Learning English in *World of Warcraft*:
Perspectives from the players

Kari-Pekka Kallunki
Master’s Thesis
English Philology
Faculty of Humanities
University of Oulu
Spring 2016
Table of Contents
1. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1
2. World of Warcraft ................................................................................................................ 4
  2.1. Gameplay .......................................................................................................................... 6
3. Theoretical framework .......................................................................................................... 9
  3.1. Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) ................................................................. 9
  3.2. Sociocultural theories to learning .................................................................................... 10
  3.3. Second-language learning: goals and objectives ............................................................ 12
    3.3.1. Native-speaker norms and International English ....................................................... 13
    3.3.2. The Common European Framework of Reference ....................................................... 15
    3.3.3. The paradigms of language teaching and learning: classic vs. modern .................. 17
  3.4. Video games and literacy ................................................................................................. 18
  3.5. Situated learning ............................................................................................................... 19
3.6. Learning in video games versus learning in school .......................................................... 21
3.7. A case example: a child learning English in networked computer games ....................... 23
4. Data and methodology .......................................................................................................... 26
5. Analysis .................................................................................................................................. 28
  5.1. General questions ............................................................................................................ 28
    5.1.1. Age and playing history ............................................................................................ 28
    5.1.2. Reasons for playing World of Warcraft .................................................................... 30
    5.1.3. Playstyle and content preferences .......................................................................... 32
  5.2. The outcomes of learning English in World of Warcraft ................................................ 34
    5.2.1. How has playing World of Warcraft helped the players learn English? .................. 34
    5.2.2. What kind of vocabulary have the players learned from World of Warcraft? ........ 38
    5.2.3. Is all language learned in World of Warcraft good for the learner? ......................... 40
    5.2.5. Learning grammar in World of Warcraft .................................................................. 45
    5.2.6. The players’ attitudes towards using correct English .............................................. 47
  5.3. World of Warcraft as a platform for language learning .................................................. 50
    5.3.1. Learning by playing versus learning from reading ................................................... 50
    5.3.2. Communicational aspects and the level of social engagement in World of Warcraft .. 53
    5.3.3. Does success in World of Warcraft necessitate good skills in English? ................. 57
6. Discussion ............................................................................................................................. 59
7. Conclusion ............................................................................................................................. 66
References .................................................................................................................................. 69
Appendix: The survey questions ............................................................................................. 72
1. Introduction

The key objectives in this Master’s Thesis will be investigating how an online multiplayer game called *World of Warcraft* facilitates learning English and evaluating the language learning outcomes the players have had from playing the game. The relevance of this research stems from the increased popularity of playing video games starting from the 2000s and the prevalence of English as the language of the Internet. According to Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012), the school classroom is only one of the many places where students receive English input nowadays. Children and adolescents constantly hear, read and learn English by engaging in different kinds of pastime activities such as watching television, listening to music and playing video games without necessarily having a deliberate intention to learn (p. 114). While the television and radio have existed for a relatively long time, video games have become more prevalent in the recent two decades. This research will take the relation between playing World of Warcraft and learning English into a closer inspection. By examining the thoughts, opinions and experiences of European World of Warcraft players, this thesis aims to provide a critical analysis of both advantages and disadvantages of learning English by playing World of Warcraft.

There is a wide range of conceptions towards playing video games such as whether video games are educational or a waste of time. One of the sub-goals in this thesis is re-evaluating these conceptions and finding new evidence that either supports or disputes the notion that video games, most notably *World of Warcraft* in the case of this thesis, can be considered educational from the perspective of formal language education. There have been some earlier studies on language learning and video games that have examined the impact of playing video games on students’ second-language proficiency. Hampel (2006) discusses the multimodality of computer-assisted language learning combining video, audio, pictures, text and actions. Gee (2003, 2004) continues that multimodality makes learning in video games ‘situated’ and contextualised, which greatly benefits language learning. Gee (2004, 2007) and Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012) discuss the motivational aspect of video games, saying that video games often create genuine motivation for learning. Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012) also say that video games such as World of Warcraft provide its players authentic situations to use, hear and practice English, which alongside with genuine motivation is something that traditional classroom teaching often has difficulties to reproduce. Thus, previous research results have
been positive and indicated that playing video games indeed has various beneficial effects on language learning.

However, the question arises whether video games can be considered as a proper and reliable platform for learning English as a second language. While the premise of this research is that World of Warcraft is an effective way to learn English, this study also aims to evaluate whether all the language learned in the game is proper or beneficial for a learner’s language skills. In this context, ‘proper English’ refers to language that conforms to native-speaker norms. More often than not, the playerbase of a select game consists of people that speak English as their foreign language. This means that the English that a player encounters while playing World of Warcraft may be ‘broken’, which means that it does not necessarily follow the general rules of English grammar, spelling or syntax. Also, the language used in an internet environment has its unique characteristics such as slang forms that are not a part of so-called ‘proper English’. Thus, by critically examining the thoughts, opinions and experiences of the European World of Warcraft players, this research aims to evaluate both advantages and disadvantages of learning English in World of Warcraft. However, in order to establish a common ground for the results, the analysis will be based on the perspective of formal English teaching. This perspective uses the guidelines established by the Common European Framework of References and the comparison between the classical and modern teaching and learning paradigms as its basis. In order to be able to evaluate whether World of Warcraft has positive or negative effects on learning English as a second language, it is necessary to establish a theoretical framework for second language learning. Thus, one of the objectives in the theoretical framework is to examine what are considered as the modern day aims and the desirable outcomes of second language learning. Another objective in the theoretical framework is to discuss video games as a platform for language learning and the ways that they facilitate and enhance learning. This framework will then be used as the basis for the analysis and discussion in this study.

The data for this research is gathered by conducting a survey on European World of Warcraft players. While the game can be played in other languages such as French, German and Russian, for example, this research will focus on the players playing on English-speaking realms. The survey consists of 17 questions that seek to assess how World of Warcraft facilitates learning in different areas of language learning and evaluate these learning outcomes based on the perceptions of European World of Warcraft players. In essence, the survey seeks to examine how the players themselves think that World of Warcraft has helped them to learn English and what kind of English in terms of vocabulary and grammar they have learned from it. In addition to assessing the quality of the English learned in
World of Warcraft, the analysis also aims to evaluate World of Warcraft as a platform for learning English. The goal is to examine if World of Warcraft encourages the players and grants them opportunities to use English both communicatively and receptively. Furthermore, another desirable outcome of the analysis is to determine whether the language learned in World of Warcraft is useful only within the game’s context or if the players think that the English they have learned from the game has also been useful in other areas of life.

There are several reasons for choosing World of Warcraft as the target of this study. First of all, it has been one of the most popular games in the world for over ten years. The popularity of World of Warcraft peaked in the third quarter of 2010 when the number of active subscribers reached 12 million. According to official statistics, World of Warcraft had 5.6 million paying subscribers worldwide by the end of the second quarter in 2015 (BusinessWire). Therefore, World of Warcraft can be considered as a quite wide-spread phenomenon and an ideal source for research. A majority of the survey respondents have been playing World of Warcraft for more than six years. Only a handful of the respondents have been playing for less than one year. Since World of Warcraft is an over ten-year-old game and the respondents have rather lengthy playing histories, the responses can be considered as quite knowledgeable and the results informative and accurate.

Traditionally, playing video games has been viewed as a hobby for boys, but the situation is rather interesting in the case of World of Warcraft. According to a predictive analysis firm Newzoo, 35 percent of World of Warcraft’s player-base consists of female players (IBTimes), which furthermore increases the relevance of a language study on video games. Another reason for studying language learning in World of Warcraft is the way the game is structured to employ language in different ways. The game relies heavily on a rich background story (‘lore’), which means that it uses language extensively and expressively in order to create a vivid fantasy world. Being a multiplayer game, the game is also based on interaction and communication between the players, meaning that the game offers many different possibilities to use language as a tool in communication. In order to make progress in the game, interact with other players and accomplish more difficult challenges, the players are enticed to employ English in a variety of different ways. Therefore, this research seeks to examine how exactly World of Warcraft encourages the players to use English, in what ways it has helped the players to improve their language skills, and also what kind of language the players have actually learned.
2. World of Warcraft

World of Warcraft was first released by Blizzard Entertainment in 2004 in the United States and in 2005 in Europe. The first installment of World of Warcraft is often referred to as ‘Vanilla’ or ‘Classic’ WoW. In 2007, Blizzard Entertainment implemented the first expansion pack for the game (The Burning Crusade) that added two new playable races, a new continent to explore and new challenges and monsters to conquer. Since then, four more expansions have been released that have gradually added more playable content and increased the maximum level limit of the player characters. The most current expansion Warlords of Draenor was released in 2014 (gamepedia.com). According to Blizzard’s infographic, since launch the game had had over 100 million unique players as of December 2013 (battle.net). World of Warcraft is by definition a Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game (MMORPG). In order to play, one has to buy the game itself first, and then set up a monthly subscription. Being a massively multiplayer game refers to the fact that there can be thousands of players simultaneously interacting with each other in the game world. World of Warcraft is an online game which means that the players must be connected to Internet when they want to play the game. Roleplaying game indicates the game’s genre. According to the introduction to the game on World of Warcraft’s official web page, roleplaying refers to three different aspects in the game (battle.net).

The first of them is that the player can choose from a variety of different races and classes when they create an in-game character. The choice of the character’s race defines their place and role in World of Warcraft. There are two factions in World of Warcraft, the Alliance and the Horde that are at war with each other. The choice of race determines which faction the player belongs, but also the place where the character begins their journey. Each race also has its distinctive characteristics. For example, on the side of the Horde, the bovine-like creatures Taurens are closely connected to the land and religiously praise the Earthmother. Trolls practice voodoo and speak with a Jamaican accent. On the Alliance side, Dwarves speak with a Scottish accent and enjoy drinking beer, while the Night Elves praise the Moon Goddess Elune and are at home in the dark. By Blizzard’s definition, “race is mostly a social choice” as it affects the player’s alignment, and therefore the characters that the player is able to interact with. This means that players from different factions cannot communicate with each other by any means (battle.net).
The second aspect of roleplaying is the choice of the character’s class. Each class has its distinctive skills, spells and playstyle. For example, a mage relies on hard-hitting, long-range spells and try to avoid close-quarter combat due to their physical frailty. In contrast, a warrior charges in the midst of battle and is able to withstand more physical punishment. A hunter dishes out damage from afar, while allowing their pet to draw the attention of the monsters. The classes have different roles in group-based content, too. These roles are a tank, a healer and a dps (damage-per-second). The tank such as a warrior keeps the monsters occupied while the dps such as mage and hunter deal damage to the monsters in order to kill them. The role of a healer such as priest or druid is to ensure that all members in the group stay healthy. While selecting a race is mostly a social choice, Blizzard defines choosing the character’s class as a “gameplay choice” as it profoundly affects how the player plays the game (battle.net).

The third aspect of roleplaying is fully immersing oneself into Warcraft’s fantasy world. Blizzard defines this type of roleplaying by saying that “some players construct entire background histories for their characters and adopt unique mannerisms when they are ‘in-character’” (battle.net). Thus, some player choose act like they believe their character would actually act in the Warcraft world, putting their real identity aside and fully embracing their virtual identity. However, Blizzard also notes that this kind of full immersion is purely optional. Another vital part of creating immersion is the background story as in lore of World of Warcraft that dates back to the original Warcraft games. World of Warcraft takes place on in a world called Azeroth. While the full lore of Warcraft is very extensive and complex and difficult to fully comprehend Blizzard summarises the lore of World of Warcraft in the following way (battle.net):

Azeroth is a world of swords and sorcery. Its lands are home to a vast number of races and cultures, led by kings, chieftains, lords, ladies, archdruids, and everything in between. Some of Azeroth’s people share bonds of friendship reaching back thousands of years; others are sworn enemies with long histories of bitter hatred. Among all these different kingdoms, cultures and tribes and territories, two major power blocs are locked in a struggle for dominance.

World of Warcraft can be considered as quite typical fantasy as it contains many of the recurring elements generally found in the modern fantasy genre. According to a list compiled by Karlene McGowen, these elements include magic, otherworlds, universal themes (such as a struggle between good and evil), special character types, talking animals and fantastic objects (Yale University). All
these elements are frequent in World of Warcraft. Many of the characters and creatures in the game possess magical abilities. The setting is of the game is otherworldly as it takes place on a world called Azeroth. While the struggle between Alliance and Horde is at the core of the Warcraft universe, it is up to the player to decide which faction represents the good and which represents the evil. However, from time to time the two factions have to heed to an outside threat such as the undead Scourge or the vengeful Black Dragonflight, and even ally with each other in order to preserve the existence of both. Also, World of Warcraft is filled with special character types such as dragons, ogres, giants and the living dead. The vice president of creative development at Blizzard Entertainment, Chriz Metzen, acknowledges that World of Warcraft contains a lot of elements that are commonly found in fantasy literature such as in J.R.R. Tolkien’s works, for example, and says that World of Warcraft is not necessarily very different from Lord of the Rings. However, Metzen elaborates by saying that Blizzard attempts to differentiate World of Warcraft from other fantasy works by adding “crazy things like space crystals and steam rifles” that are not generally in the genre of medieval fantasy (Softpedia).

2.1. Gameplay

After starting the game and logging in for the first time, the player is to select the realm they wish to play on. The realms are divided into four different types: PvP, PvP, RP, and RP-PvP. PvP (player-versus-player) realms enable the players to attack the players of the opposing faction at will, thus creating more emphasis on the war between Alliance and Horde. While the players on these realms can engage in the same activities as the players on a different type realm, the PvP realms promote player-versus-player combat more than the others. PvE (player-versus-environment) realms steer the players more towards content that involves forming player groups and killing monsters and vanquishing challenging bosses controlled by artificial intelligence. RP (roleplaying) realms are for players who seek to fully immerse themselves in the game by taking the role of their in-game character and acting and speaking like their character would in the real world. Due to emphasising immersion, roleplaying realms have their distinctive rules that the players are encouraged to follow such as not breaking out of character in order to maintain the authenticity and immersion of the fantasy world. However, the players are not required to engage in roleplaying, but will be penalised if they deliberately disrupt the roleplaying experience of other players. RP-PvP realms are a mix of RP and PvP, maintaining the roleplaying elements while focusing more on the war between the factions.
Following the realm selection, the player faces the character creation screen. In this screen, the player decides the race, the class and the gender and appearance of their character. After doing this, the player is ready to begin their journey in World of Warcraft. According to Blizzard, the core of the gameplay in World of Warcraft revolves around fighting monsters and completing quests (battle.net):

“You will encounter thousands of non-player characters (NPCs), computer-controlled characters who may need your help with tasks ranging from the mundane (such as delivering a letter) to the truly heroic (rescuing a dwarven princess from the evil Dark Iron clan, for example)”

While many of these tasks can be completed alone, the most difficult challenges require the player to seek help from other players in the world and work as a team.

As the player completes quests and vanquishes dangerous monsters, their character gains experiences and progresses in levels, allowing the character to learn more powerful skills and spells and obtain better quality equipment. The equipment that the character can wear ranges from rings and trinkets to powerful weapons and artifacts and from full-plate armour to light, magically enchanted robes depending on what class the character represents. Commonly, the process of completing quests and progressing in levels is called “leveling” while the process of obtaining better equipment is called “gearing”. After reaching the maximum possible level (currently level 100), the player enters the so-called “end-game content” that is also referred to later in the survey responses.

