

LUDOLOGY AS GAME RESEARCH IN LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY STUDIES

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1. The origin of *ludology*

The term *ludology* is a neologism resulting from the combination of two words, one derived from the Latin word *ludus* (*ludere*) – ‘to play’ which was used in ancient Rome to cover the entire, large area of games and playing, and the other – Greek word – *logos* referring to reason and science. At the same time another term existed in Latin – *iocus* (*iocari*) – however, referring to a much narrower sphere of jokes and mischief. Yet, surprisingly, it is the latter that with time expanded its meaning to ‘play’ and ‘to play’ and was transferred to Romance languages and transformed into the contemporary *jeu* (*jouer*) in French, *giuoco* (*giocare*) in Italian, *juego* (*jugar*) in Spanish, *jogo* (*jogar*) in Portuguese and *joc* (*juca*) in Romanian¹. Incidentally, many European languages do not distinguish between ‘play’ and ‘game’, thus, there is one word – *Spiel* – for both in German, *spel* in Dutch, *igra* in Russian and – as mentioned above – *jeu* in French. Moreover, even if there are two separate words like in English or Polish *zabawa* (for play) and *gra* (for a game) their semantic fields are not always identical (cross-linguistically). Moreover, the meanings of both terms often overlap even within the same language causing misunderstandings among researchers within a single language, let alone across languages. Therefore, in the literature of cultural studies, psychology, sociology or pedagogy both terms coexist and very often are used interchangeably without defining either of them, in spite of numerous attempts from the perspectives of multiple disciplines². The famous Dutch historian and cultural-researcher Johan Huizinga in his classic work *Homo Ludens* (written in 1938) coined the title term (playing man/man at playing) to be complimentary to *homo faber* (creative man) after the original *homo sapiens* (thinking man) had turned out to be not suitable enough to humanity. Huizinga justified that *homo faber* was even less accurate than *homo sapiens* as many

¹ Examples after Siek-Piskozub 1995, 2001.

² To mention the most eminent researchers: J. Huizinga (1985), R. Caillois (1973), Abt (1968), D. B. Elkonin (1978), B. Sułkowski (1984), F. Znaniecki (1974), W. Okoń (1995), Piasecki (1922).

animals are also *faber*, and what refers to creativity refers also to play. He claimed that human culture is created and develops in play and as play. The very term *ludology*, in turn, which, as might be supposed, would describe the science of games and/or play research, was first used in the context of research into computer games/videogames (or broadly speaking digital games) only. Indeed, it was used by Gonzalo Frasca³ (1999) with the intention “to describe a yet non-existent discipline that would focus on the study of game in general and videogames in particular” (Frasca 2003: 2). However, according to another famous games researcher Jesper Juul, the term had been used as early as in 1982, albeit rarely and with a different meaning. Finally, the term *ludologist* was first encountered in 2001 at the DAC⁴ conference held at Brown University and was applied to Markku Eskelinen, Jesper Juul, Gonzalo Frasca and Espen Aarseth, though, it had never been used by the last one in any of his writings. Apart from that, the term has been applied to the crew of *Game studies* journal composed mainly of the same people mentioned above. Other game researchers such as Aki Järvinen⁵ also define themselves as ludologists. Besides, the word *ludologist* has been popularised by the research weblogs ‘The Ludologist’ by J. Juul and ‘Ludology.org’ by G. Frasca.

2. The status of ludology as an academic discipline

Unfortunately, contrary to Frasca’s claim (2003) concerning ludology as the study of games in general and videogames in particular, the writings of the aforementioned scholars concentrate on computer game research exclusively or to a significant extent and their papers are read mainly at conferences typically organized by computer research associations such as DiGRA⁶. The only exception to the current trend seems to be represented by Aki

³ Gonzalo Frasca is a Uruguayan computer game designer, developer, researcher and entrepreneur. His game studies evolved from the work of the Norwegian games academic Espen J. Aarseth. Beginning in December 2004, Frasca studied games at the Center for Computer Games Research at the IT University of Copenhagen. He received his PhD in videogames studies in August 2007 and established Powerful Robot Games, a videogame studio in Montevideo. In video game theory, Frasca belongs to the group of so called “ludologists” who consider video games to be simulations based on rules. They see video games as the first simulational media for the masses – which means a paradigm shift in media consumption and production. His weblog, ‘Ludology.org’, is an important publication for academic researchers studying video games (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gonzalo_Frasca, http://www.ludology.org/about_gonzalo_frasca.html)

⁴ Digital Arts and Culture conference, April 26-28, 2001, Providence, Rhode Island.

