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**Language, gender and videogames: using corpora to analyse the representation of gender in fantasy videogames**
Heritage F., Palgrave Macmillan, New York,
NY, 2021. 199 pp. Type: Book (978-3-030743-97-0)

Date Reviewed: Apr 25 2023

( Full Text )

It has often been stated that the videogaming environment is filled with machismo, and there are many observations to that end: numerous studies have been published that back this assertion, based on the size comparison of the male and female gaming communities, on the graphic representations of male and female characters, on the interactions between male and female players in online gaming communities, and a long etcetera; the author quotes studies such as "Gender differences in video game characters' roles, appearances, and attire as portrayed in video game magazines" by Miller and Summers [1] and "A content analysis of female body imagery in video games" by Martins et al. [2]. This book's contribution is to carry forward a scientific endeavor for this fact by analyzing the language used in published adventure videogames. This is in contrast with previous works' focus on visuals, or even if focusing on language, the focus is on interactions between players. Heritage focuses on the text at the core of the games, which constructs the gameplay itself.

The author begins with a short summary on the evolution of gaming as a basic trait of human civilization, mentioning that the oldest known boardgames are around 5000 years old. Heritage focuses on computer gaming, and within that field on computer adventure games, which first appeared in the late 1970s. These games continue to grow more complex, not only in ways obvious to whoever judges computer systems evolution (that is, text-based games incrementally gaining graphics, sound, animation, multimedia integration, and achieving quasi-cinematic quality), but also in the depth of the presented adventures as well as of each of the intervening characters. The author presents the connection of the work with gender as the aspect to be researched and corpus linguistics as the toolset to perform the analysis with.

Corpus (pluralized as corpora) linguistics means gathering the sought language patterns by analyzing a large set of text representative of a given domain. Throughout the first four chapters, the author presents an introduction to the field, as well as several examples of searching for gender-relevant trends arising from the language used in the game dialogues and descriptions, as provided by adventure videogame companies themselves. In chapters 5 through 7, the author presents and demonstrates three methods for creating the corpora used for the research, applied in chapter 5 to a set of videogames and in the following chapters to a different game each. Finally, a chapter presenting the general conclusion closes the book.

This monograph is clearly written in an academic style. Without being well versed in linguistics (but with some background in natural language processing), I can appreciate the author's great job of presenting and explaining very domain-specific concepts to a relative newcomer. The book is packed with new knowledge yet quite approachable. Its goal is not to determine whether the game industry produces gender-imbalanced content--that is a given from the onset--but rather to show how linguistic analysis together with an expert guiding the process can find more subtle information, such as the evolution of gender relations in videogames over time. Furthermore, in a field as heavily male-dominated as is computing, this book helps to highlight the narratives and linguistic uses we might take as neutral, but which have an effect on making the whole area of computing more or less welcoming and attractive to women and nonbinary people.

Reviewer:  Gunnar Wolf                                      Review #: CR147580

1) Miller, M. K.; Summers, A. Gender differences in video game characters' roles, appearances, and attire as portrayed in video game magazines. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* 57, (2007), 733–742.

2) Martins, N.; Williams, D. C.; Harrison, K.; Ratan, R. A. A content analysis of female body imagery in video games. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* 61, (2009), 824–836.

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