The playable content in World of Warcraft is divided into two main fields: PvP and PvE. The PvP (player-versus-player) content revolves around the war between the Alliance and the Horde, and enables the players to fight against each other. PvP combat can randomly occur in the outworld when members of the two factions meet while doing quests, killing monsters or exploring, thus being called “World PvP”. However, most of the combat between players happens in instanced, secluded zones called Battlegrounds and Arenas that are designed specifically designed for PvP combat. PvE content (player-versus-environment) revolves around fighting monsters, clearing dungeons and completing challenges set by the game developers. The most challenging PvE content requires the players to form raids (a group of 10 to 25 people) and work as a team in order to slay end-game bosses that yield the best equipment and the most prestigious achievements available. Thus, this type of gameplay is called “raiding”. In addition, World of Warcraft is not only limited to the aforementioned content. The
player may explore the world, master different professions such as blacksmithing or alchemy, collect rideable mounts or vanity pets or spend time socialising with other players to name a few.
3. Theoretical framework

This section discusses previous research and theories in relation to language learning and video games. The goal is to gain an understanding of learning in video games as a phenomenon and to examine what has already been studied in the field of video games and learning. Furthermore, the theories and studies covered in this section will be linked to World of Warcraft and the study conducted in this paper. Thus, the theoretical framework established in this section attempts to elucidate and explain how language learning is facilitated by World of Warcraft. The discussion section will then compare the survey results examined in the analysis section to the theoretical framework in order to evaluate how World of Warcraft functions as a language learning platform and whether it is an effective and proper source for learning English.

3.1. Computer-mediated Communication (CMC)

World of Warcraft can be considered a modern example of a computer-based platform for language learning. The possibilities of using computer-based programs and applications to enhance learning have been acknowledged already in 1990s. Focus has been drawn to the possibilities of technology-assisted language teaching and learning in 1997 by Furstenberg. Furstenberg views technological content as “an extraordinary context of authentic cultural background and historical information” (Furstenberg 1997, p. 22). Furstenberg hints on the effectiveness of using technology as a tool in language learning by saying that it allows “the learner to make choices and thus provides autonomy, a sense of empowerment, and the opportunity to become an active participant in language learning” (Furstenberg 1997: 22). However, Furstenberg is quick to clarify that technology should only be used as a tool in teaching and learning, not as a focal point (1997, p. 24).

Furstenberg’s views apply to modern video gaming, too. Video games allow the learner to act as an active participant that especially in the case of roleplaying games has a great control over what the character does and how it acts. However, as later indicated in the analysis section, players do not necessarily acknowledge that they are learning English while playing, but learning is rather unconscious and a byproduct of playing for entertainment. Saarenkunnas (2006, p. 201) puts additional emphasis on everyday language learning instead of formal learning in schools. She notes that there is a growing body of research in computer-supported language learning, but says that these studies often dismiss everyday learning environments. Saarenkunnas argues that “the computer and
the Internet provide a rich informal resource for a growing body of language learners” (Saarenkunnas 2006, p. 201). However, Furstenberg reinforces the notion that computer-assisted learning is an effective complementary language learning tool, but cannot act as a complete substitute for formal education. Furstenberg’s views are supported by Hampel (2006), who also notes that computer-mediated communication does not possess the means to completely replicate face-to-face classroom learning (pp. 111, 118). While computer-mediated learning offers various possibilities for problem-solving and sociocollaborative learning, it also poses a few problems. According to Hampel (2016), the lack of body language may cause difficulties in judging other participants’ behavior. This affects turn-taking, for example, since the participants are not able to receive face-to-face signal, thus making it more challenging to determine the appropriate time to take a turn to speak during a conversation (p. 116). Kramsch and Thorne (2002) also note that global communication networks present us with a paradox, saying that they “encourage alienation by reducing face-to-face contact”, but also promote social interaction and community building (p. 85).

3.2. Sociocultural theories to learning

This section briefly introduces the psychological background to language learning in relation to video games. According to Hampel (2006), the psycholinguistic approach has been a basis for establishing theories for second language acquisition (p. 108). Hampel (2006) shortly discusses the psycholinguistic perspective to learning by quoting Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 47):

Conventional explanations view learning as a process by which a learner internalizes knowledge, whether ‘discovered,’ transmitted’ from others, or ‘experienced in interaction’ with others. This focus on internalization […] leave[s] the nature of the learner, of the world, and of their relations unexplored.

While the psycholinguistic approach acknowledges that learning can happen through interaction, it only focuses on what transpires inside the learner’s cognition. Hampel (2006) points out that this kind of psycholinguistic approach fails to “uncover a number of factors which also contribute to the success or failure of a given (learning) task” (p. 109). This applies to learning in World of Warcraft because of the relevance of the social aspect in the game. The player does not only learn from the game itself but also from their peers. Thus, a sociocultural perspective is required to fill the gaps in the psycholinguistic approach to learning.
The social aspect of learning was examined by Vygotsky in his research that was not published until 1978. According to Hampel (2006), Vygotsky studied children’s learning, and showed that adult guidance or collaboration with more capable peers contributes to learning more than independent problem-solving (p. 110). The same principle can be applied to adult learners as explained by Dalgarno (2001, p. 185): “Knowledge construction occurs best within an environment that allows collaboration between learners, their peers, experts in the field and teachers.” This same notion is also reinforced by Sylvén & Sundqvist (2012, p. 116): “By collaborating with more knowledgeable peers, the newcomer is socialized into the domain of expertise. Translated into SLA, this means that when language learners find themselves in a context where the L2 is used naturally, they acquire that language in much the same way as an L1.” This leads to an authentic context for learning language. Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012) claim that World of Warcraft simulates real-life experiences of being in a country where English is spoken as a second-language (p. 117).

While the game can be played in French, German or Russian, for example, for other European players a natural choice is to play on English-speaking realms that consist of a mix of native and non-native English speakers. The players communicate mutually in English, thus creating authentic language-using situations. However, since the players learn collaboratively from their peers who do not necessarily speak English natively, they are exposed to English that does not conform to native-speaker norms. In some cases, even the players that are native English speakers may use incorrect forms of spelling and grammar. However, whether this is a problem or not depends on what are considered as the desirable outcomes of language learning. In order to be understood and be able to cope in an English-speaking environment, one does not necessarily need to completely master all its aspects. In most situations, being able to express oneself despite grammatical mistakes is enough. The debate between native-like language proficiency and communicational competence, and the objectives of language learning from the perspective of formal education will be discussed more closely in the next section.

The development in computer networks allows learners to engage in communicative collaboration in a multimodal environment that simultaneously employs multiple different modes such as audio, text and graphics. Hampel (2016) studied communicative collaboration in her research that examines the implementation of online learning tasks in a classroom setting on university-level German courses (pp. 112-113). The online tasks provide a way to practice oral language skills in social collaboration in a case where physical interaction is not possible. The same is true for World of Warcraft. The players can engage in both oral and written communication in English with their peers without face-to-face contact. Thus, social collaboration is possible between players from all over the world without
ever leaving home. World of Warcraft also enables the players to participate in social interaction by using a virtual identity.

The employment of a virtual identity is one factor that may encourage a player to communicate and act more freely within the game. In relation to this, Gee (2003) presents three principles that reinforce the notion of video games being a useful tool for learning. The first principle is that the learner must be enticed to try, even if they are afraid of trying. The second principle is that the learner must be enticed to put in lots of effort even if they suffer from a lack of motivation. The third principle is that the learner must achieve some meaningful success in exchange for their effort. (p. 58). Gee claims that video games are particularly good at fulfilling these three principles (Gee 2007: 58). First of all, a good video game has an appealing story or setting that arouses the player’s interest. Trying in a video game takes less initial effort than trying in real-life. Gee (2003) discusses the phenomenon called psychosocial moratorium which refers to “a learning space in which the learner can take risks where real-world consequences are lowered” (p. 59). Gee (2003) further explains this by saying that one has to put a good amount of effort into a video game but the key point is that there is a fairly low cost of failure in exchange for high reward for success. Like studying, playing video games may cause frustration and feelings of being inadequate, but in video games, the learner is not engaging learning through their real-life but rather a virtual identity. (pp. 56, 59)

3.3. Second-language learning: goals and objectives

In order to gain relevant information about language learning in video games from the survey results, it is necessary to create a framework for language learning that allows us place the results in the context of formal English education. This section discusses the values, intentions and desires of language learning and seeks to establish a basis for perceiving and evaluating the language in World of Warcraft. One of the most important questions is what is considered to be the ultimate goal of language learning, and how the general perception the objectives of language learning has changed in the recent decades. Thus, in order to be able to evaluate the language learning in World of Warcraft, we first need to determine the purposes and the aims of learning a second language. Furthermore, this section also seeks to define ‘proper’ and ‘desirable’ language that the learners should strive to learn, i.e. should one aim for native-like language proficiency or is the objective of language learning to obtain communicational competency that allows one to express themselves clearly and cope in an English-speaking environment.
One of the survey questions examined in this research asks if “all English learned in World of Warcraft is good for the learner”. This question can be considered to be biased towards the classical paradigm of formal English education discussed later that endorses learning English that conforms to native-speaker norms. Thus, the hidden implication behind the question is that there can be English that is “bad” or “improper” for a learner. According to Timmis (2002, p. 240), the debate is whether students should conform to native-speaker norms discussed in the next section in an era when English is increasingly used in international contexts. Furthermore, according to Kramsch and Thorne (2002), the ability to easily access foreign speakers and cultures via internet communicational tools has been considered to contain potential to transform the learning of foreign languages “from a decontextualized exercise into an engagement with authentic real-word contexts of language use” (p. 83). They note that this has also raised the concern that the type of communication that global online networks facilitate might not fulfil the “communicative goals traditionally associated with the learning of foreign language (Kramsch & Thorne 2002, p. 83). Thus, the following sections work towards creating a theoretical framework for second-language learning in an attempt to define what are considered as the desirable outcomes of second-language learning.

3.3.1. Native-speaker norms and International English

One of the key research questions in this thesis is if the English learned in World of Warcraft is proper and beneficial for the learner. This sections aims to form an idea of what exactly is meant by ‘proper’ English and whether or not it is something that a learner should be striving for. Instead of discussing ‘proper’ English, Timmis (2002) introduces the term ‘native-speaker norm’. This alleviates the problems of using the term ‘proper’ as it is quite subjective what each and every one considers as proper English. Since there is such a variety of different English dialects spoken by English speakers that are considered to be native speakers, it is quite impossible to choose one of them and refer to it as the norm for proper English. Thus, referring to native-speaker norms in place of the so-called proper English allows us to remain neutral on the matter of which English dialect should be considered as a medium, and enables comparison between the English spoken by native speakers in the world and the International English spoken by non-native English speakers.

Furthermore, this section seeks to delve deeper into the fundamentals of language learning. Since this research seeks to evaluate the results of learning English in World of Warcraft from the perspective of formal English education, it is necessary to discuss what formal education considers as the goals
of language learning but also to question these goals. Should learners aim for native-like language proficiency or should they strive for communicational competence? In the context of second-language learning, communicational competence can be seen as the ability to spontaneously engage in a social communicative situation. Thus, the speaker needs to be able to ‘negotiate’ and deliver meanings. Kramsch and Thorne (2002) refer to Savignon’s (1983) definition of ‘negotiation of meaning’, explaining that it is a process where “a participant in a speech event uses various sources of information – prior experience, the context, another participant – to achieve understanding” (Kramsch & Thorne 2002, p. 84). Furthermore, another view of communication by James Carey (1988) essentially sees language as an “instrument of dramatic action”, thus focusing on the sharing of experience, ideas, values and sentiments (Kramsch & Thorne 2002, p. 84). Thus, communicational competency can be seen as the ability to transfer some kind of information from person to another in an intelligible and understandable way. This leads to the question of the importance of native-speaker norms for a non-native English speaker.

Timmis (2002) discusses the role of native-speaker norms in his research, noting that the debate of the goals of language learning has failed to hear the opinions of teachers and students themselves, but rather relied on the input of academics and researchers (p. 240). Timmis (2002) suggests that the students’ views may in fact be quite different from those of teachers and academics. Thus, it necessary to hear what the language users and learners have to say about learning English and what they deem important. Also, according to Carter and McCarthy via Timmis (2002, p. 240), written-based grammars “exclude features that occur widely in the conversation of native speakers of English”. This essentially means that written grammars are not necessarily a correct representation of the practical use of English. Therefore, the question can be asked why should students strictly conform to written grammars and rules when not even native-speakers do so? Timmis also asks another question referring to Cook (1998): “Why should the attested language use of a native-speaker community be a model for learners of English as an international language? (Timmis 2002, p. 249).” Essentially, the debate is whether or not the English spoken between non-native speakers should conform to the rules and desires of the language spoken by native English speakers. One of the teachers in Timmis’ study says that native-like English is unnecessary and too complex for international English speakers unless they are living in a country that speaks English as a native tongue, continuing that between two non-native speakers, this kind of language is useless (Timmis 2002, p. 248). However, Timmis (2002) notes that many teachers taking part in his study say that the students need to control a certain standard of neutral English before trying to learn native-speaker variations (p. 248). This in turn leads to the problem of defining what can be considered to be the neutral standard of speaking English.
According Timmis’ (2002) study, the major motivation for students in learning English is to learn to communicate. However, he notes that some students still desire to ‘master a language’ even though they are in a minority. Timmis found that teachers are more readily moving away from the native-speaker forms than students, especially in pronunciation. According to his study, the part-taking students view native-like proficiency desirable, although many of them acknowledge communicational competency is closer to realism. However, Timmis found that among the teachers, the tendency was to view ‘accented intelligibility’ as the desirable outcome of learning English. Timmis acknowledges that the teachers may have opted to answer this way because gaining communicational competency is a more realistic benchmark than achieving native-like proficiency. Timmis also elaborates by referring to one teacher who says that native-like proficiency is preferable but in reality impossible to achieve. It is rather viewed as a long-term goal and ideal that “every teacher dreams of” but that is near impossible for students to achieve. (Timmis 2002, pp. 242-249).

3.3.2. The Common European Framework of Reference

It would appear that while the ultimate goal of language learning might be native-like proficiency, gaining communicational competency is more desirable or at least more realistic is a common opinion among both students and teachers. Interestingly, teachers appear to be more content with students reaching communicational competency rather than achieving level of English that fully conforms to native-speaker norms. This development is supported by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). According to the Council of Europe (2014), “the CEFR describes foreign language proficiency at six levels”. These levels range from lowest to highest A1-A2, B1-B2 and C1-C2. The main purpose of these proficiency scales is to make examination and test results comparable “across languages and national boundaries” (Council of Europe 2014). Furthermore, it is stated that the CEFR also offers “a detailed analysis of communicative contexts, themes, tasks and purposes as well as scaled descriptions of the competences on which we draw when we communicate” (Council of Europe 2014). Thus, the emphasis in CEFR’s language learning policy is clearly on communicational competence, and instead of having an ultimate mutual goal for all learners, the proficiency scales allow setting individual goals for each learner that can be achieved step by step.

According to Parmenter and Byram (2012, p. 2), the CEFR serves two purposes. Firstly, the CEFR presents itself as a “common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe.” Thus, the CEFR establishes a common ground for the
school systems in Europe that may greatly differ from each other, therefore enabling the comparison between language learning and teaching in different school systems. Secondly, the CEFR acts as a description of “what language learners have to learn in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively” (Parmenter & Byram 2012, p. 2). Thus, the CEFR emphasises communicational competency in a language and the skills and knowledge a learner needs to acquire in order to achieve an intelligible level of language skills. Rather than striving for native-like proficiency, the CEFR values an intercultural approach (Parmenter & Byram 2012, p. 3):

In an intercultural approach, it is a central objective of language education to promote the favourable development of the learner’s whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture.

Therefore, the trend in language education is to retain learner’s identity and consider it as an enriching rather than hindering aspect in language learning. In contrast to a more traditional view that promotes hiding any traces of speaker’s origin when speaking a foreign language, the CEFR values cultural and linguistic diversity.

