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The Impact of Games on Foreign Language Learning

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Abstract

In this analysis I am going to evaluate the benefits of games in the process of learning a foreign language, taking into account a specific game: Genshin Impact.

The purpose of this case study is to understand how impactful always having to do with new words that occasionally return is, to linger upon the vastity of semantic fields that lie into video games, understanding in this way their potential and to suggest them as studying companions in the process of learning a new language during middle and high school.

In order to do that, I will lean on several papers written by scholars who studied the topic in details and I shall present at the very end of my chapters, a glossary with all the terms that really helped me out on my process of learning English during primary, secondary and high school.

At the end of my dissertation we will find out the meaningful impact of having a brief but constant exposure to the designated foreign language, we will also have a clearer point of view regarding the advantages of playing video games.

Introduction

At a first glance, learning a foreign language might seem daunting, especially when the learners are already grown up. As a matter of fact, if children tend to learn a new language without questioning its difficulties, it may be because they do not yet know the required efforts. Grown-up students and adults, on the other hand, do already know that language learning requires knowledge in different language fields such as grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, idioms (and so forth) in order to acquire mastery in all four main language skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking. Due to this, they may be more prone to study with learning tools that help them improving their language skills. These companions might range from extensive academic reading, to watching movies or media, from listening to music to video games. The latter, especially, are believed by many people to be a worthy tool for second language vocabulary enhancement and acquisition since they combine music, videos and interactive tasks all in one. Furthermore, playing a video game every day gives players the chance to be exposed to large amount of both written and oral second language output that can help gamers to widen their vocabulary knowledge as well as improving their pronunciation. In addition, many video games have a large number of characters, each of whom use both complex and simple level sentences that can be exploited during everyday conversation.

The following dissertation aims to investigate whether or not video games designed for entertainment, thus not for language learning, might be a useful resource for enhancing the existing knowledge of second language vocabulary. In this paper I decided to conduct a small-scale experiment on a game that, from my perspective, englobes all the features needed in order to help players to enhance their second language knowledge. This game is called Genshin Impact (HoYoverse, 2020). It is believed by many scholars (Gairns et al., 1986; McCarthy, 1990; Schmitt et al., 1997; Griffith, 2008; Schmitt, 2008; Rasouli et al., 2016 et al.) that vocabulary acquisition might be the first step to undertake for second language improvement: once it has been consolidated, fluency comes consequentially since learners will not waste time thinking about what words should they use. Moreover, video games such as Genshin Impact have the option to play

“single mode”, which allows players to pause the game whenever they please in order to linger upon some unknown items, giving them the time to interact with the newly encountered words, and eventually learning and retaining them. In addition to this, researchers such as Wei et al., 2018, believe that video games are useful to relieve anxiety, and along with its eradication there may come increased engagement (Schmitt, 2008; Kostler, 2018; Wei et al. 2018; Rentia et al., 2022 et al.), which appears to be an effective component in the process of vocabulary recognition and retention. In fact, according to many scholars, game related tasks spur players to use the encountered vocabulary in order to understand how to achieve the desired rewards. Another important feature in video games is the repetition of terms that, in the long run, are more likely to be retained in players’ minds (McCarthy, 1990; Zahar et al. 2001; Pigada et al. 2006; Schmitt, 2008 et al.).

For the experiment conducted, I prepared a questionnaire divided into four parts, and in the last one I chose to add a translation task in order for me to understand their level of retention of Genshin items (from A1 or lower to C2 or higher vocabulary and expressions). The survey was administered in May 2023 and was answered by 10 young people out of 13. The reasons why I subdivided the questionnaire is that each section serves a different function: in order to evaluate whether or not something might have influenced their actual knowledge I needed to know: which background knowledge they possessed; what are they doing now; how much time they spend playing and since when have they played; their perception of anxiety from different sources of L2 output; and other perception-related questions. The purpose was to answer the question: can video games designed for entertainment be a tool to enhance students’ and/or players’ second language knowledge? In order to investigate this question, my questionnaire has both a quantitative approach (in order to see whether or not language students’ Genshin vocabulary knowledge is higher compared to those who do not study languages and to compare this second group to the group of workers’ vocabulary knowledge) and qualitative approach (to investigate how students or players gain awareness of unknown vocabulary and how they are retained over time).

The following dissertation has been divided into three chapters. In the first one, I will focus on the importance of vocabulary acquisition: I will present different strategies to widen the individual's already existing vocabulary knowledge and I will briefly linger upon the importance of repetition. The second chapter aims to give a birds-eye view of video games and their related benefits for vocabulary acquisition. I will discuss the importance of engagement, how it is triggered and its role when speaking about anxiety eradication. I will linger upon the effects of contextualised vocabulary and its potential in inferring the meaning, as well as upon the combination of both written and oral output that, according to many researchers (Joe, 1998; Vidal, 2011; Andriani et al., 2022 et al.), is an effective means of vocabulary recognition and retention. Finally, in my third chapter, I decided to verify the knowledge of some Genshin Impact players in order to have data to explore the issue in hand. From my point of view, this game and this topic are important to understand that learning a language might not be such an unbearable effort. With the following dissertation I would like to explore whether with time and commitment, we can acquire the language of the characters' dialogues. Finally, I would also like to reflect on whether video games might be acknowledged by teachers as studying companions, as extensive reading or other activities are, in order to suggest them as extracurricular activity to those students who do not enjoy reading L2 books or might feel uncomfortable when watching L2 multimedia and movies.

Chapter 1

Learning Second Language Vocabulary

The main purpose of this first chapter is to linger upon one of the most important aspects to acquire in terms of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). According to many researchers, a breakthrough can be made through vocabulary learning, since they state “no effective meaning can be conveyed without adequate lexis. The following chapter will also focus on the most efficient paths to undertake in order to enable a better retention of vocabulary as well as gaining understanding of the overall message thanks to personalised strategies that second language learners are recommended to use that shall help them acquiring a higher level of mastery facilitating their deduction of unknown lexis, also known as “inferring” from the text, better if it has high rates of contextualisation. However, this last skill is something that can be effectively achieved only by those who already have acquired a certain level of mastery in their second language, otherwise, as we will see, this technique could lead budding learners to a state of anxiety, ending up losing interest in second language learning.

1.1 What is vocabulary?

In order to understand the key factors for language acquisition, we need to linger upon what the vast majority of scholars believes is the most effective tool to enhance our second language output. A great, if not the greatest, importance is given to vocabulary learning since it can unlock certain areas of our brain, which allow us to have a better understanding of a second language as well as being able to manipulate information, thus having a wider range of words to use, both in a speech and in written language. To realise the strengths of this breakthrough, we need, in the first place, to understand what is vocabulary and how does it work.

According to Rasouli and Jafari (2016), vocabulary is the most important aspect of a language; they stress that without an adequate vocabulary, students cannot understand others, nor express their own thoughts. Schmitt & Schmitt (2005) explain that the term “*word*” refers to a sound, or combination of sounds, which communicates meanings and is represented in written or spoken form. McCarthy (1990) gives us a more analytical definition of vocabulary. Starting from the verb “eating”, made up of the two morphemes “eat” and “-ing” he concludes that vocabulary is a morpheme, or a combination of morphemes, as in the example mentioned above, which conveys a particular meaning. In this respect, in order to acquire new words, we also need to know the functions of these morphemes so as to allocate prefixes (before them) or suffixes (after them). Angraeni, Chuzaimah and Nasir (2019) describe vocabulary as the knowledge of the meaning of words. Similarly, Snow, Griffin and Burns (2005) state that vocabulary includes conceptual knowledge of words, which goes well beyond a simple dictionary definition and that students’ vocabulary knowledge is a building process that occurs over time.

Another definition of vocabulary is given us by Hatch and Brown (1995 in Angraeni, Chuzaimah and Nasir, 2019:163) who believe that vocabulary refers to a list or to a set of a particular language or a list or a set of words, that speakers may use. They also add that vocabulary is the only system presented in alphabetical order. Furthermore, Lessard and Clouston (2013 in Rasouli and Jafari, 2016:40) define vocabulary as the words of a language which conveys a particular meaning. Based on these statements Angraeni, Chuzaimah and Nasir (2019) conclude that vocabulary is a list of words, representing the basic components of language proficiency which has a form or expression and contains aspects as meaning, use of words and forms. Alfaki (2015, in Chih-Ming, Huimei and Hong-Bin, 2019) gives a similar definition: “vocabulary can be defined as the words of a language or a lexical unit, including single items and phrases or chunks of several words, which convey a particular meaning”.

Nation (1990) states that word knowledge includes, mastery in several sets of information such as: meaning (knowing both the explicit and the implicit meaning of a word and its spelling); the spoken form (knowing the pronunciation of a word), the part of speech (to know if the word is a noun, a verb, an adjective and so on); frequency (regarding the knowledge of old fashioned, common and rare words); collocation (knowledge that certain words accompany others); register (knowledge of formal, informal, general or technical words) and association (referring to the knowledge of how a word relates to other words). Nation (1990) refers to all these factors as “vocabulary depth” lingering upon the fact that both teachers and students are expected to learn these aspects of each new word.

Despite the magnitude of vocabulary, McCarthy (1990) states that there are some fixed forms referred as “idioms”, settled structures mostly composed of interrelated “chunks” of morphemes, such as (to) verb + (the) + object. Some idioms may be misleading due to their non-resemblance to their real meaning, while others may immediately make a bell ring thanks to their similarity to their sense. The writer proposes many examples of idioms: among the deceptive ones I, would mention “*to bite the dust*”, which means “*to die*”, while for the easier ones we have idioms such as “*to go wild*” that means “*freaking out*” but with a positive connotation. However, continues the writer, these idioms must be learned by heart because they cannot be simply made up from the L1 since every language has its fixed expressions due to their own references and symbols. McCarthy (1990) also explains that other important features occur in L2 learning are collocation, sense relations, semantic field, homonymy and polysemy, metaphor and componential analysis. In addition, Gairns and Redman (1986:35-36) describe idioms as semantically opaque structures that must be learnt at whole since the meaning cannot be inferred by analysing their single parts and these same parts, if switched change the idiom meaning. If we say, for example, that someone has a “*chip on their shoulder*” is not the same as saying “*shoulder with a chip*”. As a matter of fact the first example shall result as “*you seem arrogant*” while the second one shall have the literal meaning of the sentence.

The same worth for every other idioms since, they continue, “an idiom is a sequence of words which operates as a single unit”.

1.2 The role of vocabulary in L2 learning

Having understood what vocabulary is, the following section will focus on the reasons why vocabulary learning is so important in the process of language acquisition. As we will see, vocabulary knowledge makes a huge difference during the process of second language output since it allows students to express themselves. Rasouli and Jafari (2016) spot the four basic skills that everyone needs to master for both L1 or L2 learning. These skills can be split up into two active parts which are speaking and writing, and two receptive parts, listening and reading. Apart from these skills, they suggest three more components that are important to English language teaching which are grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. The last one, according to the writers, is the key factor since without adequate vocabulary, students cannot understand nor express themselves the way they would like to. Furthermore, Wilkin (1972) wrote that “while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”. In addition to this, Lewis (1993) also supports the afore-mentioned theory, stating “lexis is the core or the heart of language”.

According to Wei et al. (2018) vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar represent the three primary elements of language “with the accumulation of vocabulary being the most essential”. Wilkin (1972) stresses that people are unlikely to successfully express any message without appropriate words. However, from McCarthy’s perspective (1990, in Schmitt and McCarthy, 1997:140), vocabulary is the most important aspect of communication. In fact, he states that it does not matter how accurately grammar and pronunciation are acquired if speakers cannot find their own words to express themselves the way they wish. Nagy (1997:64) claims that vocabulary is at least as important as its context. The writer explains that, according

to Webster's Third New International Dictionary Unabridged (1964), there is 40% of the overall vocabulary which holds more than a single meaning. In fact, Nagy (1997:66) states that "the interpretation of a word in any given context is necessarily more specific than the meaning stored in our mental lexicon". As a matter of fact, English can have the same word but with two different facades: let us take the word "bear" or "book" for example. These words can be both nouns and verbs. Out of context it would be very hard to spot their referred meaning but, when contextualised, students can gain the insights needed, allowing them to be even able to infer unknown words from the very context itself. This process of deduction from the context works also for those polysemic verbs such as the phrasal verb "to take off" which contains three different meaning (to leave in a hurry, to remove clothes from the body, to become airborne).

Gairns and Redman (1986) believe that vocabulary learning is important because there are various ways to refer to a word and each of them convey their own specific meaning. Firstly there are polysemic vocabulary that changes its meaning depending on in which language it is used. Let's take, for example, the word "dedos" which means both "fingers" and "toes" in Spanish. If Spanish students used only "fingers" to describe both appendages of the hands and feet, English speakers would not immediately understand the reference. Secondly we have homonymic vocabulary in which the same word or its pronunciation might enclose different meanings. For instance, the writers propose the word "file" which can be both a collection of documents and a tool used for shaping wood or any other hard material. Thirdly we have synonyms that provide a similar meaning that may not be suitable for every occasion, otherwise there would not be the necessity of synonyms. The writers, therefore, consider synonyms as "partial synonyms". As a matter of fact, if we take the verb "extend", it might resonate with "increase" or "expand" but in the sentence "the company has decided to extend its range of products", the afore mentioned synonyms cannot be replaced because in this case, their collocation is different. Taking into consideration "umpire" and "referee" then, despite being both rackets,

they refer to different sports. Fourthly, they enlisted hyponyms which englobe more meanings into a single word. For instance, if we consider the word “*fruit*” we might refer to “*oranges*” as well as to “*plums*”. The same worth for words like “*animal*” that can refer to whatever existing animal in our planet. According to the writer, hyponyms should be learnt as such, being aware of their vague meaning in order to delve into the specific facades of that vocabulary on a second moment. Finally we have antonyms that, from the writers’ perspective, are of most importance. They would, in fact, allow students to answer the question “*What is the opposite of X*”. Antonyms are divided into three sub-categories: complementary antonyms where we only have two poles and therefore if its meaning is not “*A*” must necessarily be “*Z*” (this is the case of “*male*” and “*female*”, “*animal*” and “*vegetable*” and so fourth); converse antonyms which, in some extent, may look alike to the previous sub-section, refer to those lexis that have opposite meanings but they do not necessarily answer the question “*What is the opposite of X*” (for instance, these are words like “*nephew*” and “*aunt*” or “*taller*” and “*shorter*”); gradable antonyms refer to those words that are used to express relative thoughts about the subject matter (for example, if we say “*Sue’s house is big*” or “*Sue’s house is small*”, the two adjectives do not render an absolute idea of “*the big/small house*” since there might be bigger or smaller houses); multiple incompatible antonyms then are words that belong to the same group but once chosen one, the others are excluded. There antonyms are divided into two groups: closed systems composed of limited-numbered items such as the days of the week or the four seasons or open systems that refer to those undefined-numbered items like the name of vehicles, name of flowers, name of tools and so on (Gairns and Redman, 1986:22-28).

1.3 Strategies to learn vocabulary

Having realised the importance of vocabulary in second language acquisition, I will now take a look at some strategies that may help learners to achieve a balance in the four language skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking. What I will explore in

this third section, is also the importance of enjoyment and repetitions that shall shed a light in the learners' mind, facilitating vocabulary retention. Rasouli and Jafari (2016) estimate that English native speakers know between 12,000 to 20,000 words, depending on their educational level. Goulden, Nation and Reed (1990) state that native speakers will obtain 4000 to 5000 words when they are five years old, gaining almost 1000 words each year. Hu & Nation (2000, in Schmitt, 2008) explain that in order to master a second language, speakers should have at least a total coverage of vocabulary knowledge of 98%. This percentage should be enough, according to the writers, in order to manage to express themselves accurately and being able to understand forty nine words out of fifty on average. Therefore the writer concludes that in order to have a 98% coverage of vocabulary knowledge, students are required to know between 8000 to 9000 words order to comprehend novels and newspapers.

Despite the various ways to describe vocabulary learning strategies, from my point of view, Bialystok's (1978, in Griffiths, 2008:86) definition is the one that comes closest to what I believe being the most accurate picture of these strategies. In fact, according to her, vocabulary learning strategies are "optional means for exploiting available information to improve competence in a second language". But learners shall also choose their personalised strategy in order to become advanced learners since different strategies exist because of people's different interests and approaches. Thus, from Anderson's (2002, 2005:99) perspective, vocabulary learning strategies would be crucial for metacognition. The writer renders us metacognition as the process of "thinking about thinking", stressing that students shall start from their own background knowledge. After that, language strategies have to be applied and here is where metacognition would start working as mediator among the various gained skills. To better understand what metacognition is, the author gives us the idea of a kaleidoscope. He draws five key points for language learning and places metacognition at the very centre and he evaluates each point from three perspectives: telescopic, microscopic and kaleidoscopic. What is important to us is the telescopic view (see all perspectives in Griffiths, 2008:100-104). These main

points are five: preparing and planning for learning (where students activate their prior knowledge to face the activities), selecting and using strategies (crucial part since budding learners need different strategies from those used by seasoned ones), monitoring learning (teachers' task), orchestrating strategies (interweaving different strategies in order to gain the maximum amount of help from complementary strategies) and evaluate learning (teachers' task).

Schmitt (2008:333) also states that, when referring to the language learning process, four learning partners are involved: students (who, according to him, need the willingness to be active learners over a long period of time in order to achieve a substantial vocabulary size); teachers (who provide guidance about the lexical items to learn); researchers (whose role lies in their expertise, to provide reliable information about vocabulary itself such as frequency); and effective methods of learning a language (thanks also to researchers and teachers). Ushioda (2008:19) also believes that the willingness of students plays a crucial role in the process of language learning since she claims that motivation is the key factor for succeeding in vocabulary acquisition. It is indeed the only reason why learners choose to devote time to vocabulary learning. Thus, according to cognitive theories by Pintrich and Schunk (2002, in Griffiths, 2008:21), motivation can be triggered by personal goals and enjoyment, which have a huge impact on what we are doing, helping us staying tuned, focused and productive. Ryan and Deci (2000, in Griffiths, 2008), split the motivation into Intrinsic (the pure pleasure of language learning itself) and Extrinsic (for the sake of achieving goals, pleasing the teacher and so forth). Therefore, according to Ryan and Deci (1990, in Griffiths, 2008), motivated learners perform better in retaining and refining their own vocabulary for the pure intrinsic pleasure of self-enhancement. This is why Deci and Flaste (1996, in Griffiths, 2008) state that in order to achieve this state of engagement, teachers should foster the desire of their students by finding what is really motivating for each of them.

When studying L2 vocabulary, Meara (2009:21,22) explains that words association falls into two main categories: syntagmatic associations (where a given word recalls others that usually occurs together: for instance if we start from “dog”, its syntagmatic associations are bark, spotted or bite (this type of association is typical of native children that produce the so called “clang associations” until they turn 7 or so) and its pragmatic associations (where a given word gives us a bird-eye view, are cat, wolf or animal, typical associations of adult native speakers). Learners have the tendency, according to Meara (2009), to produce clang association like children, therefore, they may fail to understand some stimuli, with words that seem having a phonological resemblance. For instance if we use the word “file” as stimulus word, its pronunciation might be similar to “fail” from a beginner’s point of view. On the other hand, if the vocabulary has a more unique or distinctive sound, it might be easily recognisable. This, according to the writer, is due to the incorrect or correct choice of the stimuli themselves. In fact, if we chose simple and variegated vocabulary and topics, students would be more prone at distinguishing them. Afterwards, the writer focuses on three aspects of language learning: the first is the stability of learners’ response in word association (if learners’ vocabulary is in a state of flux, and therefore not fixed, they tend to give idiosyncratic responses); he then addresses how new words become integrated into the learners’ mental lexicon, as in order to consolidate new words, there must be a constant engagement; and the third one refers to error of identification.

McCarthy (1990) claims that there are multiple strategies for vocabulary acquisition because people’s minds are different and “poor” learners may find difficult to learn new words with the same strategy as “good” learners. Medani’s research (1989, in McCarthy, 1990:124) explored a wide range of strategies and divided the strategies used by both “good” and “poor” learners. Among the various strategies used, the second most adopted by both groups investigated was inferring from the text. Although being quite useful for “good” learners, “poor” learners might struggle to guess the meaning of certain words inside a context. Let us take “*nasty snags*” from

the sentence “There are a lot of *nasty snags* yet to overcome”, for example. For an experienced learner, the issue may only lie in “*snags*” which may be inferred correctly thanks to the verb “*overcome*” and to its collocation. On the other hand, “poor” learners might also struggle to guess “*nasty*”.

Despite the example above, Brutten (1981, in McCarthy, 1990:126) found that students are surprisingly good at inferring low-frequency vocabulary from the context because much depends on the text in which words are included. Xiaolong (1988, in McCarthy, 1990:126) does not agree, affirming that those who are good at inferring from the text are those whose retention is better. Note-taking is also a valuable strategy to use since, according to McCarthy (1990), “the very act of writing a word down often helps to fix it in the memory, even if only with regards to its spelling”. That is why, according to Redman and Ellis (1989 in McCarthy, 1990:129), teachers should encourage students to write unknown words in a notebook, sorting them out as they please, in order to facilitate vocabulary spotting and retention.

Gairns and Redman (1986) then, focus on how learners are used to discovering the meaning of the unknown lexis. They divide this process into two different approaches: traditional approach and learner-centred approach. Among the traditional procedures, what students tend to use more frequently are visuals approaches, useful to learn the name of concrete object by means of illustrations like flashcards; mime and gesture, unfortunately considered weak in some scenarios since if the teacher mimed the word “*shiver*”, student could misinterpret the gesture for “*fear*” (citation and page as soon as I find where i found this example); verbal techniques such as rephrasing sentences, using synonyms, making contrasts; enlisting scales of items like degree of pleasure/frequency, making examples that come by the item in the matter; direct translation of vocabulary, useful also in order to detect false cognates like “*sensible*” and “*sensitive*” in French or Italian and to render the exact meaning, and therefore not their synonym, for each respective

vocabulary. Student-centred learning approaches, instead, focus on letting students develop their own sense of independence thus increasing learners' attention to individual needs. The methods most employed are asking others, both the teacher or peers with the second option being the best since it would allow students to use language to express a notion; using a dictionary, especially if bilingual and designed for foreign language learners such as "*The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*", "*The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*" et al. (for more references, see Gairns and Redman, 1986:101) to increase learners' independence outside the lesson; making use of a detailed context to let students infer the meaning of the unknown vocabulary.

Age does not seem to affect language learning outcomes to such an extent, since every age has its own advantages and disadvantages. As a matter of fact, from Burling's perspective (1981, in Griffiths, 2008:39), children are not aware of the magnitude of a language and thus they may be more prone and motivated to learn this language as a task to do during their life, while the opposite happens to older students who, knowing the vast range of fields that a language implies, might feel daunted, eventually leading them to lose interest in that specific language. On the other hand, Dulai, Burt and Krashen (1982, in Griffiths, 2008:40) affirm that young students lack experience, the very same experience that older students might benefit from, by relying on their previously-acquired strategies in order to proceed further with the retention of new vocabulary.

