DE GRUYTER
OPEN

*Onoriu Colăcel
Faculty of Letters and Communication Sciences,
University *Ştefan cel Mare* of Suceava,
University Street 13, 720229 Suceava, Romania
e-mail: onoriucolacel@litere.usv.ro

SPEECH ACTS IN POST-APOCALYPTIC GAMES:
THE LAST OF US (2014)

Abstract
Among everything else post-apocalyptic video games have come to stand for, notions of in-group versus out-group communication are paramount. *The Last of Us* (2014, Naughty Dog/Sony Computer Entertainment) is a case in point. I look into the game's use of subtitles and didactic texts in order to find out to the extent speech acts shape the player's understanding of what the video game is. As an understudied aspect of video games, HUD or menu elements, as well as characters' exchanges and voice-over narration, disclose what it is like to be alive, dead or in-between. Essentially, they show the tensions between the avatar and the gamer: the hero makes all of the decisions by himself and the player has to abide or stop playing all together. The avatar's identity comes alive through speech acts, while the player is left outside decision-making processes. Survival horror gaming, with a religious twist, gives insight into the in-game discussion on the representation of the zombie rather than on the zombie experience as such. On screen, the interplay between speech acts and written language amounts to a procedural language, which suggests that variability in language creates an environment conducive to learning. Particularly, language use is all about group values and communication styles that should help gamers tell apart friends from enemies, good from evil and, finally, people from zombies.

Keywords: speech acts, post-apocalyptic games, religious iconography, *The Last of Us*

Speech acts, group values and the experience of gaming

Communication in video games revolves around the need "to instruct gamers on proceeding through the game" (Luce, 2014: 92). Essentially, teaching gamers what is expected of them shapes the development of the story. In other words, players are exposed to a procedural language, which is subsumed under the "hybrid, extra-linguistic, open-ended, configurative and procedural systems that video games are" (Jones, 2008: 7).

In what follows I will discuss the interplay between spoken and written language in the experience of gaming. As an understudied aspect of video games, HUD or menu elements, as well as characters' exchanges and voice-over narration, disclose what it is like to be alive, dead, or in-between. If the subtitling option is enabled, spoken language and written transcripts amount to teaching techniques that support inquiry-based learning. This overlap of communication modes conjures up images of topical events, such as the Great Recession of 2008, and, particularly, of social debates and concerns regarding the austerity era that has followed. There is a growing body of literature that says video games legitimize neoliberal explanations and solutions to the financial crisis. *The Last of Us* (2014, Naughty Dog/Sony Computer Entertainment) offers a mode of communication that corroborates

* **Onoriu Colăcel** is Reader in English at *Ştefan cel Mare* University of Suceava, Romania. His main research interests are concerned with postcolonial studies, cultural memory and patterns of self-identification in literature, media and popular culture.

the findings of previous work in this field[1]. *The Last of Us* (hereafter *TLU*) routinely blends speech rendered in writing and language registers (formal-informal) in a manner meant to narrativize social debates about the economic meltdown of the recent past. This is to say that new insights into the graphological system, which symbolizes spoken language, are exhibited by "ethically notable videogames" (Zagal, 2009: 1). Specifically, spoken language renders (more) intelligible written symbols, i.e., the system of writing. Furthermore, written language gives a picture of speech acts that would otherwise go unmentioned. For example, various phonetic features (word stress, intonation, etc.) are employed in dealing with character delineation. The use of language shows identification and counter identification patterns that place in context the development of characters. Furthermore, language use sheds light on group values and communication styles. The feeling of belonging-togetherness is conveyed through linguistic meanings, i.e. through the way "words are used in the conduct of discourse" (Vanderveken & Kubo, 2001: 3). Cultural differences are recorded in the discourse of narrative voices (to be found mostly in voice-overs) in order to define the identity of avatars.

A formal, procedural language helps gamers understand how they are supposed to act. The conversational style of the intercourse between the computer-generated characters (hereafter CGCs) is entirely meaningful only if read against the background of the written, procedural language most gamers have come to take for granted. Specifically, the way avatars talk to each other benefits from a model of communication that entails an academic register of giving instructions. Shades of meaning and minute details are conveyed by means of explicit and definite information on whether or not the player is to perform specific tasks. A variety of language whose degree of formality and choice of vocabulary can only be defined as academic is in plain sight. As opposed to the common speech of the tacit and experiential knowledge that players are tempted to make use of, the formal (written) discourse reveals the particular course of action they would have to follow in order to reach their goals.

Locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts are performed as the story unfolds. Much like readers, players understand the "change of state […] in direct proportion to its consequences for the thought and action of the affected subject in the framework of the storyworld" (Schmid, 2010: 11). The notion of agency in video games is conspicuous in the way characters speak to each other. Players understand their agency by means of lectures given by narrative voices and seldom by means of spoken conversations. Usually, they are not told the full story and, as a result, the player is not given the opportunity to make the right choices. No less important, the "audio texts recorded for video games" (Bernal-Merino, 2015: 114) elaborate on the communication style favoured by the script writer(s). There is no way around voice-over narration in gaming as gamers are expected to take responsibility for their actions. The spoken word is used as part of plot development and character delineation. Discourses for instruction purposes are to be found in opening cinematics as well as in video clips that play when triggered by gamers. Whenever in-game cut scenes are preferred, they come with comprehensive instructions on how to pursue the ambitions of a successful gamer. This is compelling evidence that first-person interaction is one side of the coin in the experience of gaming; the other is traditional top-down communication, which is, essentially, an example of procedural language.

The goals and challenges of *TLU* push the boundaries of colloquial speech far beyond the spoken language of fictional survivors at the time of the post-apocalypse. The prestige of formal academic communication is favoured for the purpose of instruction. The gameplay is built on first person combat and stealth. The language used to teach is associated with written forms that represent speech. The gamer acquires the skills needed to survive reading rather than listening. In other words, the learning curve in gaming mimics educational contexts: listening comprehension activities are coupled with browsing through flash cards, pictures, or written texts, all available at a push of a button.

Fighting zombies and humans for resources results in emotional arousal: fear, guilt, or shame metaphors help with goal orientation over diegetic time. Moreover, the language of expiation is insistently mentioned as a means to double check on the player's moral fibre. A "procedural rhetorics" (Bogost, 2007: ix) focused on cooperation is always at hand so as players learn new skills.

The text from the environment of the game (road signs, banners, etc.), the exchanges between the CGCs as well as non-diegetic communication (if the hearing-impaired option is enabled) are

---

[1] See Gurr (2015); Hubner, Leaning and Manning (2015); Lavin and Lowe (2015); Sugg (2015).

constantly present on screen[2]. Collaborative versus competitive problem solving strategies are delineated in texts or maps that, sooner or later, gamers are asked to read. Written language shapes the behaviour of various characters and, primarily, assists both the characters and the players in their search for answers. Actually, the subtitle option and English captions serve the purpose to record the statements made by gamers and CGCs alike. They give players the opportunity to read instructions as well as the lines of other characters. As one would expect, colloquial vocabulary is quite common. Sentences are sometimes unfinished, syntax is simple, not to mention that direct speech is the obvious choice for character interaction. Likewise, rhetorical devices supposed to acknowledge the audience are often employed, namely, comprehension checks (i.e. 'ok?', 'right?', etc.) or discourse markers (i.e. 'so', 'well', 'whoa' etc.). It seems that basic grammar and short sentences are always welcome. What appear to be loosely connected sequences of thought are rhetorical gimmicks, most of the times staged for the purpose of instruction. The aim is to claim the immediacy of game experience: supposedly, CGSs think and produce language at the same time. Such assumptions cause pauses (i.e. 'um', 'hmm', 'huh', etc.) and false starts in conversations. As a matter of fact, such examples come to prove that *TLU* developed methods of conversing by means of words and symbols otherwise meaningless.

The formal discourse of giving directions and advice is a case in point of practical language. It leads to decision-making based on self-interest and, ultimately, personal gain. More complex, longer sentences are employed to hint at race, gender, and social class or to describe the way the player's avatar is supposed to prevail over the competition. The attempt to convey shades of meaning and explicit details requires a rather challenging phrasal syntax, while the clausal one is relegated to conversation.

