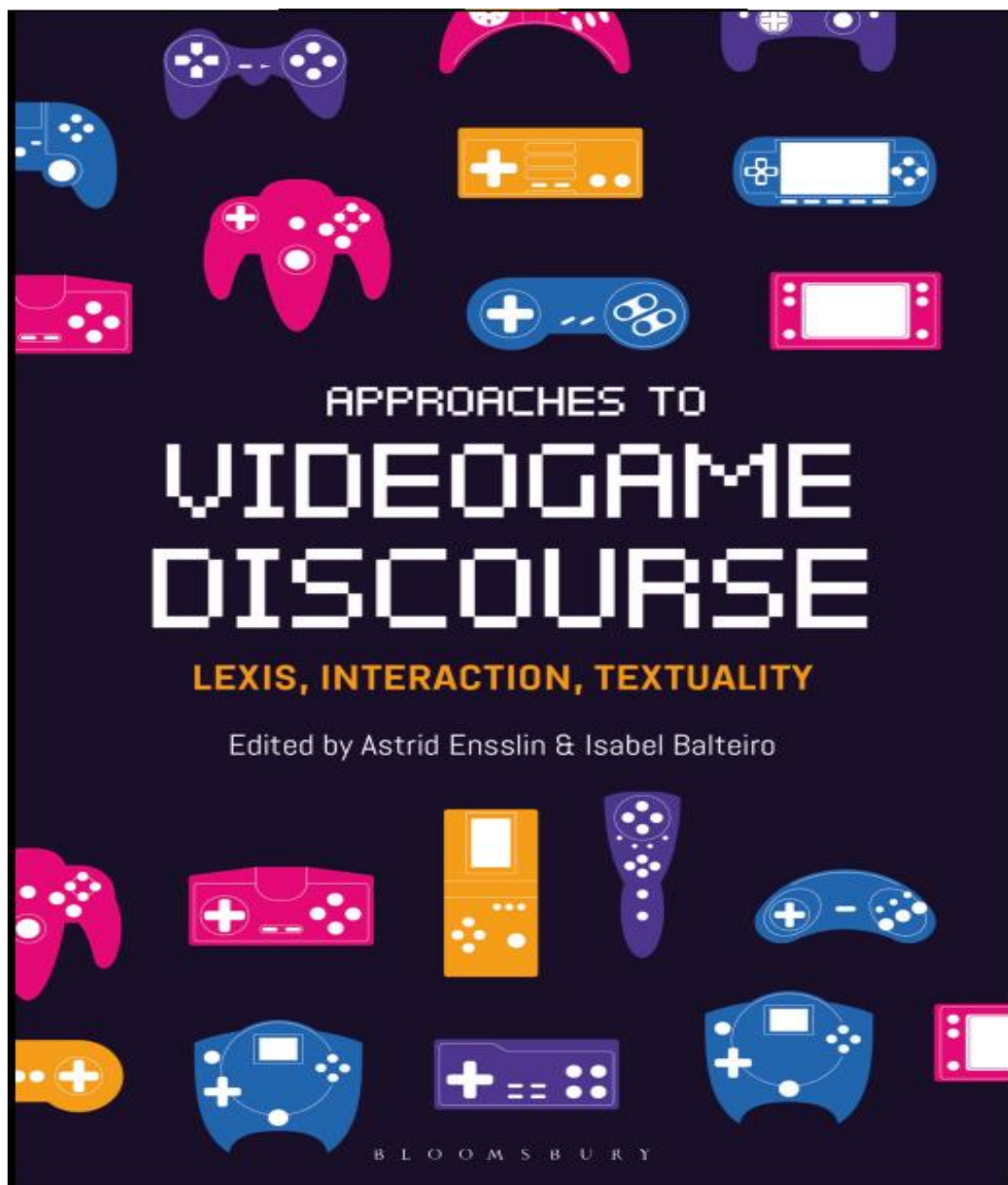


**ENSSLIN, A.; BALTEIRO, I. (EDS.). Approaches to Videogame Discourse: Lexis, Interaction, Textuality. New York: Bloomsbury, 2019. 320 p.**

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As a developing art form, and a communication and entertainment medium, video games have come a long way from the pastime of a specific and centralized niche of people — geeks and nerds — to an industry with social and cultural capital that already outstrips the earnings of both cinema and music industries combined. The impact of games ranges from digital games marketed by large conglomerates, small and medium-sized companies; to the use of native game resources for application in different contexts, gamification (Rego, 2015).

