

## Learning and Teaching Languages in 3D Worlds Creating Machinima for Language Teaching

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### **Abstract**

*This presentation will focus on Second Life® (SL) a Multi-User Virtual Environment accessible via the Internet. SL was launched by Linden Lab in 2003 and belongs to the most popular social 3D worlds with a large and highly active educational community. A free client programme enables its users to interact with each other through 'Avatars' via voice and standard text communication tools (chat, IM). An 'avatar' is the graphical representation of a computer user representing himself/herself or his/her alter ego. Recent literature in the field endorses SL as a particularly appropriate platform for the development of oral language proficiency in distance education, collaborative and intercultural learning contexts and vocational training.*

*The machinima provided in this presentation demonstrate how the use of 3D worlds and/or the creation of machinima can enhance language learning.*

*Machinima is a technique for making videos or films from 3D virtual spaces using screen-capture programmes. In machinima the virtual world, its inhabitants and all their actions in it are captured 'on film'. Machinima allow people to document their activities and experiences in virtual worlds.*

*Machinima are very powerful in giving students the opportunity to keep evidence of their creations or activities in a role play and provide food for thought and discussion afterwards. Creating their own scenarios encourages students to practice reporting back from places of virtual worlds visited and analysing their presentation skills when recording their performance. Machinima are also a powerful tool for creative narratives or interviews which could also include real life footage such as Skype and recordings on mobile devices.*

*This presentation provides examples of different genres of machinima such as Narratives, Jokes and Riddles, Interviews, Informative Videos, Language Teaching Scenarios (shopping, selling and buying), Idioms, Phrasal Verbs etc.*

### **1. Introduction**

Many universities and organisations have found their way into virtual worlds over the past 10 years to offer courses and seminars with qualifications and degrees. However, there are numerous organisations as well as individual teachers, who are still sceptical about learning and teaching in virtual worlds. One of the main factors that prevent teachers from getting involved with virtual worlds is technical insecurity and the fear that their students might be well ahead of them.

In order to familiarize learning groups, teachers or individual learners with virtual worlds and trigger interest for further use, CSiTrain started to create a series of films, called machinima to:

- promote learning in virtual worlds,
- make access easy through simple and visual instructions,
- trigger interest in learning and teaching in virtual worlds,
- demonstrate what can be achieved by learning in virtual worlds,
- understand the benefits and challenges of learning in 3D worlds.

Our vision is that 'It is never too late to learn something new' [1] and this is what CSiTrain devoted a machinima to, which was produced to encourage people, in this case especially older people or people with disabilities, who are not able to go to places or travel around and are bound to stay in their home, to get involved in virtual worlds and maybe learn a language or visit other places and meet people to talk to. In virtual worlds the avatar, which is the graphical representation of a computer user representing himself/herself or his/her alter ego, does not show – unless you wish to do so - age or impairments.

### **2. What is Machinima?**

The term machinima [2] derives from the words machine and cinema. The best way to explain what machinima is, is to get started with one. 'It's never too late to learn something new' captures some basic ideas of machinima and work in virtual worlds. Machinima can be defined as a technique for

making videos or films from 3D virtual spaces using screen-capture programs. Machinima allow people to document their activities and experiences in virtual worlds. Machinima are very powerful for language learning in giving students the opportunity to keep evidence of their creations or activities in a role play and provide food for thought and discussion afterwards. Creating their own scenarios encourages students to practice reporting back from places of virtual worlds visited and to analyse their presentation skills, when recording their performance.

### 3. Setting the scene for filming

In order to get started with filming you need a storyboard that provides everybody involved in the film, for example actors and camera operators, with detailed information about the props and the settings in order to complete the project successfully. This includes careful considerations about the shots and angles to be taken, the purpose of each shot, the props needed, and the story, whether it will be a dialogue a narrative or an action on the screen.



Depending on the roles and avatars required for different scenarios, you choose your avatar accordingly.

In order to capture a full screen video with audio narration, launch a trial version of the Camtasia Studio [3]. It will not be possible to go through the whole process of filming, saving the footage, editing and producing the film in this paper, but Camtasia Studio provides excellent tutorials with instructions how to proceed after recording and how to edit and produce the film.

When recording it is advisable to record the same scenario from different angles. It is important when making machinima to be able to animate the avatar according to its role.

In some scenarios you might want animate your avatar to give somebody a piggy back as demonstrated in the graphic.

You can always change your avatar according to the place, period and requirements.

### 4. Genres of machinima

CSiTrain produced a variety of machinima for language learning. The productions were categorized under the following genres of machinima:

1. Informative
2. Narratives
3. Humour - Jokes and Riddles (for children)
4. Grammar – including phrasal verbs and idioms
5. Instructions
6. Role-plays
7. Documentaries

It will not be possible to share samples of all productions in this paper, but you will find a good overview of the machinima produced on the CSiTrain website: <http://www.csitrain.net/videos/> or on the Youtube Channels under Carol Rainbow or Christel Schneider. A collection of German videos can be viewed on the German website: <http://chschneider.jimdo.com/lernmaterial/>

## 5. Learning grammar can be fun

We found that learning grammar can be motivating and enjoyable when shown in a film and in context. We first started with the phrasal verb get, where we put different meanings of the phrasal verb get into context..