Conclusively, the so-called academic style of the procedural language on screen gives structure to the inquiry-based gaming activity. The choice between basic grammar patterns and the elaborate grammar of written discourse (i.e. between phrasal and clausal syntax) varies in accord with the two communication modes above-mentioned: formal language versus common speech. As a matter of principle, the game makes the point that the rhetorical commonplaces of storytelling come across as spoken and written language, used to get things done. This hands-on approach to language use means that the listening and the reading skills of the players improve as they progress through the game.

The way they talk: the out-group

The language and action of *TLU*'s zombies are of a particular nature: various phonetic features such as word stress, intonation, or juncture are used in order to build characters. Speech acts (i.e. orders, promises, and apologies) describe the relation between the social reality of gamers and the environment of the game. Understanding events seems to entail mostly illocutionary and perlocutionary acts performed by the CGSs. One way or another, gamers agree that there is only one proper way to behave in the post-apocalyptic world – abide by the decision of the hero, Joel. The unfolding of the game hinges on specific choices prompted by morally significant interactions with stock characters. Choosing good over evil (in point of fact, making self-interested choices) helps the story unfold in order to reveal death and resurrection at the time of the post-apocalypse: "this persuasive intent is inscribed into the implied player and is primarily expressed in the juxtaposition of dangerous city spaces and calming nature spaces" (Farca & Ladevèze, 2016: 6).

Considering that the very use of language customarily points to a "selection of reality", which is "also a deflection of reality" (Burke, 1966: 45), *TLU* is a case in point of speech action. Players experience the way their world is effectively changed by means of words, namely by means of speech acts. Gaming is experienced through both illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Moreover, speech acts are indicative of social action within and outside the speech community of the CGSs.

The religious undertones of the story amount to a specific discourse that delineates the framework of the storyworld. It helps the average gamer to piece together the graphic account about zombies and other human flesh-eaters. The boundaries of the out-group are set by the symbolic action of language:

Tess: […] Is that your people?

---

[2] Most of the times, non-native speakers of English choose to enable the subtitle option.

> Marlene: What's left of them. Why do you think I'm turning to you guys? (*TLU*, "The Quarantine Zone")

More than anything else, the way the story is told is what drives the narrative forward. The characters themselves side with one group or the other in the debate over death and survival. Everybody is willing to warn against a variety of challenges: technologic meltdown, global climate change, environmental degradation, etc. A system of connections between the game environment and the implied players is rationalized in the same terms used to describe the aftermath of doomsday. The game stages "the modern monstrous" (Conrich, 2015: 23), translating eschatological fears into a story of countless dead who come alive. Essentially, the point of view of the player replicates the use made of hand-held camera in popular cinema. The game aesthetics brings together the language registers of various storytellers who strive to detail what it is like to be alive, dead, or in-between. The player needs to deal with a wide range of tasks accomplished through language, specifically by means of particular language skills. Language use defines the verbal behaviours of two speaking communities, i.e. the "in-group" versus the "out-group" (Sumner, 1902: 7).

Telling apart the good from the bad aims to describe social and pragmatic effects produced mostly by language. Even if the vocabulary of characters and narrators should be similar, it turns out that this is not always the case. Basically, contending parties call names and point fingers, while engaging each other over resources. The out-group is delineated by means of the hands-on investigation into the dilemmas raised by working together:

> Ellie: We can help each other.
> Joel: Ellie.
> Ellie: Safety in numbers and all that.
> Henry: She's right. We could help each other. We got a hideout not too far from here. Be safer if we chat there.
> Joel: Alright, take us there. (*TLU*, "Pittsburgh")

TLU is yet another narrative of last things. Relentlessly, the player is called upon to fill the shoes of a father, a role that is key to the success of survival among zombies. Somehow, playing the part of the father "uphold[s] the cinematic convention of the zombie as infectious" (Lauro, 2011: 208) and makes the point that one's own family is in jeopardy. The surrogate-father, Joel, strives to keep alive a 14-year-old girl, Ellie. He is on a quest for a symbolic replacement of his own girl, Sarah, who died at the beginning of the zombie outbreak.