However, Parmenter and Byram (2012) mention that while CEFR is essentially a policy that imposes certain values and intentions to teaching and learning, it does not explicate any particular approaches or methods that “emphasise policy as the stimulant to specific action” (pp. 3-4). Parmenter and Byram elaborate that the CEFR cannot be directly applied to some context, but it should rather be used as a reference for teaching. Since the CEFR presents us with values and intentions instead of practical approaches and methods, interpreting and rendering it for the uses of teaching remains as the user’s responsibility. This is acknowledged by the Council of Europe, too, saying that the CEFR “does not offer ready-made solutions but must always be adapted to the requirements of particular contexts” (2014). Thus, while the CEFR aims to establish a common ground for all educational sectors in Europe, in practice its applications to teaching may greatly differ depending on its interpreter. The CEFR acts as an essential reference for evaluating the results in this research, too. It allows establishing a viewpoint that enables comparison between the survey results and the objectives of formal education.
3.3.3. The paradigms of language teaching and learning: classic vs. modern

Second language learning has undergone a paradigmatic change started by The International Phonetic Association in the 19th century, causing the values, attitudes and beliefs towards language teaching in the educational system to shift from a conservative, classical view to a modern and a more naturalistic paradigm (Parmenter & Byram 2012, p. 16). This section seeks to draw comparison between the classical and modern paradigms of language teaching and learning, which in turn works towards establishing a framework for evaluating the language in World of Warcraft. The two paradigms differ from each other quite profoundly. The classical paradigm is considered to have a puristic attitude towards language. This means that it emphasises the correct use of cultivated language, thus regarding written language as the basis for language teaching and learning. Grammar is to be viewed as a systematic body of rules that need to be learned and observed. Furthermore, knowledge in language and error-free performance are considered as the fundamental objective of language learning. (Parmenter & Byram 2012, pp. 16-18)

The modern paradigm, however, emphasises the value of the language spoken and used in everyday situations. The objective for learning is to develop communicative ability, which means that success is measured in the learner’s ability in communicating a message. While the classical paradigm is considered to be puristic, the modern paradigm is viewed to have a naturalistic approach to language learning, emphasising spontaneous and fluent use of language rather than language that strictly conforms to the rules of grammar. Thus, grammar is seen as a means to construct and convey meaning and it is tied to the practical use of language instead of being a system disconnected from the other elements of language. The modern paradigm also views the role of the teacher and the learner differently than the classical paradigm. According to the modern view, the teacher is less of an authority but rather a facilitator of learning. This changes the role of the learner from being a receptive observer into becoming an active participant. The modern paradigm emphasises group interaction and cooperation between learners unlike the classical paradigm that sees learners as individuals that compete against each other. Thus, the modern paradigm is closely intertwined with the sociolinguistic approach that views adult guidance and collaboration between peers an essential part of effective learning (Hampel 2006, p. 110). In relation to language learning in video games, Parmenter and Byram (2012) mention experimenting, discovering, games, role play, simulations, projects and discussions as the most important means of learning in the modern paradigm (pp. 16-18). All these means are frequently employed while playing, granting World of Warcraft quite convincing theoretical preconditions for being an effective platform for language learning.
Since this research seeks to evaluate language learning in World of Warcraft from the perspective of formal education, the goal in these past three sections has been establishing and describing what formal education considers as the objectives of language learning and the proper means to achieve those goals. It would appear that the classical paradigm is inevitably waning and the general consensus of language learning and teaching is shifting towards the modern paradigm. Communicational competency has taken the place of grammatical and expressional accuracy in the center of language learning. This is supported by Timmis (2002), whose findings show that while the ultimate goal of language learning might be native-like proficiency, it is nigh impossible to achieve and the focus should be on developing communicational abilities (pp. 242-249). Despite applying less emphasis on accuracy of expression and rules of grammar, it does not mean that grammar can be completely dismissed. In some cases, the difference between being understood or misunderstood is highly dependent on using the correct grammatical form. A classical example in the context of video games and the Internet would be the difference between “you’re” and “your” that tend to get mixed with each other and may greatly change the meaning of a sentence. Thus, learning correct grammar is quite essential in order to reach communicational competency, but the modern teaching paradigm sees grammar as an inherent part of communication. This means that instead of studying English grammar as a system disconnected from the practical use of language, it is studied as a means for effective communication. Furthermore, the CEFR and its presented values and desires towards language learning indicate that language learning is developing into becoming more accommodated on each individual learner’s subjective goals and aspirations instead of every learner having the same fixed goals and expectations.

3.4. Video games and literacy

Gee (2007) claims that “[W]hen people learn to play video games, they are learning a new literacy” (p. 17). He notes that literacy traditionally means the ability to read and write, but says that literacy should be applied to the domain of video games, too. Gee explains this by saying that “language is not the only important communicational system”. He emphasises the role of images, symbols, graphs, diagrams, artifacts, and many other visual symbols, saying that they are a more significant part of communication than ever before. Furthermore, words and images are very often juxtaposed and integrated, complementing each other. Gee points out, though, that in modern textbooks images may even contain new information that is not necessarily explicated from the words itself, meaning that a learner must also be able to “read” the images in order to fully understand the text. Thus, in such
multimodal texts that combine words and images, images often communicate different things from the words. (p. 17) Gee brings his point even further, saying that multimodality goes beyond images and words to include sounds, music, movement, and bodily sensations. All these aspects are constantly actively processed in video games, and therefore Gee calls video games “multimodal literacy par excellence”, best of its kind (p. 18).

The multimodal nature of video games means that “gaming language and literacy (words, images, movements, and sounds) are married to gaming practices” and to gaming as an activity in the world (Gee 2007, p. 18). Thus, literacy does not only include being able to decode words and images. It also requires people to engage in social practices involved in a certain domain. In the context of video games, this means that in addition to being able to decode language, images and concepts, the player must also be familiar with the domain where the language, images and concepts are used in (Gee 2007, p. 18). In order to elaborate his point, Gee (2007) introduces the term semiotic domain. By this he means “an area or set of activities where people think, act, and value in certain ways” (p. 19). He also notes that these semiotic domains also have their sub-types (p. 19). For example, the domain of video games can be divided into smaller domains such as real-time strategy games or roleplaying games that have their own distinctive features.

3.5. Situated learning

Situated learning is a key theme in discussion about video games and second language acquisition. Gee (2004) argues that there is lot to be learned from how people learn to read texts when they are playing video games. Gee (2004) says that young people tend not to read the manuals and print that often come with video games, and mentions that older people see this as an indication that young people do not read anymore (p. 38). However, Gee (2004) also makes the notion that young people who play games make “a very wise decision when they start by playing and not reading” (p. 38). The reason for this is that the texts that accompany video games often contain complex language that is difficult to understand until the player has some experience from the game. Thus, experience from the game gives the language in the text specific “situated meanings” that allow the player to make connections between the content of the text and what actually happens in the game (Gee 2004, p. 38).

Hampel (2006) discussed the multimodal nature of computer-generated environments that combine video, audio, images, text and collaborative interaction. The theory of situated learning introduced by Gee (2004) is directly connected to multimodality. In the case of World of Warcraft, the language in
the game works in co-operation with the action and the visual and the auditory clues given by the
game. The context of the language is constantly present while the players play the game, thus allowing
them to make meanings for words and concepts previously unknown for them. Gee (2004) further
discusses the situated meanings by saying that words often have more than just a general dictionary-
like meanings, depending on the context where the word is used (p. 36). In the case of video games,
the context of the game’s vocabulary is constantly worked by the player. Even complex, technical
vocabulary becomes clear for the player because they act within its context and the actions in the
game give situated meanings to the words. Gee (2004) uses an instruction manual from a game called
*Deus Ex* as an example (p. 38):

> Your internal nano-processors keep a very detailed record of your
> condition, equipment and recent history. You can access this data at any
time during play by hitting F1 to get to the Inventory screen or F2 to get
to the Goals/Notes screen. Once you have accessed your information
screens, you can move between the screens by clicking on the tabs at the
top of the screen. You can map other information screens to hotkeys using
Settings, Keyboard/Mouse.

Gee (2004) points out that while this passage makes sense at a literal level, without any knowledge
of its context it contains worthless information. Playing the game gives the passage a situated
meaning. When pressing F1 button in the game, the player can access the Inventory screen. Thus, the
player can immediately see the connection between the word and the action it provokes. The same
principle applies to other words that appear in this passage. Without the context of the game, words
such as “condition”, “equipment” or “Goals/Notes” only have a literal meaning, but the reader will
only have a vague idea of what kind of information the text attempting to relay. (p. 39)

Gee (2004) calls reading “an embodied process” (p. 44). In the case of the manual text from *Deus Ex*,
the meanings of the words are embodied within the game, and are processed by the player as they
play. By recalling the images and actions from the gaming experience, the player can make sense of
the manual text. Gee (2004) also states that “language, perception and action in the world are all
tightly connected together” for humans (p. 44). These three aspects are entwined in video games.
Especially when playing role-playing games, the language that the player faces consists of a myriad
of complex English words and expressions. In role-playing games such as World of Warcraft, the
emphasis is on creating a vivid and immersive fantasy world. Much like in fantasy literature, this is
achieved by a diverse use of language. However, the difference between reading fantasy literature
and playing fantasy video games is that in video games the language is constantly supported by the visual images and actions in the game. The learner does not necessarily need to stop and find a word from a dictionary, because they can use the context of the game to decipher the meaning of a given word. While the player might not be able to immediately tell a word’s literal meaning, the information given by the game allows them to understand and remember a word’s situated meaning. This situated meaning may then help the learner to expand the meaning of the word for other contexts, too.

3.6. Learning in video games versus learning in school

One of the desirable outcomes of this research would be gaining a better understanding of how video games facilitate language learning. That knowledge could be beneficial for formal school teaching in order to enhance especially the motivational aspects of language learning in school. While formal teaching should remain as the basis of learning a language properly, the learning principles surrounding video games could have plenty to offer for formal language teaching, too. According to Kramsch and Thorne (2002, p. 86), using and learning a language over global networks such as video games can provide various benefits that cannot be implemented as effectively in a classroom setting. Benefits like this include increased peer-to-peer interaction, access to expert speakers that provide an authentic model for speaking the language and the development of online discourse communities (Kramsch & Thorne 2002, p. 86). These aspects in turn lead to an overall increase in the total production and use of the language by students compared to classical classroom studying.

Gee (2004) discusses the concept of learning to read in schools and ponders what kind of children tend to have difficulties in learning to read. Not taking the children with neural disorders that complicate learning into account, Gee makes the notion that majority of children with difficulties come from poor minority groups that have historically been victims of prejudice and oppression, but still questions the link between being poor or a member of a certain social group and having difficulties with learning in schools. However, the key point that Gee makes is that children that have difficulties to learn in schools might not have similar difficulties to learn from playing video games. (p. 6) Motivation is a central aspect of learning that is facilitated by video games in a different way than by formal teaching. According to Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012), the participants in a second-language learning environment such as World of Warcraft are highly motivated to “understand the communication between co-players and the rules and commands that are inherent parts of the game itself” (pp. 116-117). Furthermore, Sylvén and Sundqvist claim that World of Warcraft offers a great
deal of linguistic input, and most importantly, that input is often on the border of the players’ proficiency. This means that in order to be able to understand, communicate and simply survive in the game, a great deal of effort is required from the player to make sense of what is transpiring in the game. A key point presented by Sylvén and Sundqvist is that World of Warcraft is not designed as a learning game, thus being a voluntary activity that is a good prerequisite for motivation. (Sylvén & Sundqvist 2012, p. 117)

Despite clearly having various qualities that enhance language learning, Saarenkunnas (2006) notes that computer games are a disputed issue. She says that on the one hand, they are seen as “a threat to the physical and mental health of a whole generation” (Saarenkunnas 2006, p. 200). On the other hand, Saarenkunnas (2006) claims that video games are seen as “capable of teaching children some of the basic skills the information society requires” (p. 200). Saarenkunnas elaborates by saying that as Finnish children start their formal foreign language education at the age of nine, many of the children have already developed skills to act in a foreign language environment thanks to the games (p. 200).

3.6.1. A case example: Pokémon

Gee (2004) argues that the children from poor minority groups do not face such difficulties in learning outside school as they do in a school environment (p. 8). He takes video games as an example, more notably Pokémon. Pokémon first appeared as a hand-held game on Game Boy console in Japan in 1996. The aim of the Pokémon games is to catch and train various different types of monsters, and battle other Pokémon trainers in order to become the champion of the Pokémon world. The franchise has been expanded to an anime television series and a trading card game, for example, and the number of Pokémon has risen from the original 151 to a total of 721. Many of the Pokémon share resemblance with real life animals and objects. Squirtle is a combination of a turtle and a squirrel, while Gyarados has borrowed its appearance from Chinese dragons. Trubbish resembles a trash bag while Vanilluxe is an ice-cream cone. As the Pokémon gain experience and levels, they gain more power and access to new moves. Some Pokémon also have up to two evolutions.

The world of Pokémon is obviously rather complex, but the franchise’s target audience is children but according to Gee they possess the capabilities to learn and master the system regardless of their social or financial background. “I know of no evidence that mastering the Pokémon universe differs
by the race, class and gender of children.” (Gee 2004, p. 8) Gee (2004) continues: “Furthermore, in the case of learning to read in school, but not in the case of learning Pokémon, race and class make a big difference, since poor children and children from some minority groups, on average, learn to read in school less well than more privileged children” (p. 8). Gee claims that poor children are just as adept as the rich at learning and mastering the Pokémon world as long as they have a similar access to it. Gee (2004) illustrates his point by comparing mastering the Pokémon universe to learning to read in schools (p. 8):

When children have to learn phonics, they are faced with a system of 44 phonemes (the basic speech sounds in English) coupled with 26 letters of the alphabet. That is, the child needs to learn with which of 44 sounds each of 26 letters can be associated. This system is pitifully smaller than the Pokémon system.

The system in Pokémon combines 721 different Pokémon, 18 types and a pool of 621 different moves. Each Pokémon has a list of moves they can possibly learn, while they can have four moves on their move set at a given time. The Pokémon can also hold an item each with a unique effect. On paper, it would seem that learning how to battle with Pokémon is much more of a daunting task than learning to read. With his example of the Pokémon games, Gee illustrates the fact that video games induce learning and promote problem-solving and complex thinking. Also, a key point in learning from video games is genuine motivation, something that schools often fail to reproduce. “We all know that if we turned Pokémon into a subject on the school curriculum, then certain children, many of them poor, would all of a sudden have trouble learning Pokémon.” (Gee 2004, p 8). While crediting video games for motivating children to learn even complex subjects, Gee draws primary focus on the flaws of the school system. This reinforces the claim that formal teaching could draw influence from video games in order to enhance especially the motivational aspect of learning.

3.7. A case example: a child learning English in networked computer games

Language learning in video games has been studied before in the form of case studies. This section introduces a case study conducted by Saarenkunnas (2006) observes the actions of a ten-year-old boy, Sakari, in networked computer games, mainly in an online multiplayer roleplaying game called Runescape that represents the same genre as World of Warcraft. More specifically, the study aims to
resolve what resources the learner draws on in solving language and technology related problems. Saarenkunnas notes that Sakari has received formal teaching in English only for a year and a half, but argues that he is able to use English in the games environment “resourcefully and creatively” (Saarenkunnas 2006, p. 199). Saarenkunnas’ findings are relevant for the research conducted in this paper because some of the respondents in the survey claim that they started playing World of Warcraft at a very young age. Thus, it is important to understand how children are able to understand the complex language that roleplaying games such as Runescape and World of Warcraft are heavily based on.

The historical body of Sakari as a gamer and language learner explains his adeptness in video games at a later age. Sakari started playing video games at the age of three with his mom. At the age of seven Sakari shifted from Finnish-speaking environments (e.g. Moomin games) into mainly English-speaking environments (e.g. Super Mario). Saarenkunnas (2006, p. 206) notes that Sakari comes from a monolingual Finnish family, but was still able succeed in the games even when they had lengthy English instructions in them. Furthermore, Sakari watched movies in English at a very young age. Saarenkunnas (2006) explains that while Sakari did not pay much attention to the language, “the visual elements, extralinguistic signs, music and other effects seemed to be strong enough resources for him to make meaning to the films” (p. 206). This assumption is relevant when discussing language learning in video games, too. Since the language and action are closely intertwined in video games, it is not far-stretched to assume that the player is able to make meanings of the lingual elements in the game through the aid of action and visual clues even if the player is not familiar with the language. However, Saarenkunnas (2006, p. 206) continues by claiming that Sakari must have also learned English while watching the films with the aid of visual clues. This leads to one possible problem in this thesis. It is highly probable that the respondents heard in this study have received informal English input from sources other than World of Warcraft, too. When reminiscing their language learning experiences in World of Warcraft, the respondents might not be able to accurately pin-point what they have learned exclusively from the game. However, since the players have played the game for several years, they can be considered as quite knowledgeable on what parts of their language skills they have obtained from World of Warcraft.

The social and communicational aspects of playing video games are also discussed in Saarenkunnas’s (2006, p. 206) study as she describes how Sakari started to play more with friends creating a social network for playing and discussing games. The social network became more prevalent when Sakari started playing an online multiplayer roleplaying game called Runescape. Saarenkunnas explains that the game interface in English, and while the players come from various different countries and
background, their mutual in-game language is English. Even though Sakari is only ten years old, he is able to play the game with aid of his social network: “While playing in this environment Sakari meets constantly with language problems, which he usually solved with the aid of his network of friends.” (Saarenkunna 2006, p. 207). Collaboration is an essential part in Sakari’s playing experience in Runescape. Saarenkunna (2006) introduces excerpts from the data of her study, showing the process of Sakari and his friends negotiating meanings for words together and explaining the concepts of the game such as Wilderness (‘wildu’), a place where the players can engage in combat with each other (p. 210-212).

Saarenkunna also notes that Sakari’s mother suggested Sakari to use dictionary as a resource, but he refused saying that there is no time to check meanings for words in a dictionary. This suggests that Sakari is able to make meanings for words and concepts in the game based on the game’s visual context and the actions in the game, while also asking other players for help if needed. Thus, the game provides enough resources for Sakari to understand the language without having to resort on help from outside the game. Also, according to Nation and Coady (1988) via Saarenkunna (2006, p. 209), learning vocabulary through context is a major way for increasing one’s vocabulary knowledge, which is a major reason why video games such as Runescape and World of Warcraft can be considered as an effective way of learning new vocabulary. This is also what Gee (2004) calls “situated learning” (2004, p. 38). Thus, Saarenkunna concludes that Runescape offers “a rich resource for language learning at least on the level of acquiring vocabulary” (Saarenkunna 2006, p. 213). She also notes that the game engages the players to collaborate and discuss the game together. She makes a key point saying that “in games the linguistic elements are strongly supported by visual cues, which is an important and utilised meaning resource for the language learner” (Saarenkunna 2006, p. 217). Furthermore, Saarenkunna argues that the language learned in games also functions as a resource for solving language problems in everyday contexts other than video games (p. 217). The findings in Saarenkunna’s case study act to reinforce the notion that video games function as a source for language learning. World of Warcraft is in many ways similar to Runescape, thus making Saarenkunna’s findings a solid foundation for a language study in World of Warcraft.
4. Data and methodology

The data for this study is gathered by conducting a survey for the European player-base of World of Warcraft. The purpose of the survey is to investigate how playing World of Warcraft has helped non-native English speakers learn English, what kind of English in terms of vocabulary and grammar they have learned, and how the language skills learned in World of Warcraft has helped them in other areas of life. The study is qualitative as it employs the perspectives and experiences from the players to assess language learning in World of Warcraft. This is achieved by having mainly open ended questions that allow the respondents to share their experiences and views in a more detailed manner. The complete body of data consists of 202 survey answers. The survey was posted on World of Warcraft’s European web forums (battle.net) and in a closed Facebook group called “World of Warcraft EU” that is aimed for European World of Warcraft players. The group is ‘closed’ in the sense that a new member has to request for a membership from the group admins who moderate the group. The purpose of the group is to provide the European players a platform to socialise with each other, find partners to play with and discuss matters related to World of Warcraft.

The age distribution of the respondents falls between 15 and 47 years. The premise is that the respondents live in Europe as the survey aimed for World of Warcraft’s European player community. However, the respondents were not asked to announce their nationality or gender in the survey. A vast majority of the respondents speak English as their second language which is enough information for the purposes of this study. A handful of the respondents are native English speakers in which case they have indicated it in their answers.

The survey consists of 17 questions in total, of which seven questions are multiple-choice, and nine questions are open ended questions. It is mainly aimed for European World of Warcraft players who do not speak English as their first language, while some native English speakers have contributed with their perspectives, too. The first four questions are general questions and aim to map the respondents’ age distribution, playing history, playstyle preferences and reasons why they play World of Warcraft. The focus of these questions is to give an idea of the respondents’ historical body as gamers. However, the survey does not ask the respondents to reveal their gender or nationality. This is to narrow down the research to only investigate learning English in World of Warcraft in general. A further study could be conducted in order to compare differences between players of different nationalities, and also the differences in learning between genders. The aim is to also reveal reasons
why the players think that World of Warcraft is a good game and why it remains an appealing and engaging game for even those who have played it for over eight years.

The next section of the survey focuses on what kind of English the respondents’ have learned by playing World of Warcraft. Questions number five and six are open-ended and ask how World of Warcraft has helped the respondents to learn English, and what kind of vocabulary and other aspects of language have they learned from it. Questions number seven, eight and ten are multiple-choice and aim to reveal the respondents’ attitudes towards using correct English grammar in-game and if World of Warcraft has been helpful for them in learning proper grammar. Question number nine asks the respondents to contemplate whether all English learned in World of Warcraft is good for the learner. Question 11 aims to evaluate what the respondents think about World of Warcraft as a source for learning English. Question 12 asks if the game requires the player to know English well in order to be successful or make progress. This question works towards analysing if the game itself motivates the player to improve their English. Questions 13 and 14 evaluate the collaborative aspects of the game and ask if it encourages communication between players and whether the respondents prefer to play alone or interact with others. Question 15 and 16 ask about the respondents’ experiences with language outside World of Warcraft. The aim here is to evaluate if the language learned in World of Warcraft has been useful for the respondents’ and encouraged them to use English in other areas of life, too, such as school or work. The 17th question allows the respondents to have a free word where they can give any other input related to language learning and World of Warcraft.
5. Analysis

In the analysis section, the goal is to examine the results gathered from the survey. For the purposes of this Master’s thesis, the first 100 answers in order are chosen from the complete body of answers for a closer inspection. Due to the qualitative nature of this research, a sample of 100 responses can be considered to be adequate in order to receive broad and representative results. The analysis section will be structured in a way that the results of the survey will be examined one question at a time. However, the questions are divided into several different themes based on what aspects of language learning in World of Warcraft they seek to assess. These themes are general questions that examine the respondents’ historical body as World of Warcraft players, questions that evaluate the learning outcomes of playing World of Warcraft and questions that seek to evaluate World of Warcraft as a language learning platform.

5.1. General questions

The first four survey questions seek to assess the respondents’ age distribution, length of playing history in World of Warcraft, the reasons why they play World of Warcraft and the game content they prefer to play. This section aims to describe the respondents and their relation to World of Warcraft. However, in the hindsight, it might have been a good idea to also ask the respondents for their nationality. In this way, the responses could have been made more comparable to each other. Obviously, the quality and magnitude of formal English education and exposure to English language differs from country to country, which also means that the respondents’ history and background as English learners may greatly vary from each other. This will naturally affect the results as those with more extensive knowledge in English have learned and focused on different aspects of English language than those with more basic knowledge and skills in English.

5.1.1. Age and playing history

This section illustrates distribution of the respondents’ age and the length of their playing history in World of Warcraft. The average age of the 100 respondents used as a sample in this research is 23 years. The following chart demonstrates the age distribution of the respondents in relation to how long they have been playing World of Warcraft. The X-axis represents the different age brackets
while the Y-axis indicates the count of respondents belonging to each age bracket. The different colored bars indicate the number of years spent with the game by the respondents.

![Graph 1: The distribution of the respondents’ age compared to their playing history](image)

**Graph 1: The distribution of the respondents’ age compared to their playing history**

This diagram acts as an indication for two facts. The first one is that the majority of the respondents are aged between 15 to 25 years, which counts for a total of 70 respondents. The rest of the respondents are distributed in the following way: 25 of the respondents are aged between 26 and 35 years, five respondents are more than 35 years old with the oldest respondent being 47 years old. The age distribution clearly shows that World of Warcraft is more popular among the younger generations, but also that video gaming can be accessible and appealing to older people, too. The second fact demonstrated by this chart is that a vast majority of the respondents aged between 15 and 25 have been playing World of Warcraft for more than 8 years. This means that many of them have started playing at a fairly young age. For example, two 22-year-old respondents say that they have started playing World of Warcraft in 2005 when they were 12 years old. This means that many of the respondents have been playing World of Warcraft while they still have received formal English education in school. Thus, this will be an interesting factor when examining the survey responses in the light of World of Warcraft complementing English teaching in schools.

The reason for asking to declare how long they have been playing World of Warcraft is to gain an understanding of the respondents’ historical body as World of Warcraft players. When linked to the respondents’ age, these findings should work towards establishing an idea of how extensively World
of Warcraft has been a part of the respondents’ language learning. The game was released in February 2005, which means that some of the respondents may have played World of Warcraft already for ten years. Closer examination of the responses reveals that 41 percent of the respondents have been playing World of Warcraft for more than 8 years. Only six percent of the respondents have played the game for 1-2 years, while all of the respondents have been playing for at least a year. A total of 70 percent of the respondents have been playing World of Warcraft for at least four years. Thus, the respondents’ answers can be considered knowledgeable and reliable since most of them have had years of experience in World of Warcraft. However, it may be quite difficult for the respondents to discern between what they have specifically learned in World of Warcraft and what they have learned from other input sources. Thus, conducting case studies that observes the players’ language learning in World of Warcraft over a lengthy period of time would be more beneficial in order to receive more specific results. This study, however, seeks to assess language learning in World of Warcraft more as a phenomenon relying on a large sample of responses that help establishing an understanding of how World of Warcraft functions as a platform for language learning.

5.1.2. Reasons for playing World of Warcraft

The survey asks the respondents to briefly explain their reasons for playing World of Warcraft. This question seeks to shed light on why World of Warcraft has remained such an appealing game throughout its 10-year-history. The question also aims to unveil factors that motivate the players to keep playing and, depending on the results of this thesis, also learning. Genuine motivation is a key to learning, or to doing anything else at all, for long periods of time. By examining the reasons that entice the players to keep on playing World of Warcraft, we can form an idea of some aspects that function as incentives for motivation. In turn, these aspects could possibly be transferred for the uses of school education. While this thesis seeks to assess language learning in World of Warcraft, hardly any of the answers to named learning as one of the reasons for playing the game. Only one out of 50 respondents clearly stated learning as a reason to play World of Warcraft. This serves as a hint that learning while playing is not conscious but rather a result of having fun in the game. The game itself keeps the players motivated to work with the language without them necessarily realising it at the moment of playing. However, in retrospective, the respondents are able to quite clearly analyse how World of Warcraft has helped them learn English and what kind of English they have actually learned.
A few major themes rise from the answers. The first of them is socialisation. One of the main reasons for playing World of Warcraft appears to be being able to play with friends, make new ones and meet people from all over the world. A vast majority of the respondents name socialisation as the main reason for playing, but also for quitting the game. For some, playing with friends is the only incentive to keep on playing. For those with social anxiety problems, World of Warcraft is a safe place for meeting new people and interacting with them. A second important factor is entertainment. Several aspects in the game contribute towards the entertainment factor. Some enjoy online roleplaying games and the fantasy genre in general, thus making World of Warcraft and appealing game to play. Some state that playing World of Warcraft has been a long-time hobby or that they have been fans of the Warcraft games from a child. A few of the respondents claim that they simply love the game and the world behind it. Thus, immersion has a major role in making the game enticing to play. Some of the respondents name the rich lore of World of Warcraft as one of the main reasons that keep them immersed in the game. They enjoy the background story for the whole fantasy world that World of Warcraft is based on.

Some respondents play World of Warcraft to pass time and prevent boredom. The game offers various different activities for the players to spend time on. While in theory the player can complete all achievements, obtain the best items and all collectibles and vanquish the most difficult foes, it would take years of time and dedication to complete everything the game has to offer. Even then, the game is constantly being developed and new content is added, thus making it nigh impossible to fully ‘complete’. Thus, the game also offers a sense of accomplishments for the players. In one of the more extreme cases, a respondent says that they suffer from depression and low self-esteem, but that playing World of Warcraft allows them to feel like they are good at something and receive boosts in confidence. For many others, too, the feeling of accomplishing something in the game is comparable to accomplishments in real life.

One of the most common reasons for playing World of Warcraft is escapism. For many, World of Warcraft functions as getaway from mundane tasks and problems. For example, one respondent writes that “[I]t helps relieve me of the stresses that come with my job and life.” Another respondent directly states that they play World of Warcraft as an “escapism from real life issues”. According to the respondents, the virtual identities do not only help with escaping problems in real life, but also enables one to act like they would not be able to act in real life. One of the respondents says that being disabled in real life, World of Warcraft offers new possibilities to enjoy oneself. Thus, playing World of Warcraft may act as escapism from the stress and problems of real life, but also serves as a way to escape from one’s real identity. From the perspective of language learning, this kind of full immersion
of oneself in an English-speaking environment can be seen as extremely beneficial for a learner. However, becoming too involved with a virtual world may seem worrisome especially in the case of younger players. Extremely, a few respondents directly admit that they are addicted to World of Warcraft.

5.1.3. Playstyle and content preferences

The respondents were asked to define what kind of content they usually play in World of Warcraft. The purpose of this question is to gather information about what aspects or content of the game the respondents enjoy playing the most in order to identify the different instances that the players use the language in. ‘Content’ in the context of World of Warcraft means all the different types of things the player can do in World of Warcraft. This leads to one of the sub-objectives of this paper which is to examine whether the language the player use changes depending on the content they play. However, since World of Warcraft has a great variety of different ways to engage the players, it might be difficult for them to identify themselves strictly as certain type of players. Also, the survey question had the option to name aspects of the game other than those that were already given. In hindsight, this might have been slightly redundant. Furthermore, the question included the option “a bit of everything”, which was probably a too broad and easy answer to choose and does not yield as much relevant information as desired. However, the responses still provide a general idea of how the players tend to spend their time in World of Warcraft and what aspects of the game they find the most engaging. The respondents’ playstyle preferences are demonstrated in the following chart:
The respondents’ preferences on playable content in World of Warcraft

This graph indicates that 43 percent of the respondents consider themselves as quite versatile players and do not identify with any specific player types. However, 36 percent firmly identify themselves as raiders. A raider refers to a player who mostly plays the end-game player-versus-environment (PvE) content that involves forming raid parties of more than ten people in order to vanquish the most challenging and rewarding end bosses and monsters. This is significant because as indicated later in the survey results, this kind of raiding environment engages the players to cooperate and communicate with each other, and according to the respondents, is one of the most efficient ways to learn and practice English oral communication skills. Nine percent identify themselves as ‘PvPers’ who mostly enjoy the player-versus-player (PvP) content. This includes dueling one-to-one against other players, fighting in arenas that has two-versus-two, three-versus-three and five-versus-five formats or taking part in larger scale fights on special battlegrounds that can sport fights between teams of 40 players at maximum. However, the representation of PvP players is far lesser in numbers compared to PvE players, though. Other minor groups are levelers who enjoy developing multiple characters and roleplayers who generally want to fully immerse themselves in the game’s world and characters. This graph does not yet give any indication on whether the players use language differently in different scenarios, but helps with establishing an image of what aspects of World of Warcraft the respondents enjoy the most and prefer to engage in. However, the survey results hint that in roleplaying scenarios, the players strive for as perfect English as possible in order to maintain the immersion. Credibility, in turn, plays a great role in creating immersion in the first place as explained by one respondent in the survey:
“...credibility in roleplaying usually comes with a good story-telling-tag attached. What better way to do it other than flawless English?”

This notion is reinforced by another respondent who says that the typical Internet language full of abbreviations and slang is not acceptable in World of Warcraft’s roleplaying scene. A couple respondents say that they deliberately joined the roleplaying scene in order to improve their English. These responses also show that despite not necessarily identifying themselves as roleplayers, there are quite a few persons among the respondents who engage themselves in roleplaying action.

5.2. The outcomes of learning English in World of Warcraft

In this section, the analysis will delve deeper into examining how World of Warcraft has helped the respondents learn English, and what kind of English they have actually learned in terms of vocabulary and grammar. The aim in this section is to present the survey results and establish an accurate and detailed description of the sample responses. This will be done by finding any recurring themes that arise from the respondents’ experiences and opinions, while also highlighting details or possible anomalies.

5.2.1. How has playing World of Warcraft helped the players learn English?

One respondent makes an important point that the way the players learn, use and process English while playing greatly depends on the players’ age, how long they have been studying English and what is their native language. Thus, for some, World of Warcraft has been a primary source for learning English. For some, it acts as a complementary source for learning alongside formal school education, and for some it helps maintaining English skills on a daily basis. The native language of the players could affect how easily they are able to transfer the language elements learned while playing to their own use, for example. Comparing learning in school and learning from playing is also a recurring theme in the responses.

A handful of respondents say that World of Warcraft has been their primary source for learning English. One of them says “I never had any english classes in school, so everything i know came from cartoons and world of warcraft, so you could say that WoW was my english teacher.” [sic] Another respondent, a player from Arabia, also says that they have not ever had any English
classes in school, but that playing World of Warcraft for a long time has helped them to improve their English. A third respondent has a similar story: “I started playing WoW when I couldn't speak a word in English, and overtime I got my FC diploma without ever studying English from a book.” /sic/ Thus, these respondents have had no formal teaching in English but have learned English from other sources, most notably World of Warcraft. Also, one of the respondents says that World of Warcraft acted as preparation for their formal teaching:

As I started playing World of Warcraft before english lessons started in school, it helped me greatly on the first steps. I had my dad translate texts on the first few months of my WoW career, but after that I managed to translate the basics and play the game without help.

While some respondents claim that they have learned all or most of their English by playing World of Warcraft, whether this is fully plausible or not depends on their nationality and country of living. Thus, having learned all English from World of Warcraft seems highly unlikely in, say, Finland where the exposure to English is rather extensive outside video games. However, in the case of countries such as Spain or Italy where English is not generally spoken or heard quite as often, above claims are more believable. However, the survey for this thesis does not discern the respondents by their nationality, which unfortunately disallows comparison in learning English between players of different nationalities. Thus, this research does not take differences in education or exposure to English into account, but rather seeks to examine the possibilities and drawbacks of learning English in World of Warcraft on a more global level.

Some of those who have had English as a part of their formal education compare learning in World of Warcraft to learning in school. A respondent who names grammar and punctuation as one of the things they have learned in World of Warcraft claims that the game has been able to teach them “more about grammar and punctuation in five years than school managed in fourteen”. However, a more recurring opinion in the responses is that while formal education has been effective in teaching grammar, it has severely lacked in oral practice. As to how World of Warcraft has helped the player to improve their English, one respondent says:

First of all speaking. Yeah, speaking because our schools always taught us grammar (they were not successful) but nothing about speaking. If you know grammar very well but you can't speak that means you do NOT know English. Raiding with TS (teamspeak) was very good for me.
In the responses, improved skills in oral communication and oral fluency are oft-mentioned learning outcomes of playing World of Warcraft. In relation to learning in school and learning in video games, some respondents also refer to the motivational aspect of learning. A few of them credit World of Warcraft for helping them learn English better than in school due to World of Warcraft being more immersive and interesting way to learn. Also, one of the respondents thinks that player can easily learn English pronunciation by talking to other people and listening to non-player characters “instead of just repeating after the teacher”. Listening to in-game voices is mentioned in a few other responses, too. This has helped some respondents to distinguish different dialects from each other, for example. Furthermore, according to another respondent, reading the quest texts is “infinitely more interesting” than listening to a teacher talk. Thus, playing World of Warcraft grants its players a constant exposure to English language, which allows the players to hear, read and speak English in a natural language-using environment. A few respondents also give credit to World of Warcraft for helping improve grades in school. One of them says that they scored perfect points on a FCE (First Certificate in English) exam. Another respondent says that they were a D-grade student in English, but after starting to play World of Warcraft, they progressed into an A-grade student. One respondent claims that they learned to use English fluently by playing video games such as the Elder Scrolls and World of Warcraft continuing, however, that playing video games extensively resulted in sleeping on English classes instead.

While some think that World of Warcraft has been a better source for learning than school, for many others World of Warcraft has been a place where they have been able to put the language skills learned via formal education to use. Having to use English to progress in the game and communicate with other players has been helpful for many, and it has allowed them to practise their English skills daily. For a few, World of Warcraft is a good way to maintain English skills by having to read, listen and use English on a daily basis. One of the respondents says that “[I]t mainly helped to stay in touch with English language by communicating with the game world and mostly other people”. Another respondent says that they noticed degradation in their English skills after they quit playing, but that starting to play again helped them upkeep their English. One response states that “[A] 13 year old forced converse with adults really speeds up the process of learning common structure”. Enhancing communication skills in English by talking with friends and guild members both in text and voice chat is mentioned several times in the responses. A respondent says that playing World of Warcraft has led to an overall improvement in their written skills and grammar, but even more notably speaking with guild members over a voice-chat program called Ventrilo has helped them to improve their
spoken skills, too. According to one respondent being able to communicate effectively is necessary in order to complete the most difficult challenges:

Speaking in a raiding environment requires fast processing of information and equally fast and clear delivery of it out to the rest of your raid, as being too slow or clumsy in your speech might spell the difference between a downed boss or a wipe (in extreme cases). At the very least, language barriers or problems can slow down the progress of the raid.

However, it remains for the player themselves to decide how much time and effort they are willing to invest in the game. This in turn affects the level of language they need in order to play the game. The same respondent acknowledges this in their response, saying that the language used and learned by a player depends on their mindset towards playing the game. Some players deliberately want to face the most difficult challenges in the game, which requires, as stated above, a higher level use of English. Some others may settle for a more casual playstyle, which does not necessarily require them to constantly improve their language skills. As an example from the same respondent as earlier, a player may choose to join a guild or play with friends that are not English-speaking, which leads into a lesser exposure to English language than joining an English-speaking guild would lead.

A few respondents explicitly state that while they have learned English vocabulary and grammar in school, school did not teach much about pronunciation. However, playing World of Warcraft has remedied the lack of oral practice. A German respondent says that reading World of Warcraft’s English forums and patch notes allowed them to eventually switch from the German game client to the English one, and thus also start conversing with other players in English:

Originally, i've played on a German realm and only read the patchnotes and forums in english, due to that daily reading in english my skills in this language have grown, my grades in school got way better and after a few months i've felt confident enough to transfer to a english realm, where i held my first english conversation, learned slowly how to speak and pronounce things properly in english (my school didnt teach me much about pronounciation). [sic]

This serves as an example of a success story where a player has been able to progressively enhance their English skills with the help of World of Warcraft. This also serves as an example of playing video games improving grades in school, too. A French respondent shares a similar experience of World of Warcraft complementing language skills learned in school. They say that they had “a
somewhat decent” vocabulary from school, but that playing World of Warcraft helped them improve their oral skills and accent:

I started raiding in Vanilla, and became an officer in my guild. It allowed me to practice a lot to a point where it felt natural to speak English so I could give commands and directions. Listening to native English speakers on Ventrilo also allowed me to hear the different accents and subtleties in language depending on region, which made it easier to talk to a wider audience, and slowly get rid of my own french accent. [sic]

In this passage, ‘Vanilla’ refers to the first installment of World of Warcraft that was released in 2004. The period of ‘Vanilla WoW’ lasted until 2007 when Blizzard Entertainment released the first expansion for World of Warcraft called ‘The Burning Crusade’ that gave the players two new playable races, a new continent to explore and new monsters and bosses to vanquish. This passage serves as an example where World of Warcraft has allowed a person to hear native English speakers talk and learn from them despite living in an environment where English is not heard nor used much. The respondent also mentions that they have learned different accents and ‘subtleties’ in the language by listening to native English speakers.

For many, World of Warcraft has been a source for enhancing and expanding their vocabulary. Some say that they have mostly learned words related to gaming language or language in the Internet in general, such as in-game terms or abbreviations like gtg (“got to go”) or brb (“be right back”). Learning to use abbreviations also has had negative effects as one of the respondents says that they have become more careless and lazy when using English. Also learning slang, both gaming slang and slang of different dialects, is mentioned in a few answers. Reading the quest descriptions has been helpful for learning new vocabulary as explained by one respondent: “It helped me with vocabulary. I remember back in classic looking at the quest log and searching for things like “North” or “East” and things like that to see where I needed to go.” Another respondent also mentions quest texts as an important source for learning by saying that they have learned a lot of words from quest texts. “Bosses and quests use a large variety of words to explain a situation or to give them personality.” Furthermore, according to a third respondent, “[L]arge descriptive words are very common in RPG games, as such it helps expand your knowledge of the English language.” The vocabulary that the players have learned from World of Warcraft will be examined more closely in the next section.

5.2.2. What kind of vocabulary have the players learned from World of Warcraft?
The players were asked to reflect on what kind of vocabulary they have learned from World of Warcraft. More specifically, the players were asked to give examples of words and different types, as in categories, of words that they have learned. However, some of the respondents were not able to pin-point exactly what they have learned from World of Warcraft. Thus, the survey question should have been more specific in order to produce more informative responses. Even though some of the respondents could not tell what they have learned very clearly, a vast majority of them say that World of Warcraft has definitely taught them a lot in terms of vocabulary. However, another drawback in the case of this question is that the respondents were not asked about their English learning history in the survey. It would have been beneficial to make a comparison between the respondents’ history in learning English and their responses to see what kind of vocabulary beginner-level English learners have learned compared to more advance learners. Thus, this part of the analysis is limited to describing learning vocabulary in World of Warcraft on a more general level.

Having learned abbreviations and gaming-related slang are recurring responses. One of the respondents says that they have learned abbreviations of in-game terms, but that they doubt the abbreviations can be counted as “actual English”. The respondents mention abbreviations such as brb (“be right back”), afk (“away from keyboard”), m8 (“mate”) and imo (“in my opinion”). Game-specific slang words mentioned in the responses include words such as LFG (“looking for group”), pug (“pick-up group”) and dps (“damage per second”). Some respondents also mention that alongside abbreviations, they have also learned to use shorter forms of other words and expressions such as “how r u” as in “How are you?” or “cu” as in “See you”. Some respondents say that gaming slang sometimes transfers to everyday speech, too.

A quite few of the respondents say that they have learned a lot of fantasy-related and descriptive words. A respondent from Finland says that alongside with game-specific terms, they have learned vocabulary that was not taught in school:

Apart from obvious WoW-terms, I have mostly learned fantasy related vocabulary. Granted the English education is good in Finland, but we weren’t taught these things.

Another respondent says that they have learned general fantasy terms. Although they cannot give an example, they say that they “seem to get the meaning better than before”. Thus, it would appear that the playing World of Warcraft has helped the respondent to make meanings for new words more easily. As explained earlier by Gee, having gained experience in the domain of fantasy genre, the respondent has become more adept at learning new information within the same domain. In relation
to fantasy vocabulary, a few of the respondents mention having learned antiquated vocabulary. They say that they have learned words that are not used in modern English such as ‘transmogrification’ and ‘enchants’. Other respondents also say that World of Warcraft has taught them words they had never heard before. One respondent mentions words like ‘deliberately’, ‘bewilderment’ and ‘perplexity’ as examples. Another respondent gives examples such as ‘insipid’, ‘immaculate’ and ‘aberration’. Also, a few respondents say that they have learned a great deal of words through reading the spell, ability and item names in the game. These include words such as ‘eviscerate’, ‘hemorrhage’, ‘taunt’, ‘mutilate’ and ‘bracers’ for example. In addition to uncommon, complex words, the respondents also say that they have learned many mundane words both from the game’s context and from every day conversations with other players. One of the respondents also mentions more general words related to environment (forest, winter, town) and names related to fauna.

Not all responses regarding learning vocabulary describe positive learning experiences. Some of the respondents say that they have also learned toxic language. One respondent says that World of Warcraft has taught them to ‘trash talk’ which essentially means “insulting comments that are made especially to an opponent in a contest, game, etc. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)”. Another respondent says that they can “nerd rage perfectly in English now”. According to the definition with the most upvotes on Urban Dictionary, ‘nerd rage’ means “indignant, hysterical, and incoherent screaming brought on by video game induced frustration” (urbandictionary.com). A more serious respondent says that they have been both lucky and unlucky as they have learned useful everyday words but also a lot of bad words. One of the respondents gives a more explicit example of the toxic language and bad behavior that may be encountered in the game:

[G]et the fuck out of this raid if you’re going to be pulling dps like that you total fucking scrub, I bet you don’t even have glyphs or a dps metre and you’re playing on a laptop, and I bet you’re 12 with dead parents and no dick.

In order to gain a better understanding of what kind of vocabulary and language World of Warcraft teaches the players, a larger sample the survey responses with more examples would be required. This section gives an overall idea of what kind of language the players have obtained from World of Warcraft, but leaves room for more thorough examination.

5.2.3. Is all language learned in World of Warcraft good for the learner?

This section seeks to assess whether the players think that all the language learned in World of Warcraft is good for the learner or if there are drawbacks to learning English in World of Warcraft.
The word ‘good’ in this context means that the language should be proper English and useful for the learner. The majority of the respondents see some faults in learning English in World of Warcraft, while only a handful thinks that there are no problems.

One of the most prevalent themes that arise from the responses is incorrect grammar. Since the European World of Warcraft player community consists largely of non-native English speakers, the player encounters a myriad of different ways of using English as stated by one of the respondents:

> You have quite a bit of exposure to the English language in WoW through other players, unfortunately not all of them provide good examples of proper speech.

Another respondent feels the same way saying that “little of your communication in-game is done with proper English”. A third one says that being exposed to English spoken by Europeans as their second language might not be the best for the learner as they may assume that the incorrect language spoken by the majority is actually correct. This argument is supported by a few other respondents, too. One of them says that as a non-native speaker “it is difficult to discern which other players are good examples of a proper English”. One respondent hints that this is a problem for online gaming communities in general, not only in World of Warcraft. Also, in addition to being exposed to incorrect use of language, some respondents say that laying World of Warcraft has made their grammar skills worse and their use of language lazier.

This leads to another recurring theme which is simplified language. Simplified language includes using abbreviations and short forms of words and improper spelling. One of the respondents says that one might start writing “brb, cya, cba, ftw and such instead of actually writing the words”. Another respondent hints that the language used by the players is rather one-dimensional by saying that they have not learned other ways of greeting someone than “hey”, “Hi” and “sup” (“What’s up?”). Thus, using this kind of simplified language also leads to learning informal language as explained by one of the respondents:

> A lot of things are shortened when speaking among friends or players, this could lead to making lazier uses of certain words where they are normally not welcome, because using the more formal version is unheard of for you.