⁵ Aki Järvinen PhD title: “Games without Frontiers: Theories and Methods for Game Studies and Design” 2007, Helsinki, Finland. He also runs a weblog under the same title: <http://www.gameswithoutfrontiers.net>.

⁶ The Digital Games Research Association formally established in 2003 and registered in Finland is a non-profit organisation and an association for academics and professionals who carry out research into digital games and associated phenomena. It encourages high-quality research on games, and promotes collaboration and dissemination of work by its members. (from <http://www.digra.org>). The first president of DiGRA was professor Frans Mäyrä, followed by professor Tanya Krzywinska in 2006. Papers from DiGRA conferences: “Computer games and digital cultures” (2002 June 6-8, Tampere, Finland, <http://www.informatik.uni-trier.de/~ley/db/conf/digra/cgdc2002.html>); “Level Up” (2003 November 4-6, Utrecht, the Netherlands <http://www.gamesconference.org/digra2003>); “Changing views: worlds in play” (2005 June 17-20, Vancouver, Canada <http://www.gamesconference.org/digra2005/overview.php>); “Situated play” (2007 September 24-28, Tokyo, Japan <http://www.digra2007.jp>) are available in the DiGRA digital library: <http://www.digra.org/dl>.

Järvinen whose doctoral dissertation “Games without Frontiers: Theories and Methods for Game Studies and Design” (2007) can indeed be called a milestone, or at least a solid starting point and a significant contribution to further discussion on ludological theory and methodology, or, as the author calls it himself, applied ludology. However, Järvinen is, again, first of all, like the other scholars, a computer game designer and IT specialist, nevertheless, he managed to refer in his PhD to different disciplines compiling a substantial interdisciplinary theoretical work which might be called a ludological one. However, in an effort to build the foundations of the area of ludology it is essential to take into consideration all kinds of games (including parlour games, board games, card games, computer/video/digital games, sports etc.) – to simplify matters the author of this article suggests a distinction into **digital** and **non-digital** games – with all their elements, aspects and contexts, otherwise any methodology thus created would not be reliable or useful. At the same time Frasca’s statement that ludology must not be appropriated by any other existing discipline is absolutely correct.

Ludology, in aspiring to become an independent academic discipline must fulfill – like any other discipline – specific, basic methodological conditions as even academic status does not automatically make a discipline a researchable one. These are: 1. a defined area of research, 2. defined aims of research 3. research methodology (Pfeiffer 2001). By the same token, the subject of ludological research should not be reducible to other disciplines. Like glottodidactics and many other contemporary disciplines it has an interdisciplinary character. Its interdisciplinarity is reflected by the multiplicity of disciplines represented by the members of PTBG. However, it goes beyond the interdisciplinarity of others as it results from the interrelation of, frequently shared fields of study in the humanities, social sciences and sciences. In connection with this some basic questions arise: *Is it possible and necessary to create a separate methodology for game research?* and then *Can ludology grow out of theories worked out by the humanities and social sciences exclusively?* These questions have been proposed by the organizational committee of the PTBG’s cycle of annual conferences titled “Culture-generative function of games”, and the aim of the cycle is, among others, an attempt to find answers to them and encourage further discussion.

In the case of ludology in the shape perceived by PTBG and its exceptional interdisciplinarity creating a common methodology for game research seems to be an extremely difficult task. A possible solution might be applying a deliberately flexible combination of a selection of methodologies conditioned by the aim, level and character of the research and adjusted to the subject of the research or, in specific cases, application of a compilation of methods borrowed from individual disciplines⁷. Simultaneously, there should be specified and separated pure theories, realizing cognitive aims, and applied theories realizing pragmatic aims.

⁷ One method can be action research (Burns 1999; Cohen, Manion 1994; Nunan 1992; McKernan 1996) applied by the author in his ludological research in foreign language pedagogy (Surdyk 2003).