The psychoanalytic and religious overtones of his exploits amount to clichés that recall theology based upon reasoning from natural facts. The zombie game itself is an instance of popular theology at its best. Specifically, a brand of apocalypticism is plain to see. Game-playing is naturalized in the physical features of the space available for travelling. The video environment provides opportunities to try out new behaviours that only make sense if the experience takes the players through the story in real time. Actually, it is not a matter of place as much as of placing gamers in plausible settings and communities: "you know, as bad as those things are, at least they're predictable. It's the normal people that scare me. You of all people should understand that" (*TLU*, "Bill's town"). This is an attempt to cash in on the popularity of the zombie narrative, now a "part of a majority culture" (Dymek, 2012: 45) that looks for neoliberal solutions to various crises. The apocalypse motif hinges on the events originally described in the religious iconography of doom: "everywhere you looked, you just...saw families torn apart. The whole damn world seemed to have turned upside-down in a blink" (*TLU*, "Bus depot"). The ultimate destruction of the world is explained by ethical issues that underpin the action taken by the father who constantly struggles to deliver on the promises he makes to his offspring.

All characters are subjected to the same biological and moral conditioning that pitches them against the protagonist and his new found daughter: "yeah, I thought you were one of them too. Then I saw you. If you haven't noticed, they don't keep kids around. Survival of the fittest" (*TLU*, "Pittsburgh"). The avatar of the player has to internalize society's low regard for his daughter. It follows that the struggle for life commonly takes precedence to moral concerns. The conduct of all concerned parties is conditioned by biological weaknesses and some degree of social interdependence. However, religious images (i.e. the pestilence, Ellie whose death might have saved the human race, etc.) are employed in

order to capitalize on the weight of religious traditions. The authority of natural theology is something the player has to reckon with at one time or another. The religious iconography secures the dramatic appeal of the event sequence, which is monitored first-hand by gamers: "but they need a scapegoat" (*TLU*, "The quarantine zone"); "more rotting bodies" (*TLU*, "Pittsburgh"), etc. Ultimately, the post-apocalypse is a parable meant to prove that there is hope for the few remaining survivors of the in-group.

Anyway, this is a register of communication far removed from that of the professed secular purposes of mass entertainment. Iconic images of fear, guilt or shame function as "props of Gothic terror" (Crook, 2012: 110) that may be construed as helping characters communicate better with the zombies, i.e. with "our haunted self-image, [which is] warning us that we might already be lifeless, disempowered agents of alien powers" (McNally, 2011: 253). The lurch of the undead and the gory details of hunting humans are used to complement speech acts: the video of the game adds meaning to the words of hunters and narrators. In an attempt to increase their meaning, both speech and voiceover are provided with subtitles.

Fear spirals into hate directed at the out-group. The "culture of cruelty" (Giroux, 2011: 57) on display in *TLU* misquotes familiar stories. However, this is not a moral choice as much as a practical one. Essentially, the other is defined through speech acts. Words explain whatever happens on screen and events corroborate what the player finds out at the high points of the plot:

> Ellie: Hey, look, um...about Tess... I don't even know what to--
> Joel: Here's how this thing's gonna play out. You don't bring up Tess -- ever. Matter of fact, we can just keep our histories to ourselves. Secondly, don't tell anybody about your condition. They'll think you're crazy or they'll try to kill you. And lastly, you do what I say, when I say it. We clear? (*TLU*, "The outskirts")

Effectively, Joel says over and over again that "the out-group is […] ruthless, destructive and dangerous and the in-group will take measures of defensive protection" (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2008: 99). Those who want to saw off limbs, rip you to pieces or eat you up are described in vaguely defined terms, while they call names to Joel and Ellie: "And you think we have a choice? Is that it? You kill to survive...and so do we. We have to take care of our own. By any means necessary" (*TLU*, "Lakeside resort"). The same instances of written and spoken language are often used to describe all of the characters. Particularly, they are meant to recall recognizably narrative patterns of fear, shame, guilt, or expiation.

