

Is the avatar considered as a participant by the players? A conversational analysis of multi-player videogames interactions

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ABSTRACT

Videogame interactions show a rather complex participation framework: players interact with present or absent players in and out of the game, directly or by avatars. The avatar, as fictional character which a player embodies in the videogame, has a central position: it is only through him and his actions that the player can act in the game. We therefore propose to question in detail the place the players of videogames give to the avatars. We will focus particularly on the organization of turn-taking in a complex and dynamic activity (Mondada, 2013), in which the participants constantly address their co-players as well as the different avatars in the game played by themselves. The space itself is constantly changing because the game goes on constantly. Our study is based on a collection of extracts from four French videogame interactions.

The analysis revealed a particular form of turn-taking in videogame interactions (Colón de Carvajal, 2011; Piirainen-Marsh & Tainio, 2009), where the switch of turns of speech is highly dependent on the actions in the virtual world of the videogame. Thus, we have identified four forms of exchange as if a turn or action (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004) is addressed to: a) a player, b) an avatar, c) a player and his avatar together, and d) an unclear referent.

Keywords: *videogame interactions, participation framework, avatar, player, actions, addressing, technology implication, objects role.*

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1. Introduction

Videogame sessions represent a particular kind of interactions where gaming is the prior action and where the talk is organized depending on the game (Baldauf-Quilliatre, 2014a, Mondada, 2012). The principal action is deeply related to a) acting by the use

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of objects (game figures, cards, avatars etc.) and b) acting on a digital screen. Multiplayer videogames therefore rise up questions like: “Who acts on the screen, the player or the avatar?” “Who speaks in the game, the player or the avatar?” and “Who can or who is authorized to do what at which moment?”.

The videogame sessions represent a rather complex participation framework (Goffman, 1981) where the players interact with present or absent players in and out of the game, directly or by avatars (Mondada, 2012). Turn-taking is highly dependent on the actions in the virtual world of the videogame (Pirainen-Marsh & Tainio, 2009). Specific actions raise the question about the place and the role given to the avatar in the participation framework as explain Keating & Sunakawa (2010: 338): “Space and action on and offscreen must be managed, including how tactility or the use of a keyboard or mouse with one’s hands can “translate” into action in another space or another modality”.

The avatar, as fictional character which a player embodies in the videogame, has a central position (Colón de Carvajal, 2015, forthcoming) - it is only through him and his actions that the player can act in the game. At the same time, the avatar is strongly related to the player but not (or at least not always) identically with him. He is addressed, for instance, with specific nominal forms of address, i.e. pronouns, name or surname etc. (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2010).

From these various observations, we have realized an interactional and multimodal analysis in order to investigate: (1) What is the place given to the avatars by the players of videogames? (2) Who is considered as a participant in the interactions: The player? The avatar? Both? Our study aims not only to describe and explain the participation framework through the turn-taking system in videogame interactions, but to ask if the avatar is considered as a participant by the players themselves. Insofar it is related to other analyses of different kinds of objects and their role in interaction on the one hand (Nevile & al., 2014) and to interactions through / based on / implicating technology on the other hand.

In this paper we focus on address (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2010) and, in a more conversation analytic approach, on recipient design (Sacks & al., 1974, for an overview on recent research see Deppermann, 2015). By analyzing four videogame interactions, we have observed several constellations of addressing which are related to different considerations of the avatar. Indeed, the player can address their turns or actions (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004): 1) to another player; 2) to an avatar (in this case to his own avatar or to the avatar of another player); 3) simultaneously to another

player and his avatar and 4) to a non-specified referent (in this case, nothing, neither in the verbal nor in the non-verbal or game actions of the participants, allows to determine the addressee). These different constellations bring us to the question under which circumstances player and avatar are clearly separated and when they may form a sort of hybrid and, most of all, what are the consequences for the participation framework. Our study therefore draws on previous works about video gaming and, moreover, on sequence structure in videogame interactions (Spagnolli & al., 2008; Mondada, 2012).

To illustrate some possible constellations of address, we propose an analysis of four excerpts. After a presentation of the data, we look, first, on three short excerpts. We will then analyze in detail a fourth and long example, which is more complex and gives evidence of the different constellations and their close connection.