The machinima, entitled 'A day in Sarah's life' [4], starts with Sarah getting up, then brushing her teeth, having a bath, getting dressed, following Sarah to different places like getting on the train, making phone calls in the office and so on.

From the feedback we received, students liked the verbs embedded in a story best. After watching the film, there are a lot of activities that can follow, i.e. ask students what they remember from Sarah's day, have them either write down or retell the sequence of actions and then talk about their own typical day or a very special day in their life etc.

## 6. Jokes and riddles

We had great fun in producing riddles and jokes for children and created 4 videos with 4 short jokes each. [5]. We found that different audiences reacted differently to the jokes presented. Children seemed to love them and immediately got engaged in creating their own little jokes. When showing the jokes to adults, some loved them and thought they were hilarious, others didn't think they were funny at all.

Humour is a subtle issue one should be aware of in teaching, especially when teaching students with different cultural backgrounds.

## 7. Narratives and story telling

One genre we loved producing just for fun is narratives. We produced quite a number of them, including 'Aesop Fables', 'Annabell and the Crocodile', 'What is a Circus' and others.

They encourage a lot of activities to follow in the classroom.

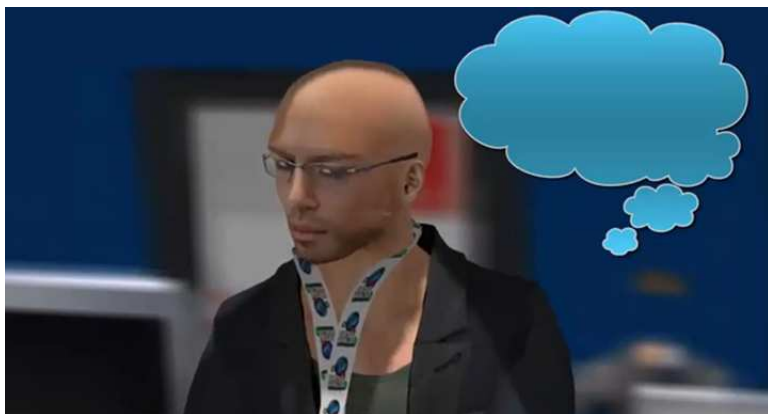
You will find a sample of activities that go along with the 'Owl and the Pussycat' a poem by Edward Lear, which could be provided for any of the other narratives in a similar way. [6]

## 8. Promotional and instructional machinima and documentaries

In order to promote learning in virtual worlds for the EU project EUROVERSITY [7] we produced machinima. One of them was 'Why teach in 3D worlds?' [8] This video has triggered a lot of interest. It includes interviews with various people in real life and Second Life and thus combines both worlds. This machinima has also embedded learning scenarios like buying clothes. It highlights the benefits of learning languages in virtual worlds and demonstrates what can be achieved in virtual worlds when learning languages.

Other genres like instructional machinima have proven very useful and quick to create when explaining how to get started with Second Life, how to move, communicate, teleport and so on. Documentaries of seminars, presentations or other events are easy to create and can be archived for later viewing.

## 9. Role plays and scenes produced by the learners



The kind of machinima we are producing more and more now are small clips, performed by the learners.

It is easier to analyse the dialogues when watching the film afterwards, discuss idioms, structure, grammar and have activities to follow as soon as you have noticed where the weaknesses are.

The following machinima demonstrates a typical scene at the airport [9]

The students were given the script of the scenario and then acted it out. The scene was recorded and then evaluated. At a next step empty speech bubbles were included in the film and the sound was taken off. The video was given to a group of students whose task was to fill in the speech bubbles and create their own little scenario which resulted in fantastic little dialogues produced by the students.

The students then performed their own little dialogues which were filmed and analysed by the students afterwards and compared with the original video. With this activity students were able to practice their writing, reading, listening and speaking skills.

## 10. Using machinima to give feedback

We discovered when facilitating and filming role plays that students enjoyed watching them afterwards. They usually are very proud about their performance. One of the greatest benefits of role-plays in virtual worlds is, that students seem to be less inhibited to act and use the target language, compared to real life situations. It is not them who make the mistakes, it is the avatar. The positive effect is, that through machinima students can monitor their avatar's progress and hence their own.

Error correction or feedback can be integrated when editing the film. The content used for this example is a discussion about the weather. The conversation is in German and was recorded in a real life virtual online course. The clip demonstrates the way correction is dealt with.



The teaching steps are as follows

1. Students receive a notecard with a scenario and different roles and familiarize themselