

**World Of Warcraft: An Autoethnography Of An English Language Learner's
Foreign Language Acquisition Through Gaming**

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Abstract

Playing a digital video game, or gaming, has become a relevant topic in second and foreign language acquisition (SLA) because it represents an appealing way of acquiring knowledge and skills in relation to it. Different research methodologies have been used to investigate how language learners can learn a language through gaming, most of them carried out as qualitative research collecting data from focal groups through observation, field notes, surveys and interviews.

However, there are limited studies on SLA and gaming developed from a learner's introspective and retrospective point of view and with the employment of autoethnographic narrative as a data collection tool. Narratives are useful qualitative methods that help to reconstruct and reflect on experiences to critically comprehend the processes of learning and their impact on the student's educational process (Bolivar et al., 2001). This qualitative study employs a narrative autoethnography to describe my experience acquiring English as a foreign language through the video game World of Warcraft and how it helped me develop an array of language skills and motivation towards English and contributed to shape my identity while I played it for about ten years.

The study's results demonstrate how I improved my English through this video game from A2 to B2 in accordance with the CEFR. It also provides insights into our understanding of online gaming as a tool for mastering English because of the role of interaction and the fostering of motivation that it brings due to its competitive nature. Finally, it highlights the impact it may have into the formation of the identity in young learners.

Keywords: Autoethnography, Second Language Acquisition, Gaming, World of Warcraft.

Resumen

Jugar un videojuego digital, o *gaming*, se ha convertido en un tema relevante en la adquisición de una segunda lengua (SLA por sus siglas en inglés) y una lengua extranjera porque representa una forma atractiva de adquirir conocimientos y habilidades en relación con ella. Se han utilizado diferentes metodologías de investigación para investigar cómo los estudiantes de idiomas pueden aprender un idioma a través de juegos, la mayoría de ellas llevadas a cabo como investigación cualitativa que recopila datos de grupos focales a través de observación, notas de campo, encuestas y entrevistas.

Sin embargo, existen pocos estudios sobre SLA y juegos desarrollados desde el punto de vista introspectivo y retrospectivo del alumno y con el empleo de la narrativa autoetnográfica como herramienta de recopilación de datos. Estas narrativas son métodos cualitativos útiles que ayudan a reconstruir y reflexionar sobre experiencias para comprender críticamente los procesos de aprendizaje y su impacto en el proceso educativo del estudiante (Bolívar et al., 2001). Este estudio cualitativo emplea una autoetnografía narrativa para describir mi experiencia al adquirir inglés como lengua extranjera a través del videojuego World of Warcraft y cómo me ayudó a desarrollar una variedad de habilidades lingüísticas y motivación hacia el inglés, y contribuyó a moldear mi identidad mientras lo jugaba durante unos diez años.

Los resultados del estudio demuestran cómo mejoré mi nivel de inglés a través de este videojuego, pasando de A2 a B2 según el MCER. Además, aporta información sobre nuestra comprensión de los videojuegos en línea como herramienta para dominar el inglés debido al papel de interacción y fomento de la motivación que conlleva debido a su naturaleza competitiva. Por último, destaca el impacto que puede tener en la formación de la identidad en los jóvenes estudiantes.

Palabras clave: Autoetnografía, adquisición de segundas lenguas, identidad, motivación, *Gaming*, World of Warcraft.

Abstrait

Jouer à un jeu vidéo numérique, ou jeu, est devenu un sujet pertinent dans l'acquisition d'une langue seconde (SLA) et étrangère parce que il représente une manière attractive d'acquérir des connaissances et des compétences en rapport avec celle-ci. Différentes méthodologies de recherche ont été utilisées pour étudier la manière dont les apprenants en langues peuvent apprendre une langue vers les jeux vidéo, la plupart ont été réalisées sous la forme de recherche qualitative en collectant des données de groupes focaux vers l'observations, de notes de terrain, d'enquêtes et d'entretiens.

Cependant, il existe peu d'études sur le SLA et les jeux, développées du point de vue introspectif et rétrospectif de l'apprenant et avec l'utilisation du récit autoethnographique comme outil de collecte de données. Les récits sont des méthodes qualitatives utiles qui aident à reconstruire et à réfléchir sur les expériences afin de comprendre de manière critique les processus d'apprentissage et leur impact sur le processus éducatif de l'élève (Bolivar et al., 2001). Cette étude qualitative utilise une autoethnographie narrative pour décrire mon expérience d'acquisition de l'anglais comme langue étrangère à travers le jeu vidéo World of Warcraft et comment cela m'a aidé à développer un éventail de compétences linguistiques et de motivation envers l'anglais, et a contribué à façonner mon identité pendant que j'y jouais pour une dizaine d'années.

Les résultats de l'étude démontrent comment j'ai amélioré mon anglais grâce à ce jeu vidéo, de A2 à B2 conformément au CECR. Ils apportent également un éclairage sur notre compréhension du jeu en ligne comme outil de maîtrise de l'anglais en raison du rôle de l'interaction et de la motivation qu'il apporte en raison de sa nature compétitive. Enfin, ils soulignent l'impact qu'il peut avoir sur la formation de l'identité des jeunes apprenants.

Mots-clés : Autoethnographie, acquisition d'une langue seconde, identité, interactionnel, motivation, *Gaming*, World of Warcraft.

1. Introduction

1.1. Video games in learning foreign languages

In the last decades, video games have caught the attention of researchers for the purpose of using them whether for educational or corporate training ends (Andersen, 2019). Even though at the beginning it was for remarking their negative effects, the narrative has been switching to research in their positive properties with learning in general (Pasfield & Neofitou, 2014).

This shift happened because it has transformed over the last 60 years from being a military simulation tool (Metuarau, 2017) and has become a multi-billion dollar industry over the past thirty to forty years (Wolf, 2015 in Metuarau, 2017). Then, the evolution of video games has been marked by technological advances that have allowed not only improvements in graphics but also adding the possibility of complex narratives, experiences and greater social interactivity, giving birth to an immense array of video games genres.

In order to understand the impact of video games in SLA, research by itself has been eventually led to the investigation of a particular genre of video games: massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG), a genre played through the internet that focuses on interacting with other persons with the purpose of attaining common goals. This research has found that video games of this type in general lend themselves well to the cognitive and sociocultural theories of SLA because this type of games can be seen as an engaging, enjoyable and motivating application of the principles and factors of SLA that result beneficial with that end in adulthood (Andersen, 2019). In this sense, World of Warcraft, or WoW for short, is introduced to the topic because it has been one of the most popular and largest of these types of games (Snow, 2008), reporting over 8 million monthly active players (Ferjan, 2022) and this enormous number of players make it one of the most popular platforms for MMORPG-based SLA studies (Andersen, 2019).

1.2. Statement of the problem

Researchers have shown significant interest in how language learning via video games benefits individuals in acquiring communication skills and knowledge and therefore they have conducted various studies exploring how people can develop those mentioned skills through interactions with video games and others.

This research in the video games field has demonstrated that, particularly, its benefits and contributions to SLA are of weight. However, most of these investigations have been made from a quantitative point of view and analyzing third parties only on very narrow spans of time of a few months at most, and the research conducted during wider spans of time has been with other aims. For example, Nardi (2010) performed a three-years research to describe group or identity dynamics in the World of Warcraft video game. It was indeed a long-lasting project circumscribed in the ethnography field and that is because, if collecting data is already demanding, monitoring the control groups is far more time-consuming and involves higher costs.

However, longitudinal research has not yet been performed using video games in the SLA field and it is important to explore and understand the long-lasting implications of them in the educational context of Second Language Acquisition because this process, by itself and in academic contexts, is one that is not achieved in a matter of months but rather lasts many years. Also, current research regarding SLA in video games has been primarily focused on educational games, with tutorial games as the dominant genre (Hanghoj et al. 2022) looking for their application in classroom contexts, and those developed in informal contexts focused on vocabulary, lexical and grammatical development.

Evidently, there is a gap in SLA research in relation to studies that comprehend spans of time far wider than a couple of months; also, there is lack of research in the field of video games employing reflective or introspective qualitative approaches such as autoethnographies because

studying third-parties has shown to be the priority. It is important to notice these two gaps because they complement each other and can be used to conduct qualitative research that comprehends long periods, or at least can be done in retrospective. In particular, some ways of applying this are through ethnographic narratives, which offer the possibility of making retrospective research, which is not circumscribed in longitudinal research, but it helps to encompass much more time than traditional quantitative research made by observation.

Furthermore, if retrospective studies that comprehend wide spans of time are not common between the fields of video games and SLA, it is less likely to find studies that have employed retrospective approaches using the World of Warcraft video game, which is, again, one of the best platforms to study Second Language Acquisition (Andersen, 2019). This can be addressed through autoethnography as a research method.

By providing this, academic research can be introduced to a new horizon of possibilities that will finally present one of the answers surrounding the question of the substantial number of students that are learning FL without formal instruction in it. Also, by taking advantage of this, the academia can be able to understand and explore another type of learning strategies that are captivating for the language students of the XXI century. Not to mention that it will outstand the status of ethnographic research and its reliance in the educational research community.

There is also a personal interest in unveiling and understanding it in a systematic manner, and taking into account the tuition and theories learned throughout the five years that have lasted the bachelor's degree, the process of learning the English language throughout the video games. This need will be addressed by the employment of a narrative autoethnography that reconstructs the English development I experienced from 2013 to present and brings to light the progress on cognitive, interactional, motivational and identitarian aspects of that process with the use of multiple resources such as screenshots, tales and other documents that help to triangulate the evolution.

This research project will use autoethnography as a way to explore the cognitive and interactional developments and the involvement of motivation in the SLA process of the researcher-participant. Autoethnography is suitable to explain how the researcher as a foreign languages learner was able to acquire English as such while playing the video game World of Warcraft throughout ten years while simultaneously being formally instructed in school. As a senior Foreign Languages student, it is important to use that method in order to reflect on the cognitive, interactional, motivational and identity aspects that I developed through the video game because the use of narratives gives the subject the level of agency and voice that the research requires (Pavlenko, 2007). In the educational field, this type of inquiry is important because it helps to comprehend the subjectivities that are present in the process of building knowledge, in this case, the acquisition of English as foreign language, yet it has not been widely explored because of the prioritizing of quantifiable methodologies.

In this sense, this autoethnographic research aims to report on the English learning process of a 25 years-old male senior student in a Bachelor's degree in foreign language education at Universidad del Valle who has been playing the game World of Warcraft for over 11 years: *me*. With the purpose of reflecting and understanding the development of language acquisition that have had place in my adolescence and early adulthood just until the entry to the Bachelor's degree. This, because as soon as I entered the university I started to have formal instruction in English and also stopped playing WoW for a while. The study will focus on the experience of acquiring English as a foreign language, particularly in the cognitive and interactional fields, motivation towards learning, and the formation of my identity and cultural capital, all of this while being guided by the following research questions.

1.3. Research questions

1.3.1. Main research question

- To what extent did I acquire English by playing the video game World of Warcraft?

1.3.2. Specific research questions

- What WoW features benefited my cognitive linguistic skills?
- What WoW features benefited my interactional linguistic skills?
- How playing WoW impacted on my motivation towards learning English?
- How did WoW impact my L2 identity and cultural capital?

1.4. Selected literature

To answer the overarching question, the literature review process will highlight the WoW characteristics that contribute to L2 acquisition in relation to language skills and its impact on FL learner's motivation; it will also establish the importance of ethnographies in the educational contexts; and finally, it will describe some research gaps.

For the purpose of researching L2 possibilities in World of Warcraft, the most representative studies will be taken into account since 2011 that matched better with the aim of the project. This piece of work focused on research made since the last decade because even though the game has been live since 2004, the SLA approach focused on interaction and communication that wants to be taken into account in this monograph was introduced in the second semester of 2011, with a feature (Cross-realm Grouping) that allowed interconnected play between realms (can be understood also as *regions*). Additionally, it is influenced by the fact that I did not start to play until 2012; therefore, I only benefited after the accessibility to people from other regions was enabled. The related research was then filtered to only look for open databases that had a free copy of the documentation, and later I only took into account literature that had a wide amount of theoretical foundation, most of them Master's degrees dissertations, articles and monographs.

With the purpose of presenting the importance of autoethnographies as data collection and analysis method, research will not be narrowed to a certain span of time but would include only those applied in the field of education.

Once the literature has been reviewed and the theoretical framework established, the research will be the methodology of analysis using categories of analysis to evaluate the process of the development of the target language.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Second Language Acquisition

The discipline that has attempted to explain how an additional language is acquired is Second Language Acquisition, referring to those different to people's mother tongue (Andersen, 2019). It is important to note that, even though the name seems to be self-explanatory and in relation to a second language, it is used to refer to the learning of third, fourth, or subsequent languages (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

This discipline started with only linguistic considerations, but nowadays, it unites it to psychological and sociocultural perspectives (Andersen, 2019) while trying to hypothesize the role of internal and external factors in the learning process (Spada & Lightbown, 2019). For linguistics, it has been supported by the theories of Chomsky's (1968) Universal Grammar, that declared that children had an innate language faculty called language acquisition device (LAD). However, its implication into L2 is controversial and has been widely challenged because of the existence of the critical period (Spada & Lightbown, 2019).

The present study takes into consideration Spada and Lightbown's (2019) work of classification for the L2 learning theories, in which they propose three different major categories to encompass the most prominent ones. In this sense, they define the major categories as linguistic, psychological and sociocultural. The following paragraphs will summarize each major author and perspective in each category.

First of all, on the linguistics perspective, Krashen (1982) is of impact due to being one of the first to make a distinction between learning and acquiring, pointing out that the acquisition is a subconscious process in which we learned our first language in unaware conditions and also the best way to learn our second. Not through learning but through acquisition we will reach fluency and dominion of language that native and proficient L2 speakers have (Krashen, 1989). This differentiation has been challenged arguing that consciousness and unconsciousness is

not a topic that has been completely defined by psychology (McLaughlin, 1990). Other authors claim that instruction is imperative for SLA to occur (Norris & Ortega, 2000), and others criticize the hypothesis due to their vague terminological definitions and wide possibilities of interpretation (Zafar, 2009). However, Krashen's hypothesis echoes the distinction made in psychology between implicit knowledge and explicit knowledge, and generative and non-generative researchers' implicit and explicit L2 knowledge (Whong et al., 2013). Luckily, the differentiation between acquiring and learning is not of greater importance in the present study.

On the side of psychological perspectives is found Behaviorism, which argues that all learning occurs through a process of imitation, practice, reinforcement and habit formation (Spada & Lightbown, 2019). Also, the same authors mention that cognitive psychology defies the paradigm of the linguistics perspectives because they hypothesize that SLA is achieved with the learner's attention and effort (p. 114). In this sense, knowledge is first acquired through intentional learning and through practice it becomes automatic (DeKeyser, 2003, in Spada & Lightbown, 2019).

Among those psychological perspectives, connectionism assumes an associative account of learning (Ellis and Schmidt, 1997, in Spada & Lightbown, 2019). One of its main hypothesis is that the brain creates networks which connect words or phrases to others, therefore developing a bond of strong associations between word that are frequently encountered together, and in that sense "language is represented in the mind as a very large number of linguistic units with varying degrees of likelihood of co-occurrence" (Spada & Lightbown, 2019, p. 116).

One of the most notable psychological perspectives is the interactionist one, because the role of interaction has been important in order to understand the processes behind the Acquisition of a Second Language as it is assumed that interaction represents a great deal in the endeavor of language learning (Spada & Lightbown, 2019). However, as it remarks the importance of others in one's SLA development, it can be somewhat linked to the sociocultural

perspectives as they mention “there is an intimate relationship between culture and mind, and that all learning is first social then individual” (p. 117).

Finally, the last perspective joints with the sociocultural one, where Vygotsky developed his Sociocultural Theory (1978) and conceives that knowledge is social in nature, and is constructed through a process of collaboration, interaction, and communication among learners in social settings (Nassaji & Swain, 2000). In this theorizing, Vygotsky claims that one must take into account that there are some aspects that the learner himself is capable to learn by his own experience, but also those capabilities can be potential by the support of L2 experts throughout the learner’s learning process, and that in an intentional or unintentional way they shape the learner’s interactional skills through exposure in the target language.

The development of the current study as an autoethnography, allowed the prioritization of having a sociocultural approach, however it was an outlook permeated by the cognitive and interactional perspectives of psychology. The following section will then group the Spada and Lightbown’s (2019) major theories of linguistic and psychological perspectives into a major category named cognitive; the sociocultural category into interactional, furthermore it highlights the role of motivation and formation of identity involved in SLA.

2.2. SLA theories in WoW

2.2.1. Cognitive understandings

Cognitive analysis was one of the first approaches researchers took into the understanding of Second Language Acquisition in the psychological perspective, and even though there has been research exploring other perspectives later, it remains important to the discussion. The cognitive perspectives analyze the mental processes involved in the ways the mind processes input and generates output, how it represents and accesses stored knowledge, and how functions such as memory and attention affect the learning process (Ortega, 2013 in Andersen, 2019).

Gaming in general, and particularly MMORPGs, contributes to this understanding because research has noticed that this type of games offers rich semiotic narrative environments that include game-generated texts in quests, combat texts, descriptions of in-game abilities, as well as player-to-player and player-to-environment interactions that involve continuous critical thinking and problem-solving skills during game time (Steinkuehler, 2004, Dickey, 2007, Nardi, 2010, Chik, 2011, Rama et al., 2012, Coxhead and Bytheway, 2015 in Kinga, 2016).

This continuous level of exposure to vocabulary is primordial to SLA according to Schmidt's Noticing hypothesis (1990). In this sense, the word exposure frequency and images related to concepts through questing in-game can facilitate incidental vocabulary acquisition (Kinga, 2016), and most of the situational environments of World of Warcraft can resemble real life situations such as trades, politics, economy, technology, etc. (Andersen, 2019). This offers a unique opportunity for vocabulary acquisition through an engaging setting that can translate to real life environments and are of use on a daily basis, this is also beneficial for one of the most important principles: Critical learning; as players are undoubtedly extremely active and critical rather than passive learners while performing the activities online (Stenberg, 2011).

2.2.2. The importance of Interaction

The most important characteristic of MMORPGs for this study is the fact that the player must get involved in social interaction within the game in order to progress and enhance their character, this, as the video game's architecture is made to do so. This feature allows players to create relationships as intense as those formed between friends or partners met outside the game, and often involve elements of collaboration and trust between players (Yee, 2006).

This setting is particularly beneficial for SLA as it provides learners with opportunities for target language use, socialization and social interaction, instruction and assistance by peers, which usually are advanced speakers, either native or very proficient, leading to fruitful

interactions that can potentially improve the accuracy, fluency, and lexical complexity of players with an intermediate-level of language; all of this because those L1 speakers can provide a high amount of motivation and may provide instant feedback, can help learners to identify their learning goals and can reduce their learning anxiety (Zariski, 2014). That is leaving aside the fact that it offers access to communities of practice, and the establishment of social relationships (Thorne et al., 2009), which is what is claimed to be the main motivator to enhance foreign language learning due to the engaging forms of interaction in which the player is involved (Jagorinec, 2021).

2.2.3. Role of Motivation in SLA

Again, Krashen firstly took part in this topic due to the development of his Affective filter hypothesis (1981). He remarked that, for second language acquisition to occur, a variety of affective variables must be taken into account: Self-confidence, anxiety and motivation (Krashen, 1981). This last one is defined as the desire to learn (Nurhidayah, 2020), and it provides the necessary tools to succeed at SLA in the long run. However, this motivation is not static, it changes depending on the context, changes over time (Gass & Selinker, 2008) and can be born out of many reasons. That is why it can be divided, in its basic understanding, into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation; the first one attends to internal factors and the second to external rewards that are usually of social nature.

In relation to extrinsic motivation and MMORPGs is brought to the conversation the term Community of Practice, which can be also understood as sense of belonging and recalls part of the sociocultural theory we developed before, because it describes a desire to be part of a community with three main characteristics according to Wenger (2004): its members share a common level of knowledge about a topic, interact in activities and, throughout the time, shape their behavior, way of speaking, etc. Belonging to a community of this type creates a level of

engagement in the participants in which they are able to create meaningful learning experiences that eventually, if exposed to L2, will lead to higher levels of proficiency in it.

In the same sense, this sense of community can lead us to engage in activities that, in some form or another, are their own reward, for instance by being enjoyable, giving us pride or improving our sense of self, or strengthening our social connections (McGonigal, 2012, Dewaele, 2013 in Andersen, 2019). When this happens, those social characteristics can turn extrinsic motivation into intrinsic because certain circumstances are sufficiently self-determined and internalized by the learner (Dörnyei, 2005).

This intrinsic motivation is the most important factor in the L2 learning process we will take into consideration because it is remarked as more successful than motivation derived from external factors (Ortega, 2013). However, at this point it is important to highlight that while some scholars argue that without motivation learning would not take place (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2011), some others argue that it is important as a psychological construct within SLA, but remark the need of a perspective taken from a sociological framework that connects learner's desire to learn a language with their changing identity and its relationship with power (Norton, 2013), which will be developed later.

Bringing it into World of Warcraft, what makes playing it motivating is that it is completely voluntary, and it is up to the learner to define how much effort they will invest in order to belong to this world. In this sense, the appropriateness level of the content, the exposure to authentic material represent and the introduction of cooperation in order to make progress is translated into a desire in the player to enhance their motivation on the game (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2011) and that leads to understanding the new language .

The importance of intrinsic motivation in World of Warcraft is notable because it offers the sense of accomplishment in almost all of its activities, as they all bring rewards that make the player strengthen their avatar's gear and abilities (Dickey, 2007, Walker, 2008, Nardi, 2010 in Kinga, 2016). In this sense MMORPGs can, without effort, provide the type of motivation and

communicative environment that language teachers are continually trying to foster in language classrooms (Zariski, 2014), which is a good setting for autonomous learners.

2.3. Identity

Identity is conceived by Norton (2013) as the way a person understands their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space. To Norton, quoting Zuengler and Miller (2006) the topic of identity is of great importance to the point of establishing it as a research area itself. And much of this work has been based on Bourdieu's (1991) constructs (p.24).

To her, categories such as race, gender, class and sexual orientation, that are individual traits are integrated into a much larger social world from which arise innumerable relations of power. Norton's research on the topic helps to unveil the impact of those relations in multiple ways and by extension the process of language learning and teaching. That is the reason she affirms that while language learners perform actions in the target language they engage in identity construction and negotiation because they reorganize a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world.

For example, Norton developed the concept of *investment* in language learning as an existing relationship between learners' desire to practice and learn the target language in which the latest will bring them a "wider range of symbolic resources (language, education, friendship) and material resources (capital goods, real estate, money)" (Norton, 2013, p.6). By extension, the learner incurs in an idealized view of the target-language speaking community (*imagined communities*), which make reference to "groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of the imagination" (Norton, 2013, p.8). In other words, communities "in near or distant future and which we imagine we would be affiliated with one day" (Nguyen, 2020, p. 120). In that sense learners develop an imagined identity, that

is “a desired sense of self the learners project for themselves” (Norton, 2001, in Wu, 2017, p.103).