2. Data

The study uses the data of two projects lead by members of the research lab “Interactions: Situations, Practices and Tools” at the ICAR Laboratory¹:

Two video game sessions were recorded within a project funded by ILF-DGLF (2007-2008) concerning the description of “Youth Language” that focused on the language of young people in leisure activity (Colón de Carvajal, 2011). In this paper, we use one of the sessions, entitled Foot_Lyon. It is a game session where two players and two spectators ahead one screen play first during one hour a soccer game FIFA 08 (Electronic Arts, 2007) on PlayStation and then, during about 20 minutes, a car rising game. The extract analyzed below is drawn from the soccer game². In this game, the players play together in one team against an adversary team via Internet. Within their team, they change continuously the avatar they move. During the whole game session the participants change several times the roles of player and spectator.

The session has been recorded with three cameras: two cameras have been placed towards the players, and one camera towards the screen. The game session of the adversary team (players and screen) has not been recorded and we have no information about the opponent players.

¹ Webpage of the research lab: <http://icar.univ-lyon2.fr/pages/equipe1.htm>

² For analysis of soccer game sessions see Mondada (2012, 2013), Colon de Carvajal (2011), Baldauf-Quilliatre (2014a, 2014b)

The other game sessions analyzed here have been recorded within the “Ludespace” project funded by the ANR program “Young Researchers” (2011-2014)³. In this pluridisciplinary project with researchers from geography, sociology, education sciences, philosophy and language sciences, interactions (social, spatial, bodily and linguistic) between players of different types of videogames, and between players and the console have been considered (Boutet & al., 2014; Colón de Carvajal, 2013). The project provides an overview and a mapping of video games practices in France according to four issues: a) The player’s diversity: who plays? b) The player’s practices: where and on which spatial configuration? c) The games activities, the games commitments: how play the gamers? d) The interactions, the nature of exchanges (between players; between players/soles) in the time and space of the game. The studies are based on a national survey, semi-structured interviews and audiovisual recording of natural videogame interactions.

In this paper, we draw on two of the recorded videogame sessions. The first videogame session is entitled “Mario” and includes four players in front of one screen. They all play together *New Super Mario Bros*⁴ (Nintendo, 2006) on Wii console, the session lasts one hour thirty. It has been recorded with one camera placed towards the players (Figure 1), and one camera towards the screen.



Figure 1. Videogame session on Wii console.

The second videogame session is entitled “LAN” and includes eight players in front of eight screens in two separate rooms. They are playing *Counter-Strike*⁵ (Sierra Studios, 2000) on networked computers. We have placed one camera in each room, one camera towards a player A and one camera towards his screen, another camera towards a player B and a camera towards his screen. The session lasts five hours in a row without anybody exiting the room (Figure 2).

³ Official webpage of the Project: <http://citeres.univ-tours.fr/spip.php?article1267>; <http://www.agence-nationale-recherche.fr/?Projet=ANR-11-JSH1-0001>

⁴ For researches on Mario games, see among others Cremin, 2012; Newman, 2002, 2002b; Shaker & Shaker, 2014.

⁵ For researches on Counter-Strike games, see among others Rambusch, Jakobsson & Pargman, 2007; Wright, Boria & Breidenbach, 2002.



Figure 2. LAN videogame session on networked computers.

In all settings, the games were selected by the participants which are more or less regular game players. They know the games they are playing, even if they have not played it for a while before the recording.

The positioning of the players in the game space will be explained in detail in the analyzed extracts.

The interaction of the players has been transcribed according to ICOR conventions (http://icar.univ-lyon2.fr/projets/corinte/documents/2013_Conv_ICOR_250313.pdf, see section 7) and translated into English (in red). Actions of an avatar in the game or other significant nonverbal actions of the game players are described in italic (in red).

3. Analysis

In the following section we focus on three different types of address: First we consider an excerpt where the player addresses his turn to his own avatar. We will argue that the player thereby on the one hand constructs a para-social interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956) with his avatar and on the other rejects the responsibility for the avatar's actions in the game (3.1). Second we discuss two excerpts where the player addresses his turns either to another player or simultaneously to avatar and player. In this part we show that there can be an identification of player and avatar, especially when the turn concerns actions which are realized by the avatar. In contrast, turns expressing actions which can be accomplished only by the player, which need an overview over the game or which are related to strategic considerations are generally

addressed only to the player (3.2). Third we show one complex example where the ambiguity of address leads to misunderstanding and negative consequences in the game. The analysis will reveal that the lack of explicit address in a complex multiplayer game is due to different perspectives and interpretations. The use of the deictic pronouns may be very useful (as we illustrate in 3.2), but it may also be problematic (as will be pointed out in 3.3).

3.1 Turns addressed to the own avatar

In the first example the player Tom encourages his own avatar to run faster to catch up an adversary. The extract involves Tom and the spectator Jos (Figure 3).

Excerpt 1. Foot_Lyon



Figure 3. Screenshot of avatar Tom (white) following avatar adversary (black).

- 01 (0.7)
avatar adv. goes goalwards, followed by avatar T
- 02 TOM aïe *[vas y cours/] cours/ cours/ cours/
aïe *[go on run/] run/ run/ run/
*((figure 3: screenshot))
- 03 JOS [il est parti]
[he is gone]
- 04 (0.5)
avatar adv. passes ball to a team member
- 05 JOS ((rire))
((laughs))
- 06 TOM eh i`s savent pas courir ces pélos\

eh they can't run these dudes

Click on this video link to play the excerpt 1.

The sequence starts with a negative game constellation for the players' team: an avatar adverse has taken the ball from an avatar of Tom who was close to the adversary goal (line 1). Tom's avatar pursues him but does not take the field. In this moment, the player Tom encourages his own avatar to go faster ("vas y cours cours cours cours", line 2) while the spectator Jos simultaneously states that it is not worth the effort (line 3): the adversary is already gone (too far away). The avatar adverse then passes indeed the ball to a team member and outside the reach of T's avatar (line 4). Jos closes the sequence by laughing: he was right, Tom's avatar did not get the ball back in order to score and the avatars of the adversary team move the ball now away from their goal and attack Tom's team.

In this small example, Tom takes the role of the spectator who looks at what happens on the screen: he addresses his turn to the fictional character as if he could interact with him. This type of interaction has been first described for interaction with persona on television by Horton & Wohl (1956) as "parasocial interaction" and later on specified as "social para-interaction" (e.g. Ayass, 1993). But in contrast to the para-interaction between spectator and actor, Tom is himself moving his avatar who cannot decide on his own if he runs faster or not. Tom is therefore simultaneously spectator and actor. But the player can only act within the limits of the game: Tom can't make running his avatar as fast as he wants to.

However, in this excerpt, the avatar is constructed as participant, Tom's encouragement is not self-addressed: it occurs directly after a vocalization displaying a certain impatience ("aïe", line 2 – it is not the response cry "ouch"), he uses for instance the second person ("vas y cours") and fixes his avatar by gaze (Baldauf-Quilliatre, 2014b). Encouraging in collective sports is not yet very well described. It is all the most mentioned as action realized by spectators or coaches (Burkhardt, 2009; Schilling, 2001). By constructing the avatar as participant who has to be encouraged, Tom takes the role of the spectator and therefore does not assume the responsibility⁶ of the avatar's actions. This rejection of responsibility is confirmed by the reproach "i's savent pas courir" (line 6): He is not responsible for the insufficient tempo of the avatar. The reproach could be attributed either to the avatars as "independent participants" who do not run as fast as necessary or to the affordances of the game

⁶ We refer here to the analysis of agency (see Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2002; de Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012).

which does not allow to move the avatars faster. The encouragement, however, seems to attribute the responsibility to the avatar. Though he has been encouraged, he didn't run fast enough to stop the adversary.

At the same time, Tom constructs the situation as “playful game playing” by acting as if he is a spectator and the avatar somebody moving on his own. Despite a strong orientation of all four participants to the screen (side-by-side positioning of the two players, the two spectators are sitting behind them, gaze focused on the screen etc.), he therefore creates a category of “them” (the avatars) which is observed, assessed, criticized, encouraged by the four boys who become in this way spectators and who can, as spectators, spend time together by watching “the others”.

3.2 Turns addressed to another player (and his avatar)

In this section, we present two examples in which the players address their turns to another player. The examples come from the Mario game session with four players sitting in front of the same screen. Each player has an avatar differentiated by a color: red, green, yellow or blue.

In example (2) one player addresses another player explicitly by his surname.

Excerpt 2. Mario

```
1 DOM   et [euh:: le jaune ] [t` arrêtes d'avancer/ s` te plaît\]
        and [euh:: the yellow] [stop moving on/           please\ ]
2 VER   [xx           ]
3 LEA           [véro/ va moins vite/ °véro va           ]
        [vero/ not as fast/ °vero not           ]
4       moins vite\°
        as fast
5       (0.3)
6 LUC   ah ben ça y est// mort/
        oh well that's it// dead/
```

Click on this video link to play the excerpt 2.

