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GAMER LSP AS CYBERTEXT

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The video game industry has become a fully evolved commercial sector, triggering a surge into professional, mostly online, competetive gaming. Thus, a completely new and innovative lexicon, comprising a language for specific purposes, has been brought forth in order to meet the demands of the (professional) practitioners (players).

The aim of this paper is to explore the scope and sophistication of the Internet-channeled communicative activity performed by modern gamers from the perspective of cybertext. The main focus will be put on characteristics of any textual matter categorized as cybertext, which I will try to present in more detail, and the bond they form with the professional gamer LSP. Subsequently, I will try to prove that the above mentioned LSP can, and should, be treated as cybertext.

Key words: cybertext, virtual reality, immersion, interface, language for specific purposes.

In the following paper I would like to comment on and, within particular areas of focus, try to emphasize certain features of languages for specific purposes used by professional gamers. I will also strive to present a correlation, stemming from the above mentioned features, between the gamer LSP – language for specific purposes and cybertext – the latter becoming an active tool allowing the perception of textuality.

In order to explore the aforementioned issue I will need to present the following components comprising it, as suggested by K. Prazjner (2009). Among them are:

1. the professional gamer LSP
2. virtual reality
3. immersion
4. interface
5. cybertext

With the formidable speed at which competitive gaming is currently being developed it is crucial to acknowledge the level of professionalism entering this field. A level of professionalism that is only obtainable through the aspect of the availability of human opponents, regardless of whether we discuss online gaming, or professional events allowing face to face encounters. It is through these people and their active contribution to the pro gamer scene – that we can observe a rise in the quality and sophistication unseen in previous years. Regardless of the name we use to the describe the phenomenon: competitive gaming, professional gaming, e-sport, or cybersport – it is clear that a group of professionals is meant – people who by all means at their disposal need to communicate and describe their environment in the most precise and time-efficient manner in order to win and as a result: earn. And as with any other sport – fractions of seconds may translate into life, or, virtual of course, death.

The potential earnings have opened many doors – Internet forums dedicated to particular computer and video games are erupting with tactics, game plans and character builds. The credibility invoked by virtual achievements is reforged into a proper vocational activity that includes creating messages and the ability to interpret the messages emerging from the community. In this sense it is possible to envelope the means of communication put to use by gamers as a language for specific purposes. Just to recap: according to Prof. S. Grucza (1994), a language for special or specific purposes can also be referred to as a technolect and can only be treated as an autonomic language. In turn, I would like to emphasize the fact that the gamer LSP is by default a technolect and while employing the idiolects of particular users, or language bearers, it is a genuine language in a professional and challenging operational environment.

A decisive factor among those determining the requirements behind the creation of a LSP is the level of engagement, or involvement, characteristic for an individual language user. In the case of computer and video games it is important to define the frame of the digital world presented to the user – delivered via means of what we call virtual reality and by the depth of immersion that can be achieved via a transparent interface.

An immediate manner in which virtual reality can be described is available by stating that it is a temporary and voluntary suspension of lack of belief, as suggested by K. Prajzner (2009). In order to be able to become lost in a world that does not exist one needs to dedicate a particular type of focus towards the object of interest. Victor Nell (1988), distinguishes the following kinds of focus from the perspective of immersion in text, which, as I will soon depict, is my main scope of interest:

– Concentration – used within the scope of texts/media considered 'difficult' to understand and digest;

- Engagement – the focus is largely consumed by the text/media, but the reader retains the understanding and separation between the fictional and the real world
- Delight – loosing all conscious bonds with the surrounding world; important note – the reader/player can still emerge from the VR world with full comprehension of the immersion process;
- Addiction – escaping from reality, may be treated as a medical condition;

In my research – delight is the stage which contributes the most to the gaming culture that I am presenting. It is also important to note that the decision to accept the simulated environment stems not from the technological interface. The virtual worlds do not exist in some abstract technological entity used to depict them, nor in the mind of the user. Rather, in the relation between the inherent intellectual entities and the technological representations of these.