The research on the creation and circulation of games, therefore, reflects the scope and influence of the media in the fields of Social Communication, Pedagogy and Humanities (Digital). However, most of these studies focus on the video game as an artifact, regarding digital games as media and not as texts situated in a field of human activity. Specifically in Applied Linguistics, research on games is still timid, despite the amount of players who join the academy and bring with them their experiences interacting with games while growing up.

That is why I recommend reading *Approaches to Videogame Discourse: Lexis, Interaction, Textuality*, which contributes to reducing the research gap on games as an object of study in Applied Linguistics and Discourse Analysis (DA). Separated into three major parts, the book deals with the video game, as well as the myriad of paratexts through which players, creators, and producers who work with games interact. The volume brings together a collection of articles dedicated to research on video games as a text and object of study from different strands of DA. Focusing on lexical studies while expanding its scope to studies on interaction between players and multimodality. The book is edited by linguists Astrid Ensslin and Isabel Balteiro.

Astrid Ensslin is Professor of Digital Humanities and Game Studies at the University of Alberta, Canada. Her research in Media Linguistics, situated in the field of Sociolinguistics, is focused on the literality of games and how it can be studied in order to understand the ideologies that surround this media. She has led cross-cultural video game research projects; reading, curating and analyzing digital fiction; linguistic variation and language ideologies in video games; as well as *Corpus Linguistics*. Isabel Balteiro is Senior Lecturer in English Lexicology at the University of Alicante, Spain. Her main teaching and research interests focus on the lexicon and the mechanisms of

word formation in English and other languages. Her research is situated in the fields of Lexicology and Pragmatics, with publications in journals on English Language and English Teaching. The work done by the two teachers is carried out in the volume reviewed here, organized from the perspectives of the studies of lexicon, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics, to understand the processes that involve the act of playing video games as a field of human action.

The first part – chapters 1 to 5 – deals with video games from the perspective of lexicology, localization and variation, with chapters that resort to the lexical approach to the study of games; forums, tutorials and walkthroughs;<sup>1</sup> the role of science fiction lexicon in games; and a critique of the legal language used by end-users in digital games. Based on theoretical lexicology and variationist linguistics, this first pillar of the work investigates the role of lexical processes in different contexts in which video games are used, in order to better understand the economies and ecologies of games. The first part of the book highlights the media's potential for understanding Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) related phenomena and their effects on language change and contact. As an example, I cite the first two chapters of the first part.

In chapter 1, the authors - Carola Álvarez-Bolado Sánchez and Inmaculada Álvarez de Mon - conduct a case study to understand neologisms in the journalistic discourse of the games niche in Spain. The study suggests that the neologisms that appear in their data are primarily semantic, that is, they are recontextualizations of terms that already exist in Spanish and are appropriate for the context of games. Chapter two (authored by one of the organizers of the volume, Isabel Balteiro), uses the lexical approach and *corpus* linguistics to analyze the language used in video game forums, highlighting, through its results, the way computer-mediated communication affects the way new terms create a balance between specialized jargon and plain language, with consistent use of abbreviations.

Studies such as those presented so far shed light on how video games can enrich a language, given that words recontextualized by the discursive domain of games can be reincorporated into the standard language. In addition, they suggest possible

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<sup>1</sup> “video [or text that] that teaches the player how to beat each of the stages of the game, usually with text or text subtitles and images (screenshots).” Source: <https://novaescola.org.br/bncc/conteudo/24/conheca-seis-generos-digitais-sugeridos-pela-bncc>. Seen: 04/05/2022

perspectives on the CMC language (Herring, 1996) and how it may affect asynchronous (off-line) contexts.

The media of games becomes, in this way, a means of studying the linguistic changes caused by new technologies and a means of understanding the acquisition and learning of lexicon. Examples of this media potential can be seen in works dedicated to understanding lexicon acquisition in English learning (Leão, 2014), which investigates how vocabulary acquisition occurs by students of English as additional language, when playing video games of the RPG genre. Leão's work emphasizes that lexicon acquisition takes place through information redundancy, that is, when a lexical item is presented verbally, simultaneously with visual and sound elements.

