

# Second Language Socialization in a Massively Multi-player Online Game: An Ethnographic Case Study

## Syed Abdollah Shahrokni - Department of Teaching and Learning, Washington State University

### Introduction

#### Abstract

This ethnographic case study (still in progress) explores the process of second language socialization in a massively multiplayer online game (MMOG) called *Stronghold Kingdoms*. The participants are a faction of 10 gamers out of whom 2 are non-native English speakers. Using 3 data sources (observation, artifact analysis, and interviews), I aim to understand the process by which a non-native English speaker socializes into the sociocultural norms of the community, including the use of the language.

#### Introduction

##### Theoretical Frameworks

- **Second Language Socialization (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986)**

How individuals become competent members of social groups and the role of language in this process.

- **Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998)**

How learners' identities as language users evolve through group participation.

- **Peripheral Legitimate Participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991)**

Through social interaction in CoPs, learners evolve from peripheral to central participants and pass their knowledge onto newcomers.

##### Research Questions

1. What are the linguistic and cultural norms and practices of the faction community in which non-native English speakers (NNES) participated?
2. How does the faction community shape and support the NNES' development of linguistic skills?
3. How does the NNES' language proficiency influence their inclusion in the community?

### Method

#### Ethnographic Case Study

Cultural behaviors, social factors, issues of gender, power relations, etc.

- **Setting:** Stronghold Kingdoms: A game faction
- War against the world, post-war peace and life in exile, the end of the world, and immigration to a new world.
- **Participants:** 2 (1 male Egyptian and 1 female Swedish) NNES and 8 (2 male English, and 5 male and 1 female American) NES.
- **Data sources:** Observation, records/artefacts, and interview
- **Data Analysis:** Field notes, discourse analysis, open and axial coding as well as corpus analysis of in-game faction messages

### Preliminary Results

- The players need to be active—they log in to the server at least three times a week.
- Although there is a leader, leadership is porous—everyone is a leader in some way—everyone has a role to play in the community.
- Old-timers support newcomers in the workings of the game.
- The focus is gameplay. Intentional language support is not given to the NNES of the faction.
- The faction reflects particular game values (e.g., hierarchy, quests, territorial integrity, and, generally, pseudo-militaristic gaming culture).
- NNES speakers try to scaffold their identities and roles in the faction by figuring out how to use language to reflect, reify, or reproduce the discourses of the game.

### Preliminary Results (continued)

- Assumption of social roles in the faction helps NNES socialize into the norms of the game.
- The language produced by all gamers has grammatical and lexical mistakes/errors. The focus is the general idea.
- The personal connections are very strong. One of the main reasons that players do not quit and are active is because of their personal bonds.

### Conclusion

- The MMOG provides special affordances for second language socialization.
- Group dynamics in an MMOG makes learning engaging and fun.
- MMOG CoPs, similar to Gee's (2005) Affinity Spaces, are places where effective learning can take place.

### General Discussion of Results

- The importance of MMOGs in 21<sup>st</sup> century education.
- The importance of creating educational MMOGs supporting task engagement principles (authenticity, feedback, balance of skill and challenge, social interaction, interest, and autonomy).
- The importance of sociocultural approaches to SLA.
- More longitudinal studies in exploring SLS.

### References

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