Lewis et al. (1993, 2000, in Schmitt, 2008) tried to find a new methodology by highlighting "phrasal vocabulary", but the small studies conducted found that students, after a 10-week EAP class, became much more aware of phrasal vocabulary by the end of the course, showing a slight improvement in the production of phrases in a C-test, yet they did not show any noticeable improvement in their output of phrases in composition writing. According to Schmitt (2008), there are three points to maximise learning outcomes: using activities that maximise the

learner's engagement with target lexical items; ensuring repeated exposure to target lexical items; considering which aspects of lexical knowledge to focus upon. The writer states that in order to consolidate and enhance their knowledge of lexical items, learners must receive extensive exposure generated by meaning-focused input, from which, as he says, incidental learning can occur. As a matter of fact, he concludes that teachers and material writers need to take into account the maximisation of meaning-focused exposure alongside vocabulary learning.

According to McCarthy (1990), oral exposure is as important as written input, in the process of language acquisition. As children take advantage of the oral stream of sound, second language learners should do so as well. Instead, students often focus mainly on the written-orthographic part of the language and this could be a hindrance when developing oral skills. Moreover, some words that have an irregular pronunciation such as "*busy*", "*tough*" or "*womb*" might be mispronounced due to a lack of oral exposure. Cooper (1999, in Schmitt, 2008) argues that although extensive reading programs can maximise vocabulary input, a way to help learners is to teach them inferencing. According to Walter (2006), learners of different level seem to benefit from different approaches, a finding that leads to the importance of personalised strategies. In fact, Liu and Nation (1985) found that higher proficiency learners successfully guessed 85% - 100% of the unknown words, while the lowest proficiency learners only guessed 30% - 40% successfully.

Cameron (2001, in Rasouli and Jafari, 2016) article proposes vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) as "actions that learners take to help themselves understand and remember vocabulary". In this article, Niyokos and Fan (2007) detect four factors that affect VLS use: proficiency level of the learners (high proficiency students tend not to use glossary since they can guess the meaning of words from the context but this level, is obtainable only if there is a strong will from learners); individual variation and gender (where findings proved that female students are better at performing overall); strategy use development and learning environment. In this

respect, Nyikos (in Griffiths, 2008) states that men and women tend to perform differently because they behave differently. Therefore, each sex (and not gender) shall apply different approach to the language hence, according to the writer, teachers should act accordingly, in order to find personalised strategies that shall smooth the gap between the two sexes. Studies seem to indicate that women would be better at performing listening and speaking, not only because they mature earlier than men but also because they use the side of the brain they use is more prone for language practicing. Moreover, their two sides of the brain are interwoven allowing them to develop more mastery with ease (Legato, 2005a and Tyre, 2005 in Griffiths, 2008:74). Other scholars, instead, believe otherwise since they state that women are better at language learning and practicing since they mature quite early and thus parents fill them with expectations. On the other hand, men's brain seems to be more goal-centred and therefore it tends to pay less attention to the theory, leading men to feel less motivated, thus less productive. In this regards, different strategies have to be adopted since our role nature is but a fraction of the overall language learning strategy scheme. In fact, Rubin (1975 in Griffiths, 2008)'s article divided in two groups male learners from female learners and showed how personalised strategies given to both sexes, helped men filling the gap, leading to almost equal results. This, according to Green and Oxford (1989 in Griffiths, 2008:77), would be due to a different way of gaining insight of that language. Men would rather acquire inputs from in-language television programs or movies while women, would be more prone to study the rules since, maturing earlier than men, they feel the importance of languages.

Atkinson and Shiffrin (1968, in Wei et al., 2018) explain how words consolidate into learners' long-term memory through three stages: sensory collection (in this phase, great importance is given to external sensory reception); short-term memory (in which these new words and their meaning occasionally return into the learners' mind); and long-term memory (in this final stage, words will eventually be

consolidated). The writers continue by saying that repetition is very important, but is also very important that these does not lead to boredom or, even worse, to anxiety.

Schmitt (1997:208-217) suggests the most relevant strategies in order to achieve a good mastery of vocabulary. He divides these strategies into two groups: Discovery Strategies (needed to enter the new vocabulary world) and Consolidation Strategies (useful in order to retain new vocabulary meanings). The Discovery group contains the following strategies: Determination Strategies (guessing the meaning of cognates from the context but, unless the learner has a certain level of proficiency, lexis meaning must be checked in a dictionary, preferably monolingual); and Social Strategies (asking someone the meaning of a word, taking into consideration the exact equivalent in the first language throughout collocation, for example). The main retention strategies are instead: Social Strategies (cooperative group learning in order to enhance learners' group communicative skills); Memory Strategies (based on recalling already existing knowledge throughout both visual and verbal imagery); Pictures or Imagery (where vocabulary is not associated with its own meaning, but rather with its image, using flashcards that have the advantage of being taken anywhere); Related Words (using synonyms, coordination, collocation or antonyms in order to make students understand the meaning of the target word); Unrelated Words (creating rhymes with unrelated words in order to remember the jingle one creates); Grouping (which works better on experienced learners since their ability allows them to remember more items into a group, with the "narrative chain method" being the best grouping strategy overall); Cognitive Strategies (using mechanical repetitions, both written and oral, in order to retain the new vocabulary), Metacognitive Strategies (to reflect on all their strategies, see Schmitt and McMcCarthy, 1997:208-217).

O'Malley and Chamot (1985, in Schmitt and McCarthy, 1997) gathered the existing language vocabulary learning strategies, 26 in all, into three groups: Metacognitive strategies (useful to consolidate the already existing skills); Cognitive strategies

(which require manipulation of information in an immediate task in order to learn the new vocabulary); and Social or Affective strategies (which have to do with “interpersonal relationships” and “controlling one’s emotional constraints”). Among these, one of the most effective strategies to enrich vocabulary seems to be repeated exposure to the target words. In fact, O’Malley et al. (1985, in Schmitt and McCarthy, 1997) found that repetition was the most commonly used strategy mentioned by students. As well as repetition, there is another feature that, according to Craik and Lockhart (1972 in Schmitt and McCarthy, 1997), helps students achieve their language goals. This skill is manipulation of information, allowing learners to enter a state in which they can form associations.

Furthermore, according to Cohen and Aphek (1981, in Schmitt and McCarthy, 1997), lighter strategies could be beneficial for beginners since “poor” learners may find hard to decipher the entire content of a given text and therefore they would need easier tasks, while advanced learners would benefit more by using deeper strategies, in order to enhance the already existing vocabulary knowledge as well as retaining new words, even if that means inferring from the context. In addition, Chamot and Rubin (1994, in Schmitt and McCarthy, 1997) believe that the effectiveness of a strategy does depends on several variables such as proficiency level, tasks, the learner’s characteristics and so forth. This last variable is particularly significant in terms of vocabulary retention since Sanaoui (1995, in Schmitt and McCarthy, 1997:202) claims that there are two types of vocabulary learners: the first kind is made up of those who structure their vocabulary learning, proving to be engaged in the activity, and the second, who do not do so. However, according to Schmitt (1997:202), adopting different strategies could be useful since students from different backgrounds and cultures may disagree about the usefulness of certain items of vocabulary that our culture considers important to be learned and used.

Angraeni, Chuzaimah, Nasir (2019) state that among the many techniques for improving vocabulary acquisition (such as song lyrics or pictures), especially in a

high school context, we can name video games, thanks to their level of engagement. The writers continue by explaining the various advantages of using games: the first one is that generally speaking children love video games, and thus they are more inclined to play with them. The second advantage regards the fact that games put in various players into contact and since gamers enjoying playing, even the most introvert one may sometimes forget about their shyness, socialising with other players because they need something from them. This last advantage is somehow linked to the third one, since regards the possibility of every player to communicate with different gamers from others countries, encouraging them to communicate in the lingua franca. In order to understand the most common statements students make when they have to learn new vocabulary, Angraeni, Chuzaimah, Nasir (2019) gathered many observations made by the students through questionnaires. It appears that among the various statements students gave, the most commons were being able to understand the meaning of new vocabulary when playing games and being forced to create a new vocabulary list with the translation in their language, in their case in Indonesian.

Lee and Reynolds (2017) affirm that there is no proof that gaming is more effective than direct instructions, yeti it seems that they are both of great value. In fact, a study conducted by Krashen (1994), say the authors, supports the Pleasure Hypothesis, the idea of pleasant activities as a means of achieving language acquisition. He, for example, proposes reading as an effective method for vocabulary acquisition since activities that are usually perceived as pleasant are more conductive to learning. On the contrary, unpleasant activities can lead to boredom or struggle. Lee and Reynolds (2017) affirm that thanks to the intrinsic motivation gamers have, gaming can be considered an effective tool for vocabulary acquisition and retention, exposing learners to constant contextualised stimuli.

1.4 Repetitions

According to many scholars, repetition of new vocabulary is one of the most effective strategies in order to facilitate vocabulary retention. The following section will delve into the importance of frequent recurrence of the new vocabulary as well as repeating words in order to consolidate their meaning. To consolidate new vocabulary as well as their form-meaning link, words should be encountered relatively frequently and into different contexts in order to “develop mastery” of these words (Schmitt 2008). As mentioned above, Pigada and Schmitt (2006) believe that in order to be consolidated words should be met about ten times but, is that really enough? Their study indicated that for some words, even twenty encounters did not ensure knowledge of that vocabulary. This is why they suggest that even exposure of 15 to 18 times would not have great gains over time and words that were encountered less than 5 times were not successfully retained. Nevertheless, Zahar, Cobb and Spada (2001) claim that the amount of repeated exposure varies, according to the proficiency level of the learners, since experienced learners seem to acquire more vocabulary over time compared to beginners. However, they also suggest that a 8 to 10 reading exposure would give learners a good start.

McCarthy (1990) states that knowing a word does not only mean being able to recognise it. In fact, in his view, vocabulary knowledge refers to the “ability to summon up the word when required”. In this sense, both receptive and productive knowledge must be practiced. Webb (2007 in Rasouli and Jafari 2016:43) states that for every repetition, a piece of that word is retained, supporting the above-mentioned theory, according to which new words need to be met about 8 to 10 times in order to acquire full retention of that vocabulary. According to Nation (2001, in Rasouli and Jafari, 2016) the words that are most likely to be forgotten immediately after their encounter are the new ones with the oldest being better retained. This, according to the author, means that the very first time a new word is encountered, this should be encountered again relatively quickly in order to allow for better consolidation.

Students may then focus on meaning and form, engagement, interaction and negotiation by putting this newly acquired language skill into action.

Conclusion

In the end, we might say that among the various aspects to take into consideration for language acquisition, vocabulary learning seems one of the most essential. As a matter of fact, according to many scholars, vocabulary learning would help second language speakers to express their thought the way they would like to. At a first glance, studying vocabulary might seem daunting due to its large amount, but this obstacle can be overcome thanks to vocabulary learning strategies. In fact, each strategy should be personalised, taking into account students' skills such as mastery level, sex, localisation, passions and so forth, in order to face with ease the process of vocabulary learning and retention. Furthermore, a key role is played by repetition of new lexis both in different contexts and in the learners' mind in order to frequently recall that vocabulary and eventually being able to manipulate it by means of its own characteristics such as morphological structure, collocation and so on. These repetitions would be even more useful if listened while reading a script, in order to fix that word in mind alongside with its phonologic form. Games like role playing games (RPG) might offer a wealthy range of these stimuli since they contain many dialogues. Moreover, while choosing a strategy, learners have to be very careful because if they manage to find their appropriate way of learning out of the lesson, they shall develop their own sense of independence, trying to discover the meaning of unknown words by using the bilingual dictionary, if available. Passions are part of vocabulary learning strategy variables, therefore for those who like gaming would be the perfect match. This would stimulate them to continue playing thanks to the amusement generated by the very game, and keeping listening, reading, thus, learning unconsciously, or at least partially, students would develop more language mastery as well as the will to challenge themselves during classroom

activities to see their gains. In the next chapter, we are going to investigate the potential of games and, in particular, of the title “Genshin Impact”.

Chapter 2

Video Games in Second Language Learning

The following chapter aims to explore the reasons why gaming could be so effective in second language acquisition. According to many writers, the amusement triggered by video games would consolidate retention through repetition, contextualisation and incidental vocabulary encounters. Engagement may also lead students to experiment with language during lessons thanks to the familiarity with the second language stimuli to which they are daily exposed. This state reduces their level of anxiety and therefore helps them perform better.

2.1 A bird's-eye view. Video Games: which seems the most effective?

Rollings (2006 in Angraeni et al., 2019:164) claims that today online games are available not only on platforms such as PCs or consoles but may also be hosted by mobile devices such as smartphones or tablets. They stress that there are several genres and environments (from the most simple game to the most complex in terms of rules, lore, graphics and so forth) for each type of game to consider in order to find the most engaging one for each player. As a matter of fact, Schmitt (2008:329) stresses that “the overriding principle for maximising vocabulary learning is to increase the amount of engagement learners have with lexical items”. Hulstijn and Laufer (2001 in Schmitt, 2008:338) split involvement into three components: “*need*” (the requirement for a linguistic feature in order to achieve some tasks), “*search*” (the attempt to find the required information) and “*evaluation*” (the ability of contextualise or compare words). According to Chen, Liu and Huang (2019), instead, in order to trigger engagement, one should shift the focus to other aspects that players prioritise in a mobile game. These features could be the game interface design, its content, its gamified design, players’ age groups, game backgrounds and characteristics.

Reinhardt and Thorne (2016 in Dixon et al., 2022:1) state how it is now easier to consider digital games a source of L2 learning. They believe that game developers have commercial interests in releasing a game with a wide variety of languages, in order to let gamers choose to play in their own language or in their second one, being potentially exposed to a massive amount of engaging L2 input. Dixon et al. (2022:2) drew up five variables that directly affect the overall effectiveness of digital games in terms of L2 learning outcomes. The first one regards “whether the game was originally designed for entertainment or if it was created for educational purposes” in which, in this last case, despite their title “educational”, they might be less effective than the previous ones according to many digital game-based learners (DGBL) researchers since with their simple and repetitive mechanics, would lead gamers to boredom. The second variable refers to “the effects of the number of players involved at one time during gameplay”. Games designed for entertainment often have the possibility to be played alone (single player mode), in small groups (multiplayer mode) or in a massive group (MMOs). Among these varieties of ways to play, according to Reinders and Wattana (2012 in Dixon et al., 2022:16) MMOs could be the least effective mode to play when speaking about L2 learning since this mode allows only communication in real time, without letting the previously received information settle. On the contrary, single player mode might be more effective since it allows players to pause the game, lingering upon the new input received, thus using them. Finally, in Dixon et al.’s conclusion (2022), multiplayer mode has been considered the best overall according to the students’ responses. The third variable concerns “the modes of communication used during gameplay”.

The authors explain how games designed for entertainment have a stronger impact on the player due to the presence of story quests and, most importantly, to the wide variety of characters and features that expose players to a massive amount of both spoken and written input. The fourth aspect is closely related to the previous variable since it is about “the effect that digital games have on various language skills” (taking into consideration the already acquired grammar and/or sentences structure); and finally, the last variable is “whether supplementary materials was incorporated into the game treatment”. This last point is extremely important when speaking about digital game-

based language learning (DGBLL) since according to the authors' investigation, carried out by using the game "*the SIMs*" as supplementary material, showed that gains for those who played alongside with supplementary materials were significantly greater than those who played without any additional material. This last experiment leads the writers to conclude that, despite the design of games, what is essential is supplementary material that appears to help players gain insight, without necessarily relying on the help of a third party such as the teacher. Prensky (2001 in Wei et al., 2018:146,147) states that such games can feature text, voice, video or other multimedia features that help gamers enter the so called "Immersive State" that could activate the learners' sense of competition or cooperative behaviour in order to complete the various challenges and achieve the rewards.

As mentioned above, having a personalised strategy is a very important factor for the process of second language acquisition and retention. To foster this statement, Wei et al. (2018) claim that students' skills level depends on "the students accessing different auxiliary resources". Here lies the reason why they believe that personalised assistance may positively affect both academic tasks and game-like educational scenarios, in order to help learners reach "a proper balance". Russell's analysis of different studies (2001 in Wei et al., 2018:155) also shows that personalised strategies, applied to video game, could eventually produce long-term learning incomes due to their high level of engagement. In fact, these may strengthen gamers' vocabulary knowledge as well as keeping this vocabulary constantly refreshed, lowering their anxiety levels and letting them enjoy the learning process.

Another study, carried out by Chen et al. (2019), demonstrates the benefits of mobile English vocabulary learning app (MEVLA). Their study analysed 20 Taiwanese students and split them into two halves, balancing sex and skill ratio. The former group played with game-related functions while the latter, also called "control group", did not. After four weeks, the results of the first group were sharply superior to those who played without game-related functions. This, according to the writers, could be due to the learners' motivation of vocabulary learning, generating significant correlations between vocabulary acquisition performance and several actions associated to gamified

functions. Students' feedback was also very positive, stating they felt motivated and involved.

As regards the dichotomy between video games designed for entertainment and those designed for education, Dixon et al. (2022)'s study reveals that games designed for entertainment are more effective in L2 learning compared to educational games thanks to their high level of engagement and to authentic language interactions, which could increase the overall gain. On the other hand, other studies tend to prefer educational games as a means to learn L2 vocabulary. In fact, Cristea and Fărcașu (2015 in Wei et al., 2018:148) found that English vocabulary games are one of the most effective tools for L2 learning since they can reduce anxiety, promote concentration and improve academic outcomes. Yip and Kwan (2006 in Wei et al., 2018:148) explain how arduous the task of memorising new disconnected vocabulary could be, but, using video games might be more involving. The results of their study demonstrate that online games help students to achieve their designated outcomes, promoting participants' longer memory, and thus their retention. Ashraf, Motlagh and Salami (2014 in Wei et al., 2018:148) claim that this retention is possible thanks to the creation of a pleasant environment that can stimulate learning income. Wei et al. (2018:155) believe that such games can improve the gamers' degree of immersion, as well as their competitiveness but, in order to acquire an "immersed state" there must be a balance between skills and challenges faced. As a matter of fact, the authors lament the fact that sometimes these challenge thresholds are so easy to achieve that may do not trigger any challenging state, leading learners to become disinterested and eventually fail to become immersed.

Additionally, Ashinoff (2014), in his analysis, takes into account video games designed "for fun" instead of educational ones, to prove their potential in facilitating foreign language learning. To support this hypothesis, the writer makes a comparison between the first generation of Pokèmon games (Game Freak, Creatures, Nintendo et. al 1996) and the periodic table of the elements (such as oxygen, hydrogen, gold, potassium and so forth). Although each group has almost the same number of items, with the former being even slightly higher (151 Pokèmon toward 118 elements), it seems that children are more likely to know more about Pokèmon features than about the elements

themselves. This could be due to the fact that young players, according to the writer, find it easier to memorize the name, skill, moves, ability, types, weaknesses and strengths of each Pokémon than to learn the symbol, name, atomic number and weight of each element. This tendency to learn more and more items is due to the large amount of engagement that these games can trigger in players' minds. Therefore, gamers start feeling more motivated and prone to progress through the game, allowing them to absorb new vocabulary with ease.

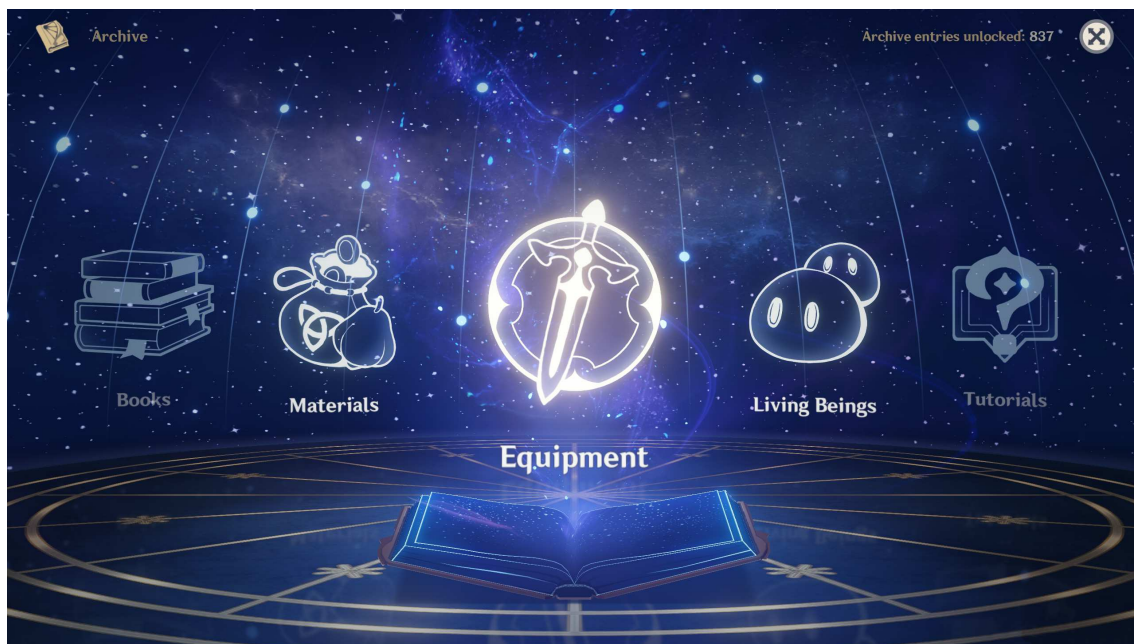


Figure 1: Genshin Impact archive menu and some of the items it contains. Picture from internet ¹.

Essentially games teach players the skills necessary to proceed with the game. In fact, video games teach contents that are limited to their own semantic area, without extending to other semantic fields (Ashinoff, 2014). However, some studies cited in their paper show that video games can help players develop other skills. For example, using the video game “*Civilisation III*” (Firaxis Gamers et al., 2001), while players progressed through the game, they were given information regarding the historical background of their chosen civilisation. Furthermore, there is a website called “*Civilopedia*” which provides players with accurate information regarding in-game

¹ <https://genshin-impact.fandom.com/wiki/Archive>

aspects such as raw materials and where to find them, civilisations' historical information and so forth, expanding the range of semantic areas and thus their range of vocabulary.

Fahran (2022), in suggesting online games as an enhancing tool for vocabulary acquisition, claims that teachers should take into account their several benefits. In fact, the writer gives some advice to future teachers who intend to use “*Genshin Impact*” as enhancing tool for vocabulary acquisition: in the “*Archive*” section (Figure 1 and 2), one can read the description of places, weapons, fictional tales, artefacts, animals, monsters, characters, items stored in the bag, raw materials, recipes and many other items. Students, on the other hand, have to pay attention to the storyline and whatever other output given by the game itself in order to master the vocabulary, as well as developing listening and reading comprehension skills.

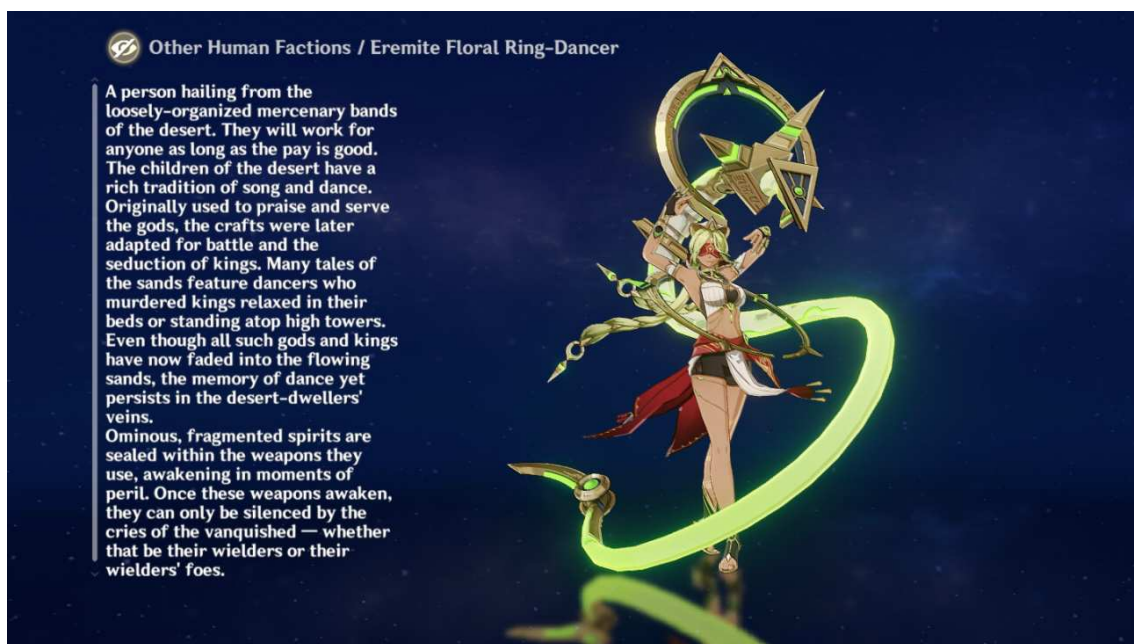


Figure 2: *Genshin Impact* enemy description, screenshot from the game.

Along with many other scholars, Calvo-Ferrer (2017:265) firmly believes that there is no difference between educational computer games and conventional instructions, given in classroom. Although video games may teach vocabulary in a more efficient manner promoting long-lasting learning, there is still little research about the educational

benefits of games, especially if these games are used without any supporting material. As a matter of fact, his study, conducted by means of pre-, post- and delayed tests, led gamer students with supporting materials to a better performance than those who were in the control group.

Reynolds (2017) tried to understand in which extent games may be of more effective in vocabulary retention than extensive reading. Many scholars cited in his article suggest that off-the-shelf titles would be the most suitable ones for teaching purposes since these games were not designed for any specific learning goals, but rather, achievements can be customised. As a matter of fact, Godwin-Jones (2005 in Reynolds, 2017:469) claims that educators should start taking into consideration the idea of using digital games as learning tool, promoting the learning with their technology, enhancing the overall learning income “in order to create richer opportunities for language learning”. In the same paper, other studies support the idea of off-the-shelf titles. DeHaan (2005:278), for instance, carried out a study in which after a month of playing a Japanese baseball video game, students’ Japanese listening comprehension and kanji characters recognition improved drastically, thanks to repeated contextualised oral and written exposure to the text. This statement also confirms the last section of Chapter 1 regarding the importance of repeated stimuli as means to favour vocabulary acquisition and retention. A similar study, conducted by Purushotma (2005:86), used the game “the SIMs”. This scenario, according to the author, could provide repeated interactive exposure that would enrich contextual associations, letting students play with the language. Furthermore, they suggest that in this game, educators might have the possibility to give bilingual vocabulary output to the characters in order to memorise the sentences the teacher chooses, as the author says, in a “gloss-like method”. Here lies the reason why Rainalli (2008 in Reynolds, 2017:470) suggests that instead of using video games for the purpose of teaching specific vocabulary, they should be used to promote incidental vocabulary acquisition and retention.

2.2 Engagement

Koster (2014 in Rentia & Karaseva, 2022:9) explains that engaging games make players joyful and their brain starts to secrete several hormones such as dopamine and endorphins that affect motivation and desire to learn new information. After the pattern of a game has been memorised, one may become bored and leave the game or enter in the “grokking” state which allows players to overcome the boredom of repetitive contents, becoming interested in the game overall. This “grokking” state, according to Kostler (2014) is responsible for executing actions without any excitement. In fact, he believes that repetitive games will not lead to boredom but, on the contrary, they shall enhance the already existing knowledge. In addition to this, Crook (2007 in Rentia & Karaseva, 2022:9,10) affirm that people’s mind is eager to learn new information and, once retained, they are more prone to use their brand-newly-acquired vocabulary. Also, according to him, before mastering a skill, four elements must be triggered: action (how players interact with the game), simulation, feedback (received as results of the action, represented by a visual representation of a change), modelling (where “grokking” can occur, spacing from new retained vocabulary). Then, according to the writer, skills acquisition are divided into five categories: mastered, partially mastered, unexercised, active and burnout. The first two categories are relatively easy to understand. The third category refers to those skills that yet *need* to be mastered. Active skills are those that the player is using at the moment and finally burnout skills refer to those abilities that players has lost their interest in. There is, however, another type of skill that the writer calls “red herring”, that concerns partially acquired skills, which creates connections between the already existing knowledge and the specific contents.

Schmitt (2008) explains how important involvement is in order to consolidate vocabulary into learners’ minds, stressing that material writers as well as teachers should start taking video games into account. In fact, games could lead to better engagement, and this factor, as the author says, can improve vocabulary learning. However, Laufer (2005 in Schmitt, 2008:341) claims that is not enough to infer the meaning of single words from the context because this might lead to the overall understanding of the sentence while completely skipping the unknown words. This is

why the author believes this approach may not be always reliable, unless the learner has a vocabulary knowledge of 98% of all the words. In his view, this could be due to the fact that these guessed words may not generate enough engagement and, therefore, could be easily forgotten. One way to prevent this is to make that specific word reappear again relatively quickly, in order to refresh and consolidate it, for an average of about 10 times.

As primary source of focus, Wei et al. (2018) rely on the “Immersion State”, also called “Flow Theory” (firstly proposed by Csikszentimihalyi in 1975). They bring this theory up to explain “the flow pattern within which individual becomes fully involved with”. According to this hypothesis, individuals become so focused upon the activity, to lose track of the surrounding space and time leading them to a “selfless state of mind” called “flow”. This state could help players achieve a sense of satisfaction “without relying on other sources” in order to achieve that sense of satisfaction. Flow Theory is composed of six main elements which are control, concentration, curiosity, intrinsic interest, skill level and amount of challenges (Beard, 2015; Csikszentimihalyi, 1975 in Wei et al., 2018:147). According to the writers, these two last components play a crucial role in vocabulary acquisition since students can achieve a stable level of flow only if their skill level matches the challenges level. According to Reynolds (2017:481) the more the task requires one to use unknown words, the more engagement will be involved.

Woods (2022)’s investigation shows the most important feature that triggers engagement in gacha games like “*Genshin Impact*”. His study, conducted on 21 Singaporean university students that were regular players of “*Genshin Impact*” revealed that there are two main types of players: *weeaboos*, obsessed with Japanese culture and hyper-sexualised characters that help them fulfil their fantasies; and competitive players, those who want to obtain the most strong or useful characters, in order to progress further through the game, regardless of the characters’ appearance. Either way, the common purpose of both type of players is related to the acquisition of characters, both for their usefulness and for their appearance and/or background story. Having obtained the desired character, players feel the need to obtain their “skin” (their alternative costume) to have a more exhaustive immersion into the game. This, according to the

results of Woods (2022)'s survey, makes players feel more immersed in the game, letting them sympathise with the various characters and starting considering them as people, instead of characters, thus wanting only the best for them. This aspect maximises their affective value as well as fulfilling players' needs for visual satisfaction, engagement and fantasy, shifting from the human to the nonhuman life. Without their favourite characters and skins (optional), players' experience would not be complete.

Also from Rentia & Karaseva (2022)'s study results, we can see that the most appealing features for a video game are its story, characters (for collecting) and art style (like an anime-like style for instance). As a matter of fact, according to a participant in their research, gaining a character, is more important than acquiring a virtual item since in a



Figure 3: Genshin Impact characters' personal information and thoughts that can be followed through their transcription, screenshot.

game such as “Genshin Impact”: every time you unlock a certain character, you unlock their voice lines (both readable and listenable) leading to a better knowledge of the “gacha item” (Figure 3). Furthermore, in some gacha games like “Genshin Impact”, there are certain mechanics that allow gamers to access character's contents, despite not having them. This mechanic is called “Trial” and let players choose whether to pull for a specific character/item or not. Gamers can listen to their voice lines, potentially

learning new vocabulary and entering into their storyline, throughout the related story quest. In their study then, the authors tried to understand which factors may lead players to stop playing “Genshin Impact”. They asked the interviewed and these explained that their absence from the game was mainly because of a slow-down in releasing new contents. Rentia & Karaseva (2022) explain that updates and thus releasing new contents is a crucial factor in the process of keeping players engaged with the game since it affects players’ overall experience, unless one applies the already mentioned “grokking” to that game in order to compensate and overcome this lack.

2.3 Anxiety State

The study carried out by Wei et al. (2018) is mainly focused on finding personalised assistance in order to lower the anxiety level and enhancing students’ degree of immersion. Related to foreign language learning, the writers firmly believe that Anxiety State “is usually attributed to the inability to use second-language skills”. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991 in Wei et al., 2018:147) classified anxiety into three categories: trait anxiety, based on a stable and long-term state of anxiousness; emotional anxiety, which refers to a temporary state of concern; and situational anxiety, caused by a particular deed or environment that generally causes a state of unease. In their view, the above mentioned “Flow Theory” could cause learners to be fully involved in the learning process letting them free from distractions. However, when challenges require multiple skills may lead to the “Anxiety State”, which might be vanquished by entering the “Heart State”, helping students improve their level of concentration, which is the most crucial factor in order to favour the “Immersion State”. As a matter of fact, studies show that the focus of the students examined, who had overcome their anxiety state, was closely related to their retention of new English vocabulary.

Many studies have indicated that frustrated or anxiety-ridden students tend to underestimate their ability, ending up by giving a bad performance overall. Conversely, positive emotions are closely related to cognitive ability for their overall learning. Despite these statements, Mak (2011 in Wei et al., 2018:147) claims that, as the

literature suggests, anxiety is a very important factor in the process of learning, having a remarkable influence on educational outcomes when learning a second language.

2.4 “Gacha” games and Genshin Impact: what feature triggers engagement?

In recent years, new types of games have been gaining popularity. These are free to play (F2P) “gacha” games. These games require no money to be played, but allow players to convert real currency into in-game currency, in order to acquire more desired items. Alha (2020 in Rentia & Karaseva, 2022) states that unfortunately “sometimes special items can only be collected within a certain timeframe, building pressure on the player to spend money to get them before the time runs out”. Rentia & Karaseva (2022) give us a pretty exhaustive definition of gacha games: “a “gacha game” is a video game that is developed around the gacha mechanics, despite the fact of not necessarily being its core mechanic”. As examples of gacha games, they propose, among many titles, *Honkai Impact 3rd* (HoYoverse, 2016), *Maple Story* (Wized, 2003) and *Genshin Impact* (HoYoverse, 2020) and I would personally add to the list also *Honkai Star Rail* (miHoYo et al., April 2023). The authors also compare the gacha mechanics to loot-boxes since players can pay in game currency in order to achieve a random item with a random rarity. They explain that the term comes from Japanese capsule toy vending machines where the prizes were divided in terms of rarity. The action of spinning the handle of the machine is called “pulling” or “rolling”. Yet, it is recommended to be careful while playing since many scholars have written about the risks of addiction due to this gacha aspect (Rentia & Karaseva 2022). Their design, in fact, may lead players to spend more than anticipated because, after an “unlucky pull” there is the groundless belief that the next pull will be better than the previous one.

Simatupang (2022) claims that especially with the COVID-19 pandemic, video games continued to thrive. With video games, people could stay connected each other with the multiplayer option or they could decide, as well, to play on their own. The main language used in video games is English so, as a matter of fact, he proposes “*Genshin Impact*” as a source of English vocabulary acquisition. This choice has also been

supported by the fact that this game can be played by everyone since it lacks elements of violence against humans and no blood has never been shown (Simatupang, 2022:3). According to the writer, the large variety of languages a player could choose from is the real source of knowledge. In fact, while the voiceover has only four languages, which are Chinese, Japanese, Korean and English, the subtitles can be in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, English, Indonesian, Russian, Portuguese, German, Vietnamese, Thai, French, Spanish and lately also in Italian. The author firmly believes that vocabulary knowledge and refinement are essential in order to master all four language skills and thus a video game with many dialogues, both written and spoken, can be beneficial.

Simatupang (2022) believes that while vocabulary learning itself might seem boring and sometimes daunting, exploiting video games could smooth the path for vocabulary acquisition. In this sense, players can listen to the dialogues in their desired language with the subtitles in their own language to translate the meaning of unknown words, or maintain the dialogues and the subtitles in the same language in order to have a look at the vocabulary, spelling, collocation, punctuation, grammar and so forth. Moreover, according to Simatupang (2022), “*Genshin Impact*” provides fun and challenges, increasing the level of concentration as long as the challenges require players’ attention, helping players overcoming stress and socialising.

In order to promote vocabulary learning, Fahran (2022) also proposes video games as a way to delve into the dialogues, triggering engagement, thus stimulating students to be more flexible and receptive toward new vocabulary. He also mentions “*Genshin Impact*”. In fact, many studies studying the psychological advantages of video games have found that there is a correlation between playing open world games like this and cognitive functions, executive control and spatial awareness skills. These abilities could be due to the amount of engagement triggered by the game itself. However, when students come across challenges such as listening, despite having the text in front of them, they may find it difficult to keep up. According to Fahran (2022), this hindrance might be due to the fact that students practice their English skills only during their English classes. This leads the writer to suggest video games, especially RPG (Role-Playing Game) or MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game), such

as “Genshin Impact” as a studying companion, in order to improve students’ overall capabilities.

As a matter of fact, many studies found that these type of games (with the Co-op mode) provide a motivating environment that offers chances of language application. Furthermore, Fahrhan (2022)’s study was conducted among 80 students of English Education Department at Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University during the Academic Year 2021/2022, to demonstrate the beneficial effects of online games in L2 vocabulary acquisition. In his experiment he used the game “*Genshin Impact*” and the students who part in the test had to have already played and be currently playing. The results of his investigation showed that over 50% of those taking part were responding “well” towards vocabulary acquisition thanks to the game.

2.4.1 Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition through Video Games

Extensive digital gaming may be as useful in incidental vocabulary acquisition as extensive reading. As a matter of fact, a study carried out by Sylvèn and Sundqvist (2012 in Reynolds, 2017:481) showed that after young EFL learners’ extracurricular activities, the results of the vocabulary assessment of those who frequently played was high, followed by the results of those who seldom or never played, since their level of involvement was lower. This, according to the authors, should be taken into account by teachers and material writers in order to encourage vocabulary acquisition. However, according to Schmitt (2008), incidental vocabulary learning seems to be more effective at developing and enhancing the already existing knowledge of vocabulary. Schmitt (2008) compares the effects of reading versus listening as a means of vocabulary acquisition and retention. Research has indicated that the overall gains from extensive reading were quite discouraging. Horst, Cobb and Meara (1998 in Schmitt, 2008:347) believe that this could be due to the fact that incidental vocabulary learning from reading tends to “push words to a partial rather than full level of mastery”.

Laufer and Hulstijn (2001 in Reynolds, 2017:467,468) introduce task-induced involvement to explain why some words are better retained than others. This process has three key components that are necessary to store new words. These are: “need” as the motivational component which regards the necessity to fulfil a designed task, both externally or self-imposed; “search” as the action of revealing the meaning of those unknown words; and “evaluation” meant as the ability to appropriately recognise and collocate words. In this respect, the authors believe that video games may also be considered a source of incidental vocabulary acquisition since there is the “need” component that would create engagement allowing the player to proceed throughout the game, the “search” component that is crucial in order to understand the various conversations or tasks during the gameplay and there is also the “*evaluation*” component that activates the players’ mind during a language input, letting players exploit the newly acquired words to achieve the rewards.

As Fotouhi, Ghazvini et al. (2009 in Reynolds, 2017:481) explain, DGBLL is one form of incidental learning that allows the player not to focus on the learning itself, but rather on the engaging game play, acquiring incidental vocabulary regardless. As a matter of fact, many studies showed that the amount of vocabulary retained through video games was equal to a direct instruction program. Vidal (2011:223-226) spotted four factors and conditions that could help students increase their rate of vocabulary growth during everyday listening and/or reading situations. These are: “*elaboration*” (easily achievable throughout structures of definition, questioning, naming and description that seem to aid the comprehension and acquisition), “*frequency of occurrence*” (according to the author the least effective, but important because it allows one to consolidate new vocabulary), “*predictability*” (L2 words that resemble L1 words are easily retained) and “*type of words*” (in terms of frequency we have high frequency words, academic words, technical words and low-frequency words. As mentioned when talking about predictability, the retention of new words, according to Vidal (2011), depends on the learners’ will to remember that specific vocabulary. If the word triggers a high degree of involvement, that word is more likely to be memorised overtime. On the contrary, if these words are too unfamiliar, the learners’ mind may decide to skip that unknown word, probably understanding the meaning of the sentence regardless.

A study on 92 Taiwanese undergraduate and graduate students, reported in Vidal (2011)'s paper, highlights the three main factors that correspond to the motivational and cognitive dimension of the task-induced involvement construct during gameplay, embracing the theories brought up in Reynolds (2017) and in Schmitt (2008): "need", referred to the necessity of keeping playing a designated game; "search" refers to the necessity of checking the meaning of unknown words on the dictionary; and finally "evaluation", the part in which players choose the most suitable vocabulary to use into certain contexts. So under the right conditions, the writer concludes that digital games may induce a state of incidental vocabulary learning, suggesting to new game developers to enhance their games with elements that might induce further "evaluation".

Ashinoff (2014:3) blames the inconsistent methodologies used by various scholars, for not having reached agreement on whether or not there is a casual relationship between playing video games and cognitive improvement. The writer believes so, and thinks that also cognitive skills are necessary for succeeding in a conversation and that cognitive abilities and social abilities are profoundly interconnected skills since learning a language necessarily mean interact with another subject. These social skills, according to the author, could be improved by MMORPGs. These games, thanks to the possibility to co-operate by entering other players' world, could enhance social skills as well as leadership skills.

2.4.2 Contextualised reading and listening in video games such as Genshin Impact

Incidental vocabulary learning from listening, instead, seems to be more effective in the process of L2 vocabulary learning. Joe (1998), for instance, finds that just actively listening to a conversation may lead to vocabulary learning. However, despite this benefit, studies demonstrate that there is no listening better than listening and reading combined (Amer, 1997; Brown, Waeing; Donkaewbua, under review in Schmitt, 2008). Vidal (2011:219,220) also wrote about the effects of listening and reading on incidental vocabulary acquisition and retention. She claims that academic listening and reading are the most important sources for second language learning since they enhance the already

existing vocabulary knowledge. Additionally, the reasons why players are willing to play *Genshin Impact* and why they want to exploit its language contents in order to improve their language skills and widen their vocabulary knowledge is shown by Andriani and Rahmawati (2022)'s investigation. They interviewed fourth-year college students of the English language at a university in Karawang. The result of the interviews was positive overall since according to the students' responses, playing *Genshin Impact* "is like learning while gaming" (Andriani and Rahmawati, 2022:1175). The students were asked what things make them like and be interested in learning English through *Genshin Impact* and the respondents replied that they could learn while having fun, the listening is more engaging with character's voice actors than formal listening and the combination of puzzle combined with advanced vocabulary-level. Then, when asked the question "what skills did you learn through Genshin Impact" the respondents explained that reading and listening were the primary enhanced skills. Furthermore, some other participants claimed that listening to the dialogues could help them improve their intonation and grammar while learning idioms and figurative language.

Another question asked regarded which aspect of the game was related to their motivation rate of proceeding further with the game. The main answer was related to the pleasant way of learning English through language stimuli that are fun. Furthermore, the unknown vocabulary encountered during the dialogues, according to the respondents, must be translated in order to understand the entire text and be able to recall it when future related contents are released. The students were then asked, whether in their view, *Genshin Impact* could be a means to develop their language skills and the respondents said that their listening skills improved since you can listen to the characters' dialogues, and you can follow their discourse thanks to a text bubble (Figure 4) in order not to miss any word characters say. Finally the last question regarded their willingness to continue playing *Genshin Impact* in the future as a means at language enhancement and the students firmly claimed to be definitively willing since listening to expert speakers seems to be more pleasant than classroom listening.

As regards the benefits of audio and script combined, Boers et al.'s (2006 in Schmitt, 2008:340) research found that “learners exposed to considerable amount of listening and reading, were later considered more orally proficient than those who received the same input but were taught with a traditional grammar-lexis dichotomy”. In addition, Dixon et al. (2022:16) state that games with both written and spoken input are considered the most effective, while games requiring mainly spoken or written output tend to be less effective since they do not provide enough examples to let gamers collect and use the information gained so far. Despite this statement, the writers claim that games that require both spoken and written output outperform those requiring only spoken or only written output.



Figure 4: Conversation with an enemy, Genshin Impact, Screenshot.

The effects of vocabulary acquisition and retention on readers, according to Lund (1991 in Vidal, 2011:221), is different compared to those on listeners: the former tends to recall more information in general but listeners recall more order ideas and produce “more erroneous but also idiosyncratic [...] constructs”. According to Vidal’s (2011) findings, theme-related texts provide favourable conditions for learning. This was clear when the results of the delayed post-test on 116 students, who were asked to take part to a class for lecture presentation, indicated a vocabulary retention of 4 weeks that showed their vocabulary knowledge had increased significantly after the various lectures.

In their study, Zaelani and Purnamaningsih (2022) analyse which levels of English vocabulary were used in the very first trailer of Genshin Impact “*Genshin Impact Teyvat Storyline Preview: Travail*”. By doing so, they made use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which suggests which skills are necessary for each language level, along with the English Vocabulary Profile (EVP), which provides information about which vocabulary should be learnt for each level of the language, A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2. They counted the overall words of the entire trailer and from the total 449 words, 51% of them were A1 vocabulary while only 3% and 5% were C1 and C2 vocabulary respectively. This leads the authors to conclude that, although the trailer has few precise words, the overall language used might be quite comprehensible since the dialogues are based on lower language levels.

Conclusion

To summarise, in order to master the four skills a language requires, to attain language fluency, informal activities should be practised to widen learners’ vocabulary knowledge. These activities might include: watching films, videos, webpages, music and so fourth but video games, according to many, can combine all these activities together. Video games then, could trigger engagement in gamers’ mind, which plays an important role in the process of vocabulary acquisition since Reynolds (2017), Schmitt (2008) and Vidal (2011) split it into three components: “need” (the requirement for a linguistic feature in order to achieve some tasks), “search” (the necessity to look for a specific meaning in order to understand a sentences) and “evaluation” (the ability to choose to use one word instead of another). This state of engagement will trigger a pleasant environment that plays an important role in the process of anxiety reduction in second language learners, making students at ease during language lessons.