In relation to informal English, slang and different English dialects used and heard in the game are also mentioned as causes for problems. One of the respondents says that the biggest problem is the
difference between British English and American English. The spelling system used in the game itself is based on American English, but the players are European. One respondent refers to this by saying that since the game is in American English, one might learn “an incorrect” dialect instead “learning the proper spellings”. Another respondent claims that one tends to “inherit the regional differences” of the people they play with meaning that being exposed to many different dialects may cause a conflict and confusion for a learner. This statement is supported by a response saying that one learns “a mix of different English languages and dialects” that may confuse a learner. Alongside with different dialects, some respondents find the out-dated fantasy-related vocabulary confusing at times, too. One of them questions the usefulness of the vocabulary learned in World of Warcraft in real life, saying that the vocabulary in the game is “heroic-fantasy oriented” and not casual English at all. Another respondent says that the game contains a lot of medieval-themed vocabulary that is not used anymore. A few responses say that the players use too much slang both in-game slang and slang in general. One response provides an example of the slang that a player may encounter in World of Warcraft:

Yolo sup brehs. Imma get leh flag from leh enemy base.

You only live once, what is up brothers? I am going to get the flag from the enemy base.

This passage is only one example of the language that the players use in some circumstances. It goes to hint that the players do not always use formally incorrect English because their language skills would be lacking. In some cases, slang and erroneous English is used intentionally as a joke within a smaller circle of people. For example, spelling ‘rouge’ instead of ‘rogue’ has turned from an unintentional mistake into a commonly known joke. In order to gain a broader view of the subtleties and delicacies of the language used by the players in World of Warcraft, more examples would be required. This could be achieved by taking screenshots and video recordings from the game itself in order to provide authentic live examples of the language used.

The aspects of language mentioned previously in this section are negative in the sense that they cause confusion in the learner and may cause them to learn improper English. However, toxic language is mentioned in a majority of the responses and has a different kind of negative impact on the learner. Toxic language includes swearing, using offensive and abusive language, insulting, and overall aggressive behaviour. The respondents think that the toxic language has negative influence especially on younger players. One of them says that “as a 13-year-old I was told to go fuck myself by someone in their late 30s”. Another respondent says that there are some “angry gamers who usually say swear
words and very mean things” and does not think that this kind of influence is very good for younger players.

Similarly to lack of proper English, toxic language is viewed as a problem in online gaming communities in general:

- In any online, mostly anonymous community, especially in video games, it’s possible you will meet some insults and toxicity. If you’re not used to interacting with strangers anonymously online, this could be detrimental to the quality of your learning experiences.

While creating a virtual identity may be helpful for learning by lowering the real-life consequences of a person’s actions as stated by Gee (2007: 59), operating behind the veil on anonymity also allows a person to commit foul actions without consequences for their real-life persona. In relation to language learning, one of the respondents says that while most people who are not native English speakers may learn English by playing, the language that seems to prevail is “mostly the aggressive and bullying sort of language”.

5.2.4. Has the English learned in World of Warcraft been useful in real life?

The previous sections have analysed the type of English the players have learned by playing World of Warcraft. This section in turn investigates if the language learned in World of Warcraft has been useful for the players in real-life such as in school, work or other situations. Quite a few respondents credit World of Warcraft for helping them improve their grades or spark interest in learning English. However, many of the respondents also say that they have learned language that might not be very useful outside the game world. Some of the respondents question the usefulness of language such as internet-related slang or archaic fantasy-related vocabulary that might not be used in an everyday context. Such is not the case for all respondents as one respondent says that as a teacher knowing the slang has helped them to connect with their students. However, vocabulary and written language is only a part of language skills. The premise is that World of Warcraft also provides opportunities to use English for peer-to-peer communication, thus potentially becoming an effective tool in improving one’s oral and auditory language skills. While some language learned in World of Warcraft might not provide very useful in other areas of life, the players generally believe that the language skills attained by playing World of Warcraft have been useful as indicated by the following graph:
A majority of 57 percent say that the English learned in World of Warcraft has proven to be very useful in other areas of life. This hints that language learning in World of Warcraft is rather comprehensive. While this graph does not yield specific information on how the language learned in World of Warcraft has been useful for the respondents, the responses to other questions indicate that the two major ways in which World of Warcraft helps one to improve their English skills are by expanding vocabulary and providing opportunities to enhance communicational skills.

Related to the usefulness of the English learned in World of Warcraft is the survey question that asks if speaking and using English in World of Warcraft has encouraged the respondents to use English also in real life. Roughly a two-thirds of the respondents say that using English in World of Warcraft has borne positive effects on using English in real life, too. For many using English in World of Warcraft has translated into confidence or improved proficiency to use English at school or at work. For some it has helped them hone their social skills overall. However, the usefulness of the learned English appears to be quite dependent on where the respondents live. For example, one respondent says that living near Rotterdam means that they often meet people who speak English instead of Dutch. Another respondent, however, says that they live in very monocultural surroundings meaning that they rarely meet English-speaking people. Also, the results are slightly skewed as a handful of the respondents are native English speakers in which case it is rather obvious that they have not learned much English in World of Warcraft. One of the respondents speaking English natively says that playing with fellow British players that are from a different area has had influence on their own
speech, though. A second factor that appears to affect the respondents’ perceptions on the usefulness of the English learned in World of Warcraft is their history as English speakers. Judging by the responses, the respondents seem to have very diverse backgrounds as English speakers and learners. Therefore, there is a great difference between some respondents in terms of how long they have been studying or speaking English which in turn affects the way they perceive the language. Some respondents say that playing World of Warcraft has not had much effect on their use of English since they have already spoken it before they have started playing while for some that have not had such extensive history in learning English the effects have been more fundamental.

5.2.5. Learning grammar in World of Warcraft

While the respondents generally think that World of Warcraft is a good way to enhance one’s communication and comprehension skills in English, bad influence in grammar appears to be one of the major drawbacks when engaging in an online community such as World of Warcraft. While those interested in roleplaying say that the roleplaying scene is quite strict about using correct and proper English, such is not the case in other areas of the game. The use of abbreviations and simplified English appears to be a popular phenomenon among the players. Some respondents say that there is no time to write properly because the player has to make quick decisions and convey a message fast and clearly. Some people claim to be simply too lazy to bother with proper English. Also, another main reason for incorrect English is the fact that most of the players speak English as their secondary language, thus leading into community where English is spoken with a great diversity. One factor that may also have an influence upon the English used in the game is the players’ attitudes towards using correct English. Interestingly, when asked if playing World of Warcraft has helped the respondents to improve their English grammar, the results were the following:
According to this chart, 50 percent of the respondents feel that interacting with other players has helped them improve their grammar skills. However, when asked if all language in World of Warcraft is good for the learner, the respondents generally felt that World of Warcraft is not a good place to learn proper grammar, and that the grammar and language used by other players is rarely correct or good model for learning. In this case, we encounter the subjectivity of learning. It is reasonable to assume that a learner does not necessarily reflect their learning on any specific objective standard, but rather reflect it on their own past knowledge and skills. Thus, despite not speaking perfectly fluent English, a learner may still feel that their English has improved greatly. When comparing their English skills to the standards of formal education, for example, their English might show glaring deficiencies. However, since the learner most likely primarily compares their progress subjectively to their previous learning experiences, on their own standards they might think that their English is good or has definitely improved. This phenomenon is visible in the survey results quite clearly. There are quite a few respondents who claim that playing World of Warcraft has helped them improve their English, but the language in their responses show that they still make a lot of mistakes.

As shown in the graph above, learning from peers is not the only way to learn English in World of Warcraft. 35 percent of the respondents say that reading and listening to the language content created by the game itself has been helpful for them in improving their English. The language within the game basically includes any language not created by the players such as the quest descriptions, item and spell names, lore texts and the voiced lines uttered by the NPC characters, for example. In contrast to the language produced by the players, the language in the game is produced by the developers who
are native English speakers, and thus provide a proper and grammatically correct model for speaking English. However, as stated in the responses, the language in the game is written in American English, which some players find confusing since British English is quite prevalent among the player community, thus making it easy for the players to accidentally mix the two different dialects. 7 percent of the respondents say that they are negatively influenced by incorrect grammar used by other players. Furthermore, reading the quest descriptions, for example, is highly optional in the current state of the game. 8 percent of the respondents say that they do not pay much attention to the language in the game at all. The quests are provided with markers in the world map that indicate where to go. In the earlier days of the game, as stated in the responses, the players were not given these hints and they had to carefully read through the quest descriptions in order to figure where to go and what to do. This will be discussed more thoroughly in a later section that will seek to determine if World of Warcraft requires and encourages the players to use and improve their language skills in order to advance and be successful in the game.

5.2.6. The players’ attitudes towards using correct English

The previous sections determine that while the respondents generally think that the players in World of Warcraft are not a very reliable role model for learning proper English grammar, they still feel that conversing with others and reading the in-game texts has definitely helped them improve their English. However, this does not automatically mean that they speak English correctly. Thus, it is important to examine the players’ attitudes towards correct use of English. From the perspective of formal education, the aim is to learn to speak and write as mistake-free English as possible. For the players themselves, the aims of learning and using English might be completely different. It may be possible that the players strive more for communicational proficiency rather than perfect accuracy. Therefore, this section seeks to assess the respondents’ attitudes towards English used in World of Warcraft, and to determine if the player community encourages the use of proper and correct English.

As we have learned in the earlier sections, at least the roleplaying community clearly promotes the use of proper English. However, among those who do not role play proper English may even be frowned upon. Those who actively promote the use of proper English and habitually correct other people’s grammar mistakes are often called “Grammar Nazis” in the world of Internet. The word does not exactly elucidate positive images in one’s mind. One respondent, however, credits the “Grammar Nazis” in their guild for helping them learn proper grammar. Therefore, the purpose of this section is
to examine how the players feel about the English used by other players and if they try to promote the use of proper grammar and English themselves. The following chart represents the respondents’ thoughts about incorrect English used by other players:

Graph 6: The players’ attitudes towards incorrect English used by other players

As indicated by this graph, 53 percent of the respondents do not mind the incorrect English used by other players too much. However, 40 percent find incorrect English a little bit bothering, while only 7 percent find it very bothering. It would appear that the players do not necessarily strive for perfect English. Furthermore, when asked if the respondents themselves seek to write and speak grammatically correct English while in-game, they answered the following:
56 percent of the respondents claim that they are very careful with grammar in all situations. 39 percent say that it depends on the situation. The survey provides “speaking with a GM” as an example of a situation where the players might tend to try write as grammatically correct as possible. ‘GMs’ as in ‘Game Masters’ are people employed by Blizzard Entertainment to administrate the game’s servers. Their tasks include helping the players with technical issues in-game, deal with abusive players and generally oversee the order in World of Warcraft. The players can write a ticket describing their problem and the game masters will tend to the players problems and requests accordingly. Generally, discussing with the game masters is considered a more formal situation compared to conversing with friends, for example, thus requiring more proper use of English. These two graphs indicate that while the players might not be overly bothered by incorrect English used by other players, they seem to be quite careful about the English they use themselves. The problem here is that every respondent, and language user for that matter, has a subjective perception of their language skills that might not be reflected on any formal guidelines of using proper language. Thus, they might feel that they indeed are careful about using correct grammar, but still make grammar mistakes. However, the important point is that the players in general at least try to speak and write correct English.
5.3. World of Warcraft as a platform for language learning

The previous sections assessed the tangible outcomes of playing World of Warcraft in relation to learning English as a second language. This section in turn seeks to evaluate World of Warcraft as a platform for second-language learning. This is done by examining the respondents’ opinions on a few key questions. The respondents were first asked to reflect learning by playing to other sources of learning English such as reading literature. Since playing video games is a relatively newly-spread phenomenon, it would be interesting to see how the players themselves feel about video games as a source for learning compared to other and possibly more traditional means. As for how World of Warcraft facilitates learning English and functions as a language learning platform, the respondents were asked to discuss if World of Warcraft requires the players to know English well and constantly become more proficient in order to be successful. Another essential question is if World of Warcraft encourages the players to communicate with each other. These two questions seek to evaluate whether playing World of Warcraft can be considered a reliable and appropriate way to learn English or if learning is simply a coincidental byproduct of years of playing. Also, another important point is whether the game itself presents the player with opportunities to use and learn English effectively and in multiple ways or does the player need to take the initiative and actively engage in e.g. communicational situations with other players.

5.3.1. Learning by playing versus learning from reading

One of the survey questions asks if playing video games is a more effective way to learn than reading literature, for example. The purpose of the question was to place playing video games in the context of informal language learning and compare different kinds of language inputs to video games. However, in the hindsight, the question appears to be too leading and should have been put in a different format since the respondents only reflected video games to literature and not any other source of language input. A couple of respondents draw comparison between video games and watching TV or videos on YouTube, for example, but most of the respondents are focused on comparing video games and literature. Also, one of the respondents notes the format of this survey question, saying that the question should rather be “how the two media teach English compared to each other” instead of asking which is more effective. Despite the flaw in the case of this question, the responses should yield valuable information on the respondents’ views and attitudes towards
video games and literature as sources for learning English to see if there has been a paradigmatic change in informal learning among the learners. At a first glance, there does not seem to be a clear consensus among the respondents on which way of learning is the most effective. A closer inspection reveals that in the case of this question it is rather difficult to strictly say whether reading or playing is a ‘better’ or more effective way to learn English. In rough numbers, it appears that nearly half of the respondents think that playing video games is a more effective way to learn. The rest are divided to those who believe that reading literature ultimately prevails over playing video games and those who are torn between the two. This section does not seek to decide which way of learning is better once and for all, but rather draw comparison between them based on the opinions of the respondents and shed some light on their attitudes and beliefs regarding different forms of language learning.

A few major reasons why some respondents think that playing video games is a more effective way to learn English are interaction, peer collaboration and fun factor. According to the respondents, in video games the player becomes an active participant which makes learning fun and effective. A few of the respondents say that this aspect makes World of Warcraft friendly for younger people and beginners. Some of the respondents say playing video games helps to maintain motivation for learning better. For example, one of the respondents says that it might be difficult for some people to “keep attention long enough to read books”. Also, another respondent says that playing “engages you in a fun way and sneaks in information when you’re not aware you’re learning”. Furthermore, another respondents says that “you interact with the things you are learning”, thus making the learning situated and comprehensible by the help of the context at hand. Another respondent is along the same lines saying that “a game is very diverse and it works as a positive reinforcement while visual and auditory with cognitive performance are working at the same time”, alluding to the multimodal aspect of video games. This is especially important for learning vocabulary since, as explained by a few respondents, the words are intertwined with action and one receives both support and criticism from their peers as explained by one respondent who says that in a game one can be corrected by fellow players while a book does not give response to one’s mistakes. Furthermore, according to the responses, World of Warcraft offers opportunities to communicate and interact with other players, thus allowing them to hone their communicational and oral skills, which is something that books cannot offer. This is summarised by the following response:

   Literature will have a wider vocabulary, better sentence structure and grammar. But its weakness is the oral usage of the language: a book does not instruct how to speak a word.
This response indicates that reading literature does have several merits over playing video games. While some respondents agree with those who think that playing is an effective way to learn, they also point at some negative effects that might come from learning by playing. The most recurring theme in the responses saying that literature is a better way to learn is that literature promotes correct and accurate English while video games mostly teach colloquial and practical English. While playing might be a fast way to learn new words, one respondent notes that books still offer a wider range of vocabulary. Some respondents are stricter about the advantages of reading literature:

Literature promotes actual, correct English, while in a MMORPG like English, people tend to focus on what players write which is usually done with no regard to grammar, punctuation or spelling.

This response also hints at the players’ tendency to heed more to the language written and spoken by other players rather than the language in the game itself. Another respondent claims that “a lot of players don’t bother to even read quest descriptions and dialogue and only read what other players write.” A third respondent claims that “no one uses correct grammar and vocabulary while gaming”. Also, quite a few respondents other give credit to literature for teaching correct grammar and sentence structure. One of the respondents says learning from books and taking classes should remain as the primary source for learning, continuing that video games act as a complement to formal education by allowing the learners to use and improve their skills in the game. Another respondent says that while video games might be a good way to acquire basic language skills, it should not be the “go to” learning experience.