In the language learning context, those imaginary and desired communities are often created by the hopes of economic benefits associated with the English language learning (Kramsch, 2013).

One important aspect of identity development is critical literacy. A term that needs to be duly defined because on one hand literacy is a set of neutral, decontextualized skills that can be applied in any situation (Perry, 2012), but joined with the word *critical* it represents an ability that gives the learners the capability to analyze, interpret and reflect upon the input they receive (Hanghoj et al., 2022). That input could generate opinions about gender roles, social criticism, among others, that are crucial for the formation of identity.

Sanford and Madill (2007) also acknowledged the impact of video games as digital media and defined them as a powerful cultural force that needs to be critically studied and addressed in order to make them beneficial for the players. The authors also claim that video games are a tool to disrupt many socio-political issues present in society, thus providing identity formation of quality. Online video games in particular offer an interactional feature that allows the development of relationships between known and unknown players and that after a short amount of time playing together could lead to the examination of representations of self and others (Apperley & Beavis, 2013).

Going specifically into World of Warcraft, it is equally good to note that research has found that players abandon their real-world identities to become the characters they want to be, offering them a second life (Quesada, 2014), one in which they can strive for an Ideal L2 Self (Dörnyei, 2005). This results to be one of the most engaging characteristics of the game, and while being individually impactful it also allows the creation of entire communities, in which the creation of codes of behavior, attitudes and ways of life that represent and identify them is something that happens (Castells, 2001). Consequently, World of Warcraft’s immensely

complex, information-rich, dynamic environment (Brown, 2006), is not only a place that conduces to SLA but also to the creation of group and personal identities. Even, the identity of their characters remains an important aspect of facilitating motivation in MMORPGs (Zhao & Lai, 2008).

These types of new identities have become the focus of many ethnographers who seek to explore the practices in which players are involved and get to describe and analyze them in relation to their social, cultural, and historical context (Nardi, 2010). This is the point that is reached by playing and immersing completely into the game just for the sake of enjoyment.

From another perspective, the Latin American population of World of Warcraft is one third of the English-speaking one and that has many implications, and throughout the ten years of playing the game I got to understand the importance of becoming an intercultural player, at the time I considered myself a mediator, but now I know that skill has a name: Intercultural competence. It is described as a range of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills that lead to effective and appropriate communication with people of other cultures (Deardorff, 2009). As World of Warcraft is a game of goals, learning to suit the expectations of a specific culture, the characteristics of the situation, and the level of the relationship between the parties involved in it (Lustig, 2003) is important in order to succeed at the game.

2.4. Cultural Capital

When understanding the importance of identity development, it is also important to note the conceptualization of Bourdieu's Capital. Firstly, he defines capital as accumulated labor that is materialized or embodied, and when appropriated by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor (Bourdieu, 1986). It means that capital is a force within a field, and includes the goods that the agents can have or earn, both material and symbolic (Fernandez, 2013).

These capabilities can be furthermore framed in three: economic capital, that are material assets that can be converted into money (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014); cultural capital, which can also be turned into money but also institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and social capital, made up of social connections, which is also convertible in certain conditions into economic capital and institutionalized (Bourdieu et al. 2001).

Economic capital is easy to understand but the other ones need to be further explained by Bourdieu (1986) as such:

Cultural Capital, is acquired through working on oneself and presupposes a personal cost or investment, can exist in three ways: embodied, as knowledge in the mind and body; in the objectified state, with cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.); and in the institutionalized state, as earned educational qualification (p. 17).

Social Capital, is sized in terms of relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition, that is, depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected (p. 21).

The same author also recognizes a type of capital: Symbolic Capital, but more than a fourth type, he defines it as “the power to represent and grant value, social importance, to other forms of capital” (p. 19). That is, its power lies in “the knowledge and recognition of the other types of capital by social agents who have certain categories of perception and evaluation” (Fernandez, 2013, p. 36). Then, it is socially constructed and can be understood in its definition of *Habitus*.

This last concept is established by him as a system of provisions that is a product of practice and principle, scheme or matrix that generates practices, of the perceptions, appreciations and actions of the agents (Bourdieu et al. 2001). To further explain it, the same authors, quoting Bourdieu (1972), set the concept as a predisposition, a tendency, a propensity or

an inclination that is, additioning Accardo (1991), “socially acquired and in relation to the position that agents occupy in the system, by virtue of the logic of functioning of that system and pedagogical action that it exerts on its agents” (Bourdieu et al. 2001, p. 26). In other words, individuals are disposed because they are exposed, and therefore, “individuals are socialized by their environment and people living in similar life conditions—that is, occupying a similar position in social space—tend to develop a similar habitus, thus sharing similar lifestyles” (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014, p. 1097).

In summary, life in society implies the subtle development and acquisition of different social behaviors and norms that exist because it is already established to be that way in a society’s functioning. These concepts are of importance to the present study because life in an online environment and furthermore in an online video game does not differ much from real life. In this sense, many of the behaviors present in the identity investment part were socially constructed and remain being socially perpetuated.

2.5. Metaphors

The metaphor, understood as a literary figure that compares two unrelated concepts, is of prime value to ethnographies as it help to communicate the emotional positionalities of researchers within their field, to connect with the participants, data (Varvantakis & Nolas, 2019) and even with their readers. Similar to the concept of gamification, understood as the employment of game mechanics in areas that traditionally are not set up to function like so (Osheim, 2013), it allows to connect distinct fields in creative ways while profiting from vast creativity and allow new connections and new knowledge to be created (Varvantakis & Nolas, 2019). In this study, metaphors will be the tool used to simplify complex WoW and SLA concepts in order to connect them and make scholars understand WoW and WoW players understand language learning in an easy and creative way.

3. Literature Review

This chapter will discuss research conducted on World of Warcraft characteristics that contribute to L2 acquisition from the point of view of psychological and sociocultural perspectives. In the local context, there are not so many investigations regarding L2 research on video games and even less particularly World of Warcraft, that is why the review of literature will focus on learning from video games in general for the local context and focus on WoW on international research.

3.1. Previous studies

3.1.1. *In Pedagogic Environments.*

Firstly, Vega and Suárez (2017) proposed a didactic unit for using video games for the strengthening and stimulation of the acquisition of lexical in learning French for students of sixth semester in a Colombian public university. This study was developed as a qualitative action research project based on the concepts of Krashen's (1983) input hypothesis and Guillaume's (n.d.) psycholinguistics studies, and concluded that for vocabulary learning in FLE is fully feasible the use of video games as a pedagogical tool. The study is particularly important to my research because its conclusions reaffirm my initial hypothesis that one can use video games to learn a language. However, the length of application of the study was three sessions of 70 minutes, which is a short time, and the video game was applied as a mandatory part of the class, which may affect students' motivation to play and actually learn from it and it would be its main gap.

Within the same line, López et al. (2014) studied the influence of video games in learning a foreign language among the first semesters of Modern Languages in the Escuela Colombiana de Carreras Industriales. In a qualitative study that obtained data with interviews and surveys, the authors found that, simultaneously while learning a language through instruction, video games offer many benefits that can complement the acquisition of cognitive skills in relation to writing, comprehension, pronunciation, reading and speaking. However, this

study did not carry out any test or assessment to validate the information received during the collection of data but surveyed 51 students, which makes it one of the studies with the biggest sample on the topic. The findings are of great utility to the present paper, as it remarks SLA contribution in all four skills of language proficiency. However, the gap and opportunity for future research lies in the fact that cognitive processes were analyzed very superficially even though it could have gone into more specific analysis, taking advantage of the size of the sample. This is because the theoretical foundations of the research were also very general and did not take into account specific theories that could help the interpretation of the data.

Aragon and Medina (2015) studied how the online game *Neverwinter* contributes to the process of learning English language for five eleventh grade students of a public institution in Bogotá. The authors implemented action research in order to explore the implications of this inclusion and used a field journal along with screenshots of the gameplay in order to collect information. The results showed that students prioritized focus on meaning rather than form in order to establish communication among one another and therefore it promoted the use of strategies such as reading images, identifying cognates, and using their mother tongue within textual productions to facilitate interaction. This study revealed important findings in relation to the strategies that learners of L2 employ to develop communication when their repertoire of vocabulary is limited, but its conclusions are limited to the observation of five sessions of interaction between learners, which from one side are a few, and from another do not represent authentic use of L2 because the use of mother tongue was employed the most in comparison to English. However the use of a field journal along with screenshots was an idea that helped me to better structure the methodological approach that I would undertake, also the fact that the study had a focus on meaning rather than form.

In the same way, Baron et al. (2015) studied the efficiency of video games in the development of communicative skills in the English language in the fifth semester of a private university in Bogotá. They developed qualitative research collecting data through surveys and

interviews and found that, aside from the cognitive skills, listening is one of the most benefited competences when playing video games in L2, because it is accompanied by “lots of visual attributes” (Baron et al. 2015, p. 39) and subtitles. Even though this study offers important findings due to the sample size and interpretation of student’s perceptions, those results claim to be of importance to communicative ends but are mostly about input, and do not take into account the actual production of language, which is also important. However, the importance of those visual attributes is something remarked in the study and that motivated me to employ as many images or visual representations of the ideas I narrated or analyzed in the autoethnography in order to better illustrate my experience.

Suh et al. (2010) studied the differences between MMORPG-based instruction and face-to-face instruction in an elementary school in Korea for over two months, splitting a group of 220 students into the two types of instruction. A survey and five tests were employed to compare the development of language in both groups. The authors found that students that used MMORPG-based instruction showed higher scores in listening, writing, and reading than those who studied English with face-to face instruction. In this study, it was also found that the most influential variables in English learning achievement were prior knowledge and motivation. This study is the one with the most significant sample size, and therefore of major importance to the topic, however it consisted in 80 minutes-weekly exposition to English and the length was just two months. This short amount of time does not let the researcher fully understand the impact of motivation when it comes to learning in the long run, but it still speaks of the role of motivation and evaluates the language proficiency skills that are important to the present study.

In the context of gamification, Osheim (2013) analyzed World of Warcraft through the lens of Foucault’s concept of heterotopia and the methodology of autoethnography in order to re-imagine experiences in the game through critical communication pedagogy to enact change in the traditional college classroom. She concludes that this practice in the classroom must imply three fundamentals of gamification: high-choice, low-risk engagements in a clearly

structured environment. However, even though gamification does make everything fun, it makes the process better overall. This project is of value mainly for being formatted as an ethnography and secondly for having established relationships between WoW's systems and classes' features.

Within the same line, Topîrceanu (2017) makes use of an online platform, Gamified, which brings representative elements taken from role-playing games into the classroom and over a period of 3 years shows that the implementation of the system boosts class attendance and grades. The study is of value because it highlights the impact of student's motivation in the classroom development and performance results by making a distinction between the control and experimental group.

3.1.2. Out Of Pedagogic Environments.

In international research, there is a study conducted by Andersen (2019) implemented a mixed-methods case study which followed two Norwegian learners of Spanish as they played World of Warcraft regularly for approximately three months. The study explored and promoted MMORPGs as an engaging, enjoyable and motivating method for learning second languages in adulthood. It used cognitive and sociocultural SLA theory to explain and evaluate their learning developments. It also evaluated the validity of applying cognitive and sociocultural SLA theory to the MMORPG-based learning context. The results indicate that language acquisition through MMORPGs is possible, and that it is dependent on certain learner- and game-specific factors. Finally, the study found that the application of cognitive and sociocultural SLA theories lends itself well to the MMORPG-context.

This research is of value to the present investigation because it takes into account cognitive theories such as Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, the Interaction Hypothesis, the Noticing Hypothesis, and the Output Hypothesis; and in the field of sociocultural perspectives, the impact of regulation and mediation, The Zone of Proximal Development and Community of

Practice. All these theories and concepts can be seen during the development of a World of Warcraft session, which combines the two paradigms of SLA setting the player in a constant exposition to comprehensible TL input and authentic TL use through a varied range of interlocutors, meaning-focused and learner-centered interaction including opportunities for noticing and negotiation of meaning, increased motivation, reduced anxiety, and mentoring. However, as with the next studies that will be presented, the main gap is the length of development of the study, which was three months and is fruitful of findings but still it is such a short span of time for demonstrating the amount of knowledge that can be acquired through active and long-lasting game exposure.

Moreover, Kinga's (2016) mixed-methods case study investigated the extent to which incidental vocabulary acquisition (IVA) can occur in the context of the MMORPG World of Warcraft through the reading of quest texts and interaction with the game environment. One of the most important findings is that even in a short span of time incidental vocabulary acquisition can occur when playing an online game with rich meaning-focused input. Also, that word-exposure frequency and images related to concepts through questing in-game can facilitate incidental vocabulary acquisition at least at the initial receptive stage of learning. This is supported by Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis and Nation's (2007) Four Strands. The study was of importance because, in my experience, one of WoW's main contribution to my acquisition of English as L2 was the amount of vocabulary learned. However, the length of the study and the fact that it focuses on input, leaves a gap regarding the output the learner is able to produce, and the amount of vocabulary that can actually be acquired when playing for more than one month, which was the length of development of the study.

Jagorinec (2021) replicated a study done by Peterson (2011) on the topic of SLA in MMORPG's but Jagorinec applied it to World of Warcraft. This qualitative research was based on information collected during ten weeks in which four Croatian participants played the game in English language. The data collection was made through the recording of the discourse used in

in-game interaction, questionnaires, semi-structured interview, researcher observation and field notes. The results show that the participants engaged in forms of interaction that are hypothesized to be beneficial for SLA through the engaging authentic interaction, negotiation of meaning and coordination of groups. He used some important SLA concepts such as Krashen's input, Pica's negotiation of meaning, Swains' output, among others, to explain that the social factor of the game is the main motivator to enhance foreign language learning. The fact that the study addresses the importance of interaction for SLA and relates it to theory in academia is of high impact to this study. Still, the main opportunity for future research lies in the need of developing a far more longitudinal study that brings more light to longer periods of exposure.

Zariski (2014) made a qualitative research study that paired a native with a non-native learner for over four weeks in order to determine if the WoW video game can act as a medium for language acquisition. The researcher analyzed the participants' chat transcripts, semi-structured questionnaires and interviews to conclude that MMORPGs can potentially improve the accuracy, fluency, and lexical complexity of an intermediate-level language learner when accompanied and guided by a L1. This is due to the fact that high amount of motivation and instant feedback that L1 can bring to L2 while defining clear goals and allowing learning by experience and reducing learner's anxiety. This research is furthermore fruitful because it uses Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Affective-Filter Hypothesis.

The main concern about that study is that the act of pairing L2s with L1s corresponds to a non-authentic exposition of language due to its forced nature. However, it kind of emulates a part of the experience of playing WoW, in which proficient people may help learners throughout their journey and highlights the role of interaction for SLA. But it still leaves a gap on how authentic interaction does benefit the acquisition of a second language while playing the game.

Sylvén and Sundqvist (2011) wrote an article remarking the similarities between Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and World of Warcraft in relation to SLA because eight out of the eleven learning principles identified in CLIL are also present in WoW. They

support their findings relying on three language learning fundamentals: immersion, authenticity, and motivation that are present in the experience because of the content-rich L2 immersive environment. In the end, the authors define that for L2 learning it is imperative to (1) be motivated on the process, (2) feel involved and meaningful, (3) be exposed to L2 beyond one's level (through natives or highly proficient speakers), and (4) engage in meaningful interactions rather than form focused one's. The conclusions of this article were of high importance as it helped me redefine the categories of analysis that I would apply in the present study.

Also, Kallunki (2016) qualitatively studied how playing World of Warcraft has helped non-native English speakers learn English. The author surveyed 202 WoW European players and found that aside from the visual and auditory clues, one of the main factors for learning English is the motivation to find meaning in new linguistic features they encounter throughout the game. Furthermore, the game's characteristics does not let the player frustrate if a word is not understood because it offers a context to accompany it, thus being a beginner-friendly way to learn. Focusing on the role of motivation from so many players that seemed to live the same experience as me helped me identify the factors to analyze for this category.

Finally, Nardi's (2010) study of one of the most influential but to its long-lasting development of more than three-years of observation. However, it was not aimed at reporting SLA capabilities. Yet, there is one study that reports on this, Palmer's (2010) research in which she reported on Second Language Pragmatic Socialization in World of Warcraft. In order to do it, she gave account through observing another person and herself while playing the video game in L2, Spanish, during a time-span of eight months. This project is very valuable because it is circumscribed in 4 out of 5 characteristics of the statement of the problem of this project: 1. Being an ethnographic; 2. Being an autoethnography; 3. Give an account of World of Warcraft; and 4. Report on SLA capabilities. Letting out just 5. Being a retrospective journey.

Still, the author found that some of WoW's SLA potentials are: 1. Offering relatively easy access to communities of native speakers (p. 323); and 2. Independent learners can improve

their pragmatic skills solely through playing an MMO (p. 325). Also, throughout her research, she establishes that WoW is a better arena for language socialization (p. 317) but it also clarifies that it is not for everyone but rather for learners that enjoy gaming. There is yet another consideration found by herself, the social nature of the game allows the learner to actually make friends and get more involved. In her words, “participation in the WoW community offers learners access to a register that is unlike the classroom register in many ways and therefore can present learners with new ways to engage in their target language” (p. 318); this made the participants step out of the role of language learners to feel like gamers and forge identities in the community they participated in.

3.2. Conclusion and Research Gaps

Commercial games, defined by Hanghoj et al. (2022) as designed to entertain, have the most potential to facilitate L2 learning because they are proactively used outside the education context, allowing the student to learn literacies and bring them to the school. However, among the commercial games array, MMORPGs are the most dominant type of video game on SLA research due to the value of social interactions that they offer in regard to cognitive and sociocultural perspectives (Li, 2020). This literature review allows us to understand that because of these features during the development of a World of Warcraft session, the player is set in a constant exposure to comprehensible input and use through a varied range of interlocutors, meaning-focused and learner-centered interaction including opportunities for noticing and negotiation of meaning, increased motivation, reduced anxiety, and mentoring; complying with Sylvén and Sundqvist (2011) fundamentals for SLA: authentic, immersed and motivating content-rich L2 environment.

However, as it can be seen, the reviewed literature in relation to SLA were in part in the World of Warcraft context and there is enough research that demonstrates its contribution to it based on renown theories and authors. Nevertheless, as shown by this review of literature and

in accordance with Peterson (2013) as cited in Hanghoj et al. (2022) is that the vast majority of the qualitative research carried out in this field of SLA in video games has been done with small number of participants and in observation of short-spans of time. Leaving an enormous gap in reflective studies such as introspection and retrospection, which is crucial in education because they have shown to capture the continuity of experiences through past, present and future to generate awareness of meaningful experiences in educational contexts (Fletcher & Ní Chróinín, 2022). However, in this study I not only wish to unveil my current being (introspection) but rather understand my past learning English through WoW from 2013 (retrospection).

Another gap shown in the review is the lack of research with the use of ethnographies or at least qualitative methodologies. The current study represents an opportunity not only to use the autoethnography as a research method as a novelty analyzing yet another instance of SLA development through video games but also to analyze the development of identity in relation to L2 in a reflective way through retrospection. This last part is important because the World of Warcraft video game is then represented not only as a platform for Second Language Acquisition, but also to intercultural immersion, allowing to develop intercultural competences that are of use in a world of globalization and that is a beneficial characteristic of a second language learner. Recapitulating those experiences would help to fill the mentioned gaps currently existing in SLA research on video games.

4. Research Methodology

In order to understand the methodology it is necessary to understand the World of Warcraft video game and its features.

4.1. World of Warcraft

WoW is a video game categorized as a massively-multiplayer online role play game (MMORPG) released in 2004 by the multi-million video game developer Blizzard Entertainment. It is ambiented in a middle-age fantasy universe but it is not located in any specific time period as it includes elements from many periods in history. At this point, it is important to note that WoW is not a game created for learning but rather one whose features can be used to enhance learning, as it is shown throughout the development of this study.

WoW, as well as any MMORPG, is a video game that allows the player to create an avatar, which is the character the player will control to explore the digital world while empowering each time furthermore the character. Every aspect of it motivates the player to enhance the character furthermore and the end-goal is to become more and more powerful, eventually allowing to be able to dominate on every aspect of the video game and other players. Even though for the most part, the video game can be completed all alone, grouping-up with other players can make the experience easier and more difficult activities with the most powerful rewards require cooperation among players. This is how English can be introduced to WoW players even though they play in other languages such as Spanish or Portuguese, the game itself offers extreme accessibility with the use of tools (Cross-realm Grouping) that help to group up with players from different regions, and they are mostly English speakers, as they represent the majority of the population (WoWWiki, n.d.). According to Ferjan (2022), it has 8 million monthly active players, which makes it a good platform for putting into practice interaction with players of multiple nationalities. Additionally, advancing in the game presents each time more

difficult content that requires deeper cooperation between players in order to acquire the most rewarding recompenses.

4.1.1. Features and characteristics

One of the main features is that everything is represented by numbers, thus aspects such as power, economy, among others, are improved by getting a higher number of it. In the same sense, the first most important feature of the game is *leveling*, to explain it: the created character starts at level 1, and the long-term goal is to *level up* to the maximum level, which is 70, currently. This process introduces the player to the world and teaches the basic elements of the game. In order to do so, the player will participate in the first activities and features that the game offer, which are the following:

- **Quests:** The most simple activity. Consists of completing basic goals and does not require much time in general. Its rewards are also basic. They are used to chronologically guide the player in the story and can be done individually or in groups of up to five people. Due to its narrative nature, it represents the introduction to vast amounts of vocabulary and will lead the player to explore the zones in which the game develops. In order to do quests, the player must approach a character with an exclamation point (!) above his head, click it and instantly the quest appears. Once it opens, the player will firstly read the quest objective. It is very concrete and does not have more than three lines of text. Then, there is more context to it expressed in a narrative and longer way. They chain with each other in a sequential way that helps the player with the chronological and narrative order. Groups for *questing* (doing quests) are usually with people met and present in the same zone the player currently is. This means that, if playing in a Spanish-speaking realm, the players present there speak in Spanish, therefore in this type of activity the probability of interaction with people speaking foreign languages is almost zero unless we are playing on foreign language realms.

Figure 1.*Quest Example.*

Wowhead, (2019/12/06). The Defias Brotherhood [JPG].

- Dungeons:** The most simple in-group activity. Require cooperation among five players to complete scenarios of high complexity against computer-controlled entities, and offer the most valuable rewards during the leveling process. They can be accessed with a premade group but there is the possibility of using the automatic Cross-realm Grouping, which groups the player with other players with the same interest. As mentioned before, most of them will be English-speakers so this was for me the first moment in which I faced a foreign language in World of Warcraft. These groups communicate only through chat so the input is only written.

Figure 2.*Cross-realm Grouping feature UI.*



Dotesports, (2024/01/15). Dungeon Finder [PNG].

- **Battlegrounds:** The first and most simple activity that sets players competing against other players. In groups of 10, 15 or 40 players they are faced with a group of the same size of players from the opposing faction. Its rewards are analogous to the dungeon's. It also uses the automatic Cross-realm Grouping feature so the communication will be in English.

Figure 3.

Battleground.



Penthesilea, (2013/04/08).

Once the player gets to the maximum level, the real game begins and the avatar gets empowered by obtaining gear (pieces of equipment) with increasing stats (short for statistics, such as strength, intellect, agility, among others). In order to get those pieces, the player will develop these activities, that are equally rewarding:

- **Max level dungeons:** They are the same as the dungeons present in the leveling process, but its difficulty is greatly increased and require deeper cooperation among players to get through them. Their completion usually takes around 10 to 40 minutes, and their difficulty and rewards are exponentially increased in this order:
 - Normal dungeons.
 - Heroic dungeons.
 - Mythic dungeons.

- Mythic + dungeons. Which again are exponentially increased starting from +2 and goes all the way up to +20 in terms of difficulty and rewards. However, the most ambitious players perform dungeons of infinite difficulty (+34 is the highest ever completed according to Starym, 2020).

Figure 4.

Mythic + dungeon.



Colin Ng, (2016/09/18).

- **Raids:** Scenarios similar to dungeons but of higher length and that require cooperation of 10 up to 30 players. The first completion of a raid (in all difficulties) for elite players can take a few weeks, but for less-invested players it can take months. Similar to dungeons, its difficulty is exponentially increased in this way.
 - LFR raids (Short for Looking for Group, a feature that automatically groups-up players)
 - Normal raids.
 - Heroic raids.

- Mythic raids.

Figure 5.

Raid.



Paradux (2013/11/08)

- **Arenas:** The highest level player vs player content. It consists of groups of 2 or 3 players competing against each other in matches that usually do not last longer than 5 minutes. Its difficulty consists in earning *rating*, a scoring system that goes up if you win and down if you lose. The higher the rating, the higher the rewards.

Figure 6.

Arena.



m1nti (2022/07/04)

- **Rated Battlegrounds:** The same as the battlegrounds in the leveling process but only for groups of 10 and 15 players. Its difficulty lies in the same rating system that works for arenas.

In these max-level activities, from an entry difficulty the players will communicate through chat, but as difficulty gets higher they will start employing voice communication software, such as Discord in order to minimize delay between communication and optimize their performance.

To complement those activities, the game offers other tasks that do not power up the character but can give cosmetic or miscellaneous rewards. Those activities are pet battles, tournaments, seasonal events, among others. All of them developed in a world and making interaction with other players a must. In this sense, WoW offers a system of guilds (communities in which players develop common activities) in order to make it easy to organize and create long-lasting groups that develop the described activities. It is usual that these communities use chats to communicate but there is the practice of creating Discord Channels to speak as players play, even if they are not playing together and just for the sake of accompanying themselves.

4.2. Narrative Approach

Narrative research, particularly biographical, is characterized by highlighting on the importance of the subjectiveness of the research subject, which is the aim in qualitative research, but with the purpose of getting to learn about their experience, history and learning process (Landín & Sánchez, 2019), rather than trying to quantify and measure it. All of this, with the purpose of giving voice to almost extinguished knowledge building strategies (Moriña, 2017), that have been underappreciated due to the favored use of extremely rational techniques and institutional bureaucracy (Landín & Sánchez, 2019) that are present in the academic research field, and that numbs the development of creativity and imagination for researchers, teachers and lately students. Not to mention that these narrative types of approaches allow the reconstruction and reflection of experiences and also have an impact on the construction of identity (Molina, 2022).

One of the researches carried out in this regard but not in relation to SLA in video games is Molina's (2019) qualitative and autobiographical project in which she wanted to find the clues of her development of intercultural sensitivity during her career in language teaching. In this sense, she wrote an autobiography that narrated her life experiences in relation to language learning, exchange in the isle of Guadalupe and used Bennett's model of developing intercultural sensitivity for analyzing the stages of her goal. The author found that she did not live all the stages of the model but still the writing of her autobiography allowed her to make sense of her past and present experiences in order to rethink her teaching understanding and found importance in the employing of different strategies for her future teaching practices.

In the same way, the experiences, paths and beliefs accumulated as a student have an impact on our views and enacting of teaching; however, the reappropriation and subjective reconstruction of our experiences allow a deeper understanding of educational processes (Bolívar et al. 2001).

According to Landín and Sánchez (2019), narratives are actively interested in the subject as an actor with valuable knowledge built by contexts. The authors also claim it to be one of the biggest contributors to educational research because qualitative studies seek to overcome the rigidity of the quantitative paradigm that is heavily influenced by positivism and that have been primarily given the extreme rationality technique and institutional bureaucracy in educational contexts. All of it with the purpose of creating and developing new perspectives that show the relationship between the educational process and the experiences of those being educated, those who are the focus of qualitative research.

In particular, the narrative method deeply explores the genuine knowledge that a subject builds from his lived experience and captures the teaching strategies in order to share it with others (Landín & Sánchez, 2019). Furthermore, it also leads the subject to discover his own interiority in an exercise cycle of self-reflection and self-observation that eventually shows the sense of the experiences, as the authors claim.

This particular approach is called Introspection by the academia and consists of focussing on the investigation of one's own actual mental states or processes by shifting attention to them (Trnka & Smelik, 2020). Though due to its subjective nature and to the rise of cognitive sciences and neuroscientific approaches, it was dismissed again as it was during the first quarter of the twentieth century (Bitbol & Petitmengin, 2013). However, the same authors affirm that the information drawn from introspecting is precious material on individual phenomenological research and it by itself establishes its own internal criterion of reliability and even “validity” because it is measured in the “dynamic terms of performative consistency of the acts which produce it” (Petitmengin & Bitbol, 2009, p. 400).

These exposed reasons allow us to understand why using a narrative approach is one of the most suitable ways of developing the intended autoethnography for this piece of work, as it is the intention to dig in into the understanding of the processes and the relationship between

them and the personal experience of the researcher, that in this investigation is also the object of research.

In an educational context, it does not seek to measure or continue affirming what has been affirmed already, but rather gives us the opportunity to go to the true essence of education: the location of complex interactions in time and space, configuration of individual and social identity, building and rebuilding personal and social histories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995). In this sense, the researcher is able to produce different states of reflection and reach awareness about the lived experiences and allow the unveiling of subjectivities of the genuine educational processes from which knowledge has been learned and built (Landín & Sánchez, 2019).

In the same way, and out of the video games contexts, Ariza (2019) developed a narrative research in which she wanted to recapitulate her educational experience from childhood up to her university undergraduate process at 47 years old. She developed the project as an autobiography and analyzed each one of the five chapters with the personal and professional perspectives she has built in her learning process as an undergraduate popular educator. She concluded that the process of writing allowed her to comprehend teaching and learning as something that goes beyond the classroom and transcends in different socializing spaces.

Both projects offer important insights into the importance of autobiographies in qualitative research in order to rescue the importance of the research subject, treating it as a person located in a specific context that lives particular experiences and not just data that proves a point, as it had been the tendency due to the broad use of quantitative research. However, as well as with autoethnographies, its main topics are far from being related to the acquisition of language in the video games' context, and that is what led me to develop this research using narrative research methods.

4.2.1. Autoethnography

Autoethnography can be defined as an approach to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in relation to social ones, thus, treating research as political, socially-just and socially-conscious acts (Adams & Jones, 2008) that creates a relationship between the cultural connection between self and others representing society (Chang, 2007). One of the most remarkable aspects of autoethnographies as a method is that there are no formal regulations circumscribed to it because it does not intend to be a highly academic text, but rather a text with meaning (Méndez, 2013).

In this sense, local autoethnographies have developed in topics such as gender and education. For example, Valencia and Polanco (2021) developed qualitative ethnographic research about their experience of being Nasa indigenous people of diverse sexuality in the Bachelor in foreign language education at Universidad del Valle in order to comprehend the social phenomena given in the university context. The authors found that their intersectionality causes conflict between the spaces in which they are indigenous and where they are sexually diverse and used their writing as a form to converge their different identities.

Another important autoethnography is Valencia's research (2018) around the subject of decolonization; the author describes the process of transformation of his professional identity as EFL teacher before and after studying his masters' degree. Valencia finds that his self is transformed throughout the time and metaphorically describes it as "unsettling the mask" and becomes a "critical, decolonizing, transformative pedagogue" (p. 5).

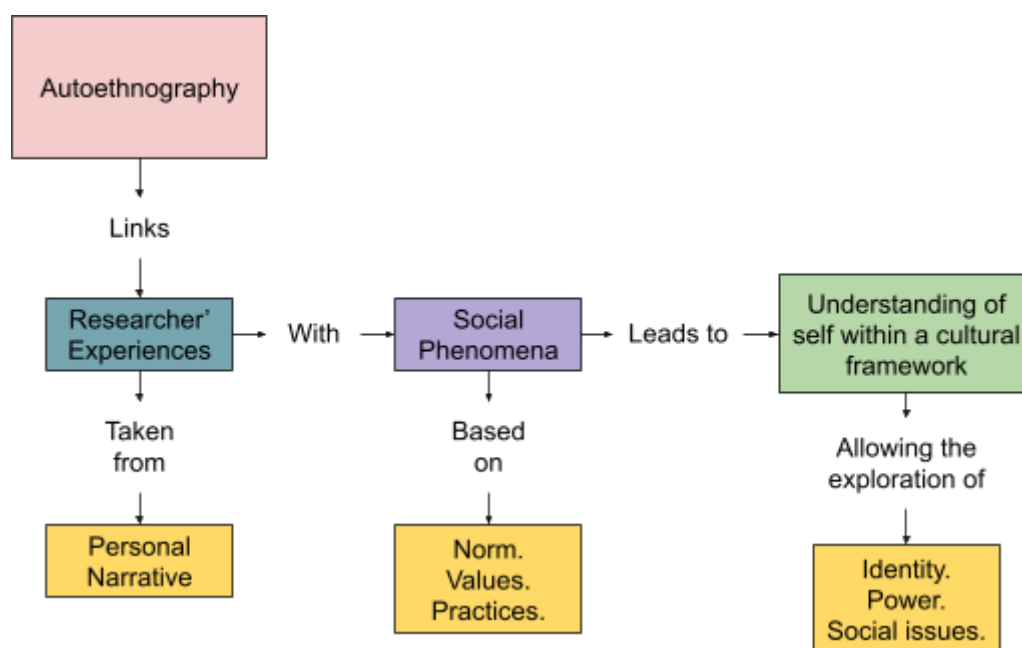
A narrative approach with the use of autoethnography was chosen because there is no much research with the use of autoethnographies in the gaming environment; this is because the type of self-reflective and retrospective approach that is taking into account has not been widely explored yet in SLA for the video games. Then, leaving an enormous gap that is important to address. This breach allows this study to take advantage of the vast number of

third-party investigation, observation and analysis that exist in order to demonstrate the product of those past investigations but this time from the point of view of someone who is actively the researcher and object of research, Thus, that can actually reflect on the processes and experiences and bring new lights to the topic from the educational point of view taking into account that it is a process developed for over a decade.

In this sense, this research project will take advantage of the valuable information taken from the development of a narrative account by applying an autoethnographic analysis in order to explore solutions to social, cultural, historical and even personal incognitos. This allows the researcher to explain elements of the acquisition theories explained from linguistics since Krashen in his Input and Monitoring hypothesis, from a psychological order from Connectionism and Interactionism, and from a sociocultural order such as Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory in which the social construct of identity can be integrated with the concept of investment and imaginary communities.

Figure 7.

Link between narratives and autoethnographies.



Note. Own work.

Autoethnography by itself allows the researcher to understand the lived experiences as part of a whole in a society. In this sense, narratives can be one of the data collection tools for compiling those experiences. This is how, starting from a very particular data collection, this autoethnography is able to connect to deeper and bigger settings and is able, for the most part, to make assumptions based on an inductive approach if joined with others.

Also, even though the autoethnography by itself is able to perform those tasks, it is only through the creation of a narrative that I was able to explore and waive my personal experience, making it a far more appealing process to myself and establishing a chronological structure more easily traceable by the ethnographic approach.

4.3. Research approach and design

The present research project implements a narrative autoethnography, as the specific research design within the qualitative paradigm. Therefore, in this particular research, the autobiographical account will be the tool used to capture the experiences lived through the World of Warcraft video game that allowed me to eventually acquire English without being formally instructed in it outside of the school environment. Only in the exercise of compiling those lived experiences throughout the utilization of the memory and the reflection that it allows, can uncover the cognitive, interactional, motivational and identity formation processes that underlined the acquisition of English and that now, me as a senior student of Bachelor's degree in Foreign Languages, can be interpreted and understood as an already defined process in the theorizing of SLA. In this sense, the autobiographical account will be used in the autoethnography applying a narrative analysis technique through an inductive analysis. Narrative analysis is a data analysis tool that uses texts, such as autobiographies, journals, field notes, letters, interviews, family stories as the units of analysis to research and understand the way people create meaning in their lives as narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). For the purpose of this research, I will adopt Denzin's (1989) definition which describes it as a sequence

of events that are significant for the narrator and his or her audience, has a plot, a beginning, a middle and an end, and relates events in a temporal, causal sequence. In order to develop a good narrative analysis, there must be some good research questions that are answered throughout the narrative, but still it does not stand by itself and needs interpretation from the researcher (Benson, 2018).

Given its qualitative paradigm, Reissman (1993) recognizes that it does not necessarily follow a preconceived pattern. In fact, Benson (2018) declares that one of the main issues with narrative analysis is that it can require another method of data analysis that helps the researcher reduce the data to manageable proportions while maintaining the integrity of the storyline to be developed.

4.4. The researcher as participant

The researcher and object of study was born in 1999 and is a 24 years-old male senior student in a Bachelor's degree in foreign languages at Universidad del Valle. He has been playing the game World of Warcraft for 11 years (from 2013 to 2024). Due to him being born and grown in Cali - Colombia, his mother tongue and unique language of communication until the acquisition of English was Spanish.

Going deeper into details, I was raised in the Jorge Eliécer Gaitán neighborhood, a working-class area located in the northeast of Santiago de Cali, in Colombia. In comparison to others, when I was born, my parents enjoyed a good income and my grand-mother worked as a housemaid in a household of an affluent family in Pance, a high-income zone in my city, Cali. In consequence, I was no stranger to English as they used to give her many things like used clothes, toys and CD's with movies and TV shows for children in that language. By this point and until my 5 years of age, I was the spoiled and only child of the family who received gifts from every member of it.

Furthermore, my father liked video games and got me into them around the age of 5. They all were in English language, then I was from the beginning of my conscience that English was some sort of privileged language and I made an effort to learn it until around 2007 when everything started to be accessible in Spanish and English started to lose its exclusivity in entertainment. For that reason, I abandoned the interest in it. In spite of all of that, when growing I met online gaming and the use of English recovered its importance in many ways. Luckily, even though my parents did not enjoy the same good income, they still could offer me lots of things that other children of the neighborhood would not have such as a computer desk suitable for playing video games, a stable internet connection and purely the calmness of not needing to worry about money in the household.

Video games, while I was raised, represented for me the epitome of entertainment as they offered me the possibility of living many different lives depending on what I played. The 2000s was the zenith of online gaming as the video game industry thought about video games as storytelling devices and started to include online play features (Academy of art University, 2020).

Gen Z, my generation, was permeated by video games everywhere and we as a whole made it grow massive, growing 55% from 2000 to 2010 with over 78 billion dollars of revenue (Pallavi, 2023). From my own experience, they were my main connection and topic with my friends and it remains my main connection to my brother, and still remains, 20 years later, my favorite hobby in which I have spent over 10.000 hours throughout my life.

On the other hand, my relation with English in my primary and secondary school was not constant as it had an intensity of around 2 to 3 hours per week, and increased in the last years because the school aimed at full bilingualism. However this was completed after I graduated. The approach back then was very tied to book-reading and workshop developments to the point that made me feel less interested in learning there but, after World of Warcraft, I took it as a method of practicing what I learned in-game.

4.5. Data collection instruments, procedures and analysis

To answer every research question, the autobiographical account would be chronologically written and for each part there would be a constant reflection that addresses the acquisition process from the cognitive and interactional perspective, and will have to take into account the level of motivation and identity development in relation to the level of engagement to the game and inclination to the English language. This reflection will be more deeply developed throughout the discussion section of this paper with the triangulation of information from outside the autobiographical account.

Developing the initial source of information, the autobiographical account, would only require the utilization of memory accompanied by some clues, such as screenshots taken throughout the multiple sessions and the research of the content launching schedule throughout the years. This helped me uncover the events in a chronological order and can tell details about my language development. Due to its recapitulating nature, the writing of the autobiographical account only required me and was written throughout the second semester of 2023 starting on July 13th. It started during the summer vacations and lately, in 9th semester during the dead times between classes, in public transport, at nights, among others. As it is by itself a reflective ordeal, the process will not be speeded up in order to represent reality as closely as it is possible.

I tried firstly to outline specific moments of impact to my experience in WoW which ended being the chapter names. Then I started to narrate my whole story taking as a starting point an Autobiographical Identity text developed in 2021 in English class. For narrating the moments in World of Warcraft, I used a folder with over 800 personal screenshots taken from 2014 to 2023 that helped to guide the timeline. Of course, as the story allowed it, I included those screenshots in the autobiographical account. The first draft of it was very straightforward so with the first revisions with my tutor I had to constantly go back to develop an idea better or

to add more context to it so others from outside of my life would understand. One of the latest modifications was the implementation of a glossary that would describe highly specific terms so the product was far more friendly with the reader.

This glossary appears at the footnotes of the biographical account but is also added at the end of the present paper as Appendix B, just for reference and consulting, but this whole main document expects to be self-sufficient and clear enough to be understood by people not familiar with the context, therefore consulting the glossary is not mandatory.

It is also important to note that the biographical account is not present in this main document due to its extension because the the end product is a 6 chapters and 34 pages account that contains the following:

1. **On the Character Selection Screen - Preface:** A prologue describing the initial retrospective reflection and conception of the idea for the monograph.
2. **My starting zone:** A deeper description of the first 10 years of my life, its setting, first incursions into video games, etc.
3. **The World of Warcraft:** A narrative recapitulation of my introduction to WoW and first steps into it. It contains a description of the video game's mechanics and use of English in the video game.
4. **Tryharding a bit:** This chapter describes how I started to produce English utterances of higher complexity around 2014.
5. **Changing sides:** Continues my tale to the point of major investment into it, when I started to do competitive practices in it.
6. **No king rules forever:** This last chapter, describes how I started to deter from WoW because of life's responsibilities and makes a final reflection on WoW's impact in my English and personal life.

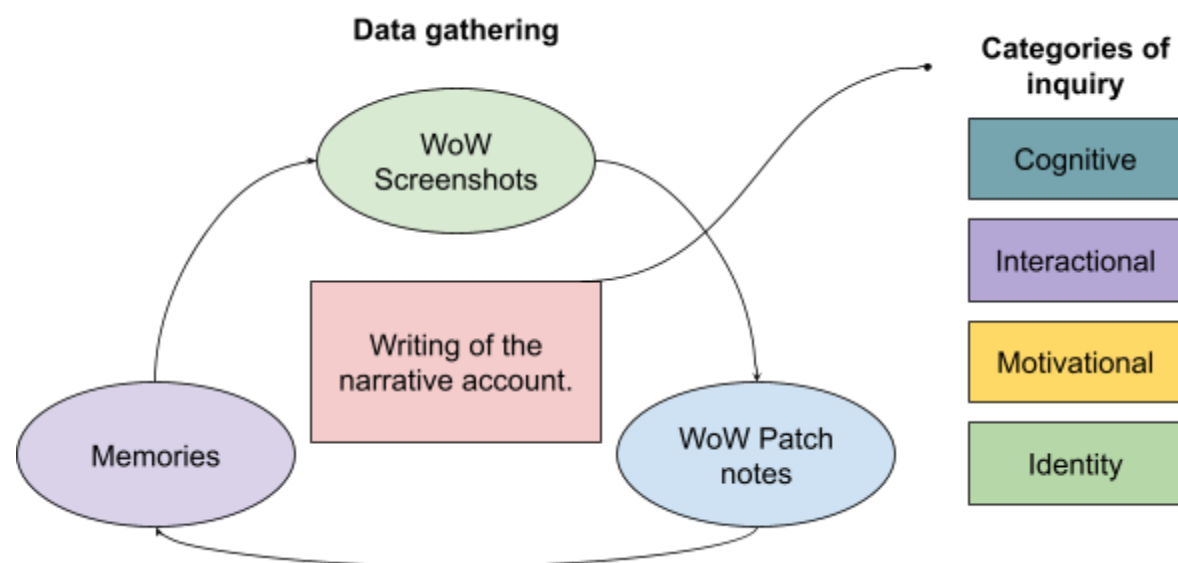
The writing of the autobiographical account was a process that lasted until December 2023 for its main structure but seemed everlasting because until March 2024 I still continued

correcting details as I had to continue looking at it for the discussion section of this paper. It was in that last part that I realized that the tale would not comprehend the entirety of the process but that I would have to extract information from other sources and triangulate it.

In that sense, there are two sources of information. The first one, the major source, the autobiographical account, is a simultaneous process that triangulates the information gathered from the video game patch notes, screenshots taken throughout the past 10 years and memories that arise from the process itself; but also at the same time searches for clues of the development of the cognitive, interactional and motivational aspects in relation to SLA. Figure 8 depicts the Data Gathering process for the autobiographical account.

Figure 8.

Data gathering process.



Note. Own work.

The second source of information is the analysis itself that will complement the information taken from the autobiographical account. This analysis, the autoethnography, will use additional information taken from other sources to extrapolate the found information, in that sense, other sources of information such as email history, personal files and photos will be

presented in the discussion section to complement the initial information and interpret it using the following categories of analysis.

4.6. Categories of analysis

After the writing is done, this information will be coded in order to highlight the details that allude the development of those aspects (cognitive, interactional, motivational and identity) because later they will become the categories of analysis used in the Narrative analysis. Those categories will be expressed as metaphors because they can help simplify complex concepts through connecting one familiar concept to another familiar one, (Schmitt, 2005, quoted in Steele et al., 2022); in this sense, we will connect the domain of World of Warcraft and Second Language Acquisition. In the words of Sfard (1998) quoted in Tammi and Kouhia (2015), linking experiences of everyday reality to scientific theories. In the context of autoethnography, metaphors are prompts to stimulate the recall of professional and personal experience because they can be valuable in framing understanding of issues within social work practice (Hardy, 2024).

