INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN MULTIPLAYER ONLINE GAMES

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Intercultural communication is one of the most rapidly growing new scientific disciplines. In the context of globalization, that has covered virtually all areas of our life an effective way of interaction with other cultures and nationalities is getting urgent. At the same time, as noted by a large portion of scientists, conflicts and misunderstandings occurring between people from different cultures and countries are not connected with insufficient knowledge of the language but with lack of cultural knowledge.[1]

Despite great interest to the problems of intercultural communication its status among other related sciences is not well defined. There is no standard and universally received terminology, no conventional theoretical foundation, no well–defined status of intercultural communication and its place among other sciences. Researchers do not agree even in the definition of the concept of "intercultural communication". In parallel, there is a large number of terms – "cross–cultural", "multicultural", "multiculturalism", "intercultural", "transcultural", "countercultural" and there is no strict distinction between them.

In this paper we are analyzing different opinions about the role of intercultural communication, methodological approaches towards researching the subject of intercultural relations and the manifestation of intercultural communication in the language of multiplayer online games.

Identity and culture are also studied within the discipline of communication to analyze how globalization influences the ways of thinking, beliefs, values and identity within and between cultural environments. Intercultural communication scholars approach theory with a dynamic outlook and do not believe culture can be measured nor that cultures share universal attributes. Scholars acknowledge that culture and communication shift along with societal changes and theories should consider the constant shifting and nuances of society [3].

Researching and widening the subject of intercultural relations is usually done with the idea of three methodological approaches: scientific, interpretive, and critical.

An experiment is the main form of scientific approach. From our standpoint scientific approach is seen as a cluster of patterns and interactions which are grouped and sorted for analysis. Yet what we have as our main objective is understanding of these patterns and forms of data without special degree or excessive amounts of past experience.

Interpretive methods consist of qualitative data collection and research approaches as one by one interviews and general ethnographic observations. We see this method as a way of understanding intercultural communication by looking at it as a means of communication without much thought towards the source of this communication.

As a result of constant change in nature of the subject it is universally regarded that the best way to widen the boundaries of the discipline is to apply critical method to the state of affairs that is perceived on a day to day basis in usual communal surrounding. The method requires a target of research. Because of the rapid development of information technologies and great popularity of computer games we have decided to study online communication between people of different cultures. So as a result our choice ended up being the most popular session based game in CIS based countries – DOTA 2.

DOTA 2 (also known as DotA or simply Dota) is a free to play multiplayer real time session–based strategy game. Through years the game has been changed drastically both visually and gameplay wise, yet the main aspect that kept the game alive both casually and competitively stayed the same throughout the years is teamwork.

One of the most important aspects of Dota is that it's a session based game which means that you play the game in sessions. One session usually takes around 40 minutes on average, but can last as short as 10–15 minutes or as long as 4 hours 17 minutes 12 seconds (world record in non–competitive matchmaking environment). For this period of time 5 complete strangers (unless you are playing with friends) are placed into a team against 5 enemy players with a goal to work towards to.

The thing that made it the main talking point of our article is game's mechanic which is referred to by players as **matchmaking**.

Matchmaking is a process of putting people of different ages, nationalities, skills, experience, culture etc. into 2 teams of 5 players each. The downside here is that this process is free from direct input of these 10 people. They can affect the end result of the matchmaking machine computing by choosing some options in–game like language preference, country of search preference, whether they would like to have "parties" of players or lack thereof. Nevertheless the main factor will always be the amount of matchmaking points – value that shows your estimate "skill" in the game.

More often than not a result of poor matchmaking leads to instantly "ruined" game sessions due to language barriers, cultural or national differences. For example Ukrainian players are often matched up with Russians due to geographical location and language preference, yet the political relationships between two nations are so tense that the end result of a simple game of Dota is decided because of prejudices and stereotypes before the actual game has a chance to be played out. SEA (South–Eastern–Asia) countries all have a variety of languages and connections between each other. A Phillipino player will often find himself surrounded by Malaysian, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Singaporean and other players from across the server due to geographical location. All these nations have "rich" history of political expansions on one another and it's pretty obvious what the end result of constructing a team out of these people will look like. Competitive games in general and dota in particular are notorious for its emotionally charged atmosphere. However, when things like cultural differences, language barriers and ethnic backgrounds are introduced the overall situation usually ends up heated.

It may seem that there are only negatives about using mutlitplayer online games as a means of intercultural communication but that is absolutely wrong. The ability to communicate with one another is quite an extraordinary evolutionary achievement in on its own but the surroundings of people playing the game make them come up with terms and expressions that grow into something more than just a transistor of in–game information. A way for people to communicate not only their thoughts but emotions and beliefs as well, which in on itself leads to in–game communications becoming something more than just "sublanguage" but a language of its own.

The subcultural language and euphemisms deserve their own spotlight at least because of how influential they are to people who spend significant amount of time using them. A lot of Sayings like "По кд" (sublang. From "On cooldown"), "Изи" (sublang. From "easy"), "ГэГэ" (sublang. From " gg" short for "good game") are sayings that are usually said after a long well–played game by both parties. And all that is only a fraction of things to come from online communication.

In conclusion it should be said that there are different approaches towards researching intercultural communication. We chose to stick with the critical method, since it's the most efficient way of studying the subject. The reasons for choosing online games as a subject of our research are a wide variety of cultures, languages, nationalities, ages involved.

Online communication is a growing sphere of research and it will only get more widespread throughout the years. So our study will be a useful piece to look up to even in years to come. Only via communicating can we discover ourselves and people around us.

Literature

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