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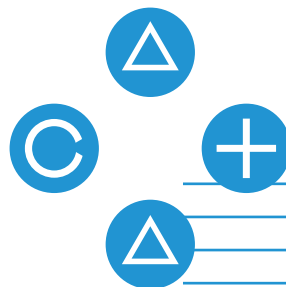
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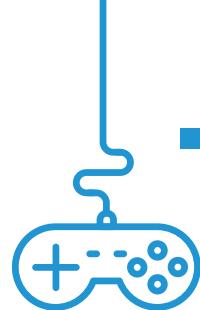
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# Journal Orientation

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Acta Ludologica is a scientific journal in the field of games and digital games. The journal contains professional scientific reflections on digital games; it also offers academic discourses on games, especially media and digital competencies, creation, design, marketing, research, development, psychology, sociology, history and the future of digital games and game studies.

Acta Ludologica is a double-blind peer reviewed journal published twice a year. It focuses on theoretical studies, theoretical and empirical studies, research results and their implementation into practice, as well as professional publication and scientific reviews of digital games.

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## Commands and Silences: Language at Play in Digital and Tabletop Games

At their core, all digital games are conversations. Be it pressing a button or typing a command, the fundamental allure of all gaming experience is the continuous interaction between player and machine. This holy grail of interactivity, naturally, presupposes the existence of some kind of language to facilitate it. From programming languages as codes to human languages as the basis of narratives, large language models, as recently emerging technologies, are increasingly utilized in game development, further complicating the already nuanced relationship between games and language. A notable recent example was when mods for *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* integrated ChatGPT as an interactive tool, creating the illusion that NPCs are now able to unscriptedly communicate with players in real-time. Artificial or human, descriptive or prescriptive, highly abstract or matter-of-fact in nature, language is the means and milieu of all in-game interactivity; even non-verbality is put forward as the silent or primordial Other of a world based on texts and language.

This special issue of *Acta Ludologica*, “Games and Language”, explores how language shapes and is shaped by games, how it sets up the social, cultural and critical context of games, and how games, in return, challenge the conventions of communication, storytelling, and meaning-making.

In the beginning was the word – and the word had to be very specific as one tried to interact with old-school text-based adventure games, like *Zork*: you could not just use a lantern, you had to be very specific about lighting it. In a more recent example, *Cryptmaster*, you had to type out the letters of skills and spells so that the characters you were in control of, would use them. The word of code, in this sense, becomes a means of command, and in a broader context a word with magically performative powers. Any virtual world is bound by the code, meaning that language, in certain cases, is an indisputable tool of control – literally and metaphorically too.

The 2019 indie game *Baba Is You* taps into this magical, creative capacity of language. Imre Horváth traces poetic defamiliarisation in the gameplay, presenting a possible typology of intersections between referentiality and what he coins ‘intraprocedural’. The problem of referentiality and functionality lies at the heart of the analysis of in-game fictionality and factuality by Tamás Csöngé, identifying the core problem with descriptive language.

At the same time, language, even in-game language use is inherently tied in with narrativity – a concept

much challenged and transformed by game studies since its conception. Certain games, despite it being self-contradictory, include for instance a narrator, such as the aforementioned *Zork*. Early on in the game, this narrator draws the player’s attention to a doorway with Gothic letters on it. If the player wants to inspect it, it will turn out that the engraving says, “This space is intentionally left blank”, as a goofy metatextual nod towards the player. The idea of such metareferentiality (metafictional and metaludic alike) is in the focus of Aylin Pekanik. Her study offers a taxonomy of metagames, arguing that their evolution demonstrates the maturity of the medium.

Language, then, both as the magic of coding and as narrative control, shows the natural and unavoidable cultural context in which any playing experience can emerge. This is why some games seek to offer a uniquely ludic experience precisely by avoiding language – written and spoken alike. The 2011 docugame *The Cat and the Coup* does just that, considering a transcultural context and audience in presenting a local, personal but ludic instance of counter-microhistory, as Mohammadreza Golshani suggests in his study. Similarly, Imola Bülgözdi focuses on the wordless world of the game *Journey*, focusing instead on the music, the nonverbal interactions and the affective qualities of connecting with someone through playing.

Even more so than digital games, tabletop role-playing games (TTRPG) are dependent on language as the primary means of communication. András Hlavacska presents an experiment that was conducted to scrutinise intra- and extraludic interactions during TTRPG campaigns. Proceeding with this idea, Orsolya Nagy explores the intersection of TTRPGs, cosplay, and transmedia storytelling through a case study of *The Wayward Wanderers* by the TikTok-favourite team Somewhere Bound. In this case a transmedia-specific ‘language’ is then developed to comment on, forward, and challenge canon narratives. Finally, the contrasting perspective on the topic is presented by Ana Arán Sánchez, who applies games and playful approaches to foreign language learning.

From the poetic mechanics of *Baba Is You* to the silent vernacular of *The Cat and the Coup*, from non-verbal connections in *Journey* and transmedia storytelling in tabletop RPGs to using playful approaches in foreign language learning, this special issue explores the many ways language shapes and is shaped by games. Language, in commands or silences, becomes both the medium and the message, defining how we play, connect, and create meaning.

**MA Norbert Krek-Polyák  
& Zsófia Orosz-Réti, Ph.D.**  
*University of Debrecen*

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