In this paper, the metaphors are terms and concepts that are seen everyday in the World of Warcraft video game so players that read the document can understand the mechanics of SLA unveiling in their everyday games. On the other hand, in order to contextualize people not familiar with WoW, the following subsection will describe their formulation and relationship with the literature review so they can understand the mechanics of WoW. The main idea of the use of metaphors is making the paper accessible to people no matter if they have played World of Warcraft or are familiar with SLA.

4.6.1. Solo Leveling

This category seeks to answer the research question: What *WoW features benefited my cognitive linguistic skills*? The metaphor used for this category of analysis was chosen because

“leveling” refers to the process of increasing levels in the video game, starting from 1 and ending in max level. While *leveling* the player acquires knowledge of the video game and the character learns skills that make it more powerful, as shown in the figure below. In this sense, this category will describe the acquisition of some aspects of the English language that are not necessarily learned by interacting with others. The metaphor of *leveling* could be translated to the real world in terms of language learning and acquisition, because, to a certain point, while *leveling* in English proficiency, a person grows both in mastering the language but also everything that surrounds it, obtaining experience and skills such as argumentation, grammar, fluency, culture, among others and is, for the most part, a personal and individual responsibility, achieved through the learner’s attention and effort (Spada & Lightbown, 2019, p. 114).

Figure 9.

Reaching a new level while leveling.



WoWWiki, C. T. (n.d.). *Power leveling* [JPG].

4.6.2. Talenting for High-End

This category will answer the research question: *What WoW features benefited my interactional linguistic skills?* The metaphor used for this category of analysis was chosen because, in WoW, the abilities and skills that a player uses are earned through the process of leveling and depend on the player's choice. Talents tree is a feature in which a player turns those points into

enhancing or learning abilities. However, points are not unlimited, and the player must have to find what abilities are of interest to him, and choose them above others. The word *Talenting* refers to the process of selecting those *talents* with a particular goal, in this case *High-End* (WoW's most difficult content), which requires mandatory cooperation with others. Therefore, there is an intrinsic need for developing relationships and learning communicative language skills. As noted in the literature review, even though language learning is social in nature, there are things that can be learned by oneself (Vygotsky, 1978). However, I made a serie of choices that helped me to deter from learning in an isolated way to starting to build English learning through interaction in social settings; therefore, I switched from a “solo” approach (described in the previous category) to a collaborative and communicative methodology in order to grow in my English knowledge and develop good language proficiency.

Figure 10.

Elemental Shaman talent tree (grey icons representing the talents the player omitted).



Stan. (2023b, July 13). *World of Warcraft: Dragonflight Talent System Guide*. Icy Veins.
<https://www.icy-veins.com/wow/dragonflight-talent-system-guide>

4.6.3. *Popping BL*

Seeking to answer the research question: *How playing WoW impacted on my motivation towards learning English?* This category also uses an in-game metaphor to allude to one English learning characteristic. Inside WoW, to *pop BL* is an expression that means to activate the *Blood Lust buff* (beneficial effect that enhances the character). This buff is only activated in the most important and exciting moments of WoW Gameplay. It is chosen as a category because the need to learn and to communicate in English functioned as this *Bloodlust buff*, boosting my interest and motivation towards it and making me want to learn it steadily. As mentioned in the literature review, intrinsic motivation is one of the most important factors in the L2 learning process so it was crucial for my SLA process. Without the *Blood Lust buff* some of WoW's hardest moments are almost impossible to complete and, in the same way, without motivation L2 learning turns into a tedious task that is frequently abandoned by some learners.

4.6.4. *Did someone say...*

Wanting to answer the research question: *How did WoW impact my L2 identity and cultural capital?* This category uses a well-known phrase in the WoW community: "Did someone say...". It is one of those bad jokes that only the people in a certain context can understand. It works similarly to the concept of *imagined communities*, described by Norton (2013). Knowing the phrase means that the player has been greatly involved in the game and invested in it, thus meaning that the player is already part of a community and developed in-game bonds. It was chosen as a category because to learn English through WoW means an incredible amount of time investment and at the same time that translated into being permeated by the WoW culture and development of relationships and it becomes a great part of one's identity.

The following table, Table 1, synthesizes and relates the research questions with their corresponding metaphor, methods, purposes and type of analysis.

Table 1.

Research questions inquiry process.

Research Question	Category	Data Collection Method	Purpose	Data Analysis
RQ1. What WoW features benefited my cognitive linguistic skills?	Solo Leveling	Autoethnography to compile: - Memories - Screenshots of the video game - Video game patch notes	Provide evidence of the features of the game that develop cognitive language skills	Deductive narrative analysis
RQ2. What WoW features benefited my interactional linguistic skills?	Talenting for High-end	Autoethnography to compile: - Memories - Screenshots of the video game - Video game patch notes	Provide evidence of the features of the game that develop interactional language skills	Deductive narrative analysis
RQ3. How playing WoW impacted on my motivation towards learning English?	Popping BL	Autoethnography to compile: - Memories - Screenshots of the video game - Video game patch notes	Provide evidence of WoW characteristics that motivate the player to learn English	Deductive narrative analysis
RQ4. How did WoW impact my L2 identity and cultural capital?	Did somebody say...	Autoethnography to compile: - Memories	Understand the impact WoW have in L2 identity and cultural capital	Deductive narrative analysis

Note. Own work.

The proposed timeline that served as a guide for the development of the process will consist of the following stages and estimated times, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2.

Research timeline.

Task	Estimated completion time
Completion of the Research Proposal	October 2023
Data collection and writing of the autobiographical account	July - December 2023
Data Analysis	March 2024

Writing up the results and conclusions	April 2024
Conclusion, abstract, references formatting	April 2024
Thesis revision and formatting	August 2024

Note. Own work.

4.7. Validity

Qualitative research involves more subjectivity than quantitative research (Lew et al. 2018), that is why, to assure the quality of qualitative research, the authors use Lincoln and Guba's (1985) proposal of terms such as *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability*. Lew et al (2018, p. 82) present a series of strategies during research to cover them. For example, *credibility* can be assured employing constant comparison, searching for negative evidence, and using member validation; *transferability* providing rich descriptions of the research so that readers can assess the applicability of the study to their own contexts; *dependability* is addressed by explicitly noting issues of researcher subjectivity, changes in the setting, detailed description of the process, among others; finally, *confirmability* is dealt with by showing as much data to readers as possible in order to demonstrate the relationship between data and claims.

Moreover, inside the qualitative paradigm itself it is more difficult to talk about validity in the use of narratives as research methods because it is not perceived by a part of the academy community as prestigious as other methods or tools due to its subjective capacity to capture reality (Landín & Sanchez, 2019). However, what that academic community omits is that the focus of qualitative research is the subject per se. In fact, one of the most appealing aspects of this type of inquiry is how it shifts the power relationship between researcher and participant (Pavlenko, 2007) to produce fruitful results with validity and reliability in topics of interest for social sciences. To value this type of research, one must shift across paradigms, try not to quantify reality or measure individuals, but rather find their meaning in the construction of the

lived experience, the subjectivity of the individuals, their memory, recollections, emotions, time and constructed meanings (Landín & Sanchez, 2019).

Then, to deal with the validity measures proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for qualitative research, one must first understand that the tools to validate its results are far different from those of the majority of research done in the academic context and that the findings of this investigation should not be generalized. For example, the tools that assure *credibility* will be peer's validation with the accompaniment of the tutor and the final review from experienced teachers; *transferability* is assured by the descriptive nature that underlies the specifications of the participant, the contexts and the explicit narrative description that will be used in the autoethnography; *dependability* and *confirmability* will be dealt with the triangulation of the narrative, screenshots of the game, use of the videogame's patch notes that relate the chronological release of the video game's characteristics, along with the additional tools used throughout the discussion section such as personal files and photos and academic history. Through the use of those tools, readers will be able to unfold and relate to the subject's experiences, because narration will be accompanied by both screenshots and a description of the game's features.

However, due to the highly specific and particular setting of this study, it is better to understand this investigation as an experience that was developed in a certain way due to the specific and particular characteristics of the subject and his context, and that represent *just one* of the multiple ways in which the language acquisition of English can become a reality, in this case for a particular senior student of Foreign Languages at Universidad del Valle in Cali, Colombia.

5. Leveling up my English - Discussion

The leveling process in video games is one of preparation. The whole process consists in getting experience points from multiple activities in order to level-up, learn more skills and continue until reaching the maximum possible level. Throughout this journey many things will happen: one can get bored and switch to another game but also one can get so motivated and get in a non-stop grind and reach the max-level in record time. This wandering is different for each one of us and there are many ways to reach that goal and so is the process of acquisition of English. There are many that worthlessly try over and over to learn in but do not succeed and others that are able to learn it and multiple other languages in a short time. Of course, this project is all about my endeavor with English, a very particular process that I abandoned, retook and succeeded at.

To answer the overarching question of *How did playing the video game World of Warcraft influence my acquisition of English as a second language?* The following section will be divided into multiple subtitles, and each one of them is going to answer one of the specific research questions taking into account the tale of my English acquisition journey named Leveling up my English in World of Warcraft (Pulido, 2024).

Each one of the subtitles' names was chosen with the purpose of immersing the reader into the World of Warcraft context and, for a moment, turning him into a player to live and understand the cognitive, interactional and identitarian aspects that can be explored in a World of Warcraft session.

5.1. Solo Leveling

This chapter wishes to uncover and answer the research question: *What WoW features benefit cognitive linguistic skills?* Defining cognitive skills as the mental processes involved in the ways the mind processes input and generates output, how it represents and accesses stored

knowledge, and how functions such as memory and attention affect the learning process (Ortega, 2013).

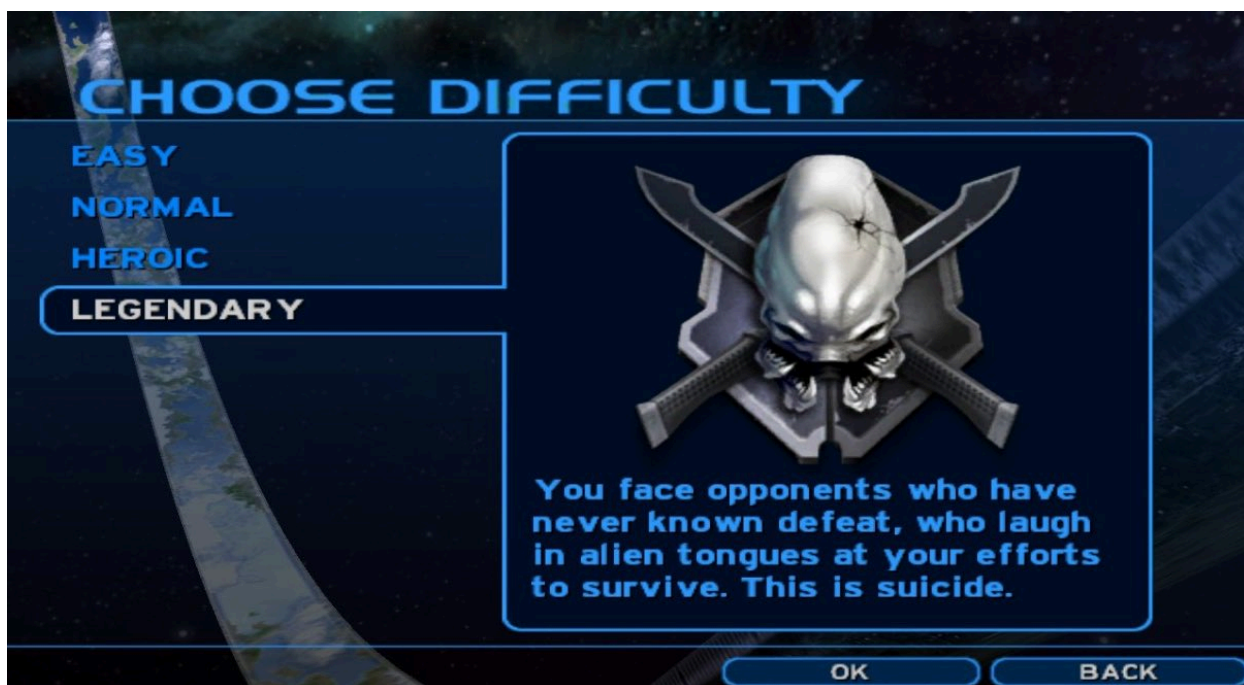
World of Warcraft is a video game full of input of every kind. However, my story with English input does not start with WoW. Those cognitive functions of mine started processing input in English from an early age with “movies and TV shows like Bionicles, Skeleton Warriors, Space Cobra, Starship Troopers” (Pulido, 2024, p. 7). Most of them were in English because my grand-mother worked as a housemaid in a household of an affluent family in Pance, a high-income zone in my city, Cali, and they used to give her many things like used clothes, toys and CD’s with movies and TV shows for children. It is usual that not only children but people of all ages coming from households with those characteristics to have a domain of English (Alonso, 2011), that is why even though everything I received was in English, I was not part of that population and my school was monolingual and therefore I was taught in Spanish and I did not understand the series I they gave to my grand-mother.

One of the first identification of mental processes I documented in my tale was trying to understand the plot of the Halo: Combat Evolved (Halo CE onwards) video game by “reading the characters’ tone of voice” (Pulido, 2024, p. 8) and expressions. It was clear for me when they were worried, upset, happy, etc. but I could not understand why. This leads me to one situation I did not narrate in the tale but could serve to exemplify the assimilations I made between Spanish and English around the age of 8.

In Halo, the difficulties are described not by mentioning differences among those in gameplay terms but by a short narration, as seen in Figure 9.

Figure 11.

Halo: Combat Evolved Legendary Difficulty.



Taken from: Sliding Difficulty [@ZestyExpedition]. (2022, March 3).

Then, as I had Halo CE in English and Halo 2 in Spanish, I could call my grandmother and read her the English menu of Halo CE in Spanish because I already had studied and made relationships between words in the two languages. Such an associative account of learning can be identified in Connectionism (Ellis & Schmidt, 1997, in Spada & Lightbown, 2019), as it declares that the brain creates networks which connect words or phrases to other words or phrases, and those connections are strengthened when learners are repeatedly exposed to linguistic stimuli in specific contexts. As I had invested so much time in both videogames, I could develop many associations between them and infer the meaning, understand their use and create basic utterances.

As the tale mentions, the input of English was very vast between the age I earned consciousness and stopped around 2007 when “commercialization of video games started to be done in Spanish” (Pulido, 2024, p. 9) and I was able to access them. For three years I was lucky enough to find many video games in Spanish, and it was only until 2010 that I had to face English again because I started to play on Xbox Live, an online platform made by Microsoft. At

this point, my English was still very basic and my abilities were pretty much the same. I had already played video games such as Doom 3 or Resident Evil 4 in English, but because of the help of a dictionary and the fact that they had the “pause” feature, I could easily understand the puzzles and general plot of them. However, those techniques were not of use when I played online in Xbox Live, and furthermore when I got introduced to idioms (Pulido, 2024).

I quite remember that one day I received one message from a player I just played with. It said: *what's up?* I could not answer it. I looked for the translation of each word in the dictionary as I did with many other games like Resident Evil 4 in the past. Furthermore, I was stunned, I wondered: *where up? On the roof? In the leaderboards? Was it a tricky question? Is he trying to make fun of me? What does it mean?* I could not make sense out of the complexity of that message and just didn't answer it. (p. 11)

One of the earliest stages of language acquisition implies the use of external resources to help, primarily, the understanding of unknown vocabulary. This can be done through the use of a dictionary or by guessing by the user (Liu, 1997). The same author affirms, quoting Hatch (1978) cited by McLaughlin (1978), that learners tend to prioritize the acquisition of vocabulary before grammar because it is their main priority. When it is done through the search of meaning in a dictionary it implies many mental processes tied to one another because after learning the word the learner also starts to understand “pronunciation, usage, and association with other words” (Liu, 1997, p. 93) for future usages. However, this usage is not recommended as permanent and some scholars teach their students to *guess* the meaning of a word from context, as it assumes both cognitive and metacognitive processes (Lopera, 2019) important most of all to a fluent reading practice and prove beneficial to SLA in the long term.

In this sense, my experience could be related to a first stage of language learning where the continuous and active use of the dictionary, not as a complementary tool but as a permanent addition, caused that the input I received formed in my mind in the embodiment of isolated words with a corresponding translation instead of words that acquire meaning depending on

context. This process was beneficial for the early stages of acquisition but as soon as I encountered idioms or phrasal verbs, it did not work anymore and the mental processes I had accustomed to perform for a long time turned futile in order to continue advancing.

At the moment I never thought that using a dictionary would be considered bad in the sense that its active use was encouraged in school and a mandatory school supply as was the bible and so on. However, as the years passed, even though it was still mandatory, the English dictionary was not demanded by the English teachers, so I gradually stopped carrying it and also turned to some other tools. By that point we got decent internet in my house so I could actively use Google Translate. That is the reason why in 2013 when I started playing WoW I did not use a dictionary (Pulido, 2024).

As it can be supposed, working together implies some sort of communication among players, which often, very often, are English-speaking people. That was my first constriction. I did not know the game, and could not communicate effectively with others to understand it. I did not use a dictionary then (p. 15).

The reasons to completely abandon the use of a dictionary are simple. First of all because of time management, looking up a word in a dictionary could take minutes while Google Translate would take seconds; second, because Google Translate was better with idioms and they were pretty common in video games, so if I actively saw them I would find it easier to remember their meaning. For example, Vanhanen (2017) found that consistent gamers find it easier to learn and use idioms that are actively used in video games. The author claims that one of the reasons that happens is because people “memorize them as sentences or fixed expressions instead of single words” (p. 8). That was a big shift and one of the biggest realizations about the English language that I experienced.

This practice of reducing the English to sentences, fixed expressions and basic vocabulary responds to a cognitive simplicity that can be named Foreign Talk (Dela & Arguelles, 2016). It is important to note that this concept is used to refer to the type of language simplicity

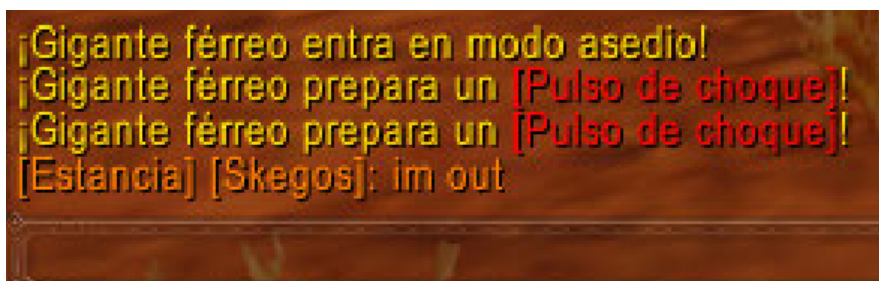
the natives use to imitate the foreigners' way of speaking, but Dela and Arguelles (2016), quoting Ellis (2009), mention that this register is similar to those found in other simplified registers such as learner language, caretaker talk, and pidgins. In this sense, my English utterances were simple as were those I received input from, and it was a practice I did not think about just until I entered the bachelor's degree.

There are some recorded instances of those simple uses of the English language. As the tale mentions: "I did what I could comprehend I needed to, and they did not bother in trying to speak with me more than was necessary" (Pulido, 2024, p. 15). Added to that, the following is mentioned:

The first image I got of me communicating in English is one from February 27th 2014, in which I just say: "im out". The context is that my group had engaged in a boss fight and I could not enter because I was out of the zone. In the 5 to 10 minutes that the fight could have lasted, all I said was that. (p. 19).

Figure 12.

im out

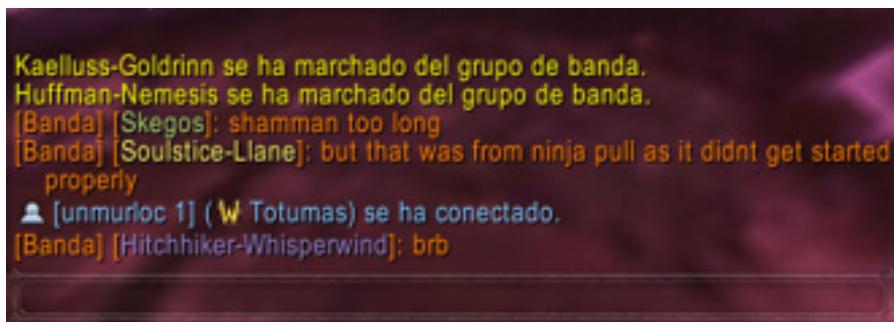


Source: Personal Screenshot from 02/07/2014 in Leveling up my English in World of Warcraft (Pulido, 2024).

Bear in mind that "Skegos" is the name of my WoW character and main character of Leveling up my English in World of Warcraft (Pulido, 2024). Furthermore the text mentions a second utterance: "Another one I got is from July the 14th of the same year in which I say: "shamman too long", trying to say that an enemy, the shaman, lasted alive so much more than it was required. (p. 20)"

Figure 13.

shamman too long



Source: Personal Screenshot from 07/14/2014 in *Leveling up my English in World of Warcraft* (Pulido, 2024).

One final retrospective example that demonstrates this use of language in the tale is found in the same page: “I was like 8 years old and tried to speak in English advising that I only spoke Spanish. What I said was: *I say Spanish no English*” (p. 20).

However, even though those utterances were very basic from my part, they represented higher cognitive use than those I had while playing Halo and I was then able to receive input and produce output of higher complexity. This could be attributed to be able to be exposed to input *just beyond* my level of linguistic competence, as supported by Krashen (1982) though his SLA input hypothesis. It also goes in accordance with the Early production stage mentioned by Lessow-Hurley (1991) in a natural approach in which I answer with few words or short phrases.

It is important then to make one differentiation, while Halo CE had far more linguistic complexity because it was all set up in English, it was just so much above my level that I could not learn so much from it; on the other hand, World of Warcraft offered me linguistic input slightly above my cognitive level and that is what helped that I could duly learn in accordance to Krashen's (2003) studies.

The reason WoW was *just above* my competences can be attributed to the following:

- ❖ I was around 5 years older when playing WoW than when playing Halo CE, therefore I had learned more vocabulary because of natural exposition to it both on video games and school;
- ❖ In 2013 I did not understand the video game nor English very well, but I got to understand everything about WoW by 2014 so the only constraint left was understanding English.

Proof of this positive development towards English is furthermore noticed in the tale (p. 23) when I started to show utterances longer and more complex than the previous ones demonstrating Speech Emergence (Lessow-Hurley, 1991). Please note that then I accurately include and conjugate commonly used verbs only about five months later (from July to December 2014, and January of 2015).

Figure 14.