Setting the background for the research area of this paper will not be complete without understanding and describing the phenomenon of immersion. I would like to start by quoting Piotr Sitarski (2002), who has neatly bound immersion with the elements I have already mentioned, labeling it as possible only alongside of taking action in the virtual world via an interactive interface – the theory has been explained in more detail by K. Prajzner (2009). The process has been presented by using the so-called 'visit' formula – the user accepts the fact that the offered world is unreal, yet looses all (some?) conscious focus on the real world; this transition has also been compared to putting on a 'mask' – causing an identity change for the duration of the immersion, as explained in both cases by K. Prajzner (2009).

A factor that I will only touch upon in this speech are the characteristics of a potentially ideal interface – in this context of a computer, or video game. I have already set a premise which states that taking action is one of the key agents influencing the process of invoking immersion. Thus, creating and up keeping a transparent and inviting interface will guarantee that a created immersion effect will not be violated – at least from this source. This theory, by Michael Mateas (2004), is essential when considering the implications of a less inviting environment used for controlling the actions within a virtual world – a world limited by its own nature to begin with – in which any distraction will deter the user from wanting to devote his, or her, concentration towards any digital entity.

Espen Aarseth (1997), a researcher from Norway, in his work entitled *Cybertext. Perspective of Ergodic Literature* creates the underpinnings of a phenomenon known as cybertext by referring to it as a mechanism allowing the perception of textuality, not just a means of description. According to K. Prajzner (2009), the ergodic approach consists of ergo – meaning to work and hodos – a path; the user works out the meaning by performing activities in a practical and physical manner within already existing entities; a closed and chaotic system that undergoes

constant changes and fluctuations without an imperative of choosing a particular transformation path. However, coming back to cybertext: K. Prajzner argues, that the key idea is that every text is organized in a mechanical fashion and bears no imposed, physical structure – at the same time it requires (demands!) a 'reorganization' from the user, while maintaining an individual identity. The user, on the other hand, is a much more integral part of the acquisition process than in the case of for example: reading and/or watching a movie, with more focus required to traverse along the text – this means that a user operates both in her/his own mind, as well as externally, based on the proposed virtual world – especially in the case of computer and video game oriented texts. It is worth emphasizing that a typical user not working with a cybertext does not, or cannot, feel the excitement of tackling a problem in a practical manner – while within a cybertext context the user is given the "what if..." approach and can tinker with the VR world to an extent unavailable by other means – and what is extremely important here – at the same time risking rejection, should the tasks, or issues requiring solving prove to be to complicated. The human mind is transformed into a player, or gambler, exploring and discovering the cybertext, finding new paths via the topographical structure of the textual mechanism.

The definition of cybertext is incomplete without stating that it does not exist without feedback. It is its cornerstone – allowing the implication that without conscious input there is no cybertext, while the user's function is scaled down to an interpretative role only. The elicitation of feedback facilitates the employment of tools like: influencing the text, configuration and reconfiguration, exploring and the already mentioned: interpretative function.

Furthermore: when planning to tackle the problem of the correlation between the professional gamer LSP and cybertext one cannot underestimate the importance of a feature embedded deeply in the concept of cybertext: it allows for particular elements of a text to be circumvented without damaging its overall structure.

Having introduced all of the necessary elements comprising the complex bond between the professional gamer LSP and cybertext I would like to formulate it in a more transparent fashion, based on a number of actual online conversations, presented below, taken from various Internet community forums established for the 'moba' (multiplayer online battle arena) phenomenon: League of Legends. I have not altered the original spelling, but I did divide the threads into smaller segments for efficiency and transparency (labeled a-j), emphasis M.M.:

> a) "Ten **build** pozwala też troszkę bezpieczniej **tankować** pod **turretem**, i zapewnia efektyw-niejszy **push**";

> b) "Build świetnie się sprawdza na **bot lane** gdy farmę oddajemy naszemu **AD carry** (...) świetny sustain dzięki dużej wartości **CDR** i sporym **HP regen.**";

c) "Słabe **ganki** na 2-5 **lvlu** (jest szansa na udany **gank** mając **red buffa**) (…) świetne **ganki** od 6 lvla.";

d) "Rzadko jest banowany, nie jest jakimś **Over Power junglerem**, są lepsze **picki.**";

e) "Tak się uparłeś na to **CDreduction**, a uważasz, że **abiliti power** się nie przyda, tylko ja widzę niezgodność ?";

f) "Budujesz merce, **Q** nie chcesz podkręcić, ale z kolei z 3 strony opłaca się **spellvamp** z hextecha?";