Making sense to my kind of people: the in-group

Computer-generated imagery (CGI) and, particularly, CGCs help build awareness of the various boundaries that define the in-group. The dramatic structure of the story is painfully clear in the everyday life of Joel and Ellie, who "endure and survive" (*TLU*, "Pittsburgh"). Surviving among the undead only comes to show that fighting zombies is half the problem since the living are out to kill them too. There are two main contending factions: the Fireflies and the army. They fight each other and the infected as well. Of course, criminal gangs, cannibals, and killers roam the post-apocalyptic world more or less at will. Essentially, everybody is looking for relief, silence, release, while operating by broken logics:

> Ellie: I'm infected! I'm infected!
> David: Really?
> Ellie: ...and so are you. Right there. Roll up my sleeve. Look at it!
> David: I'll play along.
> [He sees the old wound and grows quiet.]
> Ellie: What'd you say? Everything happens for a reason, right?
> James: What the hell is that?
> David: She would've turned by now. It can't be real. (*TLU*, "Lakeside resort")

The story of *TLU* is told from the point of view of the two main characters, Joel and Ellie. Joel met Ellie while exploring the sprawling urban landscape, which is the customary visual setting of the game. The tighter their bond grows, the more the sense of impending doom heightens the drama of the

post-apocalypse. Next to them, a number of other individuals are delineated as being part of one and the same community. Eventually, they all die or are being killed by Joel himself. I have in mind Tommy, Joel's brother, Tess, who teams up with Joel to smuggle merchandise, or Marlene, the leader of an underground group that fights the army. They are close to the father-daughter pair and the only available choices for their in-group. For example, Marlene is the one who actually introduced Ellie to Joel. She asked him to smuggle her out of danger into the safety of a non-military zone. To his great dismay, Joel had to comply with the demand in order to get back stolen ammo and weapons. Subsequently, the bond between Joel and Tess grew stronger. For all intents and purposes, he substituted Anna, Ellie's mother, who entrusted her to Marlene. Joel's fatherly commitment is there for everyone to see. Every single CGC seems keenly aware of his one soft spot; they go to great lengths in order to take advantage of his vulnerability. On the whole, the storyline examines where the tipping point of paternal morality is. It is obvious that Ellie is one of the very few female personages able to engage in a strictly asexual relationship with her environment. Her language, demeanour, and biography portray a "female without sexual agency" (Hjorth, 2011: 78). Up to the end credits of *TLU*, Ellie is an angelic being. It is safe to say that *TLU* brought into the mainstream of the Western gaming industry the cute character, which is a well-known, culture-bound representation of Japanese culture. Under Joel's supervision, Ellie makes for a great example of the child-hero who is nevertheless on the verge of entering adulthood. Ultimately, she grows into a 14-year old skilled survivor who carries a weapon of choice (i.e., the switchblade) and uses pistols, hunting rifles or explosives.

The relation between the out-group and the in-group is plain to see in the discourse of the father figure on a perpetual killing spree. Among the many conflicts CGCs engage in, the most significant is the one that has obvious religious overtones. The clash between the undead and humans (and, for that matter, between humans themselves) brings to light key issues that are explained using extended metaphors: "you can still rise with us. Remember, when you're lost in the darkness...look for the light. Believe in the Fireflies" (*TLU*, "The quarantine zone"). Explicitly, Joel, Marlene (i.e. the leader of the Fireflies who is on a quest to save the world) and Ellie make use of a language imbued with biblical meanings: the scapegoat, the prodigal son, the sacrificial lamb, etc. Elementary illocutionary acts, which consist in illocutionary force and propositional content such as orders, requests and promises, convey a sense of expiation and retribution:

> Joel: We're gonna get outta this. I promise.
> [Another pileup prevents access to the local theater.]
> Tommy: Get back! There's too many of 'em. This way! Through the alley! Go!
> (*TLU*, "Hometown")

Importantly, the climax (as well as the outcome) of events proves that the father-daughter love is built on bending the truth. The end scenes of *TLU* show Ellie being rescued by Joel from the hands of the Fireflies. In the words of Marlene, the Firefly queen, the gamer is told that they were unable to "extricate the parasite without eliminating the host" (*TLU* "Last Words"). Explicitly, they were likely to kill her in order to find out why she survived a zombie bite that would have definitely killed anyone else (for instance, her best friend actually died in the same attack). Ellie's saviour-like image is further proof of the biblical set-up of *TLU*. Ever since Joel realized that she might fit the profile of the saviouress, he and the player have been aware that Ellie is a promise of redemption: if given the opportunity, she would save the world. Considering the unknown nature of the zombie plague, the pestilence might very well be construed as divine retribution. Much is said about Ellie having immunity from the contagion (i.e., from the wrath of God). The Fireflies pursued the best interest of the human race when they set out to extricate the parasite. In other words, Ellie's death could have helped them come up with a cure for the disease that threatened to wipe out humankind from the face of the earth. Instead, Joel choses to save her life and, importantly, to lie to her. When she stands up to him, he bends the truth either for her sake or for his own benefit:

> Joel: We found the Fireflies. Turns out, there's a lot more like you, Ellie. People that are immune. It's dozens actually. Ain't done a damn bit of good neither. They've actually st…They've stopped looking for a cure. I'm taking us home. I'm sorry. […] I struggled for a long time with survivin'.

And you-. No matter what. You keep finding something to fight for. Now I know that's not what you want to hear right now. But it's…
Ellie: Swear to me. Swear to me that everything that you said about the Fireflies is true.
Joel: I swear.
Ellie: Okay. (*TLU*, Ending Cutscenes)

Ellie is forbidden to submit voluntarily to death, to shed her blood for the salvation of the people. The equivocal phrasing of the answers the child-hero receives and her willingness to accept them at face value suggest that both Joel and Ellie look for a solution rather than all-out confrontation. They talk to one another in a way that is generally out of reach for the members of the out-group. The direct communication style of everyone else is meant to deliver criticism, while the two of them focus on their shared sense of chosen people. The gamer is instructed to fear the language barrier between the in-group and the out-group. Most CGCs threaten Joel and Ellie. They make harsh demands so that everything quickly descends into sheer violence. As it happens, either Joel or Ellie has to deal with threats the only way possible: killing (almost) everything that moves in front of them. In the words of Ellie: "He [Joel] tells me that on this journey, you either hang on to your morals and die or you do whatever it takes to survive (*TLU*, Trailer)".

The popular representation of fear, guilt, or shame is further developed into the imagery of atonement. Inevitably, in order to survive, the in-group has to prevail over zombies and the few other remaining humans. In *TLU* the arsenal of clichés of the zombie genre points to sin and expiation. It shows a radical attitude towards the other, which essentially means that both the undead and the other men, women and children are denied the very right to exist. Somehow, the gamer is insulated from the horrors of the war (s)he wages against walking corpses and people alike. By means of speech acts and vivid representation of doom the CGCs are expected to reject the social reality of the world they inhabit. Savagery is linked together with a sense of moral entitlement translated in the language of deliverance from sin. For example, Marlene says it all, trying to assuage her guilt: "Here's a chance to save us…all of us…This is what we were after…what you were after" (*TLU*, "Our Story"). Behind the logic of Marlene seems to lurk the redeployment of the above-mentioned arsenal of sin/expiation. The reconciliation attempt between the Firefly queen and Joel fails and he kills her. Joel does not seem to have second thoughts about it while Marlene discloses her high regard for him: "I'm not about to kill the one man in this facility that might understand the weight of this choice" (*TLU*, "Our Story").

Joel's hands are stained with blood, as there is no rational course of action he can take. In order to protect Ellie he does not only act the part of the father, he also produces language that (mis)quotes deeply ingrained metaphors meant to express the values and beliefs of the family man. The two of them struggle to find reasons to keep on surviving and, eventually, they decide not to ask the really difficult questions anymore.

Importantly, Joel is not the only avatar the gamer operates. For quite a while, Ellie represents the player in the interactive setting of the game. Controlling both of them gives gamers an entirely new perspective on the protagonists. The prospect of being an ineffectual father is what Joel fears the most and what Ellie suspects from the very beginning. As a result, the former turns out to be a worn out survivor while the latter comes across as a scared teenager. Conclusively, the relation between the parent and the child-hero blurs the boundary between the family and the in-group. Consequently, they appear to be one and the same.