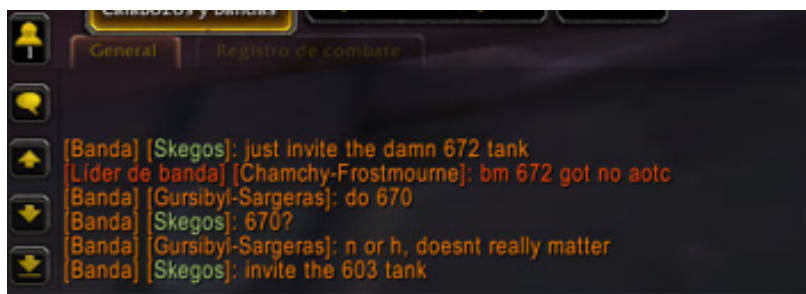
More complex sentences.



Source: Personal Screenshot from 12/21/2014 in Leveling up my English in World of Warcraft (Pulido, 2024).

Figure 15.

Learning new words.



Source: Personal Screenshot from 03/01/2015 in Leveling up my English in World of Warcraft (Pulido, 2024).

One of the reasons that can be attributed to the improvement of the level of English I acquired was the use of voice chats because as I progressed through the game I tried every time harder content which required a higher level of communication. I started using those voice chats as a listener and not as a speaker in the third to four quarters of 2014 in order to do raids in normal difficulty. In this sense, the benefits of listening in L2 are widely researched. For example, Vandergrift (2007), quoted in Bang and Hiver (2016), mentions that the process of listening is complex as it involves not only receiving and deciphering linguistic input but also interpreting and relating the input to what is already known. As I mentioned previously, I already understood the game, so relating what I knew in Spanish to what I received in English in a very close and specific context made it easier for me.

Of course, the process of adapting from exclusively writing input to voice and chat input was not easy. I recall it in one part of the tale: “when playing with voice chats I only listened and made acknowledgements in chat. I remember quitting many groups because when I heard they called my nickname Skegos I could not comprehend what they meant. ” (p. 20).

What makes listening different from writing is mainly phonetics and phonology. One example is English’s consonant clusters often interfere with the interpretation of grammatical tense, but as that one, there are other many pronunciation differences between a L1 Spanish speaker trying to learn English that may make a listener have to work harder to comprehend (Gleason, 2011). But still, if the learner has higher L2 vocabulary and grammatical knowledge it

is a great contribution to the process of listening proficiency, as mentioned by Vandergrift (2006) in Bang and Hiver (2016). This could be what made it easier for me as I had acquired good amounts of vocabulary during the 14 years of my life and also for over a year of playing World of Warcraft, and I just had to start developing the ear for it.

One of the next steps I took was setting up WoW in English in April 2015. This was because as I got a fixed spot in a Spanish-speaking group I started to feel the need to continue practicing English. When I did this, even though I had been playing WoW for over 2 years, I realized that maybe my vocabulary was not that vast enough. Yes, I could communicate with people in an effective way but when everything was in English I was not sure about what I was doing. This was mainly noticed by me when I started to do the new quest introduced in June with the patch Fury of Hellfire.

This constraint was not immediately noticed by me in April because from that month up to June I had been playing content that I already knew and the only novelty was that it was now in English, therefore it did not mean anything I was not familiar with. On the other hand, with the arrival of the new patch and content, I then had to do new quests, learn new features and understand new items. And WoW is a video game not particularly vocabulary friendly, as the tale says (Pulido, 2024)

World of Warcraft is a video game with so much vocabulary of all ambits. As seen below, in every part of the gameplay there is always vocabulary to learn from, even when you are fighting against a powerful boss, when exploring the world, doing a quest or just reading an item description (p. 25).

This quote is then followed by a couple of screenshots taken around that time in 2015 demonstrating the level of vocabulary present in a session of World of Warcraft. The first one, Figure 16, is a screenshot taken during a bossfight called Iron Maidens in the raid Black Rock Foundry. It is one of the last and most difficult bosses, meaning that if I did not understand something, I could not have time to look for it on Google translate as in a matter of seconds I

could mess-up the attempt and waste my team's time, and gold (for reparations because of their death). So it is mandatory to know and understand everything on the screen.

Figure 16.

Vocabulary in the interface.



Source: Personal Screenshot from 06/13/2015 in Leveling up my English in World of Warcraft (Pulido, 2024).

Because of the importance of understanding everything, much of the English learning attributed to World of Warcraft could be the consequence of noticing the importance of each one of the utterances of input received throughout the game. This goes in accordance with Schmidt's (1990) Noticing hypothesis where the level of learning of a L2 learner is directly related to being aware or noticing the level of importance of the receiving input. Without being aware of it, the experience could have been far different.

From April to June I switched to English, as you can tell in the previous figure, but in order to enjoy the new patch and to understand what I was doing I had to switch the language

back to Spanish. All of this because I really wanted to enjoy it, as presented in the following quote (Pulido, 2024):

In June 2015 a new patch of content was added, Fury of Hellfire. I remember my excitement and so did my friends because it was presented with a really moving trailer, it was so amazing that I wanted to play with them again (p. 27).

This switch from English to Spanish is proven in the following screenshot not taken from the tale.

Figure 17.

Playing in Spanish, again.

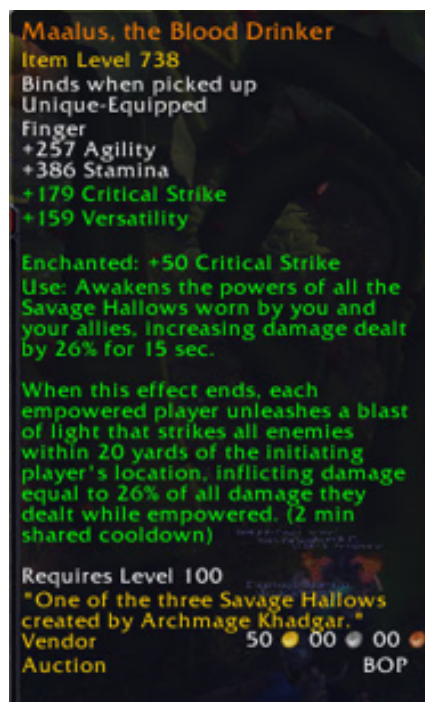


Source: Personal Screenshot from 07/13/2015.

Once I got familiar with the environment of the new patch around late July 2015 I switched back to English, as shown in the following screenshot.

Figure 18.

Legendary ring's description.



Source: Personal Screenshot from 07/31/2015 in Leveling up my English in World of Warcraft (Pulido, 2024).

From mid 2015 to 2016 my confidence in my English proficiency exponentially grew and I was able to engage in many different uses of language such as arguing, blaming and humiliating others (Pulido, 2024): “it took us to achieve our goal and into having more vivid discussions and arguing with English-speaking people, who were the main target of our scamming” (p. 28). On the same page there is another reference to that: “I could spit swear words in English on others' faces.”

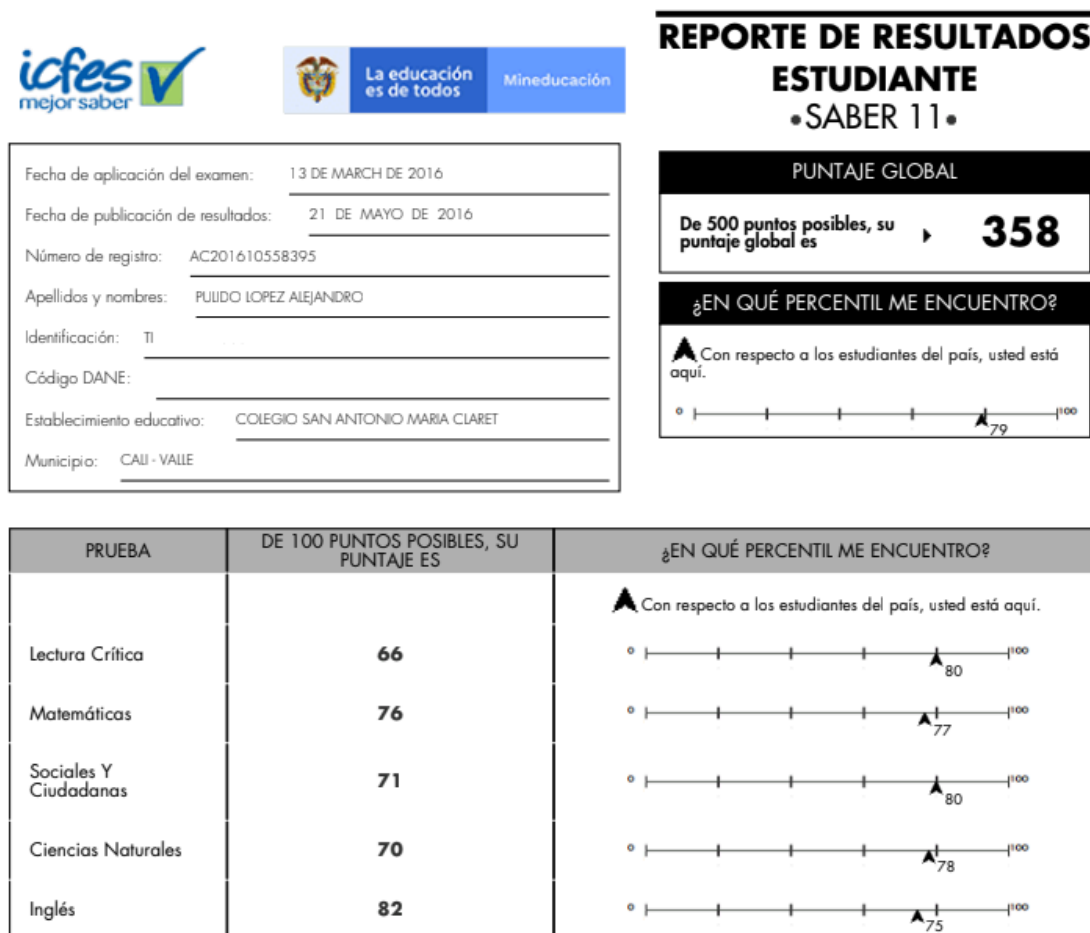
I was then so proud of my English that the following expansion, Legion, released in late 2016 I played it from beginning to end completely in English. My proficiency in it started to be highlighted and proven in many ways (Pulido, 2024):

By this point, 2016, I already had a good level of English (that I attribute to my experiences in WoW) and my mom would always highlight it on me because I consumed everything in English, from Youtube videos and music to research and everything. Since

I presented the ICFES, the mandatory state exam for high school graduates, I got a good level of English. For that exam it was 82/100. So for 2016 I already had a really good level of English (p. 32).

Figure 19.

ICFES results.



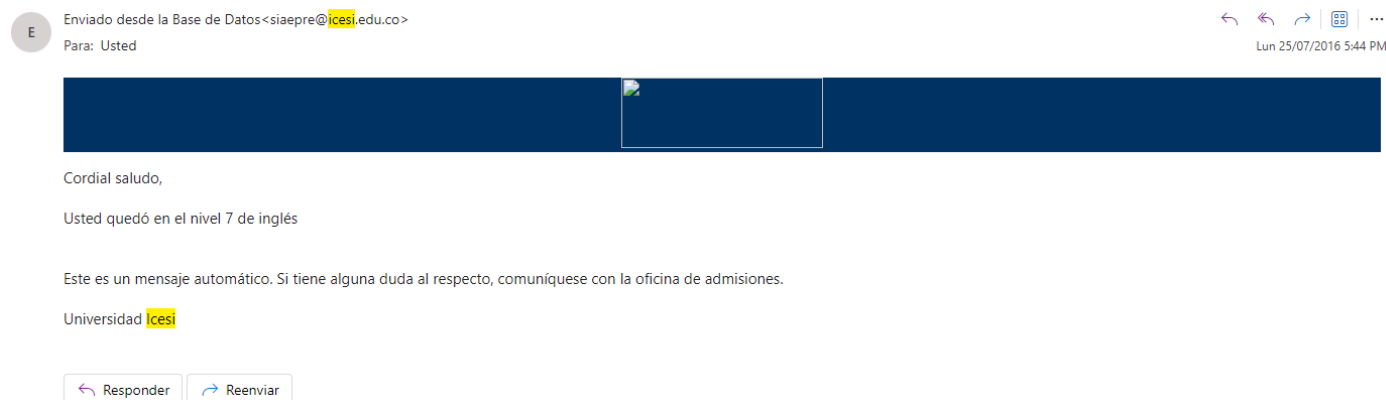
Source: Personal Screenshot

In the same year, 2016, I started my first professional degree, system's engineering at Universidad ICESI and after the diagnostic test "I was assigned to the English level of 7 out of 8" (Pulido, 2024, p. 32). The same happened when I abandoned that degree and entered the Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (SENA), a public institution in Colombia that offers free

technical and technological formation, in 2017, as I “was exonerated from attending English classes because I performed well in the diagnostic exam” (Pulido, 2024, p. 32).

Figure 20.

ICESI English test results.



Source: Personal Screenshot from my email from 07/25/2017.

Unfortunately, for the SENA English exemption I have no evidence as I still attended the course as a way of practicing English because I was very enthusiastic about it and I was really positive about my proficiency in it and ended with a grade of 4.5 out of 5.

Figure 21.

SENA grades.



EL CENTRO DE GESTION TECNOLÓGICA DE SERVICIOS

CERTIFICA

Que ALEJANDRO PULIDO identificado(a) con Cedula de Ciudadania No de Cali, realizó y aprobó el programa de TÉCNICO EN ASESORÍA COMERCIAL Y OPERACIONES DE ENTIDADES FINANCIERAS con las siguientes evaluaciones e intensidad horaria:

	EVAL	I.H.
Itinerario		
APLICAR TECNOLOGÍAS DE LA INFORMACIÓN TENIENDO EN CUENTA LAS NECESIDADES DE LA UNIDAD ADMINISTRATIVA.	4.5 A	80
COMPRENDER TEXTOS EN INGLÉS EN FORMA ESCRITA Y AUDITIVA	4.5 A	180
DAR ASESORÍA COMERCIAL Y FINANCIERA QUE CONDUZCA A LA SATISFACCIÓN DE LAS EXPECTATIVAS Y NECESIDADES REALES DEL CLIENTE.	4.5 A	200
FIDELIZAR AL CLIENTE INCREMENTANDO LOS VÍNCULOS COMERCIALES Y LOGRANDO LA RENTABILIDAD DEL NEGOCIO DE ACUERDO CON LAS POLÍTICAS INSTITUCIONALES.	4.5 A	120
PROCESAR DEPÓSITOS, PAGOS Y RETIROS EN MONEDA LEGAL Y EXTRANJERA DE ACUERDO A LAS NORMAS LEGALES E INSTITUCIONALES VIGENTES.	4.5 A	150
PROMOVER LA INTERACCION IDONEA CONSIGO MISMO, CON LOS DEMAS Y CON LA NATURALEZA EN LOS CONTEXTOS LABORAL Y SOCIAL.	4.5 A	5
RESULTADOS DE APRENDIZAJE ETAPA PRACTICA	4.5 A	880
VINCULAR AL CLIENTE DE ACUERDO CON LAS NORMAS INTERNAS Y EXTERNAS ESTABLECIDAS	4.5 A	150

Source: Personal Screenshot from my email from 07/25/2017.

Then, what started on WoW then turned into a snowball effect that led me to consume content in English language and therefore my level was increasing each time more. This is why near this point I cannot attribute my English learning to only one feature of my life as I had started to experience it in every aspect of my life and my journey with English and exclusively WoW concludes.

Analyzing it, we can identify that it started with small utterances of Early production (Lessow-Hurley, 1991), but with practice and with the desire on producing meaningful output from 2013 to 2017 I had to be constantly reflecting on my output's form but mostly in the

meaning I conveyed with it unto the other players. This monitoring goes in accordance with Swain's output hypothesis (1985). Because of the lack of focus in form, my English was visibly informal but nothing else could be expected from a video game purely made for entertainment, so it could not help me any longer beyond B2. It was then the empty seat that WoW left that allowed me to continue to grow in my English cognitive skills when I started formally learning it. From this point on, we will talk about the complementation that the Bachelor's degree on foreign languages had on the English that World of Warcraft taught, which was immense and started in 2019.

For many years, and even after entering the Bachelor's degree in foreign languages, I thought that WoW had prepared me for everything in English, but it was not the reality as eventually I struggled with academic writing:

For example, I never had to study for an English test during the bachelor's degree, I could explain myself easily and lost the shyness to speak in front of others. That helped me a lot, maybe during the first half of the degree. The later half, however, taught me things that World of Warcraft by itself could not, at least not so deeply. Among those I remark on learning new ways of expression such as the Manifesto¹, academic writing, podcasts, monologuing (Pulido, 2024, p. 33).

The reasons commonly attributed to difficulties in academic writing, mainly for L2 learners and such as I had, tend to be in relation to insufficient vocabulary (Nadarajan, 2011). However, my difficulties were not related to that as, in my opinion, my vocabulary is vast. Still, as mentioned by Raimer (1983) in Budjalemba and Listyani (2020):

When students complain about how difficult it is to write in a second language, they are talking not only about the difficulty of finding the right words and using the correct grammar but also about the difficulty of finding and expressing ideas in a new language. (p. 137).

1. It is a written statement outlining a set of beliefs and claims for change while persuading others ("What Is a Manifesto? How to Write a Manifesto," 2022).

On one hand, even though I believe that I have good vocabulary in the sense of nouns and adjectives, I was not familiar with other important aspects of vocabulary such as connectors, linking words, transitions. In WoW you did not have to use them so I never had to learn them. On the other hand, my academic writing was poor even in Spanish, my mother tongue. In this last scenario I knew much more vocabulary and even the connectors and other things, but I did not have the expertise to use them to accommodate my ideas. This is not caused by the lack of understanding of the importance of coherence and cohesion in academic writing, but because L2 students find achieving those goals quite difficult (Al Badi, 2015).

Added to that, I found a lack of understanding of the need for appropriate support to my ideas. The following is a quote taken from an essay I wrote in 2019 in the first semester of the Bachelor's degree: "La cantidad de miembros de las fuerzas militares que han estado en combate pesado y lo extrañan es una cifra bastante alta" (Pulido, 2019, p. 2). In this example I quote a part of the essay in which an exact number supported with a reliable source would have added immense weight to my affirmation, but I omitted it and left it general, obliterating my reliability. Those are aspects that the Bachelor's degree journey has taught me and is of use for any language I write in, whether it is English, Spanish or French, increasing my proficiency and ability to express myself in them.

"Since 2017, I have not been a full-time active player of World of Warcraft, but I have returned whenever I feel I have free time from university and work" (Pulido, 2024, p. 33). It is then why I conclude attributing all the learning to WoW up to that year, 2017, and I start marking it as a compliment of the formal instruction I have received in the Bachelor's degree starting from 2019. From 2017 I played it sporadically and it helped me but not that much as before. However, since 2019 I have learned so much and, in November 2023, the Escuela de Ciencias del lenguaje of the Universidad del Valle certified myself as C1 in the proficiency for English language. This monograph you are currently reading is proof of the development my English has undergone and represents my current cognitive evolution towards L2, supported a bit with

practice in World of Warcraft, but mostly attributed to the formal instruction I received in the Universidad del Valle.

5.2. Talenting for High-end

This chapter wishes to uncover and answer the research question: *What WoW features benefit interactional linguistic skills?* Defining interactional skills in simple terms as the ability to produce co-constructed understandings (Onoda, 2019). It differentiates from the cognitive perspectives as they seek to redefine the nature of learning as a fundamentally social phenomenon dependent on the social context (Andersen, 2019).

As mentioned in the previous section, my initial steps with English were all alone and by myself. It was like that from around 2006 until I started playing Halo 3 online on Xbox Live services in 2010. My English then corresponded to a very basic vocabulary and grammar knowledge, and as Kim (2016) mentions, even by having perfected those it would not have been enough to effectively communicate as the domain of language forms is not enough. Onoda (2019), quoting Ellis and Shintani (2013), agree and mention that for effective interaction to occur, participants must demonstrate sociolinguistic, grammatical, discoursal, and strategic competence; therefore he concludes, quoting Nation and Newton (2009) that speaking fluency and accuracy are critical for that to happen.

This was an immense constraint when playing on Xbox Live and I simply ended up by chatting in very basic things: “My chats were like: play? And with lots of simple verbs, and when I did not understand something I just quitted” (Pulido, 2024, p. 11).

My Xbox eventually broke and I started playing computer games again, but this was a relapse into being alone and, again, I started to use only Spanish, with English appearing remotely when looking for information on the internet. This lasted a while, until I discovered World of Warcraft, a moment in which English not only became important but also necessary as it is a multiplayer video game: “As it can be supposed, working together implies some sort of

communication among players, which often, very often, are English-speaking people” (Pulido, 2024, p. 15).

From June to August 2013 I started familiarizing with the game with the constraint of playing with foreigners that mastered the game and spoke to me in English, but I made the effort and, as I was noticeably Latin-American, they spoke to me in very simple ways. This is known as Foreign talk (Dela & Arguelles, 2016) or caretaker talk (Krashen, 1982) and, as mentioned in the previous section, it means that native speakers accommodate their utterances when speaking with learners of foreign language as adults do with kids. However, as I struggled learning to play the video game I eventually started acquiring English. I began to lightly understand what English-speaking players said just by making assimilations and relating things such as vocabulary and expressions. Kinga (2016) found that this happens because players are required to understand the game in order to progress in it. Also the fact that I have a very strong visual memory and when remembering a word I use it to remember the whole scenario and context in which I saw it previously. According to the same author, word exposure frequency suggests that getting exposed to 1-4 occurrences of a word is enough for successful acquisition. This was not a problem in World of Warcraft as the vocabulary used by the players tend to be of the same nature and very repetitive.

In fact, this continuous repetition of the same vocabulary and expressions is prone to be adopted by the whole community of WoW players. This happens because it is very common that gamers when playing video games consider the learning of vocabulary and idiomatic expressions a way of belonging to a group (Vanhanen, 2017).

Throughout my experience interacting each time with English-speaking people I eventually got better at it. As shown in the previous section, by December 2014 my English development was not only huge, but also I started to abandon the isolation and loneliness I had built for years because of mistrust of others as I was bullied at school: “I also lost trust in others

because in the first trimester of 2013 and for the first time in my life I thought I had screwed one school subject: English, because someone stole one workshop from me” (Pulido, 2024, p.12).

This trust did not come instantly. In 2013 when I did not know how to effectively communicate in English I “just did not care about the experience of interacting with them” (Pulido, 2024, p.15). But as I learned the language I started to participate in the shared creation of meaning in the community of WoW players and eventually language learning grew further as it is a process which occurs in and through interactions and relationships with others (Andersen, 2019).

I felt a strong instinct to start belonging somewhere, a tribe, therefore I started loving the WoW official forums community and fan-pages and interacting a lot with them. I remember checking them on a daily basis so I could engage in conversations with others. (Pulido, 2024, p. 19).

By mid 2014 I not only actively participated in groups with other people to complete dungeons and raids, but by then I was already creating groups and leading them in content of mid difficulty. Of course, it is important to clarify that this interaction did not start at a 100% level with English because I was not proficient enough in it, but it was a start and eventually those interactions and groups started to become more diverse and include Spanish and English.