The works in the first part of *Approaches to Videogame Discourse* will, in this way, contribute to the current and future understanding of the linguistic change caused by new technologies and configures as a fruitful research inquiry with corpus. In addition to the contributions to the understanding of language itself, we can also verify what emerges from online interaction in the perspective of social actors.

The second part – chapters 6 to 9 – focuses on interactions between players in different contexts, focusing on impoliteness strategies (Haugh, 2013) in negotiating meanings in online and offline game situations of different game genres. It reveals the various approximations between the acts of playing in virtual and face-to-face contexts. This thematic axis, which deals with the players, will use an ethnographic approach to understand the pragmatic aspects of such interactions. Among the issues addressed is what is “Bad Language” – a term that refers to taboo language and irony – to understand cooperative impoliteness in co-op (or co-situated; face-to-face multiplayer) games; the use of taboo words as an identity (re)constructor; collaborative language in digital puzzle games; and how the rules of interaction in online games conflict with the communicative strategies adopted in such environments. In this part it is possible to shed light on impoliteness in digital contexts, contributing to the studies of pragmatics in CMC.

There is, in fact, an extensive literature on impoliteness strategies in work and education environments, on social networks and other digital platforms, but the study focused on games as a field of human activity is still limited. This research gap has been

filled, more substantively, in studies that focus on ethics and morals among players (Bianchini; Oliveira; Vasconcelos, 2012; Ramos, 2012).

Research on impoliteness strategies in video games can be explored from works such as the ones mentioned above, which foster understanding on value judgments, and how they manifest themselves in social practices mediated by language, which can inform on phenomena such as those studied by the authors of the volume reviewed here. Such a path of research can contribute to studies that are dedicated to the relationship between language, technology, and society.

The third part – chapters 10 to 13 – explores the discourse of games beyond the text, with works that reflect on the language of digital games through their procedurality and transmediality, besides the ideologies and language education that question such media. In other words, it is in this thematic axis that we can see the potential of the video game language for Applied Linguistics. The perspective of Videogame Linguistics, posed by the organizers of this volume as a branch of Media Linguistics, is more evident in this third pillar. It uses a theoretical contribution that alludes to the Sociolinguistics of Globalization (Blommaert, 2010) to understand the distribution of semiotic resources between the different variants of the languages spoken in the games.

The chapters in this part look at the procedural mode, the primary form of expression in video games that can be used to comprehend the linguistic features of new media; the way players read the digital game through this mode of expression, questioning their players with different ideologies; the way in which certain ideologies can be “coded” in the procedurality of games; and in the game instructions. It can be argued that the most innovative contribution of part three is the concept of procedurality and its application in different ways on the discourse of games.

The concept of procedurality - relative to the procedural mode of expression - is well established in the field of Game Studies. Based on the idea that rules systems are, in themselves, semiotic resources capable of integrating texts - and, therefore, implementing sociocultural practices -, procedurality is studied to conceptualize the way norms and rules create meanings that teach their players how to act in society, from well-defined boundaries and implicit parameters involved in the gaming experience.

Through this exploration of the discourse of games, *Approaches to Videogame Discourse: Lexis, Interaction, Textuality* proposes to situate the act of playing video

games as a domain of human activity, with its global and multicultural aspects. It situates its “strange” and unusual aspects, which locate it in AL, given that Applied Linguistics comprises human activity manifested in language using the exception to understand the rule; the uncommon to understand common. An example of such research as is done in Brazil.

This approach highlights the concept of videogames for artistic expression (Ramos, 2013), moving it away from its purely playful character, the basis of most research focused on games – and the highlight of a key element for interaction with video games, simulation, which highlights the media’s potential for learning about life skills and confronting hegemonies, a point already raised by previous research (Lima, 2008). The act of playing video games is discussed, therefore, based on research by Ensslin and Balteiro, as well as Gee (2003), Jenkins (2009) and others, who suggest the role of digital games in making sense of the human condition in its relationship with new technologies.

The book reviewed here is a unique and innovative work that opens new paths in research with video games in AL, DA, and Sociolinguistics, a path that would contribute to fostering understanding on the relationship between language and technology in different contexts in Brazil and worldwide. Therefore, I recommend reading it to those researchers in Discourse Analysis and Sociolinguistics who are dedicated to computer-mediated communication in its pragmatic and lexicological aspects.

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