Beyond performative spaces: speech acts on screen

Afflicted by the cordyceps brain infection, humans mutate into primitive and slow-witted creatures. They reach various stages of their life cycle as zombies, namely runners, stalkers, clickers, bloaters. Once finally dead, the infected still release the pores of the fungus and spread the disease. All in all, the way they look is a challenge to traditional representations of the walking dead in popular culture. The fact that there is reason enough for a discussion about their looks opens up the question of whether zombie looks deserve further investigation. For sure, the last two stages of the infection are not kept in line with the distinctive facial features of humans. In their last stages, zombies are literally disfigured. With its defaced characters, the game looks to bring back to the genre a bodily sense of self-identification with human biology. The gamer obviously can make out human shapes and gestures, yet

facial angles and proportions in clickers and bloaters are entirely missing. This facial meltdown of more than half of the CGCs is distinctive of identity recognition in *TLU*. It challenges visual identification patterns everybody takes for granted in the derelict urban landscape of the game. At the time of *TLU*'s release, such a representation of the undead was a rather fresh take on the idea of zombie. Except for their looks, they serve to magnify the use made of illocutionary force in various contexts. Being dangerous things, the clickers and the bloaters do not look human. A fundamental aspect of their non-human identity is the blatant inability to understand the "illocutionary logic" (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985: 1) of human communication. Explicitly, orders, predictions, etc., they all fall on deaf ears. Illocutionary force is nevertheless realized through word-order, stress, or mood. Such means of expression obviously do not make sense to the undead, yet they help the in-group survive. Importantly, locutionary acts define the performance of third person narration (i.e., voice over and off screen narration), which is meant to place the gamer in the proper context of predestined fate. Explicitly, illocutionary acts are at the heart of the gameplay experience.

More than a performative space, *TLU* gives insight into an in-game discussion on the representation of the zombie rather than on the zombie experience as such. I mean that Joel, Ellie, or Marlene play their part because orders, promises, apologies work just fine in the non-diegetic space of the game. Finally, if there is no way of telling whether CGCs are moved by what one finds out while playing, the perlocutionary acts that the implied players are exposed to definitely succeed in pleasing or embarrassing them.

However, even some of the humans gradually lose most of their ability to make sense to one another. They end up resembling zombies, unable to speak about their place in the world. Irrespectively, they find the determination to carry on. The discourse for instruction purposes of the narrative voice reveals the assumptions by which gamers and avatars live their lives. Complex, long sentences are employed to hint at race, gender, and social class. The so-called academic register is a benchmark against which the plot unfolds. Voice-over narration that comes to stand for written communication (provided that English for the hearing-impaired option is enabled) highlights the immediacy of the game experience. The conversational style of communication (mostly colloquial vocabulary, unfinished sentences, simple syntax, direct speech) emphasizes the boundaries between the in-group and the out-group.

In order to enhance the experience of gamers, the identity of the in-group and that of the out-group overlap. *TLU* renders strange the way gamers come to terms with their avatars, for instance, the moment they swap between Joel and Ellie. Making sense of events circumvents the first-person interaction between CGCs. Self-identification is achieved by abstracting information from a non-diegetic past. Opening and in-game cinematics, in-game cut scenes, various other video clips make meaning seem the property of academic discourse rather than of spoken language. The formal language (that constantly reminds players how to act) highlights cultural differences that need to be bridged in order to reach the resolution of the story. In the attempt to do so, the story of Joel and Ellie avails itself of narrative passages that re-stage illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

TLU turns out to provide a rather complex understanding of the language system, which is at odds with that of the pre-digital era: a notion of literacy that kept written and spoken discourses apart is definitely a thing of the past as far as the video games culture is concerned. As digital literacy takes to the limelight, software entertainment helps gamers gain new insights into the graphological system that symbolizes spoken language. Or, for that matter, spoken language makes (more) intelligible written symbols, i.e. the system of writing. Written and spoken language are not polar opposites any more. On the contrary, they coalesce and lose (some of) their visual and acoustic identities. Pictures and the system of language (both written and spoken) are highly effective in eliciting emotional responses. Survival horror gaming, with the zombie twist, gives insight into the in-game discussion on the representation of the zombie rather than on the zombie experience as such. On screen, the interplay between speech acts and written language amounts to a procedural language, which suggests that variability in language creates an environment conducive to learning. Conclusively, communication styles and the way they are re-staged in gaming amount to a procedural language that sheds light on the many worlds gamers live in.

Works Cited

Austin, J. L. 1975. *How to Do Things with Words*, J. O. Urmson and M. Sbisa (eds.), Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Bernal-Merino, M. A. 2015. *Translation and Localisation in Video Games. Making Entertainment Software Global*, London and New York: Routledge.

Bogost, I. 2006. *Unit operations. An approach to videogame criticism*, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press.

