English is not too bad I think...have been learning it from elementary school up to University...plus english is all round us (PC, commercials, good and products...)...Maybe my writing was not perfect at the beginning, but it isn't now also (I don't read messages after writing to check mistakes) but communication was good with other team members in emails and in TS. Sometimes I have trouble with reading text when my friends write something in slang, but I look at bigger picture that time! My native language is Serbian!

(Interview, 2017)

Quote 10

Must say that I have played more at the beginning...about 4h per day at that time...maybe even more in war time...now 1 h per day (I try to be on that level) do it is hard!
At the beginning, when I become sheriff, I had little more job in here, but in time nothing more than usual! Now, I play depending from action on server...when there is war or similar, I'm more on line! when it is peace I'm less time on!

(Interview, 2017)

Quote 11

I think the writing part has...speaking is at same level as it was! but I think that playing game can help to improve learning english... If you want to communicate you must learn language up to some point! My english rating...well, we can speak about writing and speaking separate! Writing from maybe 5 to 7...I need to check sometimes how some word is being write and similar! Speaking about the same level as I was, some 7-8... Also, I use google translate option sometimes...it give few words for one at Serbian so I look for one that looks better in use...and I see also how it is being written

(Interview, 2017)

Quote 12

One experience in game! I think when I was looking at 12 timed attacks with raze going and landing to an ally player village somewhere in the middle of the war in age I... The player was on line, but excomed and too far that I can send him abs...we were waiting for the ``moment of truth``...all the attacks have landed and going out from village together with captain...but...after 5-10 sec all attacks disappeared! He survived! He was still excomed but enemy didn't send a single attack on him after that :) And beside that, it is always huge experience and exciting when you are looking at the ``moment of truth``...you are sending few timed attacks, good raze army...but it is always question in the air: ``will it be successful``

(Interview, 2017)

Quote 13

Probably because I have spent a lot of time in past in this server and want to be here until the end, so I can say I have finished this...I see this server as ``mine`` because I have started to play in here! Also I have met a lot of nice people in here...I play with them all this time...I guess I also wanted to finish this with them too...

(Interview, 2017)

Quote 14

Well, when I started to play, I was not that much open for communication with other people...what will/can I speak with them? from where are they? will I understand them? were some of the questions! But as the time has passed, I was more and more communication with people...now, I'm involved as a House General in about 15 active threads and I get a lot of mails! I was also more active in TS in past, but now I don't have time for it (plus my kids are making noise :) so I can't communicate with people in there)! I like to communicate with people that I've been playing for the last 5 years...we discuss about a lot of things...even about pancakes :) My personal life...well, except that I have spent time to play the game and not with my family 100%...that is only sphere that game has affected me!

(Interview, 2017)

Quote 15

Some people subscribe to the idea that male gamers are better and think that female gamers are of weaker mind or are less serious about games because males have a long standing supposed tendency to obsess over their games more. Which is nonsense, there are plenty of females that are just as serious and obsessive. I've seen female usernames with male avatars though, dunno why, but I also don't care.

(Focus group, 2017)

Quote 16

I think that people can play the game in isolation but if you do you will get bored. To stay for a long time you need to feel part of a team, and to do that effective communication is key.

(Focus group, 2017)

Quote 17

Playing online games means interaction with people of other languages. And I figured out that just asking for the meaning if you don't understand the meaning is the best way to communicate. You always find a way to speak together.

(Focus group, 2017)

Quote 18

Jen: I will miss you all when the world ends mostly :-p

Jack: Ah don't even talk stuff like that

Eric: I'm playing this game lately only because of other gamers not because of game itself

(Focus group, 2017)