The responses disclose two major themes. The first one is that playing video games grants the learner a multitude of opportunities to use English both for oral and written communication and to hone the language skills they have acquired from formal education. Video games allow the players to collaborate with their peers in a motivating way that facilitates learning mostly unconsciously. However, as explained by several respondents, motivation highly depends on one’s personal preferences and video games cannot be automatically considered as the most suitable alternative for every learner. The second major theme works in favor of reading literature. Many credit literature for teaching correct and proper forms, sentence structure and grammar that are often neglected in video game communities. While the respondents clearly think that playing video games is an effective way to enhance one’s language skills, the general consensus is that this mostly concerns communicational and oral skills. Reading still appears to be considered as a more fundamental way to learn and the
responses hint that learning to speak and write grammatically correct is an essential part of second-language learning that should not be disregarded.

5.3.2. Communicational aspects and the level of social engagement in World of Warcraft

Communicational competency in the context of second-language learning is a major theme in this thesis. This section seeks to evaluate World of Warcraft as a platform for learning communicational English skills and enhancing them. The survey asks the respondents if they think that World of Warcraft encourages its players to communicate with each other. This works towards investigating if World of Warcraft provides the players authentic and spontaneous situations to communicate and collaborate with each other using English as a common language. This question also seeks to determine if using English is at all required while playing. It would be rather detrimental for the notion of World of Warcraft being an effective platform for learning and using English if communication required extra effort from the players or was not encouraged by the game at all. In this context, ‘extra effort’ means that communication would not be intertwined in the everyday activities within the game but would require the player to take the initiative in order to find situations to use English communicatively instead. This section will delve into the opinions given by the respondents on the matter.

A rather common opinion is that World of Warcraft does promote communication between peers. Some say that since it is a MMORPG, communicating and socialising with other players can be considered as a given. One of the respondents says that it is very unlikely that a player would completely avoid interaction with other players or at least the environment. They also claim that that the “profile of MMORPG players is such that a vast majority are talkative and eager to interact and communicate with one another”. Also, a few respondents claim that the game would be quite boring without social interaction which encourages the players to socialise rather than play alone. Some of the respondents note that this is a personal preference and that communication is rather optional in fact. However, one of the respondents says that it is in fact easier to communicate behind a virtual avatar than in real life. The respondents also mention that while no one is forced to socialise, for example joining a guild and chatting with other guild members makes it easy to engage in everyday conversation. The respondents say that communication is a must especially in the end-game player-versus-player content that contains the most difficult challenges in the game. According to the respondents, it is impossible to slay the end-game raid bosses without close communication and
cooperation with other players. According to the respondents the same applies for the end-game player-versus-player content such as rated arena and battleground matches where effective communication is a definite must. Also, one of the respondents mentions that the end-game group content is quite hectic by nature and does not leave much time for typing. This in turn strongly encourages the players to use voice communication over text communication. However, another respondent points to the fact that while World of Warcraft does have a built-in voice chat system, it is not very serviceable and that the players are nearly forced to use some third party software such as Mumble or TeamSpeak.

A general consensus appears to be that communication is highly advised or even mandatory if the player wants to be serious about the game and complete the most difficult end-game challenges. However, judging by the respondents’ opinions, for more casual players communication is rather voluntary. Quite a few respondents say that the game does not encourage the players to communicate with each other, at least not to the extent it used to. One of the respondents claims that in the current state of the game it is possible to play without ever saying a single word. This claim is supported by several other respondents, too. According to the respondents, there are quite a few factors that discourage communication. The first one is that the content outside the end-game content is rather easy and does not require similar coordination or teamwork. A second factor is that many of the processes in the game that used to involve communication are now automated. One example is the Dungeon and Raid Finder tool that allows the players to join a dungeon group with one click of a button rather than attempting to form the group by themselves. This kind of automatisation and anonymity affects the nature of communication as explained by one respondent:

Nowadays you just click a button, wait for a while and you’re in, you’re automatically expected to know what to do, and no one talks unless someone messes up. And at that point it’s just aggressive.

This serves as an example of a situation where the kind of toxic language mentioned earlier in responses may occur. Another respondent says that the communicational aspect in World of Warcraft has deteriorated in the recent years with the introduction of these LFG (Looking for Group) and LFR (Looking for Raid) tools that have “substantially decreased” the need for players to communicate. A third respondent also says that the mentality of the playerbase has changed over the years, explaining that outside organised play the players have less patience to overcome challenges through discussion and persistence. Also, in a case where someone is not performing correctly, the other players rather instantly remove the said player from the group instead of giving them instructions on how to perform
better. This is linked to the passage above saying that the players tend to expect that everyone automatically knows what to do and see no reason for communication.

According to the respondents, the multitude of nationalities among the players has both encouraging and discouraging impact on using English for communication. While most of World of Warcraft’s European realms are English-speaking, there are also German, Spanish, French and Russian realms, for example. One of the respondents says that players of those nationalities are not forced to communicate in English since they can play with other players that speak the same native language. Players of other nationalities do not have the same privilege and for them the natural choice is to play on English-speaking realms. One of the respondents claims that for this reason, other nationalities tend to speak better English. However, as pointed out by another respondent, the English-speaking realms often have subcommunities that consist of certain nationalities and are most often manifested in guilds. While playing on an English-speaking realm indicates that the common language between international players is English, a player may join a guild that is for players of a certain nationality only. One of the respondents says that they are a part of “a purely Danish speaking guild”, continuing that many players in the guild do not speak a word of English. This acts as an example of a situation where the player can cope only with their native language even in an English-speaking environment. Thus, it would appear that playing on an English-speaking realm does not automatically lead to using English for communication.

The responses analysed in this section thus far indicate that while the end-game content encourages and even necessitates communication between players, for a more casual player social interaction is rather voluntary and dependent on the player’s preferences. Even though a player might engage in group activities such as dungeons, the responses explain that due to automatisation of the group forming process and the perceived lack of difficulty in other than end-game content the players are not obliged to communicate with each other. One of the respondents notes that in the case where communication occurs in such situation, it is often abusive by nature. The voluntary aspect of social interaction in World of Warcraft is explained in the following response:

Anything you want to do can be done without communicating with another player. Its not a fact of whether you can or not - You always can go and say hi, but you don't need to. The game never forces you to interact, it just sort of puts you in the same area as another player and assumes this is good enough to be an MMO.
The responses indicate that the game does not necessarily provide opportunities for communication that are intertwined within the everyday activities in the game. This would mean that the level of social engagement depends on the player’s personal activity and preferences. Thus, it is necessary to examine these preferences to see whether the playerbase prefers to engage in social interaction or to play alone even if the game itself does not force or at least actively encourage communicational behaviour. One of the respondents in the previous section refers to the MMORPG players as social and eager to communicate with each other. This section takes the players’ preferences on the level of social engagement into a closer inspection in order to determine whether this profile of MMORPG players holds any resemblance to the truth. Since the social engagement appears to be voluntary to a certain extent, it is important to determine whether the players still tend to interact with each other rather than playing alone without verbal communication. If there is a high level of social interaction between the players, it would indicate that the players are also frequently using English to communicate with each other which in turn would be beneficial for the players’ communicational language skills. However, there is no certainty that the language used between the players is necessarily always English as their social engagement might include communication in a language other than English, i.e. if playing with friends or guild mates that share the player’s native tongue.

The responses indicate that the vast majority of the players prefer to interact with other players while playing. This does not only mean that they are doing activities in the game together but also simply conversing with each other through text or voice chat while playing. Some say that the essential idea behind MMORPGs is interacting with other players and that playing would quickly become boring without other players. Quite a few say that this is especially true for World of Warcraft as they would probably be playing some other roleplaying game if they solely sought for a solo experience. For many, the social aspect of the game is one of the only reasons to play the game. Some also say that accomplishing things together is more satisfying than playing alone, and also that cooperation is the key to completing the most difficult challenges. However, for many the level of social engagement depends on their mood and the content they are currently playing. Some say that it can be relaxing to complete quests or explore the world alone, but that sometimes they prefer to have social interaction. A handful of respondents say that they prefer to play alone for the most part. One of them says that they prefer to avoid interaction with others saying that “most of the interaction is abusive”. For others playing alone is simply a personal preference and one of their characteristical features. However, the responses indicate that social interaction is a key reason for playing World of Warcraft. While it would appear to be possible to completely avoid social engagement while playing, the responses clearly show that the players prefer to engage in social interaction and communicate with each other.
Whether the language of communication is English or some other language is not completely evident, though. The realms that the respondents play on are English-speaking, but as explained earlier, it is theoretically possible for a player to only interact with people speaking the same language as they are without having to use much English for communication.

5.3.3. Does success in World of Warcraft necessitate good skills in English?

The last section evaluated the communicational aspects of World of Warcraft in order to determine if World of Warcraft encourages the players to interact and communicate with each other. This section continues to evaluate World of Warcraft as a platform for language learning. As explained in the theoretical framework, natural motivation encourages learning, thus making it important to examine whether the game offers the players incentive to improve their English or if it allows them to reach success even with a little command of English. However, success in World of Warcraft can be measured in a variety of different ways, and it is safe to assume that every player has a subjective opinion on what they consider as success. For a newer player, being successful might mean reaching the maximum level on a character. For a player focused on the player-versus-player content it might mean reaching a certain matchmaking rating (more commonly known as MMR) that distinguishes players by how well they fare in rated arenas and battleground. For players focused on the end-game player-versus-player content, the measure for success can be considered to be progressing through raid content and obtaining high rated items.

There is still plenty of room for variation in what people consider as success even among the players focused on the same type of content. Also, defining what is meant by knowing English ‘well’ is a rather ambiguous task. The respondents say that one needs to be able to communicate clearly and effectively and work in close cooperation with other players in order to complete the game’s most difficult challenges such as vanquishing end-game raid bosses that also require rather extensive knowledge on the various different and often complex concepts in the game. In turn, completing these challenges can also be quite safely considered as ‘success’ in World of Warcraft. Thus, a conclusion may be drawn that knowing English ‘well’ involves being able to quickly convey and understand messages in English while also commanding a rather extensive knowledge of complex concepts explained in English. The following graph provides information on how important skills in English are deemed by the respondents in terms of making progress and being successful in the game:
According to the graph, 14 percent of the respondents think that the player has to know English well in order to both make progress and be successful. Making progress in the game means being able to complete quests and move about in the world, thus gradually advancing in the game. 51 percent of the respondents believe that the player is able to progress in the game with little command of English, but in order to be successful it is necessary to know English well. Lastly, 35 percent claim that a player is able to make progress and be successful in the game even without knowing English well. In hindsight, it would have been beneficial to ask the respondents how they define success in World of Warcraft and reflect the information in the graph above to the players’ perceptions. While there are several factors that may affect the players’ opinions and make these particular results rather ambiguous, they still act as an indication that World of Warcraft offers at least some incentive for the players to improve their English skills either consciously or unconsciously. However, whether the player is required to have a good command of English greatly depends on their personal objectives in the game. While it would appear that a player needs to have a good command of both spoken and written English in order to complete the end-game challenges, the respondents’ opinions also indicate that it is possible to advance in the game without much knowledge in English. The respondents mention on a few occasions that the in-built quest helper, for example, enables the players to complete quests by following visual clues without having to pay much heed to the quest descriptions. However, this might also make the learning curve easier and act as a gateway to gradually improving one’s English skills.
6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how World of Warcraft facilitates learning English and to evaluate the language learning experiences that the players have had while playing the game. ‘Evaluating’ here means both discussing the different kinds of experiences and learning outcomes the players have had and assessing the quality of language they have learned from World of Warcraft. One of the objectives was also to gain new information and evidence of the advantages and disadvantages of learning English in an online video game. This section will discuss these aspects by examining the results discovered in the analysis section and reflecting them to the theoretical framework of language learning in video games established before.

First of all, the players do not play the game with learning primarily in their mind. As stated by Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012, p. 114), people engage in pastime activities such as video gaming without having the intention to learn. Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012) also explain that World of Warcraft is not designed as a learning game, but the game rather creates authentic situations for the use of English language (p. 117). Thus, as suggested by the survey results, learning English is a byproduct of playing World of Warcraft for entertainment. According to the respondents, the motivation to play World of Warcraft stems from its immersion, captivating lore and the sense of accomplishment it provides. It also functions as a platform for players to socialise with other players and make new friends. The social aspect of World of Warcraft is an oft-mentioned reason for the respondents to stay in the game. Another recurring reason to play is escapism. Being able to create a virtual identity and use it as a way to forget real life problems for a while is mentioned often in the results. Gee (2007) also draws attention to the virtual identities and their effect on learning, saying that engaging in a learning activity using a virtual identity lowers the consequences for the student’s real-life persona (p. 59). In the case of World of Warcraft, functioning behind a virtual identity allows the player to behave differently than in real life. This in turn allows the player to communicate and act more freely without having to be afraid of mistakes. Also, critique from peers is not aimed directly at the player, but rather their virtual identity.

While learning English by playing video games appears to be more effective in some ways than learning in a classroom setting, acquiring language only through computer-assisted tools such as video games cannot and should not completely replace formal face-to-face teaching as claimed by various authors such as Hampel (2006) and Furstenberg (1997). The responses also state that playing World of Warcraft is a good starting point for learning English, but should not be the primary source
for learning. There is also a consensus among the teachers interviewed by Timmis (2002) that students should command a certain standard of basic English grammar and spelling that conforms to native-speaker norms before attempting to learn other forms of English. This claim is supported by the findings in the survey results. The respondents say that the language of the game itself is American English that functions as one proper example of correct English for the players. However, on the European realms, the native English speakers mostly speak British English, already creating a contradiction between the two dominant dialects. Added to the mix are the players speaking English as their second language whose proficiency in English varies, creating a conflict for the learner as they face a myriad of different Englishes. This means that there might not be a clear model for speaking English present, causing difficulties in making distinction between different dialects and between proper and improper English. Thus, it would be important to first learn a certain standard of English that the learner could then use as a basis for learning English from informal language input sources.

There are still a few things that formal education could learn from video games according to the findings in this study. A key element is motivation. Gee (2004, p. 8) claims that many video games succeed in creating genuine motivation to learn for the students, a feat that schools often fail to achieve. These claims are supported by the survey results. Some respondents say that they have had problems with learning in school, but that playing World of Warcraft has helped them a lot especially with the motivation to learn. A few respondents say that they had difficulties with concentrating on English lesson, but that playing World of Warcraft was able to keep their interest better. Video games are played voluntarily, which according to Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012, p. 117) is a great prerequisite for motivation, and they provide a sense of accomplishment while presenting the player with a lowered risk of failure as explained by Gee (2007, p. 59). However, it should be noted that whether or not someone finds video games interesting and motivating is rather subjective. When asked to compare video games and other media such as literature in terms of language learning, the respondents expressed quite unanimously that personal preferences have a great influence on what form of learning one considers to be interesting or the most effective. Thus, the findings in this thesis are not automatically applicable for every learner, but rather offer guidelines how to possibly enhance English-learning. Gee (2004) also found that students who have difficulties with learning in school do not necessarily face such difficulties when it comes to learning even complex concepts and systems in video games (p. 6). While some respondents directly claim that World of Warcraft has taught them more English than school education, and a few even claiming that they have learned all their English from playing World of Warcraft, most of the respondents take a more careful approach in their
answers. Rather, they say that World of Warcraft has been a place where they have been able to put their English skills learned in school to a use.