2.1. Ludological associations

Obviously, the foundations of ludology, taxonomy, classification and terminology introduced and provided by the ‘founding fathers’ of the discipline – Huizinga and Caillois – are of critical importance, however, the civilization and cultural progress and rapid development of modern technologies and new media have created the need to update them and adjust them to the reality of our times in order for them to be applicable to all types of games – digital and non-digital without disregarding neither of the types. Creating fundamental basics of a newly emerging academic discipline is an enormous challenge for a single scientist. This makes Järvinen’s attempt in his dissertation even more worthy of appreciation. This is why larger associations gathering scholars of various disciplines are being created to work on the foundations of ludology as an independent science, although there might appear some doubts as to their perception of the scope of the discipline. One such association is DiGRA – a relatively homogenous one as far as the professions of its members are concerned – dominated mainly by media and computer games researchers, computing and IT specialists, game designers, engineers and other representatives of sciences. As can be found on the official website concerning the basic information about the association, its nature and aims:

Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) is

*a non-profit, international association dedicated to the study of digital games
a network for academics and practitioners whose work focuses on digital games and associated activities.*

DiGRA is an interdisciplinary association:

DiGRA proposes that game theory should both be informed by, and inform, contemporary game development, production and retail.

The association promotes collaboration between academic and other research institutions, as well as with commercial organisations, trade associations, independent members of the games industry and policy makers.

Interdisciplinary Agenda

DiGRA aims to support and promote the academic study of digital games and develop its recognition as a field of enquiry with, and raising, distinct questions relating to:

*theory and aesthetics of games and gaming
gaming and information technologies
production, demand and consumption of games
social, political and ethical issues related to digital games and gaming
interactive media, gaming cultures and globalization processes, among others.*

Serving the Needs of the Research Community

The association encourages high-quality research on digital games and promotes the dissemination of work by its members through research, development, commercial, practitioner and policy communities, networks and organizations. Practical means of achieving this will include:

*annual conference: see www.gamesconference.org
online resources: www.digra.org – including now the new Digital Library
support for other events and digital games research activities.” ([www.digra.org/digrainfo/
document_view](http://www.digra.org/digrainfo/document_view))*

Another non-profit academic association dealing with game research is Polskie Towarzystwo Badania Gier (Eng. Games Research Association of Poland) which is more heterogeneous, even bewildering when it comes to the professions of its members. Among the members of PTBG (GRAP)⁸ and guests of the association’s annual conferences⁹ on the cycle “Culture-generative function of games” there are media experts, glottodidactic (foreign language pedagogy) experts, linguists, theorists of literature, historians, philosophers, cultural researchers, sociologists, psychologists and psychiatrists, pedagogues, computer experts, economy experts, lawyers, game authors, journalists and representatives of other disciplines, including the sciences.

PTBG is the first academic ludological society in Poland. It gathers scholars and students of numerous universities, different specializations (linguistics, theory of literature, sociology, psychology, philosophy, history, economy, computing, and other sciences and arts) and professions, as well as practitioners – game players and game designers, dealing with broadly perceived game issues especially Role-Playing Games and computer games.

The aim of the association is to popularise and develop knowledge of games, both in theoretical (interdisciplinary, as well as from the point of view of particular disciplines) and practical (creating and distributing games; didactic applications) perspective. Games Research Association of Poland has an ambition for its members to establish valuable scholarly theoretical assumptions and introduce innovative practical solutions. The association organises – alone and through cooperation with academic institutions – meetings, conventions, conferences, workshops, courses, trainings and other enterprises related to games research.

Its intention is to popularise and publish ludological academic works written in Poland. PTBG propagates the idea of games as a form of creative use of time, intends to present proposals concerning application of games in didactics and pedagogy to the Ministry of Education and raises interest in games via different media including the internet. The association also takes a stand in public matters related to games. It is planning to cooperate with similar scientific/scholarly societies, organisations and institutions in Poland and abroad. (www.PTBG.org.pl)

⁸ Among the leading contemporary Polish ludologists the online scientific Encyclopedia *Epistema* mentions J. Szeja, M. Filiciak, A. Surdyk, J. Stasienko and P. Sitarski (<http://wiedzaiedukacja.pl/archives/86>).

⁹ Formally established in 2005 with headquarters in Poznań, Poland. The first and current President is dr Jerzy Szeja. So far there have been three PTBG conferences organised: I. “The game as a medium, text and ritual” (Poznań, November 19-20, 2005: www.gry2005.konferencja.org); II. “Game in the Education, Media and Society” (Poznań, November 25–26, 2006: www.gry2006.konferencja.org); III. “The Civilization of Fun and Games or the Fun and Games of Civilization? The Role of Games in Contemporary Culture” (Poznań, November 24–25, 2007: www.gry2007.konferencja.org). Forthcoming: IV. “The 21st Century - the Century of Games? The Usefulness of Games in Exploring and Shaping of Social Phenomena” (Poznań, November 22–23, 2008: www.gry.konferencja.org).

The idea binding scholars from so many disciplines is the common interest in researching broadly perceived games in numerous aspects, from many scientific perspectives and their application in education (including glottodidactics and distance learning/e-learning). Ludology as a science dealing with games research in human life is a young discipline, therefore it is relatively difficult to find scholars researching games as purely ludic phenomena, hence the interdisciplinarity of the association and integration of different academic circles. Above all, however, it must be emphasised that the dominant aims of PTBG specified in its status lie in the educational sphere.

2.2. *Game studies in language pedagogy*

Gonzalo Frasca in his article (2003) presented the origin, analysed and tried to explain and ridicule the misunderstanding of the alleged narrativists vs. ludologists conflict or the so called ludology/narratology debate in which some ‘radical’ ludologists were supposed to have accused narrativists of attempts to appropriate game research for their own discipline and therefore tried to discard the narrative from game studies once and for all.

This makes one wonder what the so-called radicals would say to the interdisciplinarity of the members of PTBG and their conferences. One of the largest professional groups of guests of PTBG’s annual conferences (apart from cultural and media researchers, sociologists and psychologists) are linguists interested in the use of linguistic and communicative games and other ludic techniques¹⁰ as tools for teaching foreign languages (especially English and German) and digital (also online) educational games as a valuable representative of new media in teaching foreign languages, but also interested in games in general (digital and non-digital) e.g. as media of communication or in analysing communication channels in games etc. from a pragmalinguistic perspective.

A practical example of the application of the assumptions of autonomisation in foreign language didactics¹¹ might be the innovative, communicative Technique of Role-Playing Games. The idea of the TRPG has been borrowed by the author from popular parlour games – *Role-playing games (RPG)* and adapted to the conditions and needs of academic didactics. The elements of game, play and simulations incorporated in it allow it to be included among ludic techniques (Surdyk 2003). In FL didactics it is closest to the technique of role-play (Ger.: *Rollenspiele*; eg.: Goethals 1977, Ladousse 1987, Livingstone 1983, Hadfield 1987, Littlewood 1994, Siek-Piskozub 1995, 2001) which is familiar and described in the literature on the subject. So in short TRPG can be considered a variety of role-play developed to a narrative form. Although it has to be mentioned that there are some significant and unique elements differentiating TRPG from role-play and making it more efficient and involving for the students, which have been described in detail in other works (Surdyk 2002, 2003, 2006a, 2007b):

- longer timing of the tasks (over 30 mins as opposed to usually a few minutes in role-play);

¹⁰ The terms ‘ludic strategy’ and ‘ludic techniques’, comprising simulation, game, play (including music) and intermediate forms were introduced by Siek-Piskozub (1995, 2001).

¹¹ See: Benson, Voller 1997; Wilczyńska 2002a.

- increased number of participants (up to 12 or more compared to the usual 2 in typical role-play);
- higher complexity of the form of the tasks (among others – polylogues and discussions instead of the more usual dialogues in role-play);
- changeable and flexible time and place of action (static as well as dynamic plots as opposed to static ones only in role-play);
- content of the tasks allowing greater degree of creativity and broader use of imagination;
- preparation of a scenario and additional linguistic/lexical material by a student ‘**game master**’ (a crucial session-leading participant, nonexistent in simple role-play) with possible teacher consultations before the session, and realisation entirely in the hands of the students;
- voluntary character of interactions and a non-participant teacher, which results in reduction of the level of stress;
- varied style and register of interactions conditioned by the type of discourse (from casual to academic);
- self-correction of mistakes made by the students (recording analysis) and additional correction and feedback with correction materials provided by the teacher after the session.