Dominique addresses an instruction to another player (line 1): the yellow (avatar) should stop moving. This instruction is constructed as directly addressed to the avatar (“euh:: le jaune”). In line 3-4 Lea expresses the same instruction, but this time directly addressed to the player of the yellow avatar (“véro/ va moins vite”). The first instruction seems to be similar to extract 1: the avatar is named (“le jaune”) and addressed in the

second person sg. (“t’ arrêtes d’avancer”). But while Tom in extract 1 positions himself as spectator who dissociates himself from the avatar’s actions, Dom asks somebody to act in the game. And therefore one needs the avatar as game character and the player as the person who moves the avatar. The two address forms in this extract show the ambiguity of the framework: the avatar acts in the game (“t’ arrêtes d’avancer”), the player moves the avatar and thus decides about the avatar’s actions (“véro va moins vite”). The player Véro and the yellow avatar are therefore considered as directly related to each other; and as game player, Véro knows that every remark about her avatar’s actions in the game concerns also herself as the player who moves him.

Whereas the designation by the color (“le jaune”) allows the players easily to recognize the avatar’s player and insofar to identify to whom the instruction has been addressed, an address where the avatar is designated in the third person is much more complicated. The example (3) occurs 4 minutes 15 seconds before extract 2.

Excerpt 3. Mario

- 1 LEA le p`tit jaune/ c'est qui\ là
 the little yellow/ who's that\
2 VER c'est moi\
 it's me
3 (0.5)
4 DOM hey::\ i` marche sur la tête des autres/
 hey::\ he walks on the head of the others
5 (1.0)
6 DOM ben vas à gauche/
 well go left
7 (0.8)
8 VER ouais
 yeah

Click on this video link to play the excerpt 3.

Lea tries to identify the player of the yellow avatar (line 1). Her turn projects an answer either from the player itself or from another player who might inform her. In her question Lea brings up first the identified avatar (“le petit jaune”) and asks then, which player is embodied by this avatar (“c’est qui”). The final “là” re-centres the focus to the screen and the game by situating vaguely the avatar. The turn construction shows that Lea links directly the avatar to a player. Véro’s answer in line 2 confirms the direct linking between player and avatar: she reuses Lea’s formulation and thus states that

she “is” the yellow avatar (“c’est moi”). We want to draw a particular attention on the choice of the verb: The avatar is not presented as played by, moved by or representing a player. The verb “être” (“to be”) suggests instead identification of player and avatar. After this adjacency pair Dom makes relevant an action of the yellow avatar (“hey i’ marche sur la tête des autres”, line 4). Even if the avatar is no longer doing so, Dom presents the action as ongoing or recurrent one by using the present tense. Additionally, he introduces his turn with a vocalization indicating the speaker’s negative stance. The turn can be understood as “potential complaint” (Traverso, 2009: 2389): Dom states that this avatar is doing something wrong (like “walking on the head of others”). It is the avatar who is presented as the one who is acting badly. Vero, the player, is not accused directly as responsible. By designating the avatar with the third person (“il”) Dom therefore indicates the player Vero as addressee. But Vero does not do anything, or at least she does not act fast enough. After a long silence of one second, Dom signals that the problem has not been solved. He produces an instruction which is related to the complainable matter announced before (“ben vas à gauche”, *then you will stop walking on the head of the other avatars*). The instruction can be seen as an upgrade of the potential complaint in line 4, not only in terms of action, but also in terms of addressing. The avatar and his player are addressed simultaneously with the imperative form in the second person sg. (“vas”): The avatar has to move left and Vero has to make him move. Vero answers by indicating that she is willing to do so (“ouais”, line 8). The answer indicates that the player Vero considers herself as the addressee. It is not the avatar who responds to the instruction by an action in the game, but one player who tells another player that he acknowledges.