According to Reynolds (2017:481) the more the task requires one to use unknown words, the more engagement will be involved, thus improving players concentration, a crucial factor in the process of vocabulary learning. Furthermore, according to Andriani and Rahmawati’s (2022) investigation of fourth-year college students of the English

language at a university in Karawang, more were significant vocabulary gains in students who studied through DGBLL and especially “*Genshin Impact*”. The players, as a matter of fact, did not only improve their listening and reading skills from listening to the various dialogues, but they also developed their intonation and grammar while learning idioms and figurative language.

Additionally, titles such as “*Genshin Impact*” are particularly helpful since their combination of both oral and written output creates good conditions for vocabulary acquisition. In support of this, Schmitt (2008) claims that there is no listening better than listening and reading combined together. Besides, the section called “Archive” provides players with both L2 and L1 (if available) information regarding in-game related items. Zaelani and Purnamaningsih’s (2022) analysis, shows that the language used in the very first trial of the game was mainly composed of A1 words while only 3% and 5% of the overall video was C1 and C2 vocabulary respectively. This leads the writers to conclude that the language used in “*Genshin Impact*” should be comprehensible for many, despite some niche and enriching vocabulary. The above mentioned game could also be helpful because it is not a MMO. In fact, according to Dixon et al. (2022), single player mode and co-op mode are the best ones since players can pause the game and let all the newly gained information settle. MMOs, on the other hand, requiring realtime conversation, might not let gamers recall the new vocabulary. In the next chapter, I will present a questionnaire to explore whether “*Genshin Impact*” may be useful for vocabulary acquisition and I will reflect at the extent to which this game may function in terms of vocabulary retention.

Chapter 3

Case Study: Vocabulary Learning through Genshin Impact

In the final chapter of my dissertation I will investigate whether or not Genshin Impact might be beneficial as resource for second language vocabulary acquisition. For this purpose, I designed and delivered a questionnaire in Italian to 13 Italian players and it was answered by 10 of them. The questionnaire was divided into four parts: in the first one I needed them to consent to take part in the survey and I gave them the instructions so as to proceed further; the second section regarded how much these gamers plays per day, how long they have played and whether or not they play in English; in the third section, I asked the participants about their previous studies and their present occupation, their thoughts on Genshin Impact as a tool for L2 vocabulary acquisition and other related questions, their favourite features, what keeps them playing. I also explored their level of anxiety in a dialogue that takes place in class compared to one delivered by a fictional character; and finally the last part was a translation task made up of 30 vocabulary and/or expressions to translate from English to Italian (15 questions) and vice versa (15 questions). Another aim of this investigation is to understand to which extent Genshin Impact, and similar video games, might be as beneficial for non language students and for professionals as for language students. Furthermore, I wanted to see whether the repetition of high level vocabulary in Genshin Impact might have enhanced the participants vocabulary knowledge.

3.1 Methodology - Subjects and Procedure

This survey aims to adopt both a quantitative research approach, in order to identify student players based on their background knowledge and present knowledge compared to those who have finished their studies, and a qualitative research method, in order to understand how players acquire unknown vocabulary awareness thus, widening their vocabulary knowledge. The questionnaire that was delivered required both closed answers (yes or no questions or multiple choice questions) or short open answers in

order to evaluate players' ability to recognise and retain the structure of some vocabulary encountered. The questionnaire was divided into four sections, each of them serving a different function. The first section asked gamers if they had ever played Genshin Impact and for how long. The second part was about their perception of games like Genshin Impact as a tool for second language vocabulary acquisition. Finally, the last section was about translation, to see the game in play.

The last part was made up of both multiple choice questions and short answer questions (in order to see whether audiovisual input works) and in the last section there were thirty Genshin Impact related words to translate: fifteen vocabulary items to translate from English to Italian and vice versa. Each vocabulary level had been previously checked through the CEFR level ranker in order to evaluate Genshin Impact learnable vocabulary. The words I chose belong to various language levels, from A1, B1 but also many C1 and C2, and are all frequent recurring items in the game. I made this choice to demonstrate to which extent Genshin Impact could help in improving high level vocabulary (C1 and C2). Alongside each translation I wanted to verify how these players found out the meaning: did they already know that vocabulary or did they infer the meaning of that unknown vocabulary from the context? I also added the option "I don't know actually" because I made every item mandatory to translate, in order for me to obtain all players' answers and conduct a more accurate analysis.

3.1.1 Subjects

10 participants took part in this investigation. Some of them are students from 20 to 25 years old attending different courses, mainly language courses, at the universities of Padua, Venice and Rome, while others are 25 to 30 year-old ex students that are currently working and are playing for the mere pleasure of gaming. I would argue that this division is important in order to find out whether there could be any significative aid from this game to those who do not study languages. One of the main purposes of my investigation is to understand to which extent Genshin Impact might be used as a tool for second language vocabulary acquisition.

3.1.2 Procedure

On average, the large majority of those interviewed play this game from 1 to 2 hours per day or less than a hour. Only 1 respondent claimed to play 2 to 3 hours per day. The questionnaires were delivered via email with the instructions. The instructions were presented in Italian as well, as regards their open questions, to let respondents understand what should they do and to let them express their thoughts in the matter the best way possible. Therefore, I shall translate the statements whenever will be needed. The survey was made up of four parts: the first one in which I asked them to consent to participate; the second one regarding how much the gamers played daily; the third section concerned their past education, their current occupation, interviewed's perceptions toward Genshin Impact as a source for second language vocabulary acquisition and questions about their anxiety when exposed to second language output in class compared to their level of anxiety when exposed to characters' L2 output. The final part was a task to translate 15 vocabulary items from English to Italian and 15 vocabulary to translate from Italian to English. The questionnaires were anonymous and the questions required both closed answers and short open answers, in order to see whether the vocabulary structure of some of the items encountered has been fixed into the players' minds or whether there is still room to improve in certain ways.

3.2 Results

At the beginning of the entire questionnaire, before the other three sections, I gave instructions and asked players to agree to take part in the questionnaire. I explained that even if each questionnaire would remain anonymous, their answers might be used as data for study purposes.

3.2.1 Section A

I used this first section to survey the area of the respondents with questions regarding how much they play per day and since when they have played. According to the results,

7 players out of 10 (70%) are currently playing Genshin Impact in English. Also, the data gathered shows that 5 of those interviewed (50%) have played Genshin Impact since around the date of its release, another 4 (40%) have been playing for 2 years and only 1 gamer (10%) has been playing for 1 year or less.

3.2.2 Section B

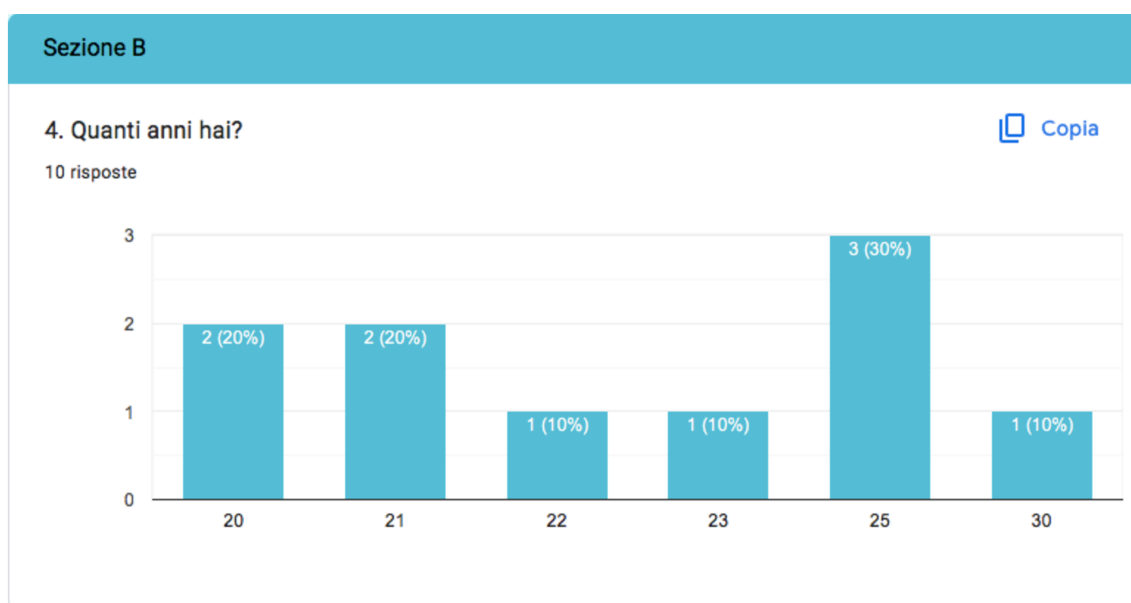


Figure 5: Age of the participants, screenshot of the graph.

The second section regarded players' age, participants' past studies and present occupation, their perception of Genshin Impact as a tool for second language vocabulary acquisition and their perception of anxiety during L2 classes compared to Genshin Impact dialogues and other salient questions. The respondents were 10 young people: 30% of the respondents (3 players) were 25, another 20% of them (2 players) were 20, another 20% of them (2 players) was 21 and the remaining 3 players were 22 (10%), 23 (10%) and 30 (10%) respectively [Figure 5], yet only 1 of them was at a language-related high school.

50% of those interviewed are currently studying languages at university while the rest of the university courses are DAMS, Primary Education Sciences or Engineering of

various types. On average, 5 players (50%) are currently playing Genshin Impact 1 to 2 hours per day, 4 respondents (40%) claimed to be playing less than an hour per day while only 1 person (10%) claims to play 2 to 3 hours a day.

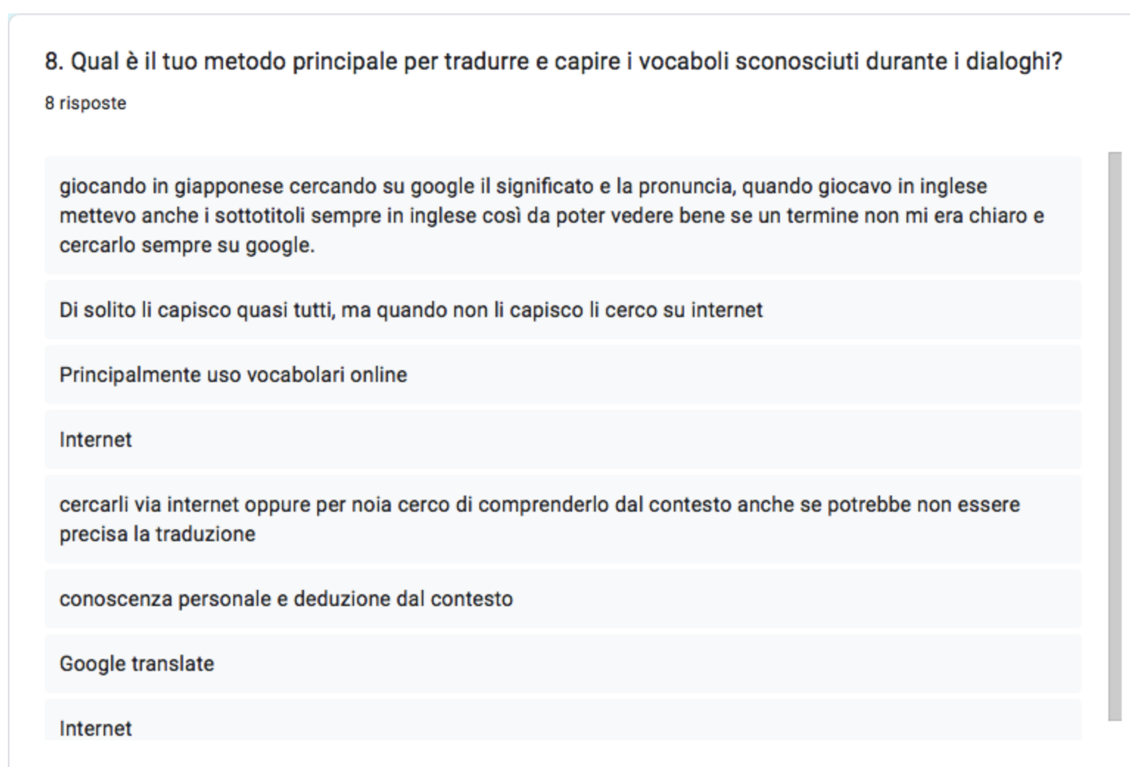


Figure 6: Participants' strategies for translating unknown vocabulary items, screenshot of the graph.

One of the main questions of my survey concerned their techniques for translating unknown L2 vocabulary. This question was answered by 8 people out of 10 (Figure 6). Although “personal knowledge”, “look up in an online dictionary” and “google translate” were the main answers, “inferring from the context” was also a widely mentioned strategy, although one respondent believes that inferring from the context might not be always accurate, so this player is more prone to look up the meaning of unknown vocabulary via the internet.

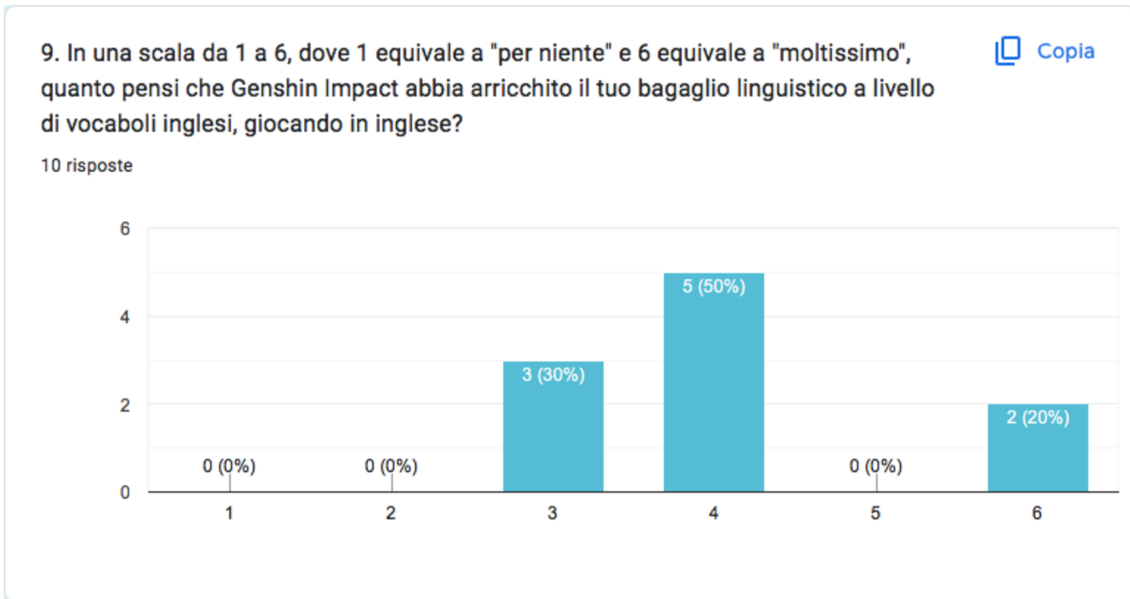


Figure 7: Graph about how much participants believe Genshin Impact enriched their vocabulary knowledge, screenshot.

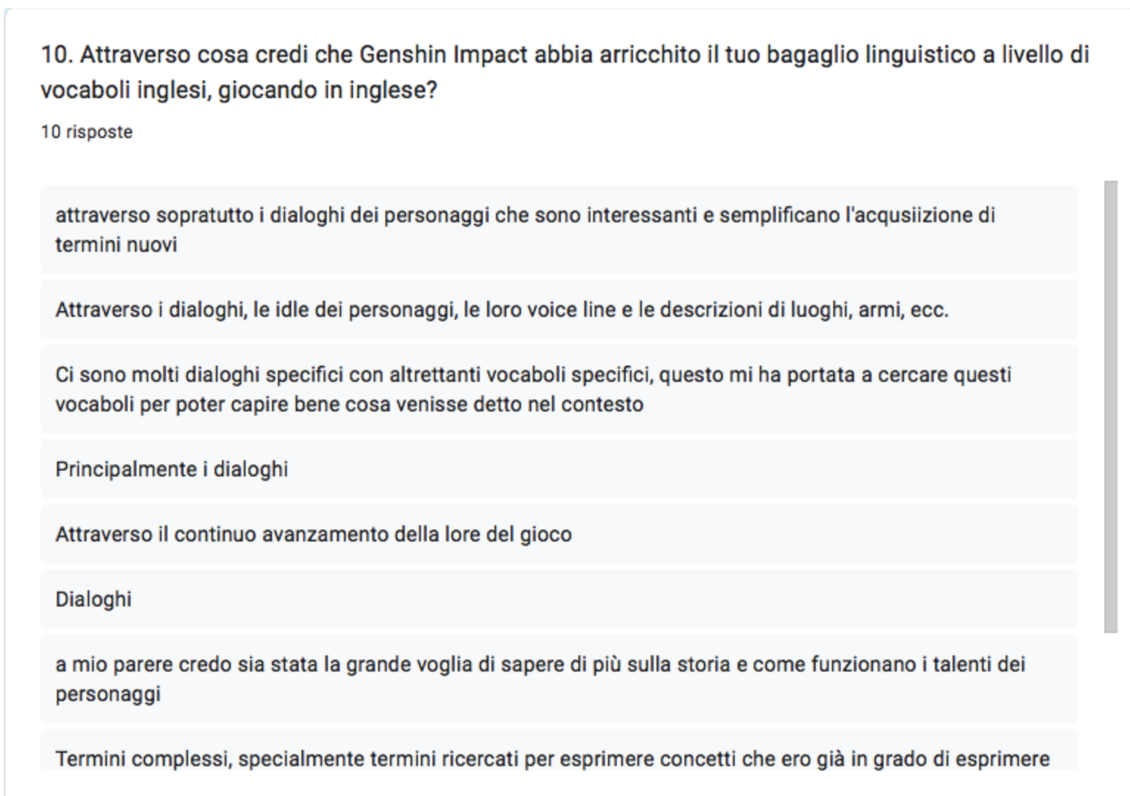


Figure 8: participants' argumentation toward how did Genshin Impact enrich their vocabulary knowledge, screenshot.

Then, I asked the participants, on a scale from 1 to 6, where 1 meant “not at all” and 6 “very much”, their own perception of unknown L2 vocabulary gains through Genshin Impact. 5 participants (50%) chose 4 out of 6, 3 others (30%) chose 3, and the remaining 2 (20%) picked 6 (Figure 7).

The main reasons for their belief (Figure 8) of Genshin Impact as source for vocabulary acquisition, according to 5 of the interviewed, were related to characters’ dialogues. Idle animations (a short sketch performed by the character in which movement and little dialogues are combined) and voice lines (the little dialogues) were the following responses for vocabulary acquisition. One participant also claimed that the desire to fully understand the lore (the main storyline) and the talents of the various characters (their skills and how each character works) makes the player look up every unknown word in the dictionary.

5 respondents out of 10 (50%) had, at least once, switched the game language into Italian. The reasons for them for doing so were varied: 2 players (20%) switched language only once just to evaluate the translations that had been made; 2 other players (20%) are used to playing along with Italian subtitles when hearing Japanese (L2) dialogues; while 1 participant (10%) was struggling at understanding Genshin Impact dialogues, thus the respondent is now playing in Italian only. The rest of the players never switched to Italian mainly because they understood the dialogues but also because, according to different players, in Italian many item names are changed and some sentences are mistranslated.

100% of the respondents claimed that they are willing to continue playing Genshin Impact in the future (Figure 9). 4 of them (40%) answered that their willingness to proceed further with the game is connected to the main storyline (lore); 2 respondents (20%) claimed that every update makes the game more engaging; and the other respondents claimed that the reason for them for continuing playing Genshin Impact are: characters acquisition, the game genre and the way it relaxes and makes feel the player home in another dimension.

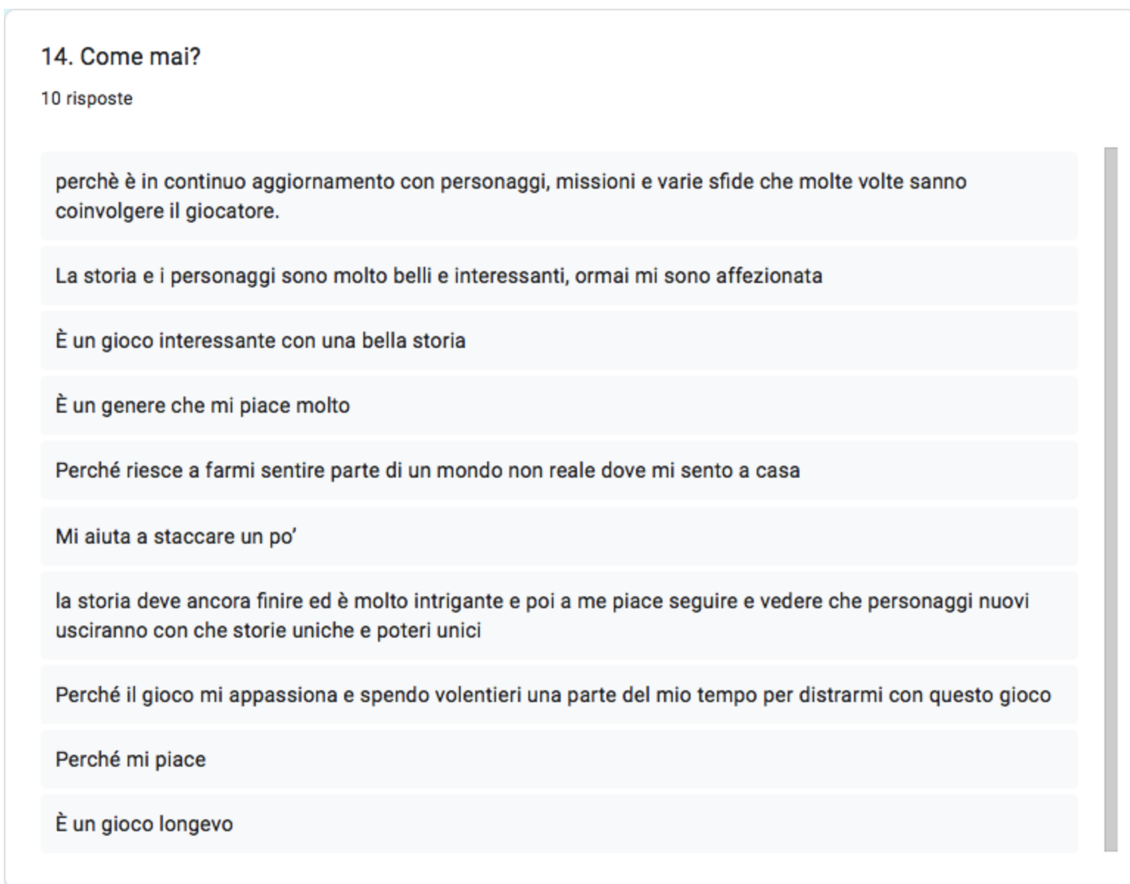
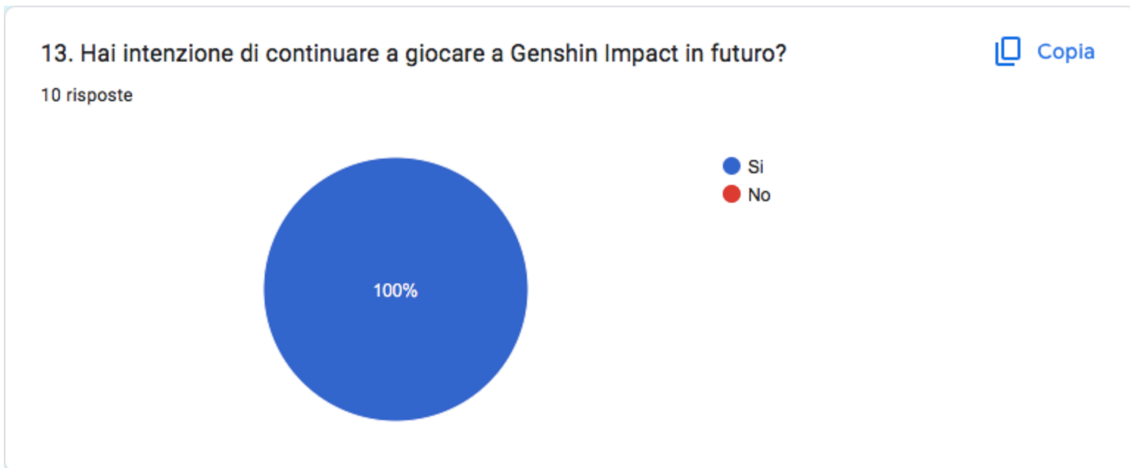


Figure 9: what makes players keep playing Genshin Impact, screenshot.

Since, at the end of Chapter 2, I discussed the understandability of the vocabulary used in Genshin Impact, this was another important question I asked the players in my questionnaire, in order to evaluate Genshin Impact language level perceived from an outside perspective, and to understand average players' overall capabilities to

understand the meaning of Genshin dialogues. For this question, the participants had to indicate, on a scale from 1 to 6, where 1 indicated “completely incomprehensible” and 6 indicated “could not be easier” their perceived complexity of the sentences encountered in the several dialogues. According to 4 players (40%), who chose 5, the complexity is just right, not too easy but even so, understandable. 3 of those interviewed (30%) chose 4, and the remaining 3 (30%) 6 (Figure 10).

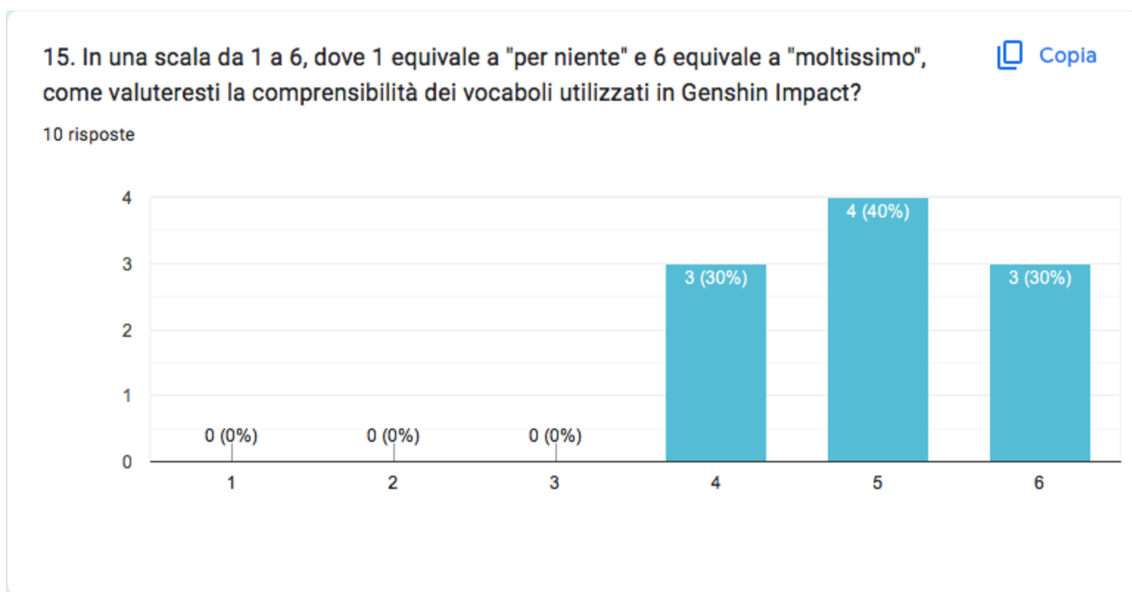


Figure 10: interviewed’s perception of the understandability of the vocabulary used in Genshin Impact, screenshot.

Through the same scale, I also asked them whether or not they believe Genshin Impact enriched their second language vocabulary knowledge and how. 5 respondents out of 10 (50%) chose 4 out of 6, other 3 participants 3 and the remaining 2 (20%) chose 6. The main players’ argumentations were: “from my perspective, I believe it is due to the willingness to know more about the lore and the characters’ kit”; (thanks to) “complex terminology, especially terms searched for the necessity to express concepts I was already able to explain but with more common words”; “Through dialogues, characters’ idle animations, their voice lines and the description of places, weapons and so fourth”; “through, in the first place, characters’ dialogues that are interesting and simplify the acquisition of new terms” (Figure 11).

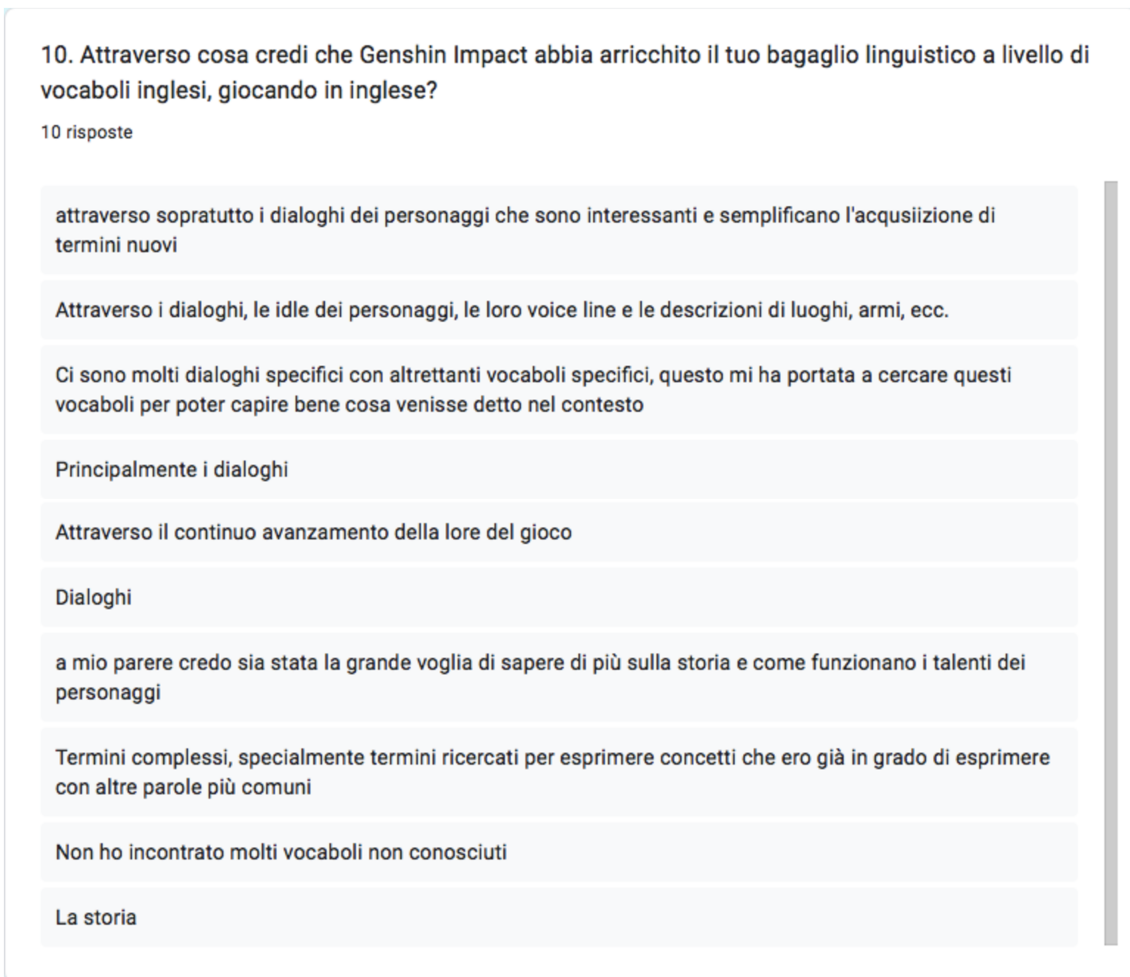


Figure 11: players' argumentation for Genshin Impact as a tool for vocabulary enhancement and acquisition, screenshot.

One of the most divisive questions concerned the most salient features which keep those interviewed playing Genshin Impact (Figure 12). As a matter of fact, “exploration” or “open world” was mentioned by 6 players out of 10 (60%) and one of them also added “building characters”; 3 others (30%) chose “character acquisition” and one of them said: “even only character release, because knowing that I could eventually get that character sooner or later, leaving me the time to study that specific character’s kit and this freaks me out”; 2 other respondents (20%) said “the lore”; 2 others (20%) mentioned the “graphics”; and one of the respondents (10%) answered “all the above-mentioned features”.

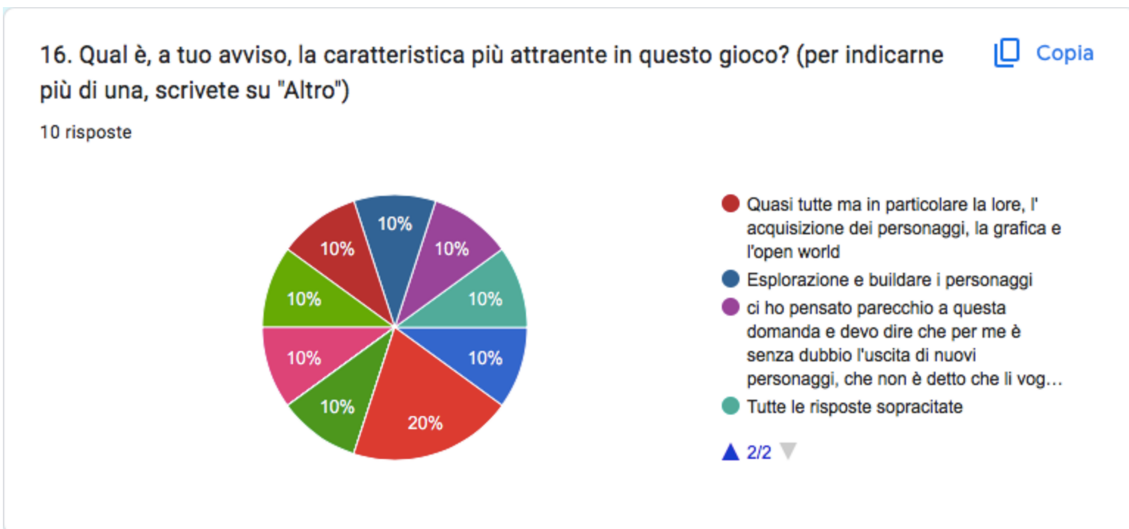
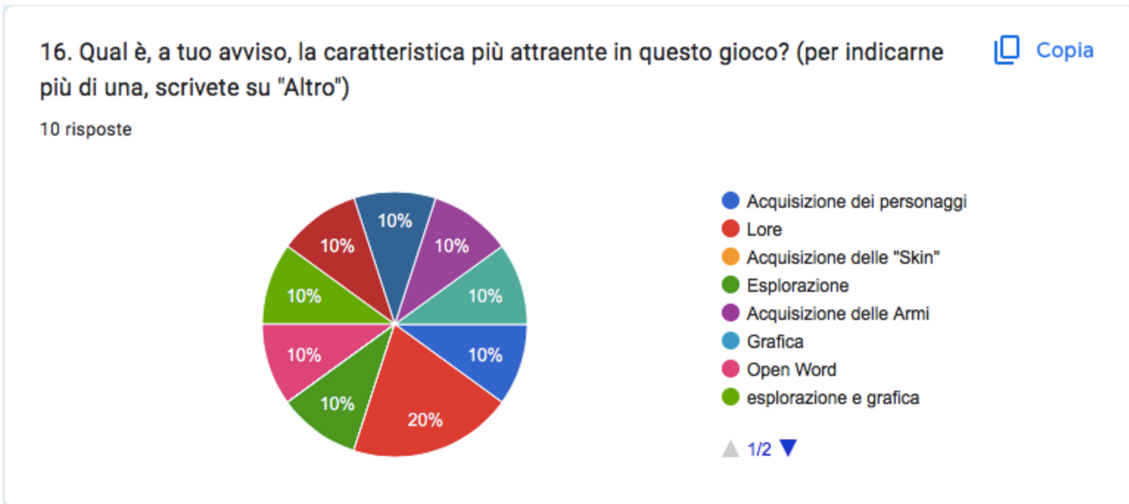


Figure 12: Respondents' favourite Genshin features, screenshot.

Another crucial question I asked in my questionnaire was whether or not and why respondents would suggest video games such as Genshin Impact as a tool for second language vocabulary acquisition. The results were unexpected. 10 people out of 10 believe that Genshin Impact, and similar video games, might be a useful tool for enhancing players' L2 vocabulary. As a matter of fact, players claimed: "yes because it undoubtedly benefitted me"; "it is a way of learning while having fun"; similarly one claimed: "you can study better, with interest"; "because if you are having fun with a video game it becomes a way of studying without getting bored"; "yes, because the language is not too complex thus, when you play, acquiring new vocabulary is less tiring"; "even if it is a video game, and it does not say such important things, the

repetition of vocabulary or expressions makes them easy to be learnt, leading the player to go and look up their meaning”, acknowledging the usefulness of repetition.

Other surprising results came up in the question about players’ level of anxiety when speaking in front of a teacher during class. To answer this question, the participants had to indicate their level on anxiety on a scale from 1 to 6, where 1 was the minimum level of anxiety perceived and 6 was the maximum. As a matter of fact, while 3 of those interviewed (30%) chose 5, other 2 participants (20%) picked 1. 2 players (20%) chose 3 and the remaining 3 picked 2 (10%), 4 (10%) and 6 (10%) respectively (Figure 13).

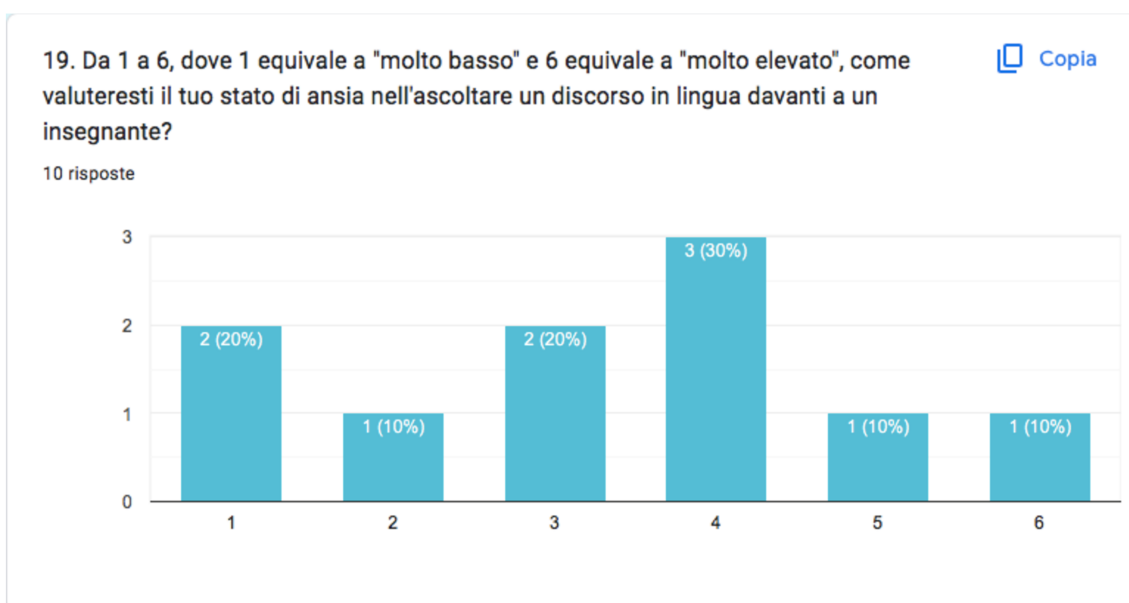


Figure 13: Participants’ anxiety level in from of a speech delivered by a teacher in class, screenshot.

The opposite happened with the next related question. Through the same scale, participants had to indicate their level of anxiety at hearing dialogues given by Genshin characters. 8 people out of 10 (80%) chose 1 while the remaining 2 players (20%) indicated 2. Then, I asked them: “Do you think the anxiety felt could somehow affect positively or negatively on your dialogues comprehension skill?”. 9 players out of 10 (90%) believe so. As a matter of fact, they supported their idea by saying: “of course, having the time to calmly reflect upon terms and not being forced to translate every item makes this activity much more serene and tranquil”; “certainly, when someone is in a

state of anxiety one is more prone to self-criticism, and often someone takes for granted not knowing some vocabulary that, instead, might have already been acquired [...]”; “I think it might affect us negatively because if there is too much focus on the unknown vocabulary, you could miss the rest of the discourse”; “for me yes because many times, after being under pressure during a conversation when I put my mind at rest, you realise that maybe that text was not that hard”; “negative, when I get anxious I panic and I cannot think straight anymore”; “I believe it could affect me negatively, a non-physical person makes me feel at ease”. The remaining player simply replied “No” (Figure 14).

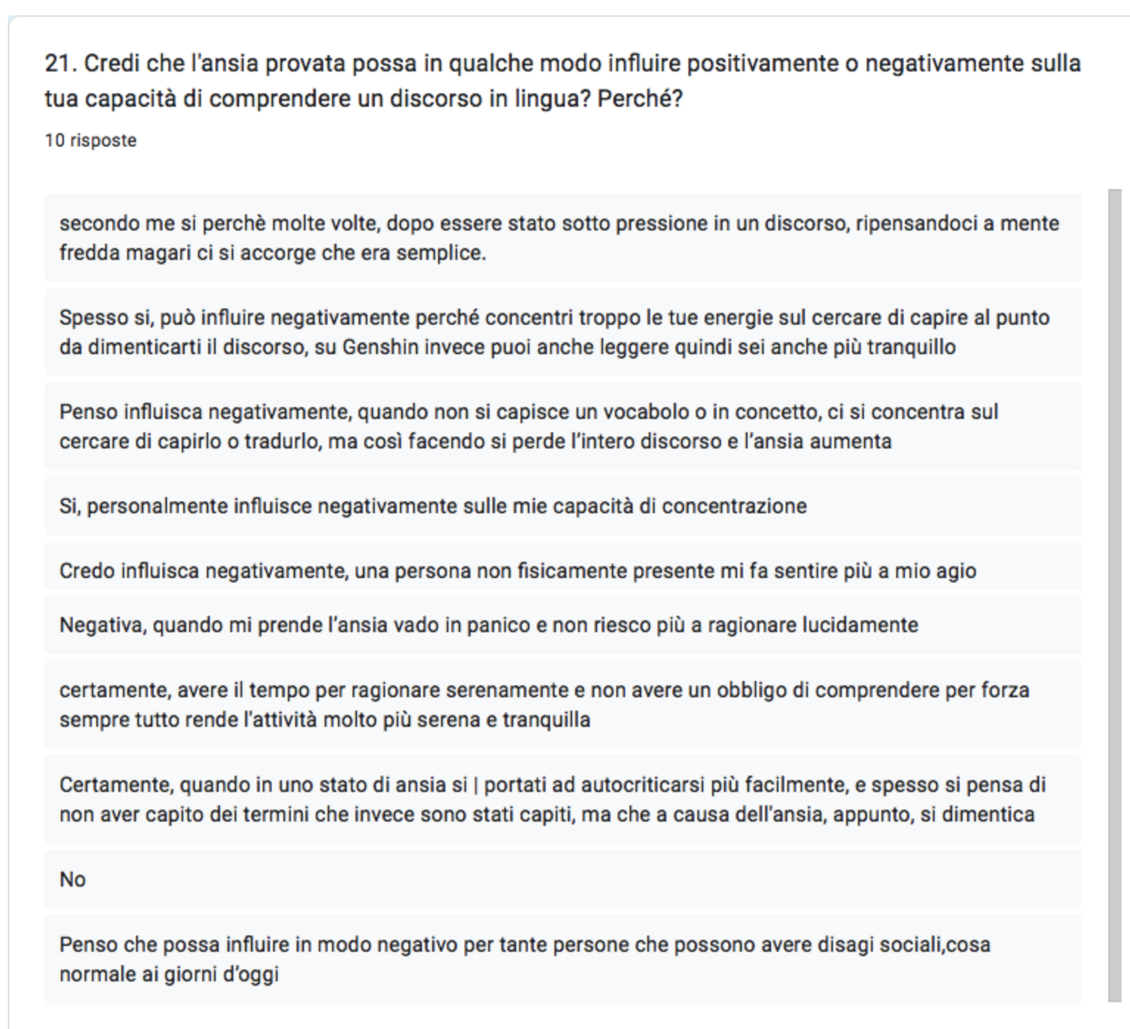


Figure 14: What players believe anxiety might imply, screenshot.

3.2.3 Section C

The fourth and last section was a translation task. I, purposefully, designed both closed and open answers in order to verify whether the structure of the vocabulary encountered during the game had been retained. Many of the items I chose for this translation task are C1 and C2 vocabulary and I did this to investigate whether video games such as Genshin Impact could be able to teach high level vocabulary and to who. All the vocabulary levels in the sheet had been checked by means of the CEFR level ranker and in the following presentation of data, I will write the level of each vocabulary item alongside the words themselves. The task was made up of 30 vocabulary items or idioms that are frequent in Genshin Impact. Many idioms come from early game characters, and are sentences that respondents might not have heard. Those interviewed had to translate 15 items from English to Italian and vice versa. After each respondents' answer, I asked them how they knew the vocabulary item. I did this because I wanted to check whether inferring from the context could have been beneficial or not, if they already knew the term before starting playing or if they just did not really know the answer.