The following is a figure that retrates a group created to complete the first four bosses of the Siege of Orgrimmar raid in mid 2014. It is composed mostly from people from the same Latin-American realm of mine, Ragnaros, but there is one from Balgun, an English-speaking realm.

Figure 22.

Skegos as Raid Leader.



Source: Personal Screenshot from 06/13/2014

For progressing into the following bosses, I did not start to lead immediately, but instead I switched again to just looking for groups already made. This is because as the raid progresses, the bosses become harder and a higher level of communication is needed, as well as more experienced and better equipped players, which are commonly English-speaking ones.

Eventually, for the hardest bosses, voice-chat was required most of the time.

However, as I played a lot, I quickly completed the easiest difficulty and switched to a higher one. To do that, I installed an add-on for the game called Oqueue, which allowed me to meet up with people from other realms easily. In that way I could complete the latest raid, Siege of Orgrimmar, in two more higher difficulties: Flexible and Normal. Normal was tough enough to require, at least for the lasts and harder bosses, voice communication. The voice apps that we used back then were TS3 (Team Speak 3) and Ventrilo (Pulido, 2024, p. 20).

Even though I was not prepared to communicate with them in English orally I did what I could: “I only listened and made acknowledgements in chat. I remember quitting many groups because when I heard they called my nickname Skegos I could not comprehend what they meant” (Pulido, 2024, p. 20).

Although research suggests that students who are more expressive in their L1 will tend to have greater confidence when speaking in the L2 (Osboe et al. 2007), this reality did not apply to my experience playing World of Warcraft. It may be related to the fact that the context was not a language classroom and I was the only “L2 learner” in the context. However, I still made the effort to learn more and more up to the second quarter of 2015.

In the following figure, you can see a group formed to defeat Blackhand, the last and most difficult boss of the Blackrock Foundry raid. In the widget of Dungeons & Raids on the left of the screen, just after it says “H BRF @blackhand” there is a speaker icon, which means that the group was using voice-chat to coordinate. As it is the last boss, the coordination needed to be of the highest order.

Figure 23.

Blackhand boss fight with voice-chat.



Source: Personal Screenshot from 04/07/2015.

Not too soon after I made a stop in interacting with other people in English because I got into a Latin-American guild and had a fixed spot to raid every week. However, that was not an inconvenience because I felt pretty good with my English then, to the point that to continue practicing it I set the WoW language to English, as seen in the Figure above.

The progress in English then started to be, again, more related to vocabulary and form in each time higher complexity. However, by the second semester of 2015 my then current guild started to form groups with English-speakers to scam them. And me, as part of the scheme, had to speak English, whether to gain their trust or to insult and taunt them after we succeeded in our conspiracy to better equip our characters at the expense of them. This lasted a while and in 2016 my English on an interactional level was very good. I was able to engage in conversations with foreigners with no problem and could demonstrate it to my parents in one trip we made in April 2016 to Monserrate in Bogotá, a place commonly attended by foreigners.

Figure 24.

Me with a foreigner in Monserrate, cropped for confidentiality.



Source: Personal Screenshot from 04/09/2016.

One final clarification I want to make is that by that year, 2016, I started to look for English conversation clubs in my city, Cali, but could not find any that were free. That is one of the reasons I made World of Warcraft the place to learn and practice English on a

conversational level. Not for free, because I paid a membership fee, but it was something I was already paying every month.

In summary, MMORPGs are theorized to be particularly promising as arenas for second language learning because they promote and enable L2 socialization and interaction; enable communication using a wide range of discourse strategies and interactive features, including negotiation of meaning, clarification requests and requests for assistance; provide access to a wide range of interlocutors, including native speakers; provide a low-risk, low-anxiety learning environment; provide an accessible, L2 dominant learning environment; and engender motivation and enjoyment (Andersen, 2019, p. 27).

This goes in accordance with what is related in the tale:

This has helped me to continue practicing English because I do not have a formal group of friends anymore and I have to play with strangers, and also because each expansion brings new vocabulary from all ambits so I can have new words that I put in practice for my academic formation (Pulido, 2024, p. 33).

Since 2017 I have only played for a couple of months in a fixed group, then World of Warcraft continues to be my playground for practicing English in an authentic way outside of the formal instruction I have received from the Bachelor's degree in foreign languages. Most of this knowledge was built in accordance with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) in which it is constructed through a process of collaboration, interaction, and communication in social settings (Nassaji & Swain, 2000). One difference is that the theorizing is focused on "learners" but in my experience and context one can see that other learners are not necessary but rather to be put in a L2 social environment with those characteristics is enough.

5.3. Popping BL

This chapter wishes to uncover and answer the research question: *How playing WoW impacted on my motivation towards learning English?* Defining motivation as the desire to learn

(Nurhidayah, 2020) in this context. The concept of motivation can still be more developed.

Some scholars argue that motivation is not static, it changes depending on the context, changes over time (Gass & Selinker, 2008) and can be born out of many reasons. It can be divided into two different categories: Extrinsic and Intrinsic. Andersen (2019), quoting McGonigal (2012) and Dewaele (2013) mention the following:

Extrinsic motivation is fuelled by factors outside ourselves and drives us to seek external rewards such as money, status, or praise. Intrinsic motivation is internally fuelled and causes us to engage in activities that in some form or other are their own reward, for instance by being enjoyable, giving us pride or improving our sense of self, or strengthening our social connections (p. 16).

It is commonly attributed for people to start learning English to do it because of job opportunities, and it is not to blame because people with a domain of English can access a higher salary up to 30% in comparison with those who do not speak it (Cuervo, 2021) in Colombia. However, my journey with English does not start with such an intrinsic motivation.

My story with English as L2 starts as soon as I have conscience with those TV shows I have talked about in the *Solo Leveling* section. But then I had zero interest in English because it was just beyond everything I could understand, and the same happened with the video games I played in that early stage of my life at 5 - 6 years old. "...those shows, movies and video games I talked about before were mostly only available in English so I did not understand them at all but enjoyed them while trying to make an idea about what they were about" (Pulido, 2024, p. 7).

My motivation increased with Halo: Combat Evolved, as there I really tried to understand the plot with whatever resource I had, but it was futile as still it was highly above my cognitive understanding of English. However, it was in 2010 at the age of 10 that I began to try to go beyond and tried to use it in an interactional way. Andersen (2019), quoting McGonigal (2012), says that playing a game is equivalent to learning how to play the game, and there is a component of motivation in playing that comes from becoming better and better, learning more

until achieving mastery of the game. This was my initial motivator as I was very good at playing Halo with my friends.

I enjoyed it a lot, and along with my now a little bit grown-up brother, my best friend Javier and some amazing friends from school, that was one of the video games I enjoyed the most playing in LAN (Local Area Network) so we could just meet in someone's house and have tons of games (Pulido, 2024, p. 10).

So, by meeting with my friends to enjoy an afternoon playing Xbox, eating and laughing eventually turns into a competition because there are only 4 controllers and 6 persons. Whoever dies passes the controller. Vorderer et al. (2003) mention that in video games motivation is tied to competition, often to one-self and sometimes to others. They affirm that a successful completion of the situations present in the video games leads to positive affect which is connected to high arousal, especially if the competitive component of the situation was strong.

As video games are tools familiar with triggering powerful emotional responses such as curiosity, frustration and joy (Buckley & Doyle, 2016, McGonigal, 2011 in Peake & Reynolds, 2020), in playing with my friends there were lots of situations where that emotional component is strong, and once I had to stop playing with them I realized I needed more. In this endeavor for more competition I reached online gaming. "Anyway, that 17th January of 2010 in which I redeemed the Xbox Live membership code, I knew what high-quality online gaming is, and I enrolled in a world from which there is no return" (Pulido, 2024, p. 11).

Many scholars claim that one of the primary motivations for playing video games was coping with daily stressors (Batthyány et al., 2009, Grüsser et al., 2005 in Kus & Griffiths, 2012). In my particular case, it could be argued that they are right.

A little bit after, around 2009, I stopped playing on the Xbox because I could only play multiplayer when my friends could. My friend Javier is older than I by four years so he was already living the life of an adolescent, and my parents were financially struggling so I could not go to my other friends' house as often (Pulido, 2024, p. 10).

I could have developed an addiction towards online gaming because the situation in my home and in my social life was starting to change and I needed an “escape from real life problems” (Allison et al., 2006 in Kus & Griffiths, 2012). However, I found the constraint that gaming is one of the widest communities that use English as lingua franca speakers (Jenkins, 2015, Kachru, 1986 in Peake & Reynolds, 2020). That could have demotivated me, but instead I chose to try it with the help of tools I had been taught to use in school, such as the dictionary.

Having that in mind, I found in online gaming, the escape I needed from reality and the trigger of my success in life. Started with Halo but eventually turned into many other games, arriving to one of the biggest hits at 2009 (Chiang, 2010): World of Warcraft, that also happen to be “one of the most popular choices for other MMORPG-based SLA studies” (Andersen, 2019, p. 26).

When I started to play in 2013 it was already a 9 years-old video game with a pretty well established base of players with tenure; because of that, I did not feel like belonging there for a while. The first levels consist of participating in the realization of quests that offer attractive rewards to enhance the character. Done in the mother-tongue, this is a very basic but enjoyable feature, however, from level 15 and upwards, with the introduction of dungeons and battlegrounds, competitiveness is shown and established WoW players are not particularly easy with new-comers as they “have not yet developed commitment to the group and have not yet learned how the group operates, it is rational for established group members to actively distrust them” (Kraut et al. 2010, p. 34). This was experienced by me in one of the earliest moments of my gameplay with English-speaking people:

The fact that I was often rejected made me just not care about the experience of interacting with them. I did what I could comprehend I needed to, and they did not bother in trying to speak with me more than was necessary as the dungeons are extremely easy and do not last more than 15 minutes each (Pulido, 2024, p. 15).

Still, as Peake and Reynolds (2020) mention, gaming is a problem-solving, rule-driven, competitive, and reward-based activity, therefore I was already familiar with dealing with constraints. And with the aid of a intrinsic motivation I tried actively to enjoy the game because of the amount of features it offered and that I wanted to master, but things were not easy, even with Spanish-speaking people as my lack of specific knowledge of the game made more difficult their experience:

I had a lot of fun back then, but I remember being judged because I did not play well. For example, I remember wearing a polearm as a weapon because it had a higher level but being told I could not use that because it had agility and I, as a warrior, should use strength (Pulido, 2024, p. 16).

By this point, I had bad experiences with English and Spanish speaking people and did not want to play with them for being rude with me, so I started a path in which I only focused on myself. I could have abandoned it and gone back to a video game I knew how to play but as “I was amazed by the game and I benefited a lot from it” (Pulido, 2024, p. 17) I could not abandon it. Due to the social nature of the game, I could not avoid grouping with other people, but using the automatic grouping systems I would get in groups with people I would never see again as they were millions of players. In this sense, the constraint of them being mostly English-speakers started to turn into a motivation as I, trying to not be seen as a new player, started to take part into activities of coordinating, distributing gameplay knowledge and reporting on actions in English, as they are the main part of WoW dynamics (Zheng et al., 2012 in Kinga, 2016).

As I turned into max-level and a competent WoW player I started to do everything to improve my character’s performance. That included playing every day to complete the daily quests and dungeons so I started to play as much as possible. It has been argued that because of the 24/7 nature and almost mandatory excessive play required in playing MMORPGs like World of Warcraft, online gaming is proner to lead to addiction (Griffiths & Meredith, 2009) and I was starting to be addicted.

Kuss & Griffiths (2012) found some characteristics that develop due to addiction to video games. For example, they quote King & Delfabbro (2009) because they noticed irregular sleeping patterns developed in addicted gamers. In my case, one of the facts not told in the tale, is that I, at 14 years-old, did not develop that behavior as I was not allowed to play past 6pm. So, the effect on me was that I started to wake up at 6 - 7 am to play more time throughout the day. This goes in accordance with what the authors found quoting Gentile (2009) and Rau et al. (2006) because adolescent expert online game players were reported to have started playing earlier to play longer.

Again, Kuss & Griffiths (2012) mention another pattern that I identify in my tale, in which, among other factors that influenced my motivation to play, was that I by the time had developed low social competence and loneliness, as reported by them quoting Choo et al. (2010) and Lemmens et al. (2011).

On the other hand, Kuss & Griffiths (2012) reported that in addiction to video games there was an increase in physical aggression, quoting Lemmens et al. (2009), and lower grade point average and school performance, quoting Chan & Rabinowitz (2006), Choo et al. (2010), Gentile (2009) and Gentile et al. (2011). However, totally on the contrary, I was not physically aggressive nor underperformed in school. On the other hand, I was an aggressive child before online gaming, mostly with my brother, but actually I was able to improve the relationship I had with him after World of Warcraft. The same happened with my school grades as I almost failed a class in 8th grade but to this day I have not been again close to it.

As my motivation to play WoW increased, so did my motivation to learn English and I “started to get out of my comfort zone in order to communicate” (Pulido, 2024, p. 19). As I continued to make Skegos stronger I also had to endure more difficult communication tasks such as joining groups with voice-communication for “the lasts and harder bosses” (Pulido, 2024, p. 20).

Of course, not everything was motivating for me as I played in Ragnaros, one of the realms with the worst renown in the video game, so I was discriminated against because of my level of English communication and also they punished my mistakes harder as a Latin-American player.

Because of this reason I manifest that for “learning English or any L2 with World of Warcraft, one must be very resilient” (Pulido, 2024, p. 20). However, this is also explained by the understanding of motivation by Ghenghesh (2010), as it is an internal drive that encourages a learner to pursue a course of action and is responsible for initiating the learning and later the driving force to sustain the learning process over the long and arduous years it takes to learn a language.

The same happened with my listening skills as I started to participate in the voice-communication with English-speakers, at first “I only listened and made acknowledgements in chat but quitted many groups because I could not comprehend what they meant” (Pulido, 2024, p. 20) but after a while “I got a little bit out of my comfort zone and kept on the voice chats even though I could not comprehend a lot” (Pulido, 2024, p. 24). This could be explained because listening is one of the most complex tasks in L2 learners and success may depend greatly on a concert of individual learner characteristics that lead them to different levels of success (Bang & Hiver, 2016).

I still think that the main driver of my motivation towards learning English could be attributed to the self determination theory, as defined by Junger (2016) as following: “human beings need three basic things in order to be content: they need to feel competent at what they do; they need to feel authentic in their lives; and they need to feel connected to others” (p. 21). For the most part, the motivation to play WoW was to be a really good player and be recognized in the community as a compensation of the absence of much social interaction in the real world, that is why “I got two achievements called Ahead of the curve, which consisted in defeating the last boss of the current raid in the second harder difficulty” (Pulido, 2024, p. 24). I started to feel

my desire for English to be authentic as “by the end of the previous expansion I already understood that I needed to learn to speak in English and I took it personally” (Pulido, 2024, p. 23). And finally, I continuously pursued belonging to a group, at first “I just wanted to play with my friends and my brother, thus we created a guild to do that” (Pulido, 2024, p. 23); then my brother left me his spot in a guild and “I finally started to belong to a higher level of community and acquired more compromises” (p. 23). In this sense I appealed to those intrinsic values to human happiness that Junger (2016) spoke of.

World of Warcraft could have been the catalyst for such an experience because it is, for the most part, a very prone platform to create further motivation in the desire to develop meaningful relationships around and engage in activities pertaining to the shared interest (Andersen, 2019). While developing them, it is very likely to develop a sense of belonging to a group and manifest behaviors typical to communities of practices for language learning. For example the adoption of idiomatic expressions (Vanhanen, 2017).

In my improvement as a WoW player, intrinsic motivation continued growing as I progressed through the raids, and at the same time progress into the domain of English can be assumed as raid leaders will not let players that cause conflict participate in their raids. Conflict, in this context, refers to players that do not understand the instructions. For example, then, the 12th boss of the Siege of Orgrimmar raid, Siegecrafter Blackfuse, needed close to perfect coordination with players with high mobility (Skegos as hunter was one). Therefore, I needed to understand what my role in that coordination was and do my job to perfection.

Also, my not perfect English was not that criticized if my performance as WoW player was enough to not cause conflict and greatly help the group. In the following picture, taken in July 2014, I was not yet at my prime in English but they had no problem in allowing me to participate in the hardest boss fights because my damage was very good, as shown top performing in the lower-left square (Green color doing twice the damage of the second and third top performers).

Figure 25.

Thok boss fight.



Source: Personal Screenshot from 07/20/2014

If by mid 2014 I was better with English, I not only was much better by 2015 but I also craved practicing it and, because of that, when I got into a guild I switched the video game's language to English so I could learn more vocabulary.

My motivation to become a better player also increased with it, so I switched sides from the Alliance to the Horde in order to find “more opportunities to grow” (Pulido, 2024, p. 27), not only as a player but also financially as I would get into the sale of carries. “That is, get paid to do content for other people in exchange for gold (the in-game currency)” (p. 27).

I greatly benefited from this switching to the Horde and completed in 3 months the Ahead of the Curve achievement and got into mythic raiding for the first time in my life. Mythic difficulty is a real feat of strength as it is considered that only 1 - 3% of players complete it.

Preparing for it I, with my Horde guild, got into some unethical practices such as Ninja Looting. “It consists of taking the rewards of an activity without taking the others in consideration” (Pulido, 2024, p. 28). This allowed us to improve the power of our characters and practice English a lot as a group because we would scam English-speaking people.

Entering mythic difficulty on October the 4th 2015 was the start of the epitome of motivation towards competitive gaming for me, but this part goes into separate ways with English learning as it was made primarily and almost exclusively with Spanish-speaking people.

Raiding on mythic difficulty is exhausting and it overwhelmed me even though I exploited my skills to the point of being one of the best hunters in Ragnaros, having performance close to the 100% in some of the boss-fights. World-class players are of course far beyond me, but for being my first incursion into the last difficulty it was pretty good and I am still proud of it (Pulido, 2024, p. 29).

However, it did not last that much because as much as I enjoyed it it also made me feel burned and was the start of a downfall for me. Huang et al. (2017) found that when performing as an expert one retains a consistent set of habits and routines that allow them to perform at exceptional levels. In my case, I retained those executions I practiced for a half a year as a mythic raider for over 8 years now and counting. I have not been able to function outside of getting motivation from improving my performance and employing a practice known as min-maxing, it consists in maximizing one thing while completely minimizing another.

This has been fruitful in life in the sense of being able to reduce the amount of effort a task requires, the inclusion of automatization, building of discipline, commitment and of course, being able to make decisions in a matter of seconds. Those are skills that have not only benefited my array of professional skills but also the acquisition of languages. (Pulido, 2024, p. 30).

However, these practices lead to the experience of lots of frustration when I find a task that can not be automated, completed while doing another one or at least speeded up, and brought undesired problems to my personal life.

This is one of the reasons I have craved to return to mythic raiding, because there I can connect with people with the same characteristics, but it has been futile.

I could never get back to perform as well as I did in those high-end environments.

Furthermore, I tried it during 2021 and did it ok but I did not feel comfortable with myself.

I felt that I had changed and that such a life was not meant for me (Pulido, 2024, p. 30).

I, as now a family man, have understood that finding motivation in the improvement of performance is a good trait that eventually leads to problems in relationships and so on because “there is no way in which education, work, family and high-end WoW performing can exist in a person’s life” (Pulido, 2024, p. 30).

However, it is a different story for learning English, my motivation towards it has never been negative and I continue to surprise myself everyday while learning new words as I love consuming content from news to entertainment in it. Furthermore, since I entered the Bachelor’s degree I only improved it in ways WoW could have never done, as mentioned in previous sections. Also, I have applied those teachings from WoW into my learning of French as a L3 as “I have not studied it with effort since second semester” (Pulido, 2024, p. 30). I did it by minimizing my exposure to English and maximizing it for French throughout the whole degree, but also by setting up WoW and my social media in that language.

5.4. Did someone say...

This chapter wishes to uncover and answer the research question: How did WoW impact my L2 identity and cultural capital? Social Identity Theory suggests that an individual’s identity and self-image are driven based on their association and membership to a particular group or community (Nematzadeh & Haddad, 2020). The authors claim, quoting Jenkins et al. (2019),

that identity works as an orienting system for self-reference by providing an individual with a conceptualization of their place in society.

As the beginning of the tale says, “I have always lived around English... because its influence was always present in some ways” (Pulido, 2024, p. 7). This, as I was given gifts from people with high income and my parents enjoyed a good financial situation for the first 5 years of my life. Also, I was exposed to video games, fantasy and Sci-fi at a very early age, and it often came in English (Pulido, 2024):

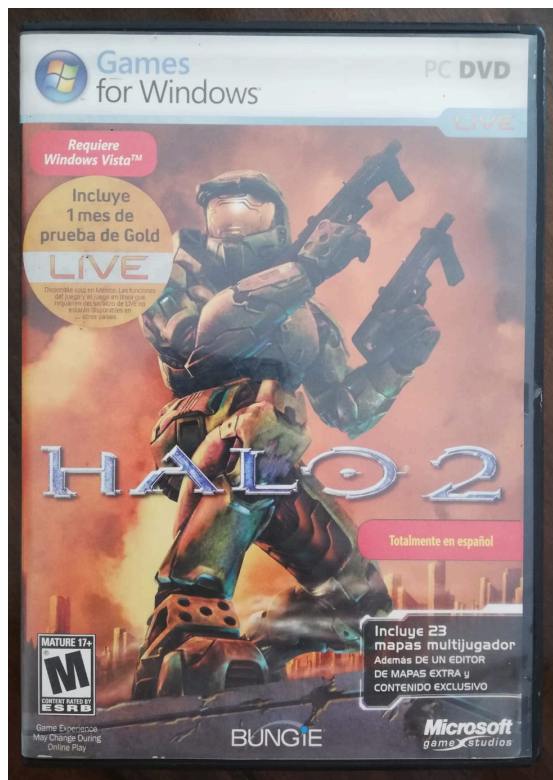
I was exposed to such entertainment from the beginning of my life because my dad was a Star Trek and Doom fan. In fact, one of the first video games I remember playing was Doom II and Duke Nukem 3D Atomic Edition. Around the same age, I also happened to play Heretic, Doom 3, Resident Evil 3, Banjo-Kazooie, among others; and watch movies and TV shows like Bionicles, Skeleton Warriors, Space Cobra, Starship Troopers (p. 7)

The fact that all of that content was available mostly in English is not an anomaly due to it being the language for international communication and also the basis for constructing cultural identities (Otilia, 2013). And effectively, this is how the formation of my identity began. As gaming continued to enter Colombia only available in English I continued to be exposed to it and for me it was the language of power as everyone would always remark its importance and it was supported by my aunt, mother and father actively trying to learn it. In the words of Norton (2015, p. 387), “learning English enhances the learners’ social, cultural, and economic capital, providing for a more promising future.”