In the two examples we could observe different formats of addressing a turn to another player: by direct addressing with the name (“véro va moins vite”), by identifying the player with the avatar (“vas à gauche”, “le petit jaune c’est qui”) or by addressing the avatar as the character in the game and simultaneously the player as the one who drives him (“le jaune t’ arrêtes d’avancer”). The direct linking of player and avatar is used to attribute or not agency and responsibility (as in excerpt 3, line 4 “i’ marche sur la tête des autres” vs. line 6 “ben vas à gauche”). Sequence analysis have shown that players understand turns as addressed to them as player even if the address terms might be unclear (see Vero’s “ouais”, excerpt 3, line 7). This is nonetheless not always the case. Sometimes, the ambiguity of references will occasion misunderstanding and problems. We want to show this in a very detailed analysis in part 3.

3.3 Problematic addressing

In a last extended example we will analyze different complex address forms. It is an extract of the LAN videogame with three of the eight players playing in the living room on the same table.

Emma, Romain and Dominique are playing the war game *Counter-Strike*. They are sitting together on the same table, everybody using his own computer. For the analysis, we have only access to the screen of Dominique. Emma and Romain are playing in the same team, Dominique is an adversary. The non-explicit and ambiguous references in the interaction of the three players have considerable consequences for the game action.

At the beginning of this excerpt, the participants are oriented to their screens (Figure 4).

Excerpt 4. LAN



Figure 4. Embodied orientation of the players.

- 1 EMM tu vas à droite/ moi j` vais à gauche/
you go right/ me I go left
- 2 (1.1)
- 3 ROM à qui tu parles//
who are you talking to//
- 4 EMM à toi\
to you\
5 EMM j` t'ai vu partir à droite alors °euh:\°
I've seen you going right and °so:\°
- 6 (3.2)
- 7 ROM i`s sont là\ (..) oh// putain:\ ((rire))
they are here\ (..) oh// fuck:\ ((laugh))
- 8 (10.8)
- 9 DOM merde\ attends/ c- mets-toi à droite/ (.)