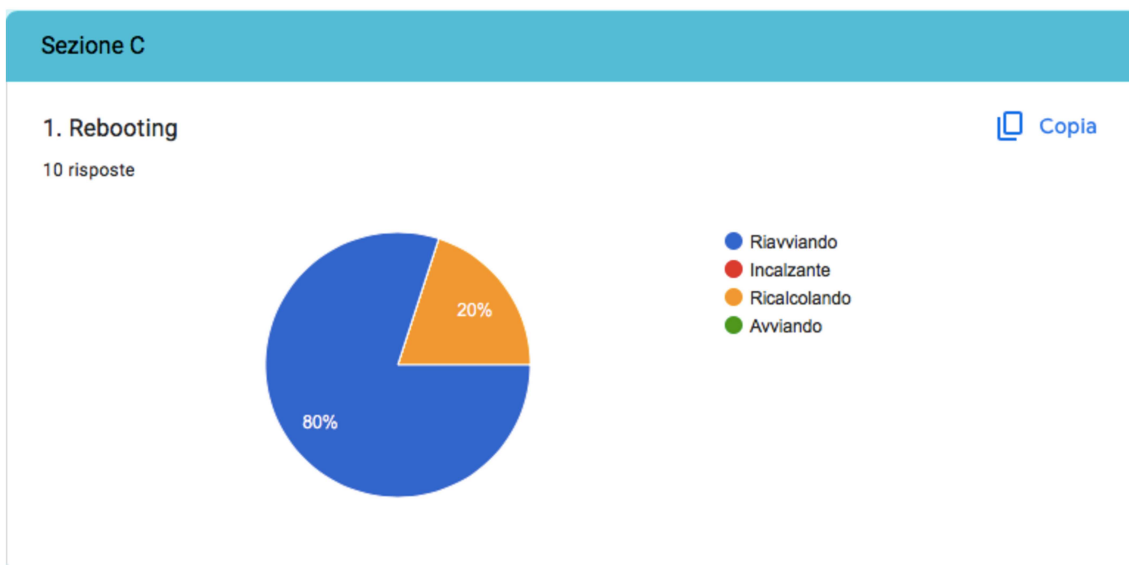


Figure 15: Percentage of answers, screenshot.

I started with “Rebooting” (C2), a verb that a player can hear from the very first day of playing. 80% of the respondents correctly answered “riavviando” and only 2 (20%) chose “ricalcolando” which might be similar in meaning anyway. 60% of the players answered that they already knew the term before playing while the remaining 30% guessed its meaning from the context, although one of them missed its accurate meaning. Only 1 participant did not know the verb (Figures 15 and 16).

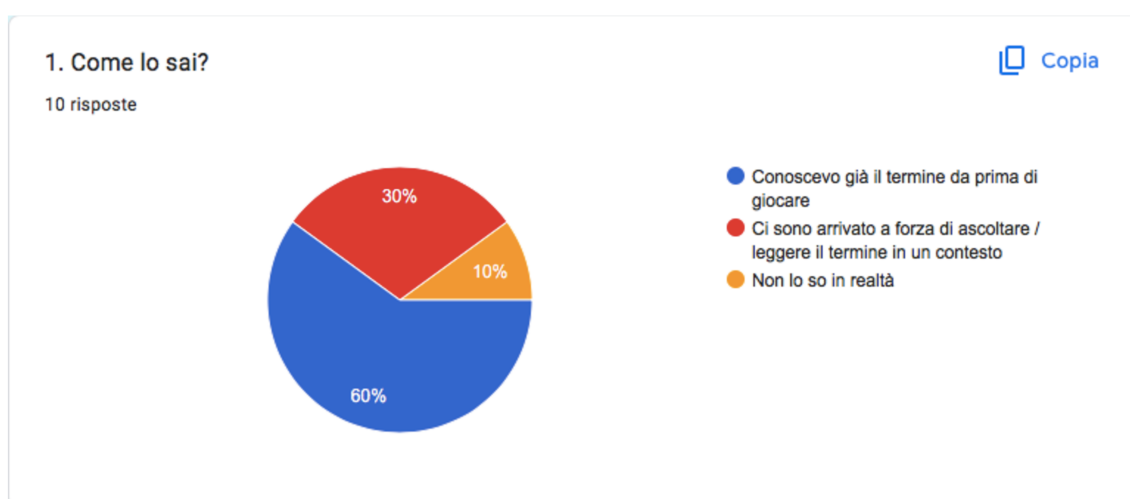


Figure 16: how did player know this vocabulary item, screenshot.

The second item to translate was “Claymore” (A1 or lower), a type of weapon you can choose from and this translation required the participants to write its translation or a short definition in Italian. 10 players out of 10 wrote “Spadone” or “Spada a due mani” and someone even wrote “Lunga spada a due mani proveniente dalla Scozia” which means “long double-hand sword hailing from Scotland”. 70% of the respondents inferred this vocabulary from Genshin visual context, while the remaining 30% already knew the term before starting to play.

The next vocabulary item to translate was “Mage” (C2 or higher), which is a common enemy from the early game, and 100% of the players answered “Mago”. 70% of the respondents already knew the word before playing Genshin Impact while 20% of them inferred the meaning from the context. Only 1 player (10%) did not know the term but guessed correctly anyway.

The fourth item to translate was the first idiom of this list. They had to choose the Italian translation for “I’m looking forward to this” (B2), one of the voice lines of Kaeya, one of the characters the game gives you at the beginning of your journey. All those interviewed correctly answered “Non vedo l’ora”. 60% of them already knew the sentence before starting playing, another 20% learnt it from the context while the remaining 20% did not know its meaning (Figure 17).

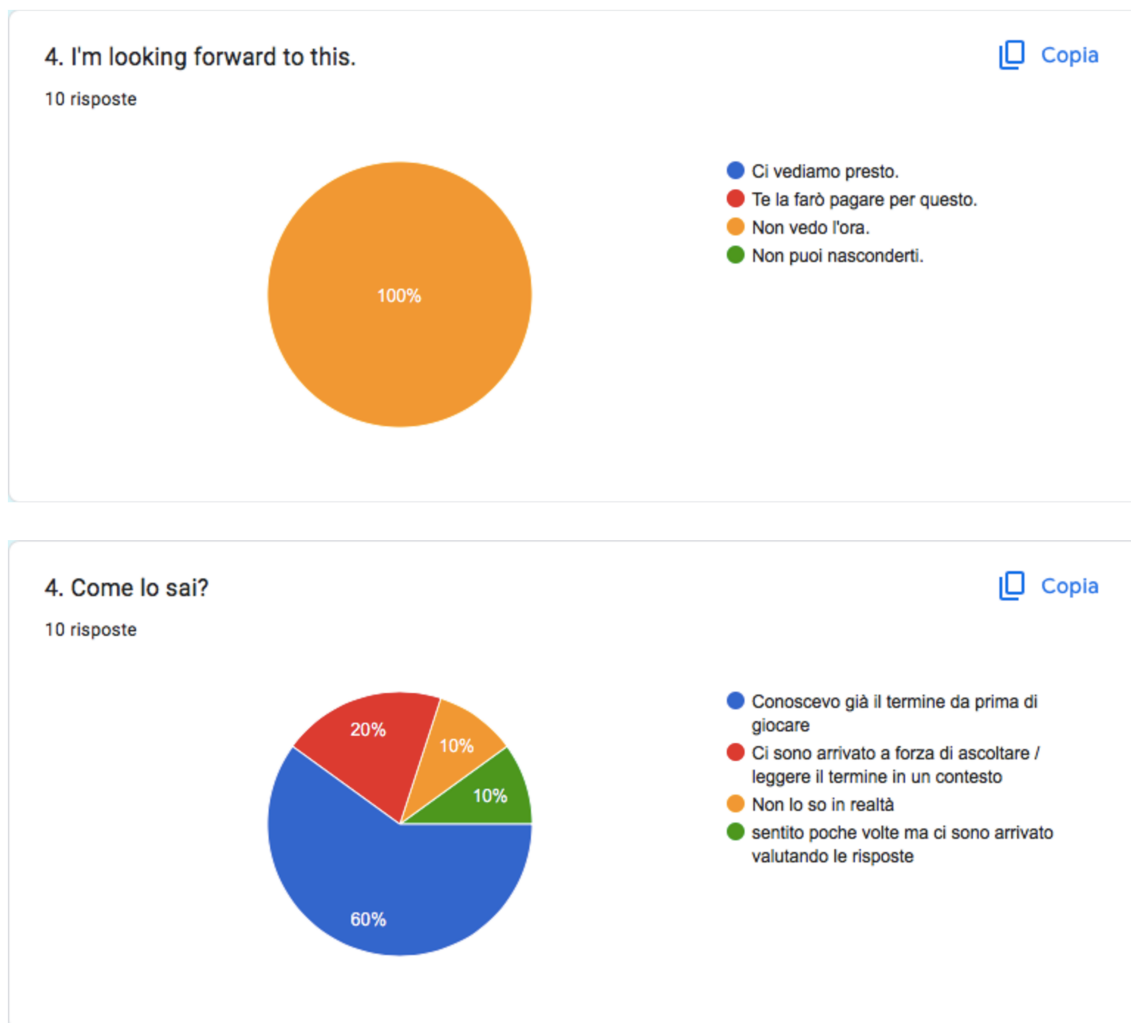


Figure 17: Percentage of answers and how they knew the expression, screenshot.

Another recurrent word in Genshin is surely “Domain” (C1) since players must enter these domains in order to achieve level-up materials. They had to write its Italian meaning and, as a matter of fact, 9 participants out of 10 correctly wrote “Dominio” (but one player wrote “santuario o dominio” which means “sanctuary or

domain”). While 50% of those interviewed did already know this word, 40% of them inferred the meaning from the visual context; one of them wrote “every day farming artefacts on Genshin”, acknowledging the usefulness of repetition, and only 1 player could not clearly express its meaning: “it is a delimited area and... I do not know how to explain it”.

The next idiom belongs to Ningguang, a character obtainable through the Wish system of Genshin but that nowadays everyone should have at least one copy of. In spite of this, it is a frequent sentence during many dialogues. The idiom in the matter is “Let’s make haste” (B2). Another 100% of right answers were given with two respondents out of 10 (20%) not knowing the answer, thus randomly guessing it. 50% of those interviewed did already know this expression before starting playing Genshin Impact while the remaining 20% learnt the meaning from the context in which this idiom had been used.

The following expression to translate was “Cut to the chase” (B2), one of the three expressions Keqing can say when she unleashes her elemental burst, but also used in many dialogues. 9 players out of 10 (90%) chose the option “Andare dritto al punto” while the only respondent (10%) who missed the translation was the same one who did not know the answer. In this case, 40% already knew the answer before starting playing while the remaining 30% of the respondents learnt the meaning from repeatedly hearing the expression in a context in Genshin and 20% of them did not know the expression. This makes it clear that one of them chose the answer randomly.

In the next translation, players had to guess the meaning of “poke” (C2) in the recurrent sentence “Come on... there's no need to poke him like that!”. 70% of the respondents gave the correct answer “stuzzicare” while another 20% went close to the meaning by choosing “provocare” which, in reality, is “to taunt”. The remaining 10% chose “bullizzare”, far from its actual meaning. However, only 20% of the respondents did not know the item and they ended up guessing the meaning, eventually making a mistranslation or going close to its real meaning. 50% of the group already knew the verb before starting playing and the remaining 20% managed to infer its meaning from

the context. Similar expressions gave the same, if not worse, results in terms of guessing. That, I presume, might be due to the options I gave them, which contained many synonyms of the vocabulary to translate. In fact, 6 respondents answered correctly (Figure 18).

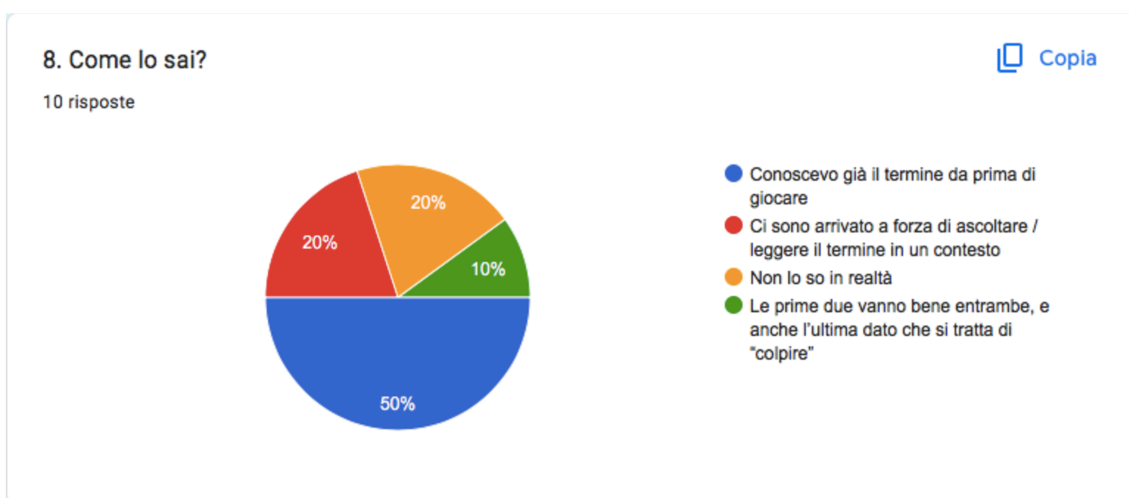
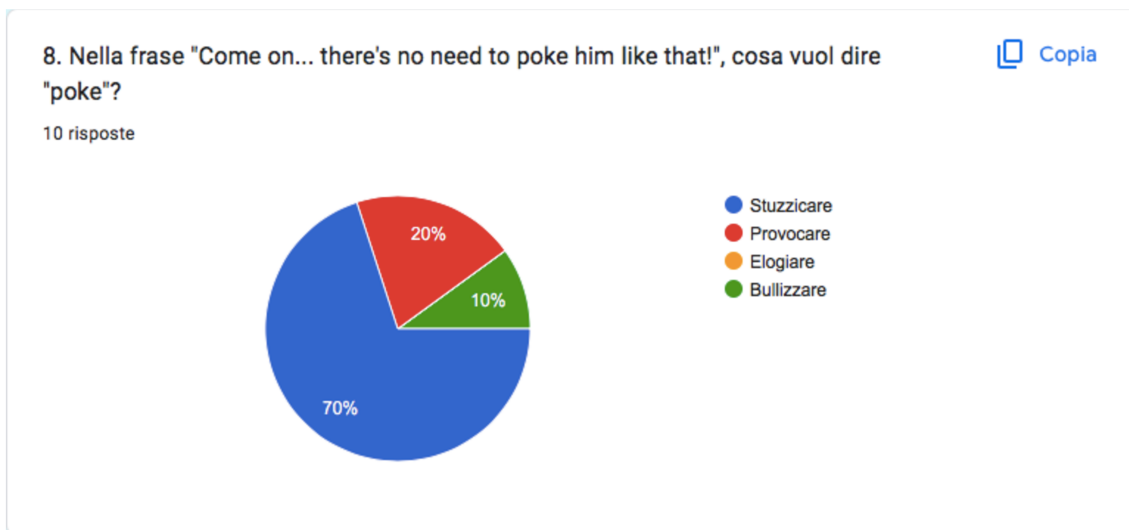


Figure 18: percentage of answers and how did they know the item, screenshot.

The players, then, had to translate the word “Fuss” (C1) from the sentence “Come on... there's no need to make such a fuss for nothing”. 60% of the respondents answered “Casino”, 30% of them chose “Dramma”, which in this case might be suitable, and the remaining 10% opted for “Agitarsi”. 60% of those interviewed claimed they knew the term before starting playing Genshin Impact, 20% believe they know this vocabulary

thanks to a contextualised environment and the remaining 20% claimed not to know its meaning. However some of those who claimed to know this item are only convinced they know its meaning since one of them chose “Dramma”. This item had a strange effect: by singularly checking each questionnaire, I found out that only 30% of the players really knew the item before starting playing, since 2 of the participants who claimed to know this word, did not. This makes me turn the data of this question into an updated one. As a matter of fact, 3 of the 6 who believe they know this vocabulary before starting playing, missed the translation. However they came at least close to the real meaning by choosing “Dramma”. 1 of the 2 who believed they had inferred correctly from the context did not and 1 of the 2 who claimed not to know the meaning of the item guessed correctly. As a matter of fact, the updated results are: 40% of those interviewed correctly guessed the item (3 already knew the vocabulary and 1 inferred the meaning from the context), another 40% believed to know the answer, even though 3 of them went close to the answer, and the remaining 20% did not know the answer and tried their luck.

The next word I asked them to translate was “Emergency food” (A2). This expression accompanies each player from the very beginning of the game since it is the nickname of Paimon, the main player’s companion. In this case 10 respondents out of 10 answered “Cibo d’emergenza” or “Cibo di scorta”. 70% of those interviewed already knew the meaning of the item while 20% of them inferred its meaning from the context and the remaining player was not sure but ended up typing the correct answer anyway.

The next vocabulary item to translate was “naughty boy” (B2) from Lisa’s (one of the characters the game gives the players) sentence “You have been a naughty boy”. Also in this case the respondents had to write the translation. 80% of the interviewed guessed correctly by writing “cattivo ragazzo”, “ragazzaccio” or “monello”, while the remaining 20% opted for “ragazzo losco” or they did not answer properly by only writing “cattivo”. Though the results of how they knew the item shows that 80% of players already knew that expression, yet this must be lowered to 70% with one participant (10%) who inferred correctly from the context and the remaining 20% of players who did not know the item.

Then, in Kaeya's sentence "I didn't know you were such a slacker", I asked the players to translate the term "slacker" (C2). The data gathered shows a 100% of correct answers despite 30% were answers randomly chosen since 3 players claimed not to be aware of this item. On the contrary, 30% of players claimed they knew the vocabulary item thanks to a context, while the remaining 40% already knew this adjective (Figure 19).

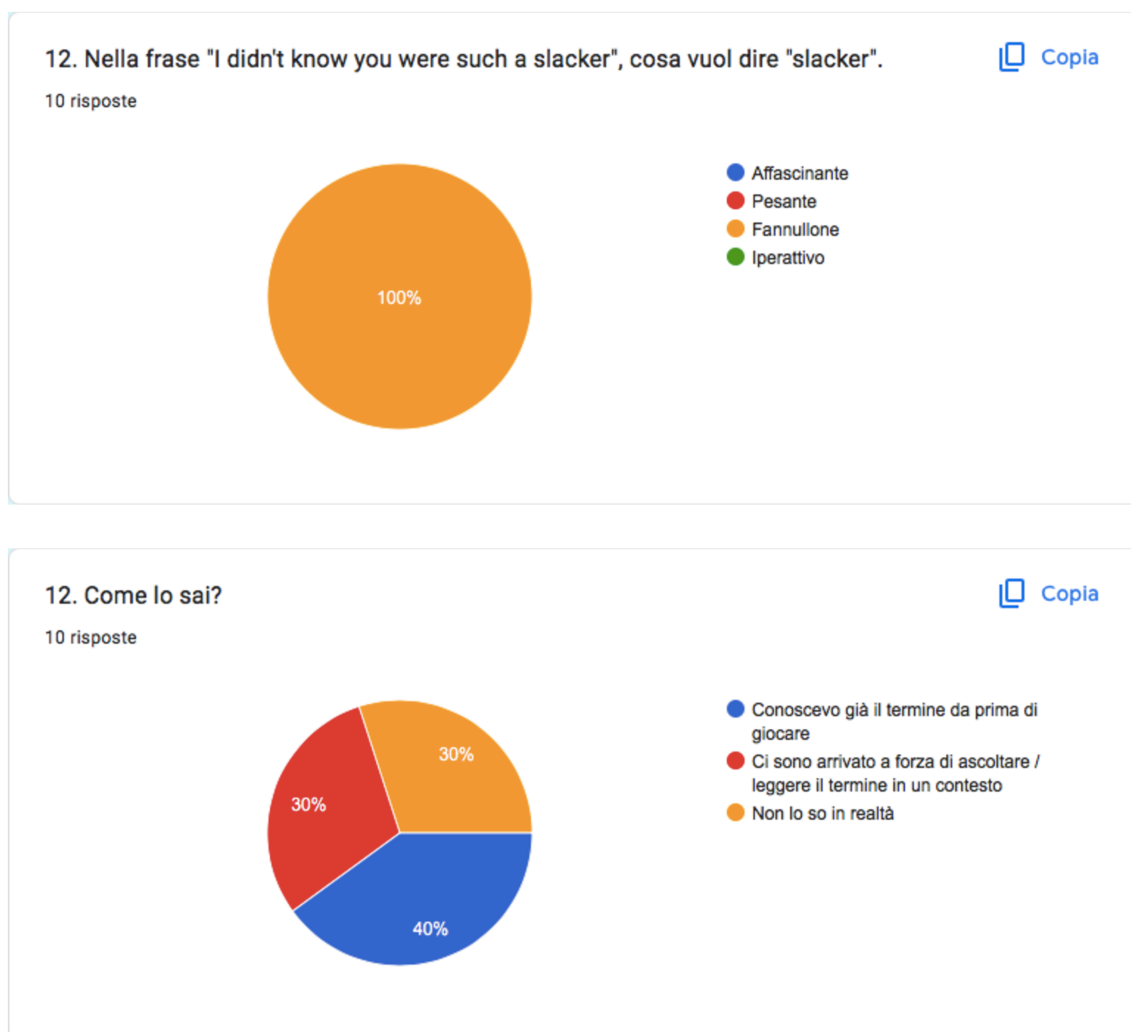


Figure 19: Percentage of answers and how did they know the item, screenshot.

Another frequent high-level vocabulary item that often reoccurs in Genshin Impact dialogues is the term "Distrust" (C1). In this case 10 respondents out of 10 correctly answered "Sfiducia". 80% of those interviewed already knew this item before playing Genshin Impact while the remaining 20% understood the meaning from the context.

Lisa's "Come a little closer" (B1) obtained a 100% of genuine right answers. In fact, also here the participants had to write down its Italian translation and the answers were "Avvicinati un po'", "Vieni (un po') più vicino" or "Avvicinati". As a matter of fact, 90% of the respondents already knew this sentence before starting playing while only one player (10%) inferred the meaning from the context.

