



Opponent's Report on the Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation
„Videogames as a Catalyst for Intercultural and Foreign Language Advantage
in Secondary School ESL Students”
by Robert Arnold-Stein

This report aims to facilitate a constructive dialogue during the defence by highlighting both the merits and areas for further refinement to consider for the publication of the dissertation.

Thesis statement

The dissertation presents an innovative investigation into the role of video gaming in facilitating L2 vocabulary learning among secondary school ESL students, and it contributes to applied linguistics and cognitive research by exploring both high-frequency vocabulary development and the sociolinguistic phenomenon of gamer-specific language.

1. Overview of the dissertation

The dissertation comprises eight comprehensive chapters that blend theoretical frameworks (approximately 60%) with empirical studies (approximately 40%) to explore the cognitive, neuroscientific, sociolinguistic, and pedagogical aspects of video gaming in relation to bilingualism and language learning. The work is supported by 57 tables summarizing the findings.

1.1 Theoretical framework (Chapters 1-5)

Chapters 1-5 establish a robust theoretical foundation, exploring:

- The introduction, purpose, research questions, and hypotheses (Chapter 1)
- Theories of bilingualism and multicompetence in the context of video gaming (Chapter 2)
- Implicit and explicit learning processes in video game environments (Chapter 3)
- Neurolinguistic aspects of language learning through gaming (Chapter 4)
- Sociolinguistic dimensions and the proposed concept of „gamerlect” (Chapter 5)

The theoretical chapters demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of the research field, proposing the adoption of a holistic model of multicompetence and the Dynamic Model of Multilingualism (DMM) to understand video gamers as language users.

1.2 Empirical studies (Chapter 6 and beyond)

The empirical part consists of three interconnected studies:

- Study 1A examines vocabulary knowledge of video gamers
- Study 1B identifies the most impactful video games for L2 learning
- Study 1C explores the relationship between socioeconomic status, gaming devices, and language learning

The methodology involved a Vocabulary Levels Test (VLT) administered to 890 Hungarian high school students, alongside qualitative analysis of gamer-specific language.

2. Critical evaluation

2.1 Strengths

The dissertation addresses a timely and interdisciplinary research topic that intersects language learning, cognitive science, and digital media studies. The candidate demonstrates:

- **Comprehensive understanding of the existing literature:** The extensive literature review incorporates theories on implicit and explicit learning, bilingualism, and the cognitive effects of video gaming, showing broad knowledge and systematic understanding of the research field.
- **Methodological innovation:** The mixed-method approach employs quantitative instruments (VLT, Stroop test, verbal fluency test) alongside qualitative interviews to capture the nuances of gamer-specific language („gamerlect”) and its impact on ESL proficiency.
- **Theoretical contribution:** The introduction of the terms „gamerlect” and „gamer argot” represents a significant theoretical advancement in understanding specialized linguistic phenomena within gaming communities. The candidate shows ability to make a significant contribution to knowledge development.
- **Substantial sample size:** The empirical data collected from 890 secondary school students provides a solid foundation for the conclusions drawn regarding the educational benefits of video gaming.
- **Educational implications:** The findings offer practical insights for language education, demonstrating the ability to contribute to societal development and support learning.

2.2 Suggestions to consider for further publication

Based on the evaluation, the following recommendations are proposed:

2.2.1 Methodological considerations

1. **Operational definitions:** The dissertation presents a well-developed research framework. The candidate could further clarify key operational definitions to enhance the study's

replicability. In particular, a more precise articulation of how *video game-related vocabulary* is defined and measured.

2. **Methodological justification:** The selection of assessment instruments, such as the VLT, Stroop test, and verbal fluency test, is appropriate for the study's objectives. Nonetheless, a more detailed justification for these choices, as well as an explicit discussion of their respective advantages and limitations, would strengthen the methodological rationale.

2.2.2 Analytical considerations

1. **Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings:** The study employs a mixed-methods approach, effectively combining statistical analyses with qualitative insights. Further elaboration on how qualitative observations complement and contextualize the quantitative results would reinforce the study's contributions.
2. **Discussion of limitations:** The dissertation acknowledges certain limitations; however, expanding this discussion would further contextualize the findings. In particular, focusing on the potential impact of sample demographics and the constraints of the selected measurement instruments would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the study's scope and applicability.

3. Assessment of degree objectives achievement

3.1 Knowledge and understanding

The candidate demonstrates broad knowledge of the research field through its comprehensive literature review spanning bilingualism, cognitive science, and educational technology. The detailed exploration of theories and concepts, particularly the proposal of „gamerlect“ as a specialized linguistic phenomenon, shows deep and current specialized knowledge. Further clarification of methodological choices would more fully demonstrate familiarity with scientific methodology.

3.2 Proficiency and ability

The candidate shows capacity for scientific analysis through the mixed-methods approach and triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data. The identification of research questions regarding the influence of video gaming on language learning demonstrates critical and independent thinking. The significant contribution to knowledge is evident in the empirical findings regarding the superior vocabulary performance of gamers and the influence of game types on vocabulary learning. The practical educational implications fulfil the objective of contributing to societal development.

3.3 Judgment and approach

The dissertation reflects intellectual independence in proposing new theoretical constructs and challenging existing categorizations in digital communication. Further discussion of ethical considerations in research with adolescents would strengthen this aspect.

4. Conclusion

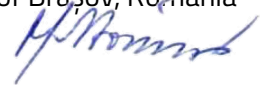
The dissertation by Robert Arnold-Stein contributes meaningfully to the understanding of how video gaming may serve as an effective catalyst for L2 vocabulary learning and intercultural communication among ESL learners. The work provides a solid theoretical foundation and empirical evidence supporting the positive relationship between video gaming and enhanced vocabulary knowledge, particularly through multiplayer and action games.

The study demonstrates considerable strengths in its innovative approach and comprehensive literature review. It would benefit from further methodological justification, improved integration of findings, and a more detailed discussion of its limitations. These improvements are recommended for the publication phase to enhance the clarity and impact of the research, thereby reinforcing its contribution to the fields of applied linguistics and educational technology.

I fully agree that the candidate, Robert Arnold-Stein, be awarded the PhD degree.

March 26, 2025

Prof. Răzvan Săftoiu, PhD
Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania



Questions for the defence

1. Could you elaborate on the rationale behind the selection of the Vocabulary Levels Test, Stroop, and verbal fluency tests, and discuss any limitations these instruments might have in capturing the nuances of video game-influenced language learning?
2. Can you discuss how the quantitative results (e.g., differences in VLT scores) were triangulated with the qualitative findings from your interviews, and what challenges arose during this integration?
3. In what ways does the concept of „gamerlect“ expand or challenge traditional models of bilingualism in your study?
4. In light of your findings, what practical implications can be drawn for the incorporation of video gaming in ESL curricula? How might educators effectively implement your findings in classroom settings?