It is also narrative¹² role-playing games which are the best example of how many different scientific perspectives a single type of game can be researched from. Thus, a theorist of literature may be interested in the content of the story told (whether in the written or oral form of a recording), the manual, scenario as text etc., literary inspirations and borrowings in them, intertextualism etc. A linguist may be interested in the language of the manual, session, the specific jargon of the players (as in any other social group), communication among players, communication between players and the leading person, among their characters, between their characters and the non-player characters etc. A sociologist might be interested in social phenomena and processes concerning both players and their characters or even the world presented. A psychologist might be interested in the subject of identification of the player with the character, attitudes of particular characters, reasons and kinds of choices made etc. In this way representatives of the other disciplines attending PTBG conferences could also be enumerated¹³.

This, however, is not another symptom of any imperialist/colonialist tendencies of the researchers but quite the opposite – it is evidence that in the field of game research there is room for any scholar of any origin. And it depends entirely on them (linguists, narrativists,

¹² Szeja (2004) proposes the term Narrative Role-playing Games (Pl.: *narracyjne gry fabularne - NGF*) – played with no computers - to draw a distinction between classic RPGs (so called table-top RPGs) from other varieties of this genre, like Computer Role-Playing Games (cRPG) which appeared much later than the first and most famous system “Dungeons and Dragons”. A definition of classical (narrative) RPG was proposed by the author in Surdyk 2006.

¹³ See conference papers from PTBG conferences: Surdyk 2007a; Surdyk, Szeja 2007; Surdyk, Szeja 2008a; Surdyk, Szeja 2008b.

cultural-researchers, sociologists, psychologists, etc.) whether, because of their interest in games, they would call themselves ludologists or not. However, one could say that, whether they want to or not, by researching games they become game researchers and by the same token – ludologists as the two are synonymous. The simple fact is that no one should deny their roots in other disciplines, and no one, as yet, has their roots in the discipline of ludology. It is all of us, together who are creating it.

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LUDOLOGIE ALS SPIELFORSCHUNG – ANGEWANDT IN DER FREMDSPRACHENDIDAKTIK

Augustyn Surdyk

Zusammenfassung

Das Ziel des Artikels ist die Präsentation der grundlegenden Voraussetzungen der Ludologie, die sich mit der Erforschung von Spielen und ihrer Anwendung im Fremdsprachenunterricht und in der angewandten Linguistik beschäftigt.

Diese Wissenschaftsdisziplin wird in Polen durch die landesweit erste ludologische Gesellschaft vertreten und gefördert („Polnische Gesellschaft zur Spielforschung“). Das Ziel der Gesellschaft ist es, Wissen über Spiele, sowohl in theoretischer als auch in praktischer Form zu entwickeln und zu vermitteln. Die Gesellschaft vereint Wissenschaftler und Studierende zahlreicher Universitäten, die verschiedene Disziplinen vertreten (Sprachwissenschaftler, Literaturwissenschaftler, Kulturwissenschaftler, Soziologen, Psychologen, Philosophen, Historiker, Ökonomen, Informatiker und Vertreter anderer exakter wie auch humanistischer Disziplinen sowie Spieler und Schöpfer der Spiele, welche sich mit Spielthemen in einem weiten Sinn beschäftigen, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der role-playing games und der Computerspiele. Doch im Gegensatz zur Digital Games Research Association beschränkt sich das Objekt der wissenschaftlichen Interessen der Mitglieder der Polnischen Gesellschaft zur Spielforschung nicht ausschließlich auf die Computerspiele.

Der Artikel präsentiert ein ausgezeichnetes Beispiel narrativer role-playing games als einen Typ von Spielen, die den Gegenstand interdisziplinärer Forschungen im Rahmen der Ludologie bilden könnten. Die Darstellung bietet gleichzeitig ein Beispiel der vom Autor im Fremdsprachenunterricht als innovativ angewandten Technik der „Role-Playing Games“ (RPG).

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