However, around 2007 more video games came into my hands in Spanish language, not only for menus and subtitles but also with voices included. I clearly remember that the first video game I played in Spanish was Prince of Persia and later Halo 2. Because of these reasons I started to abandon the importance of English in general as now I could understand everything without having to learn it, and as a kid if I could have it that easy I would go for it.

Figure 26.

My copy of Halo 2 for Windows Vista. Totally in Spanish as shown below the 2 of Halo 2.



Source: Personal Picture in Leveling up my English in World of Warcraft (Pulido, 2024).

When playing the mentioned previous video games I had no one to talk to about it, except my childhood friend Javier. He had a PlayStation One and I had a PC, and we often went to each other's houses to play together. The problem was that I liked the PlayStation because we both could play at the same time but I liked the PC's games the most. This problem was solved when I met the LAN party concept. It is defined as gaming where participants collocate their computers and play videogames with and against each other (Young, 2014). At first, it was not a party because it was only Javier and I, but as soon as I got an Xbox in 2008 I could, with my friends, "meet in someone's house and have tons of games" (Pulido, 2024, p. 10). Eventually my brother got older enough and joined us, his friends, and so on. This was a common practice for gamers before the rise of online gaming, and one of the chapters that defined me.

By this point in my life, it is important to clarify that most of these experiences around video games have been with male friends. This can be explained because game-related

products have typically also been oriented primarily towards boys and men (Dyer-Witheford & De Peuter, 2009 in Gelūnas, 2023). I could live those experiences because there were not many women in my close life and furthermore the ones that were did not enjoy video games. Geluñas (2023) also explains male gaming as a committed lifestyle and mastery of a medium, which was explained in the *Popping BL* part of the discussion as those sessions were highly competitive and being the best player was the goal. The same author mentions that the gameplay emphasizes control, domination, rationality (over emotionality), competition, and contempt for weakness and mistakes align smoothly with patriarchal, hegemonic ideas of masculinity. And me, as someone who was by then forming my personality, absorbed all of that and so did my friends.

Adding moreover that I always consumed video games about violence, specifically war, this led me to an Evolian understanding of War, in which I started to see it as a deep sacred experience (Fačkovec, 2022). In the words of Evola (2011), “war offers man the opportunity to awaken the hero who sleeps within him” (p. 21). He also “constantly glorifies death on the battlefield as the most correct possible way of life” (Fačkovec, 2022, p. 27). These understandings are not alien to modern society as militarization has become a matter of everyday life in television, sports, and video games (Leonard, 2004), and the same author mentions quoting Napoli (2003) that around 9/11 war games have begun to dominate the marketplace, and he concludes that it is particularly beneficial for the U.S. military.

Time passed and as my friends started to grow they focused on things of their age and I started to be alone and to “deter myself from the activities that my friends started to do. I was not interested in girls or love yet, I just wanted to play video games” (Pulido, 2024, p. 12). There I started to feel no longer Colombian and turned my view into the United States. “I developed an attraction towards Western internet culture, history, World War II, 911, conspiracy theories” (p. 12). As I got into all of it, I started to be all-in into the United States and that is how I met World of Warcraft, while wanting more about the U.S.:

In early 2013, I happened to discover that in the United States World of Warcraft was a very popular video game. Due to the previous experience I did not want to try it but at the same time I wanted to play something new and of course I wanted to get to know a little bit more of the American culture (p. 13).

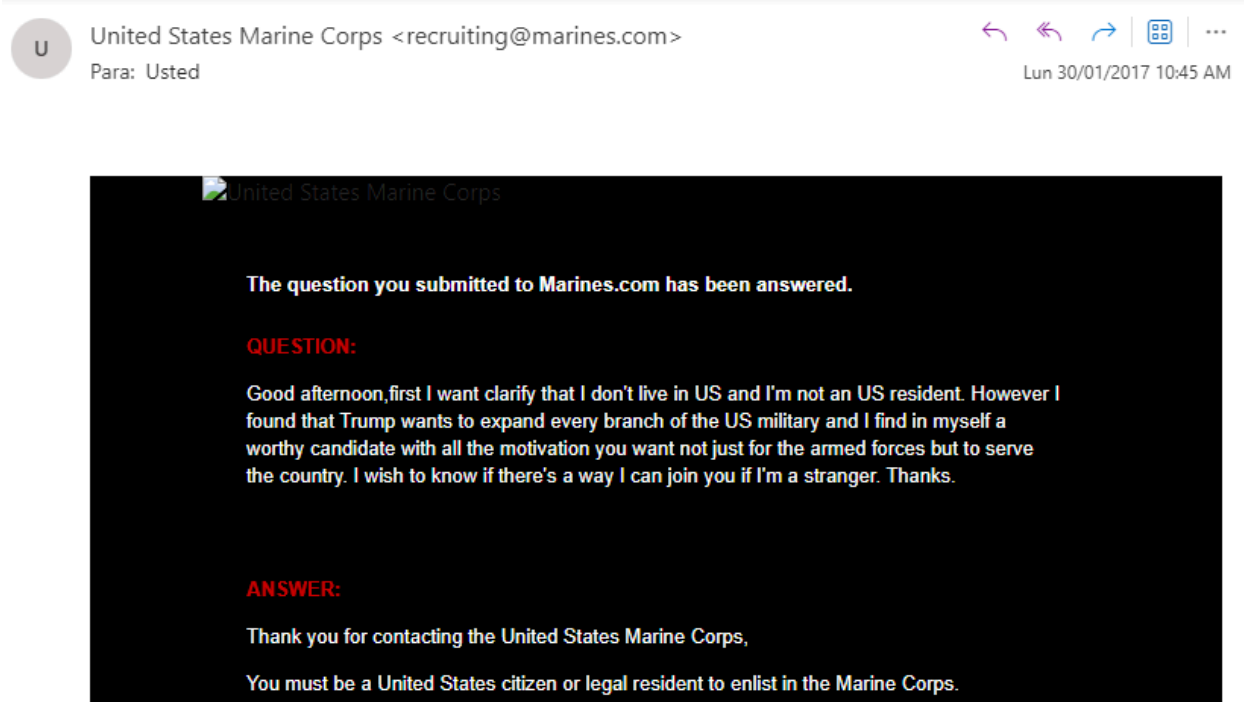
Also, as I got a lot more into World of Warcraft, all I heard about was comments about American culture. In some way I started to become like them even if I lived 4.000 kilometers away. When I was not playing I was learning about the U.S:

I also continued to develop an unrelenting attraction to western culture, mostly from the US. For example, by 2016 I lived the elections as if they were those of my own country and I wanted to actually go abroad and live there. I even structured a plan to do it but it did not happen at all (p. 32).

As mentioned by Norton, I was starting to develop an imagined identity forged by the video games I played as a child and teenager, and everything I invested into learning English was with the hope of traveling to the United States. In fact, in 2016, I was graduating from school and, because of the amount of exposure to American culture I received since 2013, I wrote a letter to my family telling them I wanted to go to the U.S. and join its military. I am not sure if they kept the letter but I do keep some emails I wrote to the U.S. Marines and U.S. Army. Of course, because of the reasons developed early I preferred to join the Marines as they were hyper masculine as its culture fosters it through formation and exhibition of aggression and discipline (Webb, 2020). Below is the email I wrote to Marines.com, along with their answer.

Figure 27.

Request to Marines.com.



Source: Personal Screenshot from my email from 01/03/2017.

This rejection I received from the U.S Marines was a turning point for me because in that year I realized that everything I dreamed of for the past years could not be possible and I would never be able to get the green card and therefore, the citizenship. Still, I kept the American culture near for a couple of years and of course maintained my idealization towards masculinity so I started the recruitment process with the national army in Colombia as soon as I turned 18 years old, which is the minimum age to enroll in the military as a recruit. One can join the Colombian Army as a minor but as non-commissioned officer (suboficial) or officer and those processes are not free but rather expensive as the semester and life inside the Officer's academia costs more than 10 minimum wage salaries and my family could afford it.

Below is the recruitment voucher, edited to highlight the erased-by-time information and cover my personal information and those of the recruitment personnel. As it can be noted, in pursuit of those heroical values of war video games and movies gave me, I decided to enlist in

the Batallón Especial Energético Y Vial N19 (BAEEV - 19) which is located in Caquetá, a territory of Colombia characterized by drug trafficking and guerrilla warfare, and that have marked the political and economic identity of the department (Casanova & Higuera-Acevedo, 2018). There I wanted to get what I had been living in video games and that World of Warcraft in its bellicist context had grown.

Figure 28.

Recruitment Voucher from the Colombian Army from 06/17/2017.

TERCERA ZONA DE INCORPORACIÓN DEL EJERCITO DIM 17 BAEEV-19

BOLETA DE CITACIÓN

NOMBRE CIUDADANO: _____ C.C. _____

TEL. _____ CELULAR: _____

ME PERMITO INFORMARLE QUE FUE SELECCIONADO PARA DEFINIR SU SITUACION MILITAR, POR ESO DEBE CUMPLIR SU CITA CON EL PAIS EL PROXIMO DIA _____ MES _____ AÑO _____ A LAS _____

EN EL DISTRITO MILITAR No. 17 DE LA CIUDAD DE CALI - CRA. 80 No. 4 - 26

ESE DÍA DEBE PRESENTARSE CON LOS SIGUIENTES DOCUMENTOS

☐ FOTOCOPIA DEL DOCUMENTO DE IDENTIDAD.

NO ACEPTE AYUDA DE TRAMITADORES PARA EXPEDIR LA LIBRETA MILITAR

NO ENTREGUE DINEROS A LOS ESTAFADORES. ACERQUESE A LOS DISTRITOS MILITARES MAS CERCANOS

NO OLVIDE SU CITA CON COLOMBIA Y EVITESE SANCIONES O MULTA DE SER DECLARADO "REMISO" YA QUE PARA LEVANTAR ESTA CONDICION DEBE CANCELAR DOS SALARIOS MINIMOS LEGALES VIGENTES (SMMMVLV) POR AÑO O FRACCION.

PREPARESE CON ACTITUD POSITIVA PARA LA MEJOR EXPERIENCIA DE SU VIDA CORDIALMENTE.

_____ FUNCIONARIO ENTREGA

RECIBE C.C. _____

HUELLA

Source: Personal picture.

As an annotation, I did not make it through the initial examination for reasons I wish to keep private, and furthermore tried again in 2018 with the same result. Marking 2018 as the end of my pursuit for military life.

World of Warcraft is related to what is previously mentioned because it can be circumscribed into a genre named Epic Fantasy, described as "a fictional story with a clear

supernatural, mythical and/or folklore component traditional, a story constructed according to principles of verisimilitude, and in which some heroes—or characters with heroic tasks or characteristics—will face a violent and plausible world.” (Castro, 2023, p. 329). With me being into everything that could represent a *hero*, this was a perfect scenario to be engaged in.

However, one important realization about this is that I was not all-in for all types of violence. Yes, as I mention in the tale, in WoW I loved to scam, insult and bully others, in display of the type of masculinity explained above, but it was not aimed at everyone as I adopted a protective posture for those close to me while sacrificing those outside of my group. This, even though I did not understand it at the moment, was one of the ways in which I developed a tendency to make my groups to emerge positively from a social comparison with others, which is a behavior of a nationalist person (Blank & Schmidt, 2003 in Kim, 2021). One may think that nationalism requires a nation in the sense of “country” but the same author remarks that its definition of nation just requires that a community of people consider themselves as one.

While the influence of the United States in video games and movies caused the initial stage of nationalism in me, it was World of Warcraft that catalyzed it. WoW gameplay moves around the ongoing conflict between two factions: the Alliance and the Horde; it makes it a deeply immersive world with political conflicts and, as a result, has lots of potential to breed nationalistic sentiments (Kim, 2021). So, while my contemporary would fight over the local gangs Alianza and Contra (Aguirre, 2014) or the local football clubs Deportivo Cali and America de Cali, I would do it for The Alliance in World of Warcraft.

Again, even though I would thrive conflict for the welfare of my groups and would, for example, at interclassroom soccer matches in school being willing to resort to violence if needed because for an unjust penalty or a foul, I never went that far, and was never in for all types of violence, just those I considered necessary and fair or justified. I think that is the reason I chose, in WoW, The Alliance over The Horde. For MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler (2008) The Alliance is formed of “the heroes of Tolkien and playable races from Dungeons & Dragons...

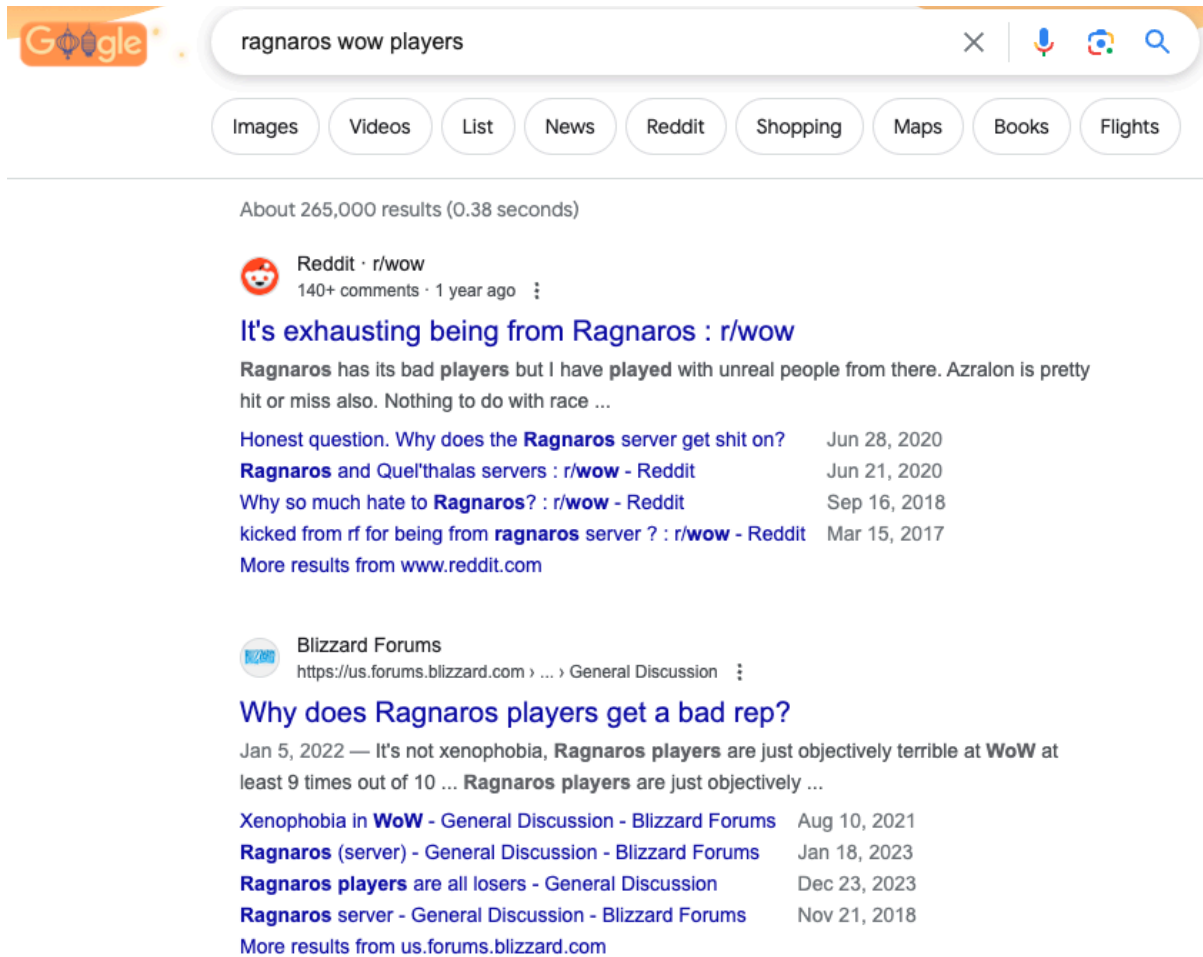
while The Horde races comprise enemies in the same texts” (p. 41). Also, there is the thought that The Horde is based on the Golden Horde from Genghis Khan’s Mongol Empire, taking into account that they both were foreign invaders threatening the already established empires and realms of the west. And, as I mentioned in the Tale, since 2006 I have loved the history of the world so I felt deeply connected with it .

This part is important because at the time I felt a very strong connection with western civilization and was belligerent towards the refugees and immigrants that threatened them. I understood then that Western Civilization was The Alliance of the real world and that those values built for centuries from the Roman Empire I had to protect, therefore I was blindly supportive of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); and understood the Horde as those threatening eastern civilizations like Russia, China, North Korea, and of course the muslim countries. By then I started to understand the arrival of muslim refugees to Europe as scouting incursions just as those I saw in World of Warcraft when The Horde players invaded our cities.

World of Warcraft was a little representation of the world in that sense, but also things changed when I started to understand that I, as a Latin-American player, was not considered part of those that represented Western Civilization but rather I was a member of those who threatened it. Latin-American players, mostly those who come from Ragnaros (the biggest Latin-American realm) are actively discriminated against and, “even though it is not academically documented, one simple Google or Youtube search with the words *Ragnaros wow players* can be very demonstrative” (Pulido, 2024, p. 20). As shown in the figure below.

Figure 29.

Ragnaros wow players search on Google



Google search for "ragnaros wow players".

About 265,000 results (0.38 seconds)

Reddit · r/wow
140+ comments · 1 year ago

It's exhausting being from Ragnaros : r/wow
Ragnaros has its bad players but I have played with unreal people from there. Azralon is pretty hit or miss also. Nothing to do with race ...

Honest question. Why does the **Ragnaros** server get shit on? Jun 28, 2020
Ragnaros and Quel'thalas servers : r/wow - Reddit Jun 21, 2020
 Why so much hate to **Ragnaros**? : r/wow - Reddit Sep 16, 2018
 kicked from rf for being from **ragnaros** server ? : r/wow - Reddit Mar 15, 2017
 More results from www.reddit.com

Blizzard Forums
https://us.forums.blizzard.com › ... › General Discussion

Why does Ragnaros players get a bad rep?
Jan 5, 2022 — It's not xenophobia, **Ragnaros players** are just objectively terrible at **WoW** at least 9 times out of 10 ... **Ragnaros players** are just objectively ...

Xenophobia in **WoW** - General Discussion - Blizzard Forums Aug 10, 2021
Ragnaros (server) - General Discussion - Blizzard Forums Jan 18, 2023
Ragnaros players are all losers - General Discussion Dec 23, 2023
Ragnaros server - General Discussion - Blizzard Forums Nov 21, 2018
 More results from us.forums.blizzard.com

Source: Screenshot from my own search.

According to Brookey and Ecenbarger (2016) quoting Ono and Sloop (2002), Latinos are labeled as ill-behaved, disrespectful, criminal and immoral in the real world and this translates to virtual worlds also. The authors studied player's behavior in the video game League of Legends (LoL) but it also can be seen in World of Warcraft because the reason the developer of LoL decided to create servers for the Latin-Americans was due to North-Americans being "unable to communicate with Spanish-using players" (p. 179). The same happens in World of Warcraft as it happened with me in the beginning as I could not communicate in English effectively. However, beyond the language barriers there are stereotypes about Latin-Americans' skills.

Again, Brookey and Ecenbarger (2016) found there is the tendency to focus on white racial identity and, quoting Brock (2011), they conclude that there are revolving arguments of segregation and exclusion around who does and does not belong to North American servers. Of course, I as Latin-American was not part of them because of my origin and the skill they supposed I had.

The matter of skill in online video games is of supreme importance and takes into account multiple variables, some of them not directly related to the player's cognitive or physical skills but rather to the computer configuration (in the case of PC games) or internet connection. In this sense, the concept of *latency* is included. Latency occurs when there is either a delay in information to the client or to the server (Dabrowski et al., 2014). The same authors found that as this delay increases player's performance will decrease, followed by player's satisfaction. It can reach a point which will cause a user to consider a game unplayable (p. 59). Latency is measured in milliseconds (ms) and its performance can be measured depending on it, the lower the number the better the latency. In video games such as FPS, it is considered that a one-way delay of 80 milliseconds is acceptable (Dick et al., 2005, in Saldana & Suznjevic, 2015), but in MMORPGs a delay of 120 milliseconds is considered good due to the different nature of them (Ries et al., 2008, in Saldana & Suznjevic, 2015).

For a person wishing to become a competitive gamer, this is a matter of supreme importance and most esports athletes and competitive players ensure this by using high-end hardware (Kim et al., 2019). This represents a disadvantage for Latin-American gamers as most hardware is sold in dollars and the exchange rate is a down-side for Latin-American currencies.

For example, in the United States, the current lowest minimum-wage is 5.15 USD and the maximum is 16.28 per hour ("State Minimum Wage", n.d.), and in Colombia it is 5,416 COP ("En El 2024 El Salario Mínimo Es De Un Millón 300 Mil Pesos Y Auxilio De Transporte De 162 Mil Pesos", 2024) per hour. 1 dollar can be exchanged for an average of 3.900 COP in 2024 (Portafolio, 2024). Then, a processor like the Ryzen 5 5600G, one of the best budget ones, can

be bought for 119 USD (AMD Ryzen 5 5600G 6-Core 12-Thread Unlocked Desktop Processor with Radeon Graphics., n.d.). Meaning that a person with the lowest minimum wage in the U.S would have to work 23.1 hours to be able to get it and a homologous Colombian would have to work 85.6 hours. And this conversion applies to all types of hardware in the field, from input devices such as keyboard or mouse, to computer screen and even headphones and microphone. Sanchez (2022) mentions that in general, for the Latin-American gamer, finding the right objects and tools to create a pleasant experience when playing is particularly difficult due to exaggerated prices, limited variety and quality. He also understands that the quality of the setup alerts the gamer's performance, behavior and comfort, including difficulties in communicating efficiently with other players.

All of these experiences are shared in the tale as I had a decent computer until “at some point in 13’s my “gaming PC” shut down and never turned on again. After that, my mom was condescending with me and my brother and let us play on her work laptop, which was terrible to play” (Pulido, 2024, p. 17).

Furthermore:

In those times with my mom’s PC I could not do well in LFR because they were 25-player raids and the computer froze every second, also it got very hot in the part where the left hand rested and was continuously uncomfortable. Not only that, but also, Movistar, my internet provider, started to have problems with WoW and I became an expert in internet connection in order to be able to explain to Movistar that they needed to fix something that they had not identified and affected exclusively the connection to WoW’s internet ports. Because of that, for a period of maybe a month or two, WoW was completely unplayable for me (p. 17)

All of these events are part of the array of shared experiences of the common Latin-American gamer, it is part of our culture and have helped us realize that “not only skill was needed to be good at the game but also needed a very good computer and excellent internet connection”

(p.18). Things that are only accessible when getting an income, as was for me that could get them “until I started working and that would, until then, put me behind the Americans in terms of performance, because they could always get better PCs and better internet connections” (p.18).