Bogost, I. 2007. *Persuasive games. The expressive power of videogames*, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press.

Bogost, I. 2012. *Alien phenomenology, or What it's like to be a thing*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

Burke, K. 1966. *Language as symbolic action*, Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Conrich, I. 2015. "An Infected Population: Zombie Culture and the Modern Monstrous", Hubner, L., Leaning, M. & Manning, P. (eds.), *The Zombie Renaissance in Popular Culture*, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 15-25.

Crook, N. 2012. "Mary Shelley, Author of Frankenstein", Punter D. (ed), *A New Companion to The Gothic*, Malden, MA & Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 110-122.

Dymek, M. 2012. "Video Games: A Subcultural Industry" Zackariasson, P., Wilson, T. L. (eds.), *The Video Game Industry. Formation, Present State, and Future*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 34-56.

Farca, G. and Ladevèze, Ch. 2016. "The Journey to Nature: *The Last of Us* as Critical Dystopia", Proceedings of 1st International Joint Conference of DiGRA and FDG.

Giroux, H. A. 2011. *Zombie Politics and Culture in the Age of Casino Capitalism*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Gurr, B. (ed) (2015). *Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Post-Apocalyptic TV and Film*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hayes, Z. 1989. *Visions of a Future: A Study in Christian Eschatology*, Wilmington, DEL: Michael Glazier Press.

Hjorth, L. 2011. *Games and Gaming. An Introduction to New Media*, Oxford and New York: Berg.

Hubner, L., Leaning, M., and Manning, P. (eds.) (2015) *The Zombie Renaissance in Popular Culture*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jones, S. E. 2008. *The Meaning of Video Games. Gaming and textual strategies*, New York and London: Routledge.

Lavin, M. F., Lowe, B. M. 2015. "Cops and Zombies: Hierarchy and Social Location in The Walking Dead", Gurr B. (ed), *Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Post-Apocalyptic TV and Film*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 113-124.

Lauro, S. J. 2011. "Playing Dead: Zombies Invade Performance Art . . . and Your Neighborhood", Christie, D. and Lauro, S. J. (eds.), *Better Off Dead. The Evolution of the Zombie as Post-Human*, New York: Fordham University Press, pp. 205-230.

Luce, A. V. 2014. "It Wasn't Intended to be an Instruction Manual: Revisiting Ethics of Objective Technical Communication in Gaming Manuals", DeWinter, J. and Moeller Mayer M., (eds.), *Computer Games and Technical Communication. Critical Methods and Applications at the Intersection*, Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 87-107.

McNally, D. 2011. *Monsters of the Market. Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism*, Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Proudfoot, W. 2001. "Experience" in Fahlbusch, Erwin [et. al.] (ed), *The Encyclopedia of Christianity, volume 2, E-I*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, Brill, pp. 250- 253.

Schmid, W. 2010. *Narratology. An Introduction*, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter Gmbh & Co.

Searle, J. R. & Vanderveken D. 1985. *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sternberg, R. J., Sternberg, K. 2008. *The nature of hate*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sugg, K. 2015. "The Walking Dead: Late Liberalism and Masculine Subjection in Apocalypse Fictions"*, Journal of American Studies*, 49(4), pp. 793-811. doi:10.1017/S0021875815001723.

Sumner, W. G. 1902. *Folkways. A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals*, The Project Gutenberg eBook, 2008, PDF File.

The Last of Us. 2014. Naughty Dog/Sony Computer Entertainment.*The Last of Us*, Trailer, available at http://www.thelastofus.playstation.com/index.html, retrieved on October 8, 2015.

Tillich, P. 1959. *Theology of Culture*, R. C. Kimball (ed), London Oxford New York: Oxford University Press.

Vanderveken, D. & Kubo, S. 2001. "Introduction", Vanderveken, D. and Kubo, S.(eds.), *Essays in speech act theory*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 1-21.

Zagal, J. P. 2009. "Ethically Notable Videogames: Moral Dilemmas and Gameplay", Conference Paper, Proceedings of the 2009 DiGRA International Conference: *Breaking New Ground: Innovation in Games, Play, Practice and Theory*, ISSN 2342-9666. Retrieved on August 2, 2015. www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/09287.13336.pdf, Brunel University.