One major difference between formal English education and playing video games appears to be that video games such as World of Warcraft are able to create authentic language-using situations that are something that schools have difficulties to reproduce. As discussed by Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012, p. 117), World of Warcraft simulates living in a country where English is spoken as a second language, thus creating authentic situations to hear and use English. For many respondents, World of Warcraft has been a place where they have been able to naturally converse in English and maintain their language skills. However, the results indicate that members of a same nationality often form their own sub-communities such as guilds that allow players to converse in their native tongue instead of having to use English. Also, according to the responses, the level of social engagement the player is involved in depends largely on personal preference. This means that it is possible to nearly completely avoid social interaction with other players in which case the player would not be presented with authentic language-using situations. According to the results, this kind of behaviour appears to be rare occurrence among the players. A vast majority of the respondents heard in this research say that they prefer to interact and communicate with other players rather than play alone, thus implying that most players are active and willing to participate in social interaction even if the game does not necessarily force them to. The respondents also say that communication and cooperation with other players is absolutely necessary in higher level of play such as in end-game raid or PvP content. If there is an incentive for the player to reach higher goals in the game, it means that there is also an incentive for them to engage in social collaboration with other players. The respondents are fairly strict about the notion that without close communication it is impossible to complete the more difficult challenges in the game.

However, the results indicate that it is possible for a player to advance in the game without knowing much English at least to a certain extent. The game provides a multitude of visual clues that combined with trial and error allow the player to complete quests and progress their character without reading, listening or using much English. Despite this, Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012) say that the participants in a second-language learning environment such as World of Warcraft are highly motivated to “understand the communication between co-players and the rules and commands that are inherent parts of the game itself” (pp.116-117). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that a player would not choose to deliberately ignore the language input given by the game, but rather be motivated to understand communication between players and the different concepts and events in the game. A majority of the
respondents think that in order to be successful in the game, as in completing more difficult end-game challenges, the player needs to have a rather good command of English language, though.

The visual clues can also be considered as a positive factor that can help a player to gradually improve their English skills even if their prior knowledge of English is very limited as mentioned in the responses. Saarenkunnas also notes in her study (2006) that the boy called Sakari had been playing video games proficiently in English from a quite young age, reinforcing the notion that playing video games can be an effective way for children and beginners to learn English. A few of the respondents also say that World of Warcraft and video games altogether have acted as a preparation for formal language education. With the aid of the visual and auditory clues and the actions in the game the players are able to find meanings for new words and understand complex English concepts within the game, even if they are on the border of the players’ lingual proficiency (Sylvén & Sundqvist 2012, p. 117). This kind of learning where learning is embedded in the activity and supported by context is what Lave and Wenger (1991) call ‘situated learning’, a concept later extended to the domain of video games by Gee (2004). In the case of World of Warcraft, the language is constantly worked by the player. The player constantly sees and hears the context of the language in front of them while committing actions supported by the language. For example, a quest description might have various words previously unknown for the player, but visual and auditory hints combined with actions in the game allow the player to make meanings for these words.

Situated learning in World of Warcraft seems to translate most notably into learning vocabulary. The survey results suggest that playing World of Warcraft is an exceptional way to learn complex vocabulary. The use of rich and diverse English language is one of the reasons why the players think that World of Warcraft is an immersive fantasy world. Therefore, the game puts a certain emphasis in language instead of revolving around action like some simpler games. This notion is reinforced in the responses that specifically name perceivably difficult words or otherwise complex language that World of Warcraft has taught them. However, since the game’s setting is based on medieval fantasy, some of the words are archaic and have no use in modern day life as mentioned by some of the respondents. Also, having learned internet and game-related slang recurs in the responses, and some respondents question the usefulness of this kind of vocabulary in the real life. While some respondents claim that they have mainly learned slang and abbreviations specific to video games, many others say that they have learned a great deal of new vocabulary through playing World of Warcraft. It is clear that all language learned in World of Warcraft does not hold much value in real life situations, but according to the survey results, most of the respondents think that the language skills obtained in World of Warcraft have been helpful in other areas of life, too.
The language in the game itself is not the only source for learning English in World of Warcraft. Some respondents claim that the players tend to focus more on the language produced by other players. While vocabulary might be mostly obtained from the game itself, other aspects of language such as grammar appear to be influence more by the language input from fellow players. Collaborative learning discussed by Hampel (2006) and Sylvén and Sundqvist (2012), for example, is one of the key theories linked to learning in video games. By being a MMORPG, World of Warcraft drives its players to collaborate and communicate with each other. Some respondents say that teamwork and social interaction are the main principles that the whole game are based on. The players also receive models for speaking English from their peers. Kramsch and Thorne (2002) say that using and learning a language over global networks such as video games can provide various benefits that cannot be implemented as effectively in a classroom setting. Benefits like this include increased peer-to-peer interaction, access to expert speakers that provide an authentic model for speaking the language and the development of online discourse communities (p. 86). For example, a few respondents say that being able to naturally converse with native English speakers has helped them improve their English.

While some respondents firmly believe that World of Warcraft is made for socialising and collaborative play, some note that many of the previously social processes such as forming a dungeon group have been automated, making the players less inclined to be social or work in collaboration than in the previous states of the game. Furthermore, a respondent also says that social interaction among a group of random people tends to be abusive. Another respondent says that they choose to avoid social interaction because of abusive behavior from other players. Toxic language is also a recurring theme in the responses. Swearing is considered as toxic language, but it also includes bad-mouthing and insulting. While using a virtual identity lowers the real-life consequences of trying and failing as explained by Gee (2004), it also lowers the consequences of bad behaviour. The players are able to unload their aggression and frustration upon other people. Therefore, the players might not always see each other as human beings, but rather only as anonymous, virtual characters. The respondents also say that the players outside organised play tend to have short tempers, making collaboration difficult and often unfruitful. Thus, it can be questioned if World of Warcraft is an encouraging platform to interact with other players after all. As indicated in the results, there is a danger of being exposed to bad language and behaviour in the gaming community especially for the younger players who tend to be rather impressionable to negative influences from their peers. This is mentioned by a few respondents, who ponder if the influence from older players is good for the younger.
The respondents also mention that being surrounded by non-native English speakers in an English speaking environment might not be the best way to learn English correctly. This appears to be especially true in the case of grammar. While some of the respondents have had the chance to communicate and interact extensively with native English speakers, and therefore learn proper forms of English, most of the players that one encounters speak English as their second language. A popular opinion in the responses is that World of Warcraft is a great way to enhance one’s vocabulary, but that grammar-wise the language the player hears and uses may even have detrimental effects for their language. According to the responses, the language that a player encounters is abundant with grammar and spelling errors. Also, there appears to be a tendency to use slang or simplified language in-game. In many cases a player might very well be able to produce correct English, but uses flawed English instead. An assumption could be made that grammatically correct English might be even frowned upon in internet communities, but this claim would require some more concrete evidence.

According to the results, the players are still generally concerned about grammatical correctness. As explained in the theoretical framework, the modern language learning paradigm values communicational competency above learning language that strictly conforms to native-speaker norms. However, the responses suggest that the players put much value on using proper grammar and spelling in English. Slightly contradictory, the responses are quite abundant with spelling and grammar mistakes. A respondent might say that the incorrect grammar used by other players is bad for a learner or that they feel that their English skills have improved a lot, but still make multiple spelling and grammar errors themselves. It would appear that the respondents reflect their learning on their previous language skills and knowledge instead of any certain standard. This means that they might feel that their English skills have greatly improved compared to their previous state, but compared to the standards of formal English education, their skills might have several deficiencies. Also, the conflict between the respondents’ attitudes towards language norms and the aims of formal language education can be explained by the fact that the paradigmatic shift in language teaching and learning is still an ongoing process while the respondents have most likely been influenced by English education that has conformed more to the views of the classical paradigm. This assumption is supported by the respondents that mention on several occasions that the English teaching in their school did not put much emphasis on oral language skills.

Also, the way that the results of this research are interpreted depends on what are considered to be the aims of learning English as a second language. The theoretical framework introduces the two paradigms of language learning and teaching, the classical and the modern (Parmenter & Byram 2012). If the goal is to learn proper and correct English that conforms to the classical language
teaching and learning paradigm, World of Warcraft might not be the best place for learning. The wide variety of different Englishes spoken in World of Warcraft may result in learning a mix of them that does not necessarily belong anywhere. The popular use of abbreviations and simplified language could be seen as an alarming phenomenon if it extends outside the context of video gaming and Internet to other domains of language use, too. However, Timmis (2002) asks why English that is used as an international language between different nationalities should conform to native-speaker norms. This thesis cannot provide a firm answer to this question. The responses hint that the players consider English that conforms to native-speaker norms as the ultimate goal of learning the language, even though it might not be realised in their language skills judged by their responses.

From the perspective of the modern paradigm, however, that emphasises communicational competence as the desirable result of language learning, playing World of Warcraft can be considered an exceptional way to practice writing, reading, comprehending and speaking English. In this case, the focus would not be a perfect grammatical competence in English, but rather a functional language proficiency that allows the learner to express themselves and manage with the language in everyday life. Thus, as suggested by Timmis (2002) and reinforced by the language learning framework established by the CEFR, the learners’ needs, goals and desires in language learning are rather subjective. This extends to the survey responses, too. The respondents are reflecting their learning on their previous skills and knowledge, making their experiences subjective. They are not taking the requirements or values of formal education into account. Thus, a respondent might credit World of Warcraft for a lot of their language learning even if the language in their answers is not proper from the perspective of formal teaching.
7. Conclusion

The results of this thesis indicate that World of Warcraft can be considered an effective way to learn English as a second language. It accomplishes this in several ways. First of all, World of Warcraft is an exceptional way for a learner to broaden their vocabulary in a motivating and entertaining way. The learning in World of Warcraft is situated as the linguistic elements in World of Warcraft are constantly supported by visual and auditory clues and the actions within the game. The language and the concepts of the game are rather complex, but the multimodal nature of the game combining visual and auditory clues with in-game actions allow the players even with limited English skills to understand what is transpiring in the game, thus making World of Warcraft a rather beginner-friendly way to learn English. However, the players are also exposed to foul and toxic language which decreases the game’s appeal as a language learning tool for young learners.

It appears that World of Warcraft sparks genuine motivation in the players. Since the players are motivated to play the game, they are also motivated to find meanings for new things they encounter in it, which in turn translates into learning. Even though the language in the game can be rather complex or belletristic at times and often on the borderline of a player’s linguistic proficiency, not knowing some words is not completely in the way of advancing in the game. Thus, a player is unlikely to become frustrated if they do not instantly understand something in the game as they are able to derive the meanings from the context provided by the game. However, due to the complexity of the language in the game the player is likely to pay attention to the language and put extra effort into making new meanings.

Alongside with sparking motivation for using and learning English and being an effective tool for learning new and complex vocabulary, World of Warcraft also facilitates improving one’s communicational language skills. Being a massively multiplayer online game, the game emphasises social interaction and collaboration between the players. Thus, it provides the players authentic situations to use and hear English language, which are something that classroom teaching has difficulties to reproduce. However, it depends on the player whether they choose to interact with other players or play alone. A general consensus among the players is that the game would be rather boring without other people to interact with, and in this way the game seems to indirectly promote communication between players. Also, it would appear that MMORPG players in general are eager to communicate and interact with each other, which means that they are likely to engage in the authentic language-using situations created within the game. However, while the respondents say that
they have had many positive social and communicational experiences with friends and guild mates, they also say that the everyday communication between random people tends to be non-existent or abusive. The respondents also say that for organised play close and effective communication is a must, but for unorganised and more casual play communication and social interaction is rather voluntary. Thus, the level of social engagement and the people a player interacts with greatly depend on the player’s personal actions and preferences.

From the perspective of formal language education, the results of this research thesis evoke mixed opinions. The modern language learning and teaching paradigm promotes acquiring functional communicational skills as the primary goal of second-language learning, and from that perspective it would appear that playing World of Warcraft provides many positive effects on learning English as a second language. These are creating genuine motivation for learning, providing authentic language-using situations and making learning English contextualised, for example. However, from the perspective of the classical paradigm that emphasises more traditional values in language learning such as purity and native-like accuracy of the language, the results can be seen as rather worrisome. While the general consensus in the survey responses is that World of Warcraft is an effective way to learn new vocabulary, the respondents also say that grammar and spelling-wise playing World of Warcraft is not a very good place to learn English. The players are exposed to various different forms of English spoken by players of different nationalities and with varying levels of English proficiency. Thus, while World of Warcraft provides opportunities to enhance one’s communicational language skills, the English used in communication between the players might not conform to any standards of English. Also, the players tend to use slang, abbreviations and otherwise simplified language that can be seen as a threat for the conservation of proper English in the Internet.

As mentioned by both the authors referred in this thesis and the players heard in the survey, the kind of informal learning that World of Warcraft facilitates should not and ultimately cannot act as a substitute for formal face-to-face teaching. It can be agreed that the language learners still need a certain standard of English that should be established in school to guide their learning. While this thesis questions the necessity of learning English that conforms to native-speaker norms especially if it is used mainly in an international context, the respondents heard in the survey feel that following the English grammar rules is important and that the variation in the English spoken in the game can be confusing. While formal language education is needed to establish the basics of the language, World of Warcraft appears to function as an effective and versatile supplement for classroom learning. The language and the concepts in the game are highly contextualised, making learning unconscious and an automatic byproduct of playing for entertainment. The player is surrounded by
real people with English as their common language, thus providing them authentic situations to hear and use English. This thesis also shows that playing video games in general has great prerequisites for creating genuine motivation. The motivation to play has in many cases, as showcased in the results, lead to motivation to learn English even if a person has had difficulties to find interest in learning in school.

However, a question for future research would be how can the motivation and authenticity created by a game such as World of Warcraft be reproduced in classroom teaching? Also, another question would be how can a video game be harnessed for the uses of formal language education? As explained in this thesis, World of Warcraft is not originally designed as a learning game and contains various elements that are either redundant or unbeneficial in terms of language learning. Also, the language learning outcomes examined in this thesis are in many cases a product of years of playing. Thus, it would appear to be quite problematic to ensure that using video games as a tool for language teaching would only provide desirable effects or any language learning results at all for the students especially in a rather short period of time. Furthermore, this thesis presents the language learning outcomes that playing World of Warcraft has produced on a rather general level. Conducting a long-term case study on students playing the game would yield more exact results on how learning occurs while playing and what kind of linguistic elements are transferred from the game to the learner.
References

“Activision Blizzard announces better-than-expected second quarter 2015 financial results”.  


Appendix: The survey questions

1. Your age?
2. How long have you been playing World of Warcraft?
3. Briefly explain why do you play World of Warcraft?
4. Are you mainly a…
   - a PvP player
   - a raider
   - a roleplayer
   - a leveler
   - a bit of everything
   - Other
5. How has playing World of Warcraft helped you learn English?
   Name a few things that you have learned from playing World of Warcraft (related to language).
6. What kind of vocabulary have you learned from playing World of Warcraft?
   Give some examples of words and types of words that you have learned from playing
7. Do you try to speak grammatically correct English while in-game?
8. Has playing World of Warcraft helped you improve your English grammar?
9. Is all language learned in World of Warcraft good for the learner?
   Name some problems that might come from learning English in WoW.
10. Does incorrect English spoken by other players bother you?
    e.g. grammar mistakes, typos, wrong vocabulary
11. Do you think playing is a more effective way to learn English than e.g. reading literature?
    Why? Why not? More than a yes or a no would be appreciated.
12. Do you think the player has to know English well to make progress and be successful in the game?
    e.g. questing, leveling a character, obtaining good gear, becoming a good PvP player...
13. Do you think World of Warcraft encourages players to communicate with each other?
    Why? Why not?
14. Do you prefer to play alone or interact with other players?
    Why?
15. Has the English you have learned in World of Warcraft been helpful to you in school, work, etc.?
16. Has speaking English in World of Warcraft encouraged you to use English in real-life, too? If so, in what ways and in what kind of situations?

17. Anything else that you have to say about learning English in World of Warcraft? e.g. what have you learned, how have you learned, actual learning experiences that you can remember...