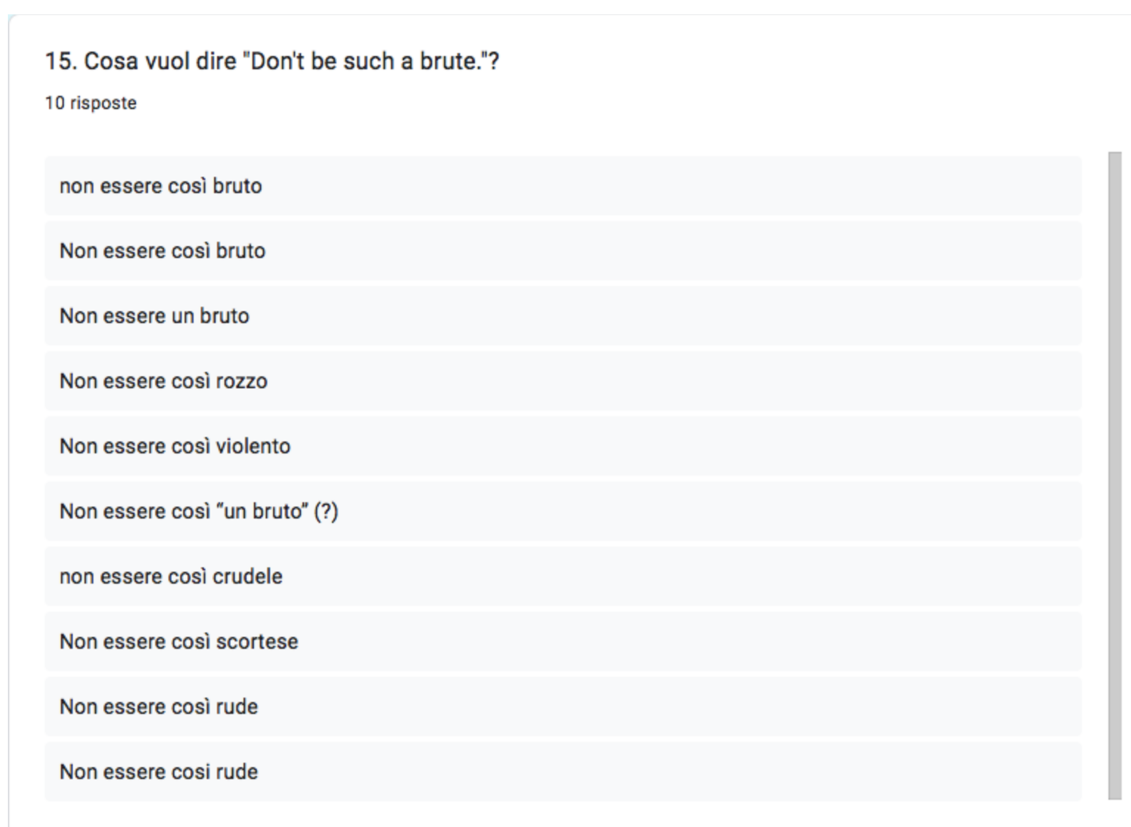


Figure 20: Short opened players' answers, screenshot.

Another sentence from Lisa was "Don't be such a brute" (C2). As in the previous translation, players had to type its Italian meaning. 40% of the respondents typed "Non essere così brutto", 20% of them wrote "Non essere così rude" while the remaining 40% interpreted "brute" as "rozzo" (10%), "violento" (10%), "scortese" (10%) or "crudele" (10%). While only 1 respondent claimed not to know this vocabulary, the 60% of the interviewed believed to know this term before starting playing Genshin Impact. The remaining 30% learnt its meaning by inferring it from the context. Despite not giving the exact answer, the above mentioned 3 respondents and 2 of the 6 who believed to know the term went really close to the meaning (Figures 20 and 21).

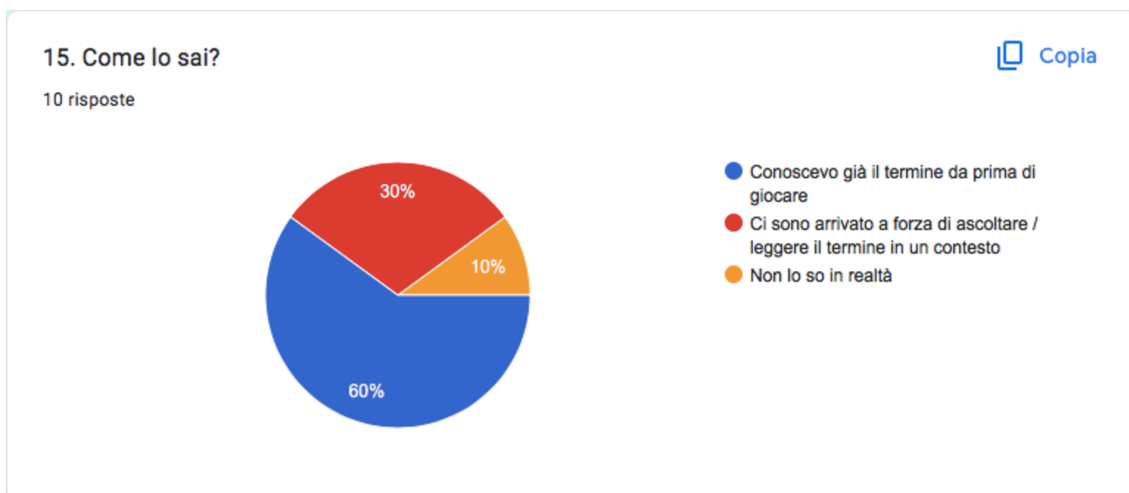


Figure 21: How did participants know this item, screenshot.

From now on, there begins the translation part from Italian to English. The first term I chose to translate was “Una lunga ricerca” which is “Quest” (C1). In this question respondents could choose more options since I put in some synonyms to sidetrack them. The winner among the four options was “Quest” with 6 points, followed by “Search” which obtained 5 points. I do have to admit that in this case we might consider that 100% of the respondents gave the correct answer, yet 2 players did not know the answer, leading us to conclude that 80% of those interviewed really knew the answer. As a matter of fact, 60% of the players were already aware of this item while the remaining 20% inferred the meaning from the context (10%) and learnt the term through the “Daily Quests” label.

I wanted to focus then on some adverbs. One of Paimon’s favourite adverb is “Besides” (B1). I therefore asked respondents to choose the most suitable translation for “Tra l’altro”. 80% of the respondents answered correctly, though one of them did not know the answer and gave a random answer. This makes me turn the previous percentage into a 70% of correct answers with a 30% claiming not knowing the item.

The next vocabulary item I asked the players to write the translation was “Porto di Liyue”, from the game known as “Liyue Harbor” (A1 or lower). With this question I

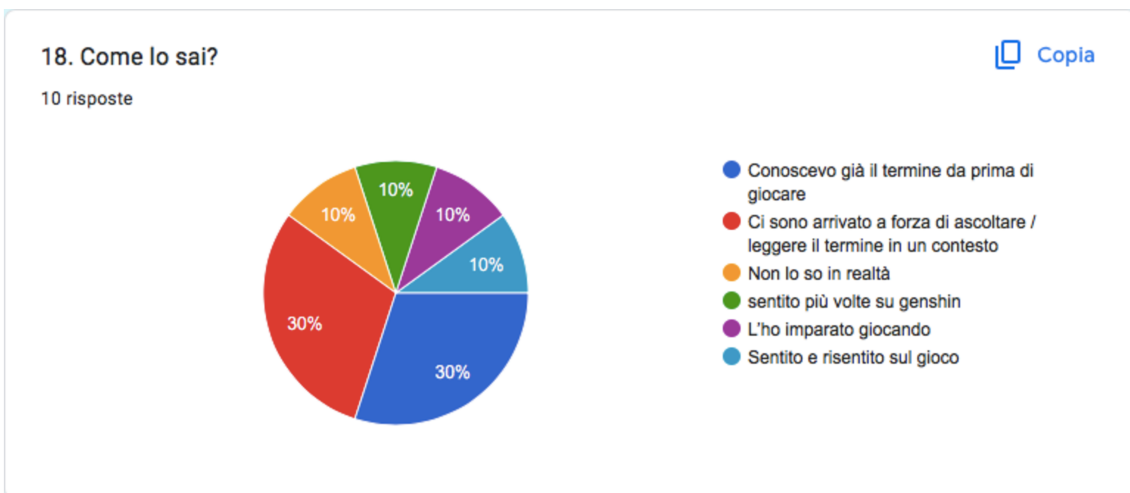
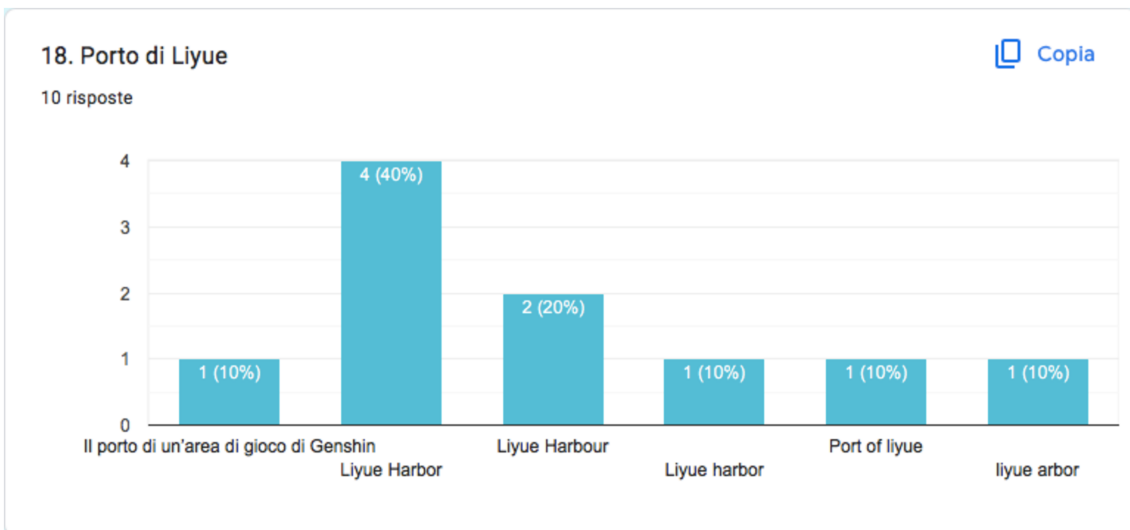


Figure 22: Percentage of answers and how did players acquire the vocabulary, screenshot.

wanted to verify if the structure of the word “harbour” had been remembered by players (Figure 22). Knowing that both “harbour” and “harbor” are correct, and that on Genshin it is written “harbor”, 50% of those interviewed wrote “Liyue Harbor” and another 20% typed “Liyue Harbour”. This leads us to conclude that 70% of the respondents wrote the vocabulary structure correctly, while the remaining 30% wrote the definition of a harbour (10%) or typed “Liyue arbor” (10%) or “Port of Liyue” (10%). While the player who missed the translation also claimed not to know this item, one person from those who believed they knew its structure before starting playing and one person from those who thought they had learnt the item from a contextualised environment actually

missed the translation. This leads us to reevaluate the data regarding the vocabulary acquisition. 40% of those interviewed acquired the item through contextualisation in the game and also through repetition, another 30% already knew this word and the remaining 30% did not know the term.

One of the weapons a player can choose from in Genshin is the “Bow” (A1 or lower). I therefore asked the players to write down the translation of the word “Arco” in English: 90% of the respondents gave the correct answer while 1 of the participants said: “A weapon”. Even though it cannot be considered a mistake, it is not the right translation and cannot be counted in the group of people who claimed to know the term before starting playing. This player (10%) shifts then to those who was not aware of the item. Therefore, the real percentage of those who really knew the vocabulary before starting playing was 60% with the remaining 30% that learnt the meaning from the context of Genshin.

As well as “Liyue Harbor”, also the “Church of Favonius” (A1 or lower) was widely mentioned during the first acts of the game. I therefore asked respondents to write down its English equivalent. Among the respondents, 8 out of 10 (80%) wrote both “Church of Favonius” or “Favonius Church”; another (10%) went close to the translation by typing “Favonius Cathedral”; while the last one (10%) said where one can find it in the game and claimed to have inferred the meaning from the context, which cannot be possible, since the word to translate was already in Italian. While no-one claimed not to know this item, it seems clear instead that one player should have (10%). Thus from 60% of those interviewed who inferred the meaning from the context of Genshin, we can lower the percentage to 50% while the remaining 40% already knew this item before starting playing.

“Legno di betulla” (Figure 23), also known as “Birch wood” (B2), was also a recurrent vocabulary item during Genshin gameplay. This item was correctly guessed by all the participants (100%). While 50% of the players knew this word thanks to Genshin Impact, the remaining 50% already knew the word.

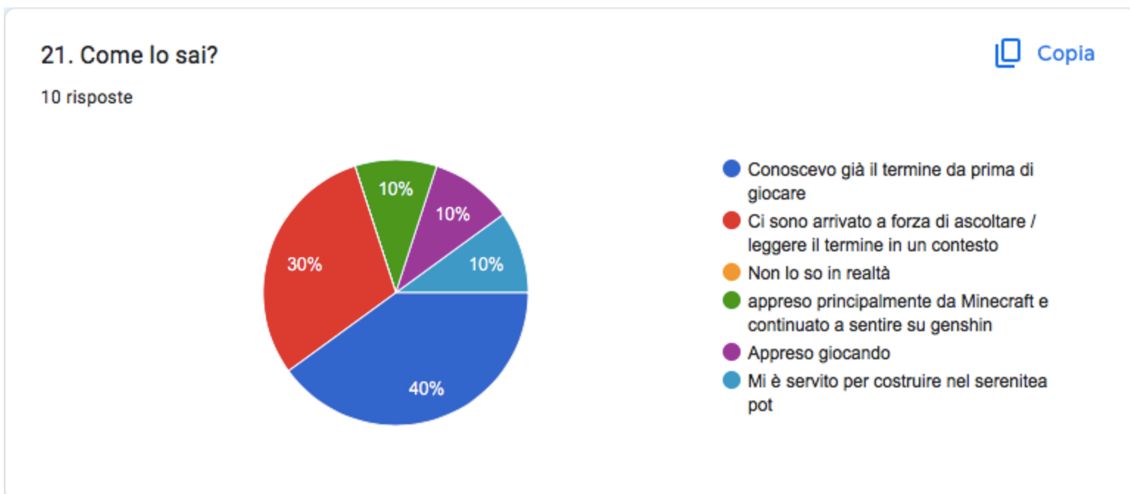
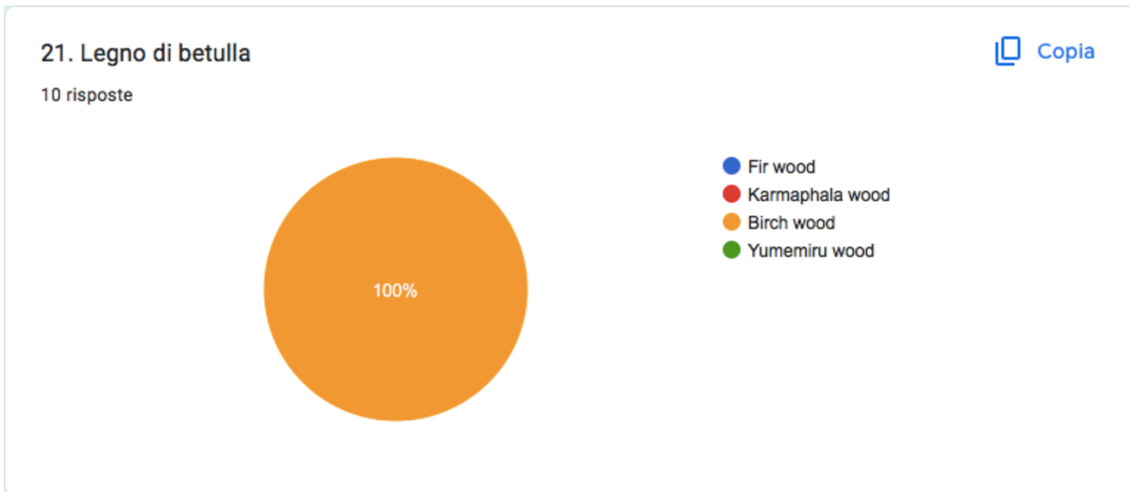


Figure 23: Percentage of correct answers and how respondents knew the item, screenshot.

The “catalyst” (C2) is also another weapon a player can choose from. I thus asked those interviewed to write down the translation of “Catalizzatore” to see whether the structure of this high level vocabulary had been retained in their minds. 9 players out of 10 (90%) wrote it correctly while one of them (10%) typed “Catalist”. 80% of the participants claimed to have acquired the vocabulary through Genshin Impact while the remaining 20% did already know this item.

“Swamp” (C1) was another recurrent word in the map of Teyvat (the name of the World in Genshin Impact). The term was successfully translated by all the players (100%).

90% of them already knew the vocabulary while the remaining 10% learnt the item by playing Genshin Impact.

The next vocabulary item I asked the participants to translate was “Sabbie mobili”, in English “Quicksand” (C2). Although 1 participant (10%) claimed not to know its translation, it seems that also 1 of the 9 players, who believed to know the item before starting playing Genshin Impact, did not since this participant gave the wrong answer. Thus, I modified the percentage of those who really knew the item before playing Genshin and those who were not aware of it yet. As a matter of fact, 80% of those interviewed answered correctly while the other 2 (20%) chose the option “Moving sands” probably due to the similar structure of its Italian cognate.

Another frequent Genshin verb I asked respondents to translate was “Svolazzare” also known as “Flutter” (C2) in English. Since 3 players out of 10 (30%) claimed to be unaware of this item, the 90% of correct answers must be lowered to 70% since all 3 of them tried to guess and 2 of them guessed correctly. 60% of the respondents were already aware of this item before playing Genshin Impact and the remaining player (10%) learnt it from the context of Genshin.

Another high level verb, and highly frequent in Genshin Impact which I asked respondents to translate is “Scatter” (C2) or, in Italian, “Spargere”: since 3 players out of 10 (30%) claimed not to know this item, 90% of the correct answers will be lowered to 70%, since 2 of the 3 mentioned players tried their luck by guessing correctly. The 5 gamers out of 10 (50%) who correctly answered, instead, already knew the item before playing and the remaining 20% learnt it both from Genshin Impact context and from its quests (for instance when a player has to scatter the wheat on the lake in order for the ducks to come and eat it) (Figure 24).

As I mentioned talking about “Besides”, I chose another frequent adverb in Genshin Impact: “Alongside” (A1 or lower). I therefore asked the participants to translate the item “Assieme a” and while this vocabulary received 80% of correct answers, one of

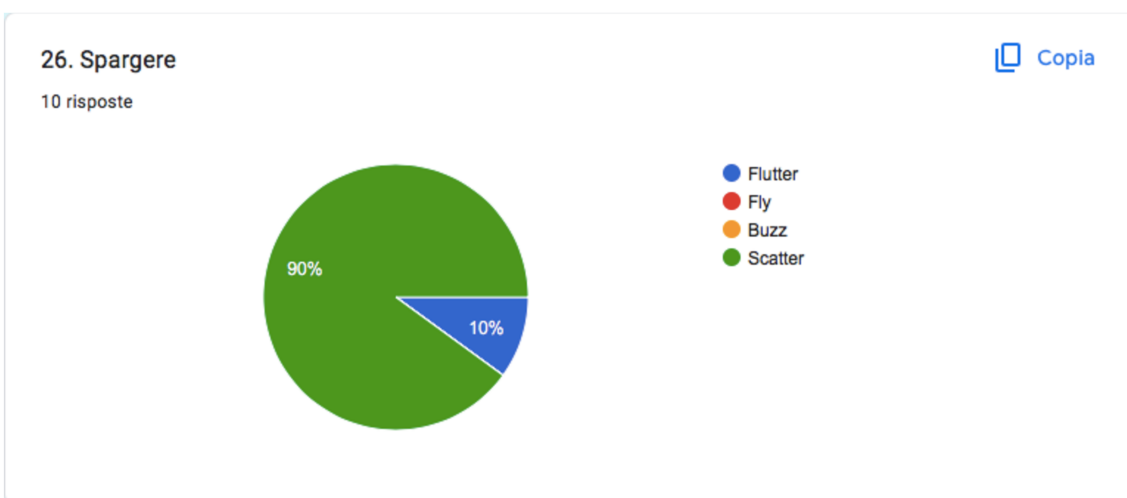
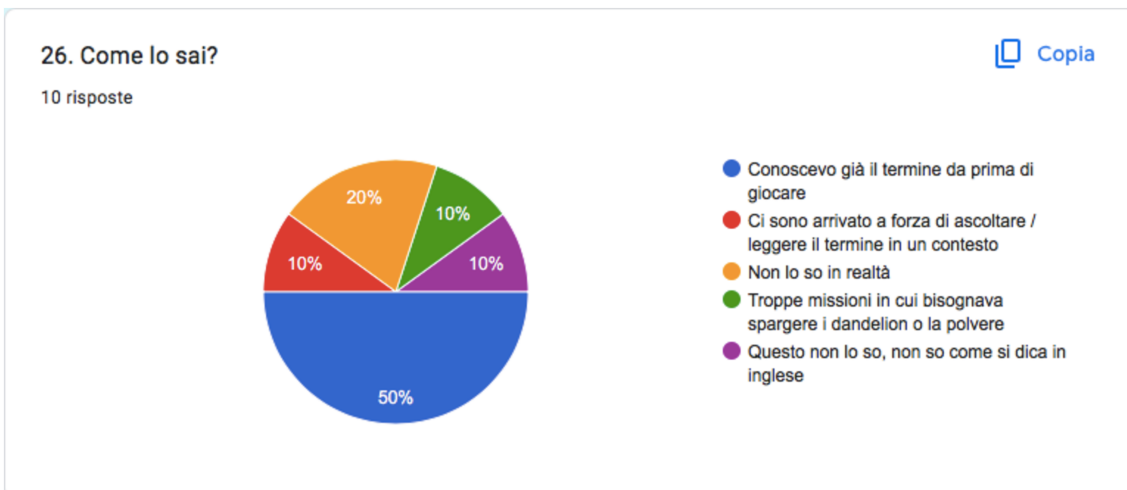


Figure 24: Percentage of answers and how did they know the item, screenshot.

them had been guessed since 30% of those interviewed claimed not to be aware of this item. Instead those who said they were aware of the adverb (70%) also guessed its meaning.

For “Withdraw” (A1 or lower) or “Ritirata” we also have an abnormal result of 100% of correct answers. As a matter of fact, it should be slightly lowered to 90% since one of the players who guessed correctly (10%) was also the same who claimed not to know the item. Another 60% already knew the item before starting playing Genshin while the remaining 30% learnt the vocabulary from Genshin Impact dialogues.

Another full 100% of correct answers was given to the word “Boar” (C2). While 70% of the participants already knew the vocabulary, the remaining 30% learnt the item from the game; one respondent also wrote: “in order to cook in the game, you need to hunt”.

Finally, the last expression that I asked the players to answer was “Lascialo a me!” or “Leave it to me!” (A1). 90% of the respondents answered correctly and the one who missed the translation (10%) was the same who claimed not to know this item. 70% of those interviewed already knew this expression, while the remaining 20% learnt it from Genshin Impact.

Conclusion and Limitations

In order to understand to which extent Genshin Impact can be a tool for second language vocabulary acquisition we need to split the participants into groups. By analysing the individual answers, we can divide them into three: language students (50%), non-language students (30%) and workers (20%). The overall result of language students can be closely compared to the other two groups: despite being the group who made less mistakes, one player of this group claimed to have acquired 15 unknown L2 vocabulary items out of the 30 of the task. This group performed better overall; most of the items the participants claimed not to be aware of were correctly translated. This makes one wonders if this was luck or intuition. As a matter of fact, during each singular answers inspection, I notified every correct randomly guessed answer by putting a crown next to the vocabulary item to translate. 1 player out of these 5 (20%) made only two mistakes, even though could have been seven since I put 5 crowns on it, which means that he guessed correctly the item, yet the participant indicated not to know which is the real answer. My question is, is it possible that the player guessed correctly 5 unknown items out of 7, of four-choice questions and short open questions? In my view, it might be due to the resonance and recollection of vocabulary in the language students’ mind. Here is why I shall not count the given crowns as mistakes: although they claimed not to know the answer, they still guessed the “unknown” word. I

also considered as correct answer, all those responses which were really close to the meaning, despite not being the precise translation.