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    shit\ wait\ I- get down on your right/ (.)
10 DOM fais-le sortir\ fais-le sortir j` te couvre\
    get him out\    get him out    I cover you
11      (1.4)
12 ROM ouah/=
    wouah
13 DOM =voilà//
    that's it//
14      (..)
15 EMM [mais tu sais] tu sais/ qu` vous jouez pas ensemble hein//
    [but you know] you know/ that you don't play together huh//
16 DOM [((rire))      ]
    [((laugh))      ]
17 ROM connard// [<((rire)) (1.1)>] j` croyais qu` c'était à moi qu` tu&
    asshole [((laugh)) (1.1) ] I believed that it was to me that you&
18 DOM          [((rire))      ]
19 ROM &par[lais// ((rire))      ]
    &were talking ((laugh))      ]
20 DOM          [((en riant)) pardon// excuse-moi//]
    [((laughing)) sorry// excuse-me// ]

```

Click on this video link to play the excerpt 4.

The sequence starts with an instruction: Emma addresses to a co-player “tu vas à droite” (line 1). She then announces what she will do with her avatar “moi je vais à gauche”. The two TCU show the identification between player and avatar already discussed before: the deictic pronouns “tu” and “je” refer to speaker and addressee (who discuss here questions about strategy) but it’s the avatar who “goes somewhere” in the setting of the game, that is, he realizes the action. As instruction and consideration of strategy, Emma addresses her turn more likely to her team-member Romain than to Dom.

However, in line 3, Romain marks Emma’s reference as problematic. He asks for precisising the addressing: “à qui tu parles”. Whereas Emma’s instruction is directed to both, avatar and player, Romain’s question is clearly addressed only to a player as to the only one who can talk (in this kind of game).

Emma answers with a self-repair “à toi” (i.e. Romain, line 4) and she explains and justifies her instruction by contextual information (“je t’ai vu partir à droite alors euh:”, line 5) projecting the instruction in order to avoid negative consequences for their

team. Here, again, it is only the player Emma who could see, but the one she saw was the avatar of Romain.

After 3.2 seconds, Romain describes a situation in the game “i’s sont là” (line 7). He therefore draws the attention to a potentially dangerous situation in order that Emma (and her avatar) and he (and his avatar) could prepare themselves. The turn is closed by a swearword and a laugh which construct the worry as less serious. As in the previous sequence, the player Romain can see “them” (the avatars of the opponent team). Follows a very long period of silent gaming (10.8 seconds)⁷ before the participation frame changes and Dominique takes the floor (line 9). It is important to bring to mind that the aim of this game is to kill the avatars of the opponent team. Each player must rapidly identify each avatar to develop after an attack strategies within his own team: Which avatar is team member and therefore supposed to protect or to be protected? Which avatar belongs to the opponent team and represents danger? In the following sequence appears an avatar identified by a shield (Figure 5) who will have a central role in the participation framework.



Figure 5. Selected view of Dominique - the avatar with a shield.

In line 9 Dom produces an instruction (“mets-toi à droite”) prefaced by the announcement of complications (“merde attends”). As in the previous sequence, only the player Dom can overlook the game and “see” eventual complications. Following the constellation in the game, the one who has to go right is the avatar with the shield. The screenshot (Figure 5) shows the selected view of Dom. We see the game world as if we were in his eyes. In this selected view, Dom (and his avatar in the game) see an avatar with a shield in front of him, and on the right, a wall where a third avatar could be hidden. The third avatar could shoot at Dom’s avatar or at the avatar with the

⁷ The parallel interaction between Vincent and a child, both not involved in the game, not visible and not noticed visibly or audibly by the players is not transcribed and taken into account for the analysis.

shield and therefore represents a danger for both of them. But if the avatar with the shield moves to the right, Dom's avatar could shoot on the third avatar and avert the danger. These strategic concerns are relevant for the player who drives the avatar with the shield as well as for the avatar who has to realize the action. In line 10, Dom completes his first instruction by a second one which he repeats: "fais-le sortir fais-le sortir". Again, the player Dom asks the unspecified player who drives the avatar with the shield and his avatar to act in order to get out the potentially hidden avatar. Dom then reassures the avatar with the shield (and his player) that there will not be any danger for them ("j' te couvre", line 10). If it is still the player Dom who speaks, it is Dom's avatar who realizes the action and covers somebody. Dom's TCUs concern again strategy: he is not trying to prevent immediate danger or acts as responses to an immediate opportunity in the game; he draws on possibilities and tries to project strategically wise actions. But at the same time he brings up for the first time his own avatar as somebody going to act in the game. The deictic pronoun "Je" therefore refers to the speaker and player as the person who plans, communicates his plan and takes up the responsibility and to the avatar who actually realizes actions in the game.

At this moment, Romain selects himself as addressee of Dom's instruction. He realizes the action ("fais-le sortir") through his avatar and gets out his avatar who was hidden behind the wall (line 11). But the self-selection was wrong: Romain does not drive the avatar with the shield focused by Dom, he drives the third avatar hidden behind the wall. Consequently, Dom's avatar kills the avatar of Romain. The screenshot (Figure 6) shows the avatar of Romain killed on the floor.



Figure 6. The avatar of Romain killed on the floor.

Dom never explicitly addressed his instructions to a player or an avatar in particular. Only a detailed analysis of the situation in the game allows understanding that the instructions concern the avatar with the shield and the player who drives him. The lack