Due to all of these reasons, I realized around 2017 that I would never play or be like people from North-America. I tried to play on North-American WoW realms and attempted to not get caught because of my English, however, as I did it I realized that much of my identity was with being a Latin-American player, specifically a Ragnaros player, and went back. Since then, I started to be the best player I could be in order to destroy the already established labels on Latin-American players, this furthermore got stronger as I could not travel to the U.S to become a citizen there, moment in which I realized that I would always be a Latino and I stopped daydreaming about building my future abroad. This point marked the rupture of my imagined identity and the formation of a new one.

I still consider very funny the way in which World of Warcraft represented the opportunity for me to “abandon” my real-world identity as Latin-American to become the character I wanted to be as I was accepted in American groups, as Quesada (2014) mentions. During those experiences, I was still labeled with “Ragnaros” on my character’s name but due to my skills I was able to not feel like it and was very welcomed into their groups. So, the experience of me learning English and becoming a good player in World of Warcraft worked as my way of living the American Dream and it worked because I was able to grow in cultural capital, as mentioned by Bourdieu (1986) and it was working well with the imagined identity I planned for my life. However, as mentioned by Norton (2015, p. 377), the concept of investment in relation to identity “conceives of the language learner as having a complex identity, changing across time and space”. And so, an important chapter of my identity development ended as soon as I realized that for most people I would always be a Latin-American because it has already been embodied in their *Habitus*, and I had to embrace that understanding. By this point I adopted a

very different perspective of everything and became a citizen of the world with open-mindedness, non-judgmentalism, and social relaxation, as Liu (2014) mentions.

Abandoning the competitive desire in WoW and by stopping to be like those “true westerners” I was able to abandon that homesickness, nostalgia and longing and transcend to start a real and meaningful life in Colombia, by starting a technical degree, getting a formal job, setting up a business, getting a wife I have been able to live a different dream far from that I had desired ten years ago due to a tunneled vision of reality that I had undergone as a gamer and a player of World of Warcraft that created an imaginary identity too much arranged around the United States.

Those realizations were furthermore internalized as soon as I began the Bachelor's degree and had to study to understand the ways in which Bourdieu's Capitals' work. In this way, throughout the development of my identity as a WoW player and eventually a citizen of the world, I had undergone many transformations that implied the internalization of many behaviors foreign to mine and once I was able to break those chains, I had to start forming an identity of my own.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Learning of English

The whole cognitive development that I had with English while playing WoW can be summarized bringing into measurable terms, as much as this narrative allows, proof of the level of WoW incidence into my English acquisition process, finishing on a B2 level of English, starting from the following quote:

in the first trimester of 2013 and for the first time in my life I thought I had screwed one school subject: English, because someone stole one workshop from me. That was the first time I cried in front of a teacher because I was so worried about failing that class because of such an unjust reason. The worst part is that I printed it again and tried to solve it because it was a workshop of just filling in blanks but I could not do it by myself and ended up getting the answers from a friend (Pulido, 2024, p. 12).

Taking it into consideration, the progression level of my cognitive skills in English can be triangulated with the three following facts:

1. In 2013 I was in eighth grade and, according to the ministry of national education (MEN, 2016), the level of English for that grade is A2, following the CEFR guide. This does not apply to private schools, as mine, but does serve as reference about what my level was before playing WoW: A2 approximately.
2. Three years later, in 2016, I took the ICFES, the mandatory state exam for high school graduates, and I got a grade of 82/100. In accordance with ICFES (n.d.) from 79 to 100 points a student is considered on level B+ of English proficiency.
3. This can be triangulated also when in the same year I got admitted to study system's engineering in the Universidad ICESI and after the diagnostic test I was assigned to the English level of 7 out of 8. In accordance with ICESI (2017) the subject Inglés VII (English 7) answers to level B2.1 and B2.2, following the CEFR guide.

These three measures summarize and conclude the process of learning English exclusively with World of Warcraft from A2 to B2. That means that I was able to switch from very basic personal and close language proficiency in a slow but clear speech in A2 (EF SET, n.d.), to be able to understand ideas of complex text and speak standard language with a broad vocabulary and large degree of autonomy as B2 (EF SET, n.d.).

In this sense, WoW is a great complement and an incredible boost of motivation to learn English, but to really develop full proficiency such as C1 or C2, one must rely on formal instruction. A C1 level, according to the CEFR, consists of the following (EF SET, n.d.):

1. Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning.
2. Can express ideas fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions.
3. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes.
4. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.

It is important to join the previous conclusions with the L2 learning theories proposed on the literature review and remark on their relationships with my case. My experience throughout the analysis allowed me to identify and establish relationships among both. First of all, it is important to recognize that along the process, many of the affective factors identified by Krashen (1981) significantly influenced my learning experience. For example, my motivation and desire to play at a higher level initially boosted my English learning but also occasionally caused delays due to emotional challenges. Nevertheless, my deep involvement in English because of my aspirations of integration into imagined communities and eventually becoming a U.S. citizen transformed language learning into a social experience, aligning with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978). This approach led to substantial progress in three of the four language proficiency skills:

reading, listening, and writing. While speaking also improved, it lagged somewhat due to limited practice and self-esteem issues. The vocabulary I acquired improved significantly, consistent with Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990), which emphasizes that high exposure to new vocabulary is crucial for second language acquisition. This exposure enabled me to communicate fluently in informal settings, even though it restricted my proficiency in formal communication due to the limitations inherent to the context of video games.

Still, fluency was achieved through practice and some of the psychological perspectives exposed by Spada and Lightbown (2019) highlight its importance as they declare the learner first needs to focus on something to learn and put effort into practicing it. While initially I assumed a Connectionist approach and understood that language learning could be achieved through translation and started making associations among English and Spanish words, I eventually turned out to discover that the structure of English was different and started to identify that some structures are accompanied by others and English had to be learned independently from Spanish. In this way I started to be aware of such differences and started imitating what I saw. As is argued in Behaviorism by Spada and Lightbown (2019), all learning occurs through a process of imitation, practice, reinforcement and habit formation. Such was the case in my learning process as I had to immerse myself in intensive practice in order to develop L2 proficiency. And to immerse myself I could not only set up everything in English but actually engage in conversation with others, that resulted in positive and negative, direct and indirect feedback that eventually I put into practice to achieve the desired proficiency.

However, one can count on both formal and informal learning for a maximum benefit and use WoW for practicing new learnings with natives in an authentic context. The platform is not only authentic for practicing but also for fostering intrinsic motivation as improvement in English can go in hand with improvement in video game skill.

6.1.1. *Implications for the classroom*

World of Warcraft's constant exposure to English, or other languages, through quest texts, item descriptions, and in-game dialogue help learners naturally absorb vocabulary and grammar. Additionally, the need for real-time communication with other players, both through chat and voice, provides practical experience with conversational English, including the learning of slangs and some idiomatic expressions.

Furthermore, its engaging content and objectives make the language learning process enjoyable and encourages consistent practice. Moreover, the game's vast community extends beyond the game itself, with forums, videos, and posts predominantly in English, further enhancing English practice.

Because of these reasons, this type of learning must not only be recognized but also be given a voice in the classroom, allowing players to be visible and part of the classroom diversity. Also, in teaching activities, a critical position should be promoted regarding how video games negatively affect our identities as an exercise of social responsibility for teachers because, in my case, video games brought positive but also negative effects of psychological and identitarian order and I was at risk of indoctrination. It could be the case that, in our classrooms as Foreign Languages teachers, if not video games any other type of content that students are consuming could put the students at similar risks. If it is possible, it is recommended that resources of this type be applied in the classroom as pedagogical tools but it needs to be duly planned and consulted for the best benefit.

As the intention of this type of research is to help to improve the state of video games and put it in a level comparable to literature in terms of contribution to SLA, yet more research is needed to be carried out, specially with the use of retrospective methodologies, to further affirm the goals achieved in this investigation. It is desirable to explore these findings with more subjects that had duly documented their English journey unconsciously as I did. However, if

there is the possibility of developing long-term research by finding young subjects that had recently started playing WoW and desired to be participants it would bring new light to the topic. Of course, assuring that their experience and involvement in the video game remain as intact as possible to not interfere with the real results in the same ambits of cognitive, interactional and motivational development of L2.

Also, it is important to recognize that some students in the classroom actively use video games in order to identify possible psychological and identitarian developments. Young learners need to be accompanied by their tutors and by their teachers throughout the process of learning inside and outside the classroom. The dangers of unsupervised access to video games, or internet in general, remain threatening towards them as forming human beings and active but also comprehensive accompaniment is necessary.

6.1.2. *English learning privilege*

One of the most important findings in relation to the acquisition of English, is that, for me, it was possible to learn English because I had the means to do it. The sole possibility of being able to play a video game represents many things:

1. I have (or had) the time to spend on leisure activities. That meant I did not have a heavy academic workload or that I did not need to work a full-time job. For example, currently I want to play video games but I now have both, and I can only find time to do it on mid-year and Christmas vacations, thus, not being able to have a continuous experience.
2. I had access to a computer with decent hardware. World of Warcraft is an old game with almost 20 years, however, its graphics have been improved and the open-world and massive activities imply a heavy CPU work-load, thus requiring a good computer.

3. I had access to a decent internet connection. When I started playing in 2013, I had an internet connection of 5Mb/s. That could work, but at the time it was a commodity not every person had.
4. I was able to pay a WoW membership. It has always costed USD 15 and though the exchange rate has changed a lot in Colombia it keeps a similar ratio. The average exchange rate in 2013 was 1,869.10 COP for each USD. That meant 28.036,5 COP. In 2013 the minimum wage in Colombia was 589.500 COP, thus, a person earning the minimum wage needed to work two days in order to afford a WoW subscription. That is difficult for households in which only one person works and the other takes care of the home.

This goes in accordance with Norton (2015) because learning English does not only require the desire or motivation to do it, there are many other factors revolving around it. Therefore the access to opportunities is a major variable in this endeavor. For instance, there were some privileges I had access to and not everyone is able to get and represent an important part of my learning process and a definitive factor for motivation in learning English as L2. It is then imperative to be taken into account as the realities of Latin-American gamers greatly vary from case to case, and therefore, recommending the use of video games, particularly World of Warcraft for English learning should be taken carefully into account in order to not demonstrate lack of empathy with the multiple realities of Latin-American countries.

6.2. English and social justice

WoW offers, for the most part, the possibility of learning English because it represents easy and instant access to native speakers of the English language. Throughout the investigation, my tutor asked me to see if there was the possibility of having the same experience but with another language as L2. Of course there is, Andersen (2019) and Palmer (2010) relate it, but still I believe that it would not be the same as learning English because of population reasons.

In the real world, there are around 1.5 billion people worldwide who speak English in 2023 (The Most Spoken Languages Worldwide 2023 | Statista, 2023), that is around 18% of the world's population that speaks English, either as first or second language. Also, around 52% of the internet's content is set in English (Usage Statistics and Market Share of Content Languages for Websites, December 2023)

The same happens with WoW. Below, there is a screenshot of 2018's WoW population (WoWWiki, n.d.) in accordance with RealmPop.com. As you can see, there are over 30 million characters (different from actual players) of English-speaking countries, that is, for the Americas and Oceania region, over 20 times the amount of Portuguese and Spanish-speaking people; and for Europe, almost twice the amount of German-speaking people, five times the amount of French and Russian-speaking people and more than 10 times for other languages.

Figure 30.

WoW characters population by country.

Recent character populations

According to RealmPop.com as of December 2018 (numbers are rounded down):

- **US realms** (including Brazil, Latin America, and Oceanic): **24 million characters**
 - United States (includes Canada?): 20.9 million characters
 - Brazil: 800 thousand characters
 - Latin America (includes Mexico and Central America?): just under 700 thousand characters
 - Oceanic realms (includes Australia and New Zealand): 1.6 million characters
- **EU realms** (including Russia): **22 million characters**
 - English realms: 10.6 million characters
 - French realms: 2.3 million characters
 - German realms: 5.4 million characters
 - Italian realms: 200 thousand characters
 - Russian realms: 2.7 million characters
 - Spanish realms: 900 thousand characters

NOTE: Although this is data for character counts, one can use a rough estimate of 5 characters per player, so total WoW population is probably somewhere just under 10 million players.

This means that, it is indeed possible to engage into circles of native speakers from many languages, but it is far easier to engage in English-speaking communities and so is more

likely to occur throughout gameplay as well as in the real world. If it continues to be like that, it is possible to continue to see exponential growth in the research in learning English as L2 but a decrease in other languages. I actively recommend to take advantage of WoW to learn and practice other languages as I am currently doing with French and to study how these other languages are learned through the use of the video game.

6.3. Identity investment

The whole World of Warcraft, just as the real world, moves around the concept of Social Capital, defined by Bhandari and Yasunobu (2009) as “a collective asset in the form of shared norms, values, beliefs, trust, networks, social relations, and institutions that facilitate cooperation and collective action for mutual benefits” (p. 2). In this sense, collaboration is one of the most interesting features of World of Warcraft and it comes from various degrees. Sherlock (2009) groups them in two wide groups: public (forums, FAQ, Wikis, Youtube) and private (groups, communities).

The first one is very particular because it is, for the most part, collaboration made for the sake of helping out others. Of course, websites, social media pages and Youtube channels earn money with visits/views, but for the most part many of them do it in order to help the community. On the other hand, private collaboration can be more authentic as the game is made ultimately to be a collaborative game and for the most part it is only through in-game negotiation and collaboration that most of the game goals are achieved.

Still, those collaborative networks are not that simple as they all include a different array of situations. For instance, guilds are very helpful in themselves but there are occasions in which individual benefit is put over common benefit, or even, when guilds inflict damage unto other individuals or groups. That can be done when a player is bribed to disclose information about some strategy, or even when a remarkable player is offered benefits for deserting and joining another guild.

Based on this, there are investments everywhere in World of Warcraft. From paying money to buy an expansion or membership in order to have some fun, to enrolling in a guild to defeating a boss in a raid. It all implies time, money and emotional investment. However, the construction of identity and the effort we put in it is another form of investment. For instance, when talking about the use of L2 in World of Warcraft, it is possible to include Norton (2013) into the conversation. She found out that being a migrant represents a series of problems in relation to being in a specific L2 context where they do not speak the target language. She realized that it puts people in a situation in which they are prominent to exploitation because, in a manner, they may not know their rights nor how to demand them to be respected.

This can be translated to World of Warcraft as the automatic pairing system is very tending to put us with English-speaking people, there would be a lot of situations in which, if we do not know the language, we may be subject to those practices. In fact, it reached a point in which the game developers had to include a reward system that could not get exploited in self-benefit in spite of others. I myself experienced some of those situations when I started playing and I could do nothing because I simply could not communicate in English properly.

These types of issues create social pressure that may have different effects on different types of people. For example, the exposure of this type of treatment, for people with a more sensible character, could cause mental alterations prone to develop lack of self-esteem, demotivation, depression, in the worst scenarios, lead to suicide (Hardy, 2021).

On the other hand, for people with a more aggressive character, situations like mine could happen, as Freire (2005) famously said, "The oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors." (p. 45). It so happened that after a couple of years of negative treatment, my guild mates and I became the oppressors of those who did not care that we were from Ragnaros and wanted to play with us, doing exactly what they did to us and not showing any sign of regret.

Through these experiences, I developed a more critical and ethical identity. Initially, I reproduced the negative behaviors I encountered, but over time, I recognized the negative impact and effects of such actions on both myself and others. This self-awareness led me to reevaluate my approach, shifting from contributing to a toxic environment to creating positive interactions and supporting new others.

The evolution of my identity uncovers the broader implications of gaming environments like WoW in shaping ethical perspectives as the game's complexity and the social dynamics within it provided a unique lens through which I could explore and refine my own values. That, in this case reflected online but in other scenarios and for other persons could also impact real-world situations.

This could be explained, as it was found by this research, that situations like mine are possible if the scenery is proper and the subject happens to be someone in the search of their identity in their puberty. The subject then can be guided by those behaviors and if unsupervised will lead to develop improper and rude behaviors and assume identities foreign to the self-reality that are not easy to overcome once they are deeply rooted. In this case, at the end, globalization and the idealization of an imaginary identity, even though at first tried to undermine my relation to my Colombian identity, it ended up strengthening it, as explained by Paraless (2004) that could happen. Then, it is not the problem of World of Warcraft that leads to developing one identity or another but it is the whole context and the perspective you bring into the game that define it.

Research into the impact of WoW and similar games on identity development should be conducted with sensitivity and subtlety. My experiences suggest that supervision and mindful observation could mitigate the adoption of undesirable behaviors in young players, but at the same time risks being able to present an authentic development of the research.

Ultimately, World of Warcraft serves as a microcosm of the real world, offering insights into social interactions, identity formation, ethical behavior, SLA as shown by this study, but also

can be applied in other fields for modeling infectious diseases dissemination (Balicer, 2007) or even to explore the development of logical and critical thinking, along with problem-solving, and creative exploration (Alawami & Ku, 2016).

As video games are a platform in which millions of people live shared experiences from day to day, it is important to develop research around the development of these identities and it is furthermore important to do it taking into account adolescents and children that may be having unsupervised access to these resources and are forming identities foreign to themselves.

6.4. The value of autoethnographies

Autoethnographies are valuable for academia because they bring unique and personal perspectives that enhance the understanding of the social phenomena occurring each day around us and that traditional research methods might overlook. This approach broadens research methodologies by blending personal narrative with academic analysis and amplifies marginalized voices by validating researchers' lived experiences as valuable sources of knowledge (Moriña, 2017).

In particular, my research was important for my own because of the lights it was able to bring to my historical development in relation with my experience with the English language, however, as I explained in the methodology section of this paper, due to the highly specific and particular setting of this study, it represents just one of the multiple ways in which the language acquisition of English and all that underlies it can become a reality.

This approach was taken because in the undergraduate education I received in a public university it was pretty common to interact with people from many different places and ideologies. Even though when entering the university I was no longer ideologically malleable, I still had to share a great part of my days with them and eventually understand new perspectives. All of that allowed me to reconstruct the concept I had about myself and who I

wanted to be, and is one of the reasons why I constantly, along the semesters, turned into WoW to explain some things about myself. For good and for bad it had formed my identity and with all the learnings and new perspectives I could look at it and into myself more critically.

As undergraduate students of Bachelor's degree in foreign languages at Universidad del Valle the amount of perspectives is so vast that the autoethnographies presents itself as a valuable tool for blending personal narrative with cultural analysis. Promoting this type of exercise at least once throughout the degree will enable learners to reflect on their individual language learning experiences and cultural interactions, making the learning process more relevant and engaging.

By also allowing the sharing of these products, we can foster a deeper understanding of cultural differences and identification of each individual educational challenge. Additionally, those personal stories boost motivation, empathy, critical thinking and exploration of cultural identity, while sharing these reflections with other students and teachers can help build a supportive learning community that understands social challenges and is able to benefit from those learning to make it better for the students of the future.

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Appendix A. Research timeline

Table 2.

Research timeline.

Task	Estimated completion time
Completion of the Research Proposal	October 2023
Data collection and writing of the autobiographical account	July - December 2023
Data Analysis	March 2024
Writing up the results and conclusions	April 2024
Conclusion, abstract, references formatting	April 2024
Thesis revision and formatting	August 2024

Note. Own work.

Appendix B. Glossary

1. The **Character Selection Screen** allows the player to create/choose a character to play with. Characters vary on their functions and skills based on their race/class.
2. In WoW, there are two factions: **The Alliance** and **The Horde**. They are opposed and each have its own style of gameplay and story.
3. Each Faction have multiple **races**, and each one of them differs aesthetically and slightly functionally from others.
4. A **class** is what allows the player to choose what and how they want to perform in-game. A player who chose Hunter will perform close and long-range damage only, in opposition to a player who chose Paladin, which can choose to heal others, perform close-range damage or support great amounts of incoming damage.
5. **Hardcore gamers** are highly-committed players that dedicate an immense amount of time to the game and perform at the top.

6. A **realm** is an instance of the World of Warcraft game world. The terms realm and server can be used interchangeably (Wowpedia, n. d.) due to their similarities, but using the term realm is more prestigious as server is frequently tied to illegal WoW servers.
7. A **Starting zone** is the zone in which the character begins its story once it is created. It varies depending mainly on race, so each one implies a different introduction to the world with different perspectives.
8. To **Level Up** is a metaphor to refer to aging, as in the context of gaming implies that the character has gained enough points to increase its own skills and now is able to perform better.
9. I consider the 2000's the **zenith of gaming** because by this point multiple companies (Sony, Microsoft, Nintendo) were strong in the field and competed fiercely to introduce innovative video games with story-telling and choice-driven features (Academy of art University, 2020). Also, online gaming started to be far more popular.
10. The **Centro Cultural Colombo Americano** is an English institution of renown in Cali, Colombia. <https://www.colomboamericano.edu.co/>.
11. **Sanandresito** is a mall in which multiple e-shops sell their products. The products are cheaper in comparison with retail stores and that is the reason it is accustomed primarily by people from low to medium social classes. The source of their products is popularly assumed to be from smuggling (El Tiempo, 1997).
12. **Xbox Live** was a gaming network developed by Microsoft that allowed multiplayer gaming. In order to use it, you would need to buy a membership or redeem a code that was sold or came with original Xbox video games.
13. **Pandashan** was the first private (illegal) server to fully support the new World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria (Wowbay, 2013).
14. A **trial account** is the status of a World of Warcraft account that has no current monthly membership active. It involves limitations to multiple of the game's systems.

15. **Max-level** is the maximum level a player character can reach in-game. It is changed with the release of each expansion.
16. The **end-game** represents the point in which players face the biggest and more-rewarding challenges in the game. In the opinion of many players, the real game begins at end-game (Wowpedia, n.d.).
17. A **guild** is a community of players that make groups to do different type of social or competitive activities.
18. **Achievements** are challenges part of WoW's accomplishment system. They are currently present in almost every video game and guarantee that players continue playing because they add value to their profile.
19. **Mounts** are a type of cosmetic reward that your character can use to ride (or fly) in the world.
20. A **worgen** is, in short words, a werewolf in World of Warcraft.
21. **PvE** means Player vs Environment. It is used to refer to situations in which the player fights or competes against computer-controlled enemies.
22. To **gear-up** is to get pieces of equipment that makes the character stronger.
23. **To raid** means to go to Raid instances, a type of content that requires 10 to 30 people playing together and used to be the most challenging PvE content available in the game.
24. **LFR** is an abbreviation of Looking For Raid, the easiest raiding difficulty.
25. A **Boss fight** is the moment in which the player encounters a boss, an important and powerful enemy in video games that represents a challenge superior to the others.
26. A **semi-hardcore guild** is a guild that wants to progress throughout the end-game content and requires a high amount of compromise and skill but not enough to be considered top.
27. The **SENA**, Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje, is a public institution in Colombia that offers free technical and technological formation.