One of the participants (20%) made no mistakes and claimed to know 26 items out of 30 while the remaining 4 were learnt from Genshin; another one (20%) made no mistakes and this player claimed to know 25 items out of 30 and the remaining 5 were learnt from the context of Genshin; another participant (20%) made only two mistakes, already knew 21 of the overall vocabulary, and learnt the remaining 7 words from Genshin Impact context; the fourth member of this group (20%) also made only two mistakes but received five crowns, claimed to already know 8 of the overall items while they claimed to have learnt 15 vocabulary thanks to Genshin Impact; finally the last component of this group (20%) made five mistakes overall, yet obtained eight crowns (mostly on C1 and C2 vocabulary). The latter participant claimed to be aware of 14 items of the list and that the remaining 3 had been learnt through Genshin Impact. In this group we might say that Genshin Impact might not only be a way of refreshing already acquired terms, but can also help in acquiring a small percentage of unknown new vocabulary. In addition, time spent playing did not seem to have led to any major improvement. As a matter of fact, the second player in group who is used to playing 30 minutes to 1 hour per day, outperformed the last two described players who are used to playing 2 to 3 hour per day and 1 to 2 hour per day respectively. On the other hand, when they started playing had a bigger impact of them. Age then was another factor that did not seem to affect the overall results since the oldest member of this sub-group was 25 and scored averagely.

The non-language student group (3 participants) performed slightly worse. Despite the low number of mistakes, it seems that in this group Genshin Impact really taught something to them. As a matter of fact, the first participant of this group made only five mistakes: the player already knew 12 items out of 30 and learnt 13 items from Genshin. The second respondent of this list made seven mistakes and received four crowns: this gamer claimed to know 2 of the overall words and learnt 17 of these vocabulary items thank to Genshin contextualisation. The last component made only two mistakes: the player already knew 21 of the proposed items while the remaining 7 were learnt and/or

inferred from Genshin. In this group, however, seems that time spent playing per day affects the personal outcome: in fact, the second component of this group who is used to playing 30 minutes to an hour daily, gave the worst performance over the other two, who are both used to playing 1 to 2 hours per day. Age also seems to have affected the overall results too this time, since the above mentioned second player, who also studied in a scientific high school with empowered english, was 25 years old while the remaining 2 students were 20. What did not seem to have affected the performance was for how long had they had been playing, however, there were only 3 participants.

Finally we have the workers' group. In this case we do have an interesting outcome: one of the two players plays 30 minutes to 1 hour and yet managed to answer correctly and claimed to be aware of 29 items out of 30, with only a single crown on a low level vocabulary. The other participant, instead, made five mistakes and obtained other five crowns: the player was aware of 14 vocabulary items and learnt the remaining 6 from Genshin Impact contextualisation. In this case, time spent playing daily was the same but the gap between the two is huge. It seems that some non-students might somehow have a similar knowledge of L2 items as language students. In an interview, this player claimed to have already studied English in the past and found the vocabulary I proposed comprehensible.

From the data gathered so far we can see that, while in the first group Genshin Impact has a more limited function, and occasionally a teaching function, in the second and in the third group it seems to have a more instructional effect, despite few exceptions. The gap between the time spent playing a day seems to sort effects in the first two groups, while in the third one, due to one participant's exceptional knowledge of English vocabulary, this is more difficult to assess, also due to the few components in this last group. Previous education, instead, seems to have affected the overall results since many who decided to study language only at the university, gave a worse performance over the rest of the language student group who studied languages at high school too (with an exception for one player). Furthermore, the language used in Genshin Impact seems to be easy enough to make comprehensible by all groups: as a matter of fact, the language students' group chose 4 (40%), 5 (40%) and 6 (20%); the 3 non-language

students indicated 5 (33.3%), 4 (33.3%) and 6 (33.3%) respectively; and the in workers' group both participants chose 6. The anxiety felt in front of characters' L2 dialogue, then, was indicated with 1 by 8 players out of 10 (80%) and with 2 by the remaining respondents (20%). This is different to what happens with the anxiety felt with teachers: as a matter of fact, it seems that 60% of language students and some non-language students (66.7% of them) do tend to feel anxious when speaking in class. The remaining players (50% of the respondents) claimed to feel just as fine and indicated response values from 1 to 3 out of 6.

Repetition importance was autonomously mentioned by 2 of the 10 participants confirming the impact that recurrent words might have to enhance the thoughts of McCarthy (1990), Zahar et al. (2001), Pigada and Schmitt (2006), Webb (2007 in Rasouli and Jafari 2016:43), Nation (2001, in Rasouli and Jafari, 2016) and Schmitt (2008). Contextualisation of unknown second language vocabulary in dialogues then, was the primary source for the participants to unveil the meaning of most of the items encountered. As a matter of fact, it seems a working process because most vocabulary inferred from the context, led to correct answers, or at least very close to the real meaning. This fact seems to enhance Dixon et al.'s (2022) statement about the effectiveness of the combination of both oral and written output.

To conclude, from my perspective based on the data collected so far, Genshin Impact and video games in general seem to have a potential for second language vocabulary teaching. The language used seems to be comprehensible by almost everyone who has a minimum basis of English knowledge and all the newly encountered words are likely to be high level vocabulary that can be learnt through inferring from the context. However, although this technique worked for the participants in my questionnaire, many scholars, tend to suggest a paper or online dictionary, in order for players not to miss any translation. Also thanks to game-related functions, as believed by Laufer and Hulstijn (2001 in Reynolds, 2017) which exploit the already existing L2 vocabulary knowledge and requires players to use newest knowledge in order for them to acquire the rewards, players can constantly interact with these items, eventually learning them. With the single mode game, one can stop the game and reflect upon the unknown items, in order

for the player to practice and retain the newly encountered vocabulary. The association of both oral and written output, then, also according to Schmitt (2008), seems to overcome the effectiveness of oral or written output alone.

I tried to analyse the gathered data as accurately as possible, yet the lack of a conspicuous number of participants led me to draw just a little sketch of the matter at hand. Regardless whether I will or I will not be able to conduct another similar experiment in the future, my hope is that other students, scholars or even language teachers might think about conducting other experiments with a larger number of respondents. In this way, we might collect other bits and pieces of data in order to have a wider and more accurate point of view about the topic.

Conclusion

From what we have seen so far, the results of this study might be used as additional support material in the study of language acquisition through video games. I started the dissertation with the questions: “Can video games be a tool for second language acquisition and retention?” and if so “in which way can video games be effective?”. Based on the data gathered for my investigation, it seems indeed that video games can be an additional tool for vocabulary acquisition. In order to compare the data presented in the first two chapters with real-life responses, I needed the participants who took part in my questionnaire to answer questions regarding the main topics dealt with in this paper.

Alongside this theoretical part, I decided then to investigate their Genshin vocabulary knowledge through a translation task, made up of 30 terms (both words and expressions) from A1 to C2 level, through which they had to state how they had acquired knowledge of each item. As stressed by many scholars (Wilkin, 1972; Gairns et al., 1986; McCarthy, 1990; Nation, 1990; Lewis, 1993; Schmitt et al., 1997; Snow et al., 2005; Schmitt, 2008; Rasouli et al., 2016; Wei et al., 2018; Angraeni et al., 2019; Chih-Ming et al., 2019 et al.), vocabulary acquisition is the first step to take in order to improve language related skills: having acquired familiarity with a great deal of vocabulary, learners will have less difficulty thinking which word to use and can focus instead on other aspects of the language such as pronunciation and fluency, leading learners to improve their reading, listening, writing and speaking skills.

Unlike what is suggested by some of scholars (Anderson, 2002; Griffiths, 2008; Wei et al., 2018; Dixon et al., 2022), I did not prepare any vocabulary sheets in advance for participants in the survey. I did this on purpose, to verify whether repetition of words in Genshin Impact is enough to trigger memory. Moreover, I decided to do this, to investigate whether contextualised written exposure through story quests, characters dialogues (and so forth) might be powerful enough to lead to the correct deduction of the unknown vocabulary encountered. As a matter of fact, according to the data

gathered, many language students (80%) inferred correctly from the Genshin Impact context up to 7 items thanks to contextualisation and one participant out of these five (20%) learnt 15 terms out of 30. For the non-language students group (3 participants), instead, one participant learnt 7 items from Genshin Impact context while the other two correctly inferred 13 items and 17 items respectively.

The results from the group made up of workers, instead, were more limited and thus not so accurate. While the former (50%) guessed all the translation part (100%) correctly, claiming to know those items before starting playing Genshin Impact, the other person interviewed (50%) learnt from the Genshin context 6 items out of 30 and made 5 mistakes. This indicates that language knowledge might not necessarily be dependant on classroom studies. Despite the lack of a vocabulary sheet to look at, before the test began, the low rate of mistakes in the 10 questionnaires (players made from 0 to 7 mistakes), might indicate that repetition of contextualised unknown vocabulary in Genshin Impact is effective for vocabulary acquisition, retention and recollection. This seems to clash with what Anderson (2002), Griffiths (2008), Wei et al. (2018), Dixon et al. (2022) believe about additional support material.

Furthermore while some players, in the open questions, mentioned the importance of repetition as a means to enhance and retain new vocabulary, others praise the audio-visual component of the dialogues, facilitating the translation of unknown vocabulary, also thanks to the contextualisation of items. Inferring from the context is a technique adopted by 20% of the participants, while the remaining 80% translate new vocabulary through (online) dictionaries or on Google. Daily time spent playing did not seem to have affected the overall performances since, in some cases, players who had played Genshin Impact for less time than others, gave similar, in some cases better, overall results. Yet, when they started playing seems to be quite the breakthrough. With this accounted, the result of my investigation seems to indicate also another important answer.

Through contextualised written and oral exposure and through repetition and engagement, as believed by and adding additional credit to McCarthy (1990), Joe (1998), Pigada et al. (2006), Schmitt (2008), Vidal (2011), Reynolds (2017), Rasouli et al. (2016), Dixon et al. (2022), Fahran (2022), it seems that Genshin Impact and similar video games can indeed trigger incidental vocabulary acquisition. This last component, according to some of the aforementioned scholars, could be the key factor for succeeding in vocabulary acquisition since it helps players to relax, to free themselves from any form of shackles provided by anxiety and to apply the “Immersion State” to the game, favouring learning gains. As a matter of fact, anxiety also plays a crucial role in the process of language acquisition since, according to Wei et al.’s (2018) paper, it might lead to low self-esteem which, in turn, results in bad results overall. I therefore asked my participants their level of anxiety in front of a teacher, compared to language delivered by a character of a game. The overall data of the first question was not what I was expecting: while 30% of the respondents indicated 4 out of 6 (where 1 was the lowest level of anxiety felt and 6 the highest), 20% of them chose 1, another 20% indicated 3 and the remaining 30% selected 2 (10%), 5 (10%) and 6 (10%) respectively. On the following question, on the other hand, the results were to be expected: 80% of the players indicated that the level of anxiety felt in front of a character is 1, while the remaining 20% voted for 2. Then, I asked them whether or not anxiety might negatively influence language learning income and 90% of those interviewed believe so. They argue that anxiety does not let them think straight, it increases the pressure felt leading to focus too much on unknown words that might perhaps be easily understood in a more pleasant environment. Furthermore, 2 of them suggest that non-physical language interactions are the best since they put the players’ mind at ease and they do not feel compelled to understand every new vocabulary item the first time they encounter one.

Finally, 100% of the respondents definitely suggest Genshin Impact, and similar video games, as tool for enhancing the already existing vocabulary knowledge. To support their belief, one respondent thinks that due to the repetition of expressions and vocabulary in Genshin, it is easier to learn them, tempting players to look for the meaning; while other players associate learning incomes with the engagement triggered by the game. In conclusion we might say that it seems that video games designed for

entertainment can have a great potential for unknown vocabulary acquisition and retention. I hope the present dissertation may spur many scholars in the future to write more about the potential of video games. I would also like to address teachers to acknowledge their benefits, to ponder over suggesting them as support materials for incidental vocabulary acquisition, and thus for language enhancement.

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Riassunto

L'acquisizione di un solido vocabolario personale di lingua straniera sembra il primo passo da fare per migliorare la propria conoscenza di una seconda lingua. Secondo molti studiosi infatti, come Wilkin (1972), Gairns (1986), Lewis (1993), Schmitt et al. (1997), Wei et al. (2018), la conoscenza di molti vocaboli faciliterebbe non solo i due aspetti passivi della lingua, lettura e ascolto, ma solleciterebbe anche la sua parte attiva, scrittura ed esposizione orale, in quanto gli studenti non perderebbero tempo a pensare alle parole da usare ma si concentrerebbero direttamente sulla loro pronuncia o sulla struttura semantica della frase. L'acquisizione di un vocabolario cospicuo inoltre, servirebbe a saper distinguere parole simili tra loro e a conoscere le varie eccezioni presenti in una seconda lingua. Difatti, secondo Meara (2009), gli studenti di una seconda lingua tenderebbero più a formare associazioni clang, per cui un individuo alla ricezione di uno stimolo simile a un altro che conosce, tende a misinterpretarlo e a riconoscerlo come oggetto conosciuto. Sebbene apprendere nuovi vocaboli sembri essere, in alcuni casi, scoraggiante, alcuni studiosi propongono delle strategie per facilitarne l'acquisizione e la ritenzione. Infatti, Hu & Nation (2000, in Schmitt, 2008) spiegano che un oratore dovrebbe possedere una conoscenza di almeno 98% di tutti i vocaboli per capire quarantanove parole su cinquanta. Bialystok (1978, in Griffiths, 2008:86) definisce le strategie per imparare il vocabolario come "mezzi opzionali per sfruttare informazioni disponibili per migliorare la competenza in una seconda lingua". Queste strategie possono essere interconnesse tra di loro, l'importante è che ne vengano monitorati gli effetti per, eventualmente, sostituirne alcune (o sostituirla in caso se ne adottino soltanto una). Anderson (2005) spiega poi, come il processo di metacognizione, un tipo di autoriflessività sul fenomeno cognitivo, consenta l'autovalutazione e la riflessione partendo proprio dalle nostre conoscenze pregresse. Ecco che nell'orchestrare la perfetta strategia, ricorre a cinque punti: preparazione e pianificazione per l'apprendimento (partendo proprio dalle conoscenze pregresse); selezionare e adottare la strategia; monitorare l'apprendimento; intrecciare diverse strategie; e in fine valutare il proprio operato. Schmitt (2008) inoltre, individua quattro ulteriori componenti che servono per lo sviluppo dell'acquisizione di una seconda lingua: gli studenti (che devono possedere la volontà di essere costanti per ottenere un

vocabolario sostanzioso); gli insegnanti (che forniscono una guida sui vari vocaboli); ricercatori (per l'offerta di informazioni affidabili); e metodi efficaci per imparare una lingua. In aggiunta McCarthy (1990) afferma che ci siano numerose strategie in quanto esistono studenti che definisce "poveri" e altri che definisce "buoni": non avendo le stesse abilità linguistiche è giusto che adottino strategie diverse. Non solo il grado di competenza impatta sulla scelta della strategia, ma anche il sesso in quanto il genere femminile sembra più propenso all'acquisizione di una seconda lingua, non solo perché maturano prima ma anche, grazie al maggiore sviluppo della parte celebrale che consente e facilita l'acquisizione delle lingue. O'Malley et al. (1985, in Schmitt et al., 1997) crede che la ripetuta esposizione alle parole giochi un ruolo chiave nel processo di acquisizione e ritenzione del nuovo vocabolario. Anche McCarthy (1990), Zahar et al. (2001), Pigada et al. (2006), Schmitt (2008) e Rasouli et al. (2016) concordano. Differiscono invece sul numero di ripetizioni necessarie per l'acquisizione di un nuovo termine in quanto secondo alcuni basterebbero dalle 8 alle 10 ripetizioni mentre altri puntano a di più, dicendo che nemmeno dalle 15 alle 18 esposizioni sarebbero necessarie per l'acquisizione di alcuni nuovi vocaboli. Angraeni et al. (2019), tra le tecniche per l'apprendimento di vocaboli in una seconda lingua, propongono i videogiochi, specialmente in contesti come i licei o le superiori in generale, in quanto fonte di riposo e l'alto tasso di coinvolgimento che ne scaturisce. Schmitt (2008) divide il coinvolgimento in tre parti: necessità (di tradurre un oggetto per raggiungere uno scopo); ricerca (dell'informazione); valutazione (l'abilità di comparare e contestualizzare delle parole). Angraeni et al. (2019) spiegano che tra i tanti benefit, molti giochi spingono alla comunicazione tra giocatori nel mondo, essendo così costretti ad usare la lingua franca per comunicare tra loro. Continuano dicendo che oggi giorno questi videogiochi possono essere ospitati da diverse piattaforme portatili e che quindi possono viaggiare sempre con noi. Dixon et al. (2022) inoltre spiegano come, grazie alla vasta quantità di lingue presenti in un videogioco, sia sempre più semplice cominciare a pensare ai videogiochi come fonte di acquisizione di una seconda lingua. Inoltre dividono questi ultimi dal meno utile a quello che aiuterebbe di più i giocatori: MMO (Massive Multiplayer Online) secondo gli autori sembra essere il modello di gioco peggiore in quanto non lascerebbe il tempo ai giocatori di immagazzinare i nuovi vocaboli incontrati e perciò di riutilizzarli; le modalità Singolo giocatore e Multi

giocatore sono state considerate equipollenti, in quanto si può mettere in pausa il gioco e riflettere sui nuovi termini incontrati, ma nel sondaggio degli scrittori, gli studenti hanno indicato di preferire il secondo tipo. Sempre Dixon et al. (2022) credono che i videogiochi pensati per intrattenere funzionino meglio di quelli progettati per l'apprendimento di una lingua grazie alle ricerche variegata e ai tanti personaggi che espongono il giocatore a una massiva quantità di input in lingua. Credono inoltre che l'alto tasso di coinvolgimento che le caratteristiche appena citate, inneschino, a un maggiore interesse e concentrazione. In aggiunta, uno studio condotto da Chen et al. (2019), mostra come funzioni legate al gioco incrementino significativamente il tasso di acquisizione di vocaboli da parte dello stesso. Anche Ashinoff (2014) propende verso i videogiochi pensati per l'intrattenimento come strumento di acquisizione di vocaboli stranieri (esperimento pp.25-26). Alcuni videogiochi come "Civilisation III" (Firaxis Gamers et al., 2001) e "Genshin Impact" (MiHoyo, 2020), inoltre, sono provvisti di una sezione che può prendere vari nomi ma il cui scopo è presentare una descrizione degli strumenti, nemici e personaggi presenti in un gioco, fornendo vocaboli sempre diversi. Rentia et al. (2022) spiega come i videogiochi appassionanti spingano il cervello a secernere ormoni come la dopamina e l'endorfina che stimolano la motivazione e il desiderio di acquisire nuove informazioni. Questo stimolo induce i giocatori ad entrare nello "Stato di Immersione" anche chiamato "Flow" in cui, questi ultimi, ne diventerebbero così focalizzati sul videogioco da acquisirne un senso di soddisfazione indipendente da altri fattori. Questo processo di coinvolgimento avrebbe poi, secondo Wei et al. (2018), uno scopo benefico contro lo stato d'ansia che può essere vanificata grazie allo "Stato Memoria" o "Heart State" in cui il giocatore entra grazie all'immersione data dallo stato precedentemente esposto. Gli scrittori spiegano inoltre che gli studenti frustrati o pieni di ansia tendono a sottostimare le loro abilità, conducendo a scarsi risultati. Al contrario, emozioni positive tendono a rilassare gli studenti e a spingerli a mettersi in gioco. Secondo studiosi come Rentia et al. (2022), Simatupang (2022) and Fahrhan (2022), ciò che innesca il processo di coinvolgimento in un giocatore in giochi come Genshin Impact, quindi giochi "gacha", sarebbe principalmente l'acquisizione di nuovi personaggi da cui ascoltare nuovi dialoghi in lingua, degli strumenti ottenibili per un tempo limitato e la varietà di lingue disponibili da cui scegliere. Videogiochi come Genshin Impact inoltre, consentono l'acquisizione

accidentale di vocaboli attraverso i dialoghi che vengono appaiati da un testo scritto per seguire al meglio la conversazione. Il giocatore, immerso ormai nel gioco, tenderà a immagazzinare i termini sconosciuti dei vari vocaboli, come sostenuto in Reynolds (2017), senza ulteriori sforzi. In supporto a questa tesi, Joe (1998) e Schmitt (2008) affermano che non ci sia un'attività di ascolto migliore di un'attività di ascolto e lettura combinata. Per misurare e verificare, perciò toccare con mano ciò che abbiamo appena affrontato, ho deciso di condurre un esperimento attraverso un questionario a cui hanno partecipato 10 giocatori. Il test comprendeva più parti: nelle prime 3 mi serviva sapere la loro età, conoscenze pregresse date dalle superiori, occupazione attuale e i loro pareri su Genshin Impact come strumento di acquisizione di vocabolari stranieri e su altre tematiche affrontate insieme fino ad ora; nell'ultima parte ho proposto un test di traduzione di 30 termini provenienti da Genshin Impact (termini dal livello A1 al livello C2): 15 dall'inglese all'italiano e viceversa. Le risposte erano sia chiuse che aperte, per valutare se la struttura di alcuni vocaboli sia stata effettivamente sedimentata nella mente dei giocatori. I risultati del questionario, a mio avviso, sono stati sorprendenti. Non solo la percentuale di errori tra i vari test è stata molto bassa, ma si è visto come in alcuni casi, persone che dovrebbero possedere una conoscenza minore della lingua inglese abbiano surclassato i test di alcuni studenti di lingue. Sembra inoltre che il tempo giornaliero passato a giocare a Genshin non abbia influito più di tanto i risultati finali mentre, d'altro canto, ciò che è stato determinante in quasi tutti i casi è da quanti anni i partecipanti giocano a Genshin Impact. In aggiunta, tutti e 10 gli intervistati consiglierebbero Genshin Impact come strumento per l'acquisizione passiva di termini in una seconda lingua, mentre il 90% di questi ultimi afferma che Genshin abbia effettivamente ampliato il loro bagaglio linguistico grazie alle ripetizioni e ai dialoghi dei vari personaggi. Inoltre, un'altra sorprendente rivelazione è avvenuta parlando dello stato di ansia provato davanti ad un insegnante in quanto, se nel 50% dei casi i partecipanti hanno indicato un livello medio-alto, il restante 50% ha indicato il contrario. Spero che la presente possa servire a molti studiosi nel futuro, affinché possano ulteriormente supportare gli effetti benefici che i videogiochi possono apportare in contesti come l'acquisizione di una seconda lingua. Mi farebbe piacere inoltre, che anche gli insegnanti di lingua possano valutare l'idea di consigliare questi tipi di videogiochi per l'acquisizione di nuovi vocaboli, stimolando interesse e concentrazione.