of explicit address terms and the absence of other address displays (i.e. by gaze) lead to the wrong self-selection.

Romain comments the killing of his avatar with a vocalization indicating a “bad surprise” (“wouah”, line 12): he marks the killing as non-expected and reveals his misunderstanding of the addressee of Dom’s instructions; instead of being covered, his avatar is killed. Dom in contrast states the accomplished action and therefore expresses his satisfaction (“voilà”, line 13).

But now, Emma re-engages in the interaction and points out one crucial point of the misunderstanding (according to her): “tu sais qu’ vous jouez pas ensemble hein” (line 15). In fact, by following Dom’s instructions, Romain indicates that he considers him as team-mate. Emma verbalizes this tacit understanding and debunks it as wrong. The question form marks her understanding of the situation as personal interpretation (maybe Romain was conscious about what he was doing when he got out his avatar in front of an adversary). Emma addresses her turn first to the player Romain to whom she gazes (“tu sais tu sais”): only the player can know who belongs to which team. She then includes the player Dom in her reference (“vous jouez pas ensemble”).

In overlap with the first part of Emma’s turn, Dom laughs and shows that he is satisfied or at least that he considers the situation as amusing. To him, Romain is not complainable. Romain therefore blames Dom to have misbehaved (“connard”) and justifies his own (wrong) strategy: “j’ croyais qu’ c’était à moi qu’ tu parlais” (line 17-19).

From line 14, the participants sort out of the ongoing game (Mondada, 2012) and talk as players about what happened. This is visible through the accomplished actions (questions, justifications), the turn construction (rather well elaborated clausal structures) and bodily features (gazes between the players, change of position, Romain puts his hands behind his head, etc. (Figure 7).

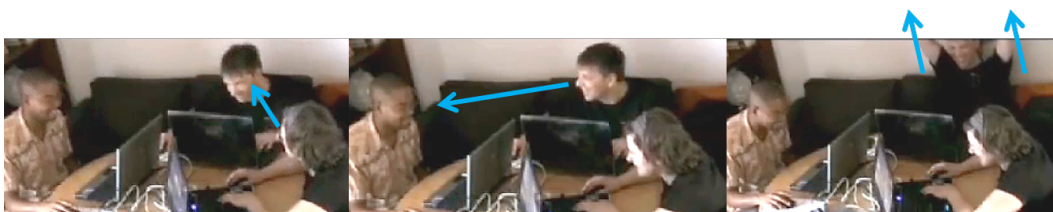


Figure 7. Change of postures and gazes.

In this last excerpt, we could see that the participation frameworks may change very quickly, not only as exchange between different couples of players (Romain and Emma, Romain and Dominique, Romain, Emma and Dominique) or as interaction inside and out of the game (e.g. the change from line 1 to line 3) but as well as instruction addressed simultaneously to an avatar and his player (e.g. line 9) or as

change of the reference and the address during one turn (e.g. line 10). The frequent use of the deictic pronouns “je” (first person sg.) et “tu” / “vous” (second person sg. / pl.) leads in these cases to a vagueness of the address which can be useful to unify player and avatar (as seen in 3.2) but it might also occasion misunderstandings like in this excerpt. These misunderstandings need to be repaired, to be renegotiated. But the players do not always have the time to question, to repair, to discuss their mistakes and to re-negotiate understanding because the game action continues (Mondada, 2013). Therefore, sometimes, misunderstandings are persistent what might affect the following course of the game and/or the interaction.

4. Conclusion

The analyses have shown that the avatar can be considered as real participant by the players on videogames. As television viewers may talk to characters on the television, videogame players can address turns to avatars as if they are “real”. This parasocial interaction has not be confounded with a lost of “sense of reality”, it is a meaningful and functional practice in interaction.

The detailed study of address has also pointed out the emergence of “multiple” identities in videogame interactions: the game player embodies an avatar and represents insofar at the same time the player X and the avatar Y. Avatar and player can sometimes be considered as a hybrid. Turns which are addressed to this hybrid represent instructions, requests, complaints, assessments, action attributions or action assumptions which concern a certain type of actions in the game, based on the affordances of the setting. In the games analysed in this paper, the avatar can *go somewhere*, he can *get out*, he can *cover somebody*. But he is not able to *talk*, to *listen* or to *look at something*. These actions can only be realized by the player himself. Only the player can consider strategies and project actions and its consequences. During the game session, the participants continuously change between turns addressed to the player and turns addressed to the hybrid. Even inside one single turn, the identity of speaker and addressee can change several times (as shown in ex. 4, line 10 “fais-le sortir fais-le sortir j’ te couvre”).

In our data, address terms are rather vague and the participants have to draw on other cues of the recipient design in order to understand to whom the turn has been addressed. Due to the configuration of the interactional space (Mondada, 2005, 2009)

(not face to face, but face to screen and absence of gazes during gaming periods), the ambiguity of the verbal turn is often not clarified by gazes, gestures, body posture etc. (Bilmes, 1975; Holler & Beattie, 2003). This may occasion misunderstandings or errors which are certainly problematic, but they are not “crystallizing” (Traverso, 2004). This may be due to the special situation “game”: The participants consider their actions as “playing”.

All the shifts between different identities imply a shift in the participation frame. However, it is not always the succession of frames one after the other, but more often a superposition, a crossover participation framework in relation with the actions in the ongoing game. Insofar, the participation frames are constantly co-constructed through the players talk and the actions of their avatars in the game.

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8. Transcription conventions

[]	Overlapping talk
/ \	Rising or falling intonation
◦ ◦	Lower voice
:::	Lengthening of the sound or the syllable
p`tit	Elision
trouv-	Truncation
xxx	Incomprehensible syllable
=	Latching
()	Uncertain transcription
(())	Comments

Is the avatar considered as a participant by the players? Conversation Analysis of multi-player interactions

& Turn of the same speaker interrupted by an overlap
(.) Micro-pause
(0.6) Timed pause