g) "W ogóle na jaką mape jest to **build** ?";

h) "Jak widzisz **laning** ?";

i) "Ten **item** jest dobry tylko dla **AD carry**, o ile w przeciwnym **teamie** sa **stackerzy HP** – mundo etc. Jesli nawet maja **tanka** z duza iloscia **HP** – Malph, Shen etc. to na pewno maja oni kolo 100-150 **m.resa**, co za tym idzie nasze mardredy bijace **magic dmg** z 4% zadaja jakies... 2%? Przypominam ze nie budujemy voida wiec nasza smieszna(w **late game**) penetracja z butków i **masterek** jest za mała zeby ten **item** cos zdzialal. Wit's End o wiele lepszy,-bo tanszy, bo pasywka miazdzy w **early**, bo **m.res!";** j) "Start z doran ringiem i spokojnie sobie **farmie** w miedzy czasie podgryzajac z Q (...) po zdobyciu **6lvla R+ignite+q** i miec **fraga** i cofam do bazy. (...) Nie liczac dorana sa to moje **core itemki** ktore daja mi wszystko czego WW potrzebuje (...) z tym **buildem** jestesmy juz prawie nie do ubicia mamy swietne leczenie spory **dmg.**";

Although the examples above are just a fraction of what can be found while researching League of Legends, the archetypal LSP values are undeniable and striking even for non-professionals. It is justified, as Internet forums tend to present themselves as the most inviting tool for gaining insight into the conversations taking place online between professional gamers. By default, a forum provides a venue for questions and answers and may be monitored to keep the content appropriate – I would like to add at this point that the moderation aspect is somewhat neglected in the case of game related forums – however, due to excusable reasons. Represented by the amount of texts created each day, or more precisely – every single hour, being absolutely overwhelming and beyond reasonable control, creating an environment that invites the process of self-assessment, in which the actual users distinguish between valuable texts and the so-called spam. However, this characteristic does not render the means of communication less professional – it is rather the metaphorical backswing behind the alignment with the cybertext theory.

A deep level of immersion that one experiences while playing, or discussing computer, or video games requires an approach that will deliver efficient methods of text creation – texts, that in the broader perspective will allow gamers to compete and win – this, at least from the assimilatory perspective, cannot be achieved by having to plow through vaguely formulated texts. One of the main consequences of such an approach is an extremely elevated level of the employment of borrowings (from English into Polish – or for that matter – into any

other foreign language utilized by gamers) – the temptation to avoid a situation in which one has to "reinvent the wheel", figuratively speaking of course, by coining native equivalents of already existing English vocabulary seems to be the prevailing tendency. In any case – one has to acknowledge this as a process that is taking place and seems to be gaining momentum, leaving not much space for a change of tide.

I have already stressed the fact that cybertext does not guarantee in any way that every single user will be able to acquire the expected and promised content – the level of comprehension in this respect lies within the competence of the user. While professionals will tackle such complexity with ease and routine, layman, or newbies in Internet slang (or noobs – which is an even more colloquial term for new and unexperienced users), might treat such encounters as far beyond their intelligibility skills. The elimination process will result in two possibilities: either loosing interest due to the level of complication, or, which in my opinion is the more frequent scenario, an increased learning curve leading to overcoming any arising obstacles. The latter situation will stimulate future discussions, regardless of whether with the help of Internet forums, chats, voice chats, e-mails, or perhaps even face to face exchanges, and will produce the obligatory feedback that will become the fuel much needed by the professional gamer community.

Furthermore – professional gamers embrace the possibility of employing only certain portions of the cybertext they are presented with for their benefit – even more so because the overall structure of the text will not be damaged and may be used in a completely different fashion by other potential users. The cybertext will be quoted, questioned and changed beyond recognition – and yet its original form will still be available for further utilization. The quoted "what if..." approach is by no means optional – it is a necessity that facilitates making the content of a computer, or video game, last for months, or years, after its original release date. It turn, it is by no means a coincidence that the most gripping games attract the most active community – and as such create the basis for emergence of the most sophisticated languages for specific purposes.

To sum up – I have hopefully presented sustainable proof that the professional gamer LSP can be treated as cybertext – based on my research I believe that it fulfills the strict guidelines and fits within the acceptability frame for cybertext and I would want to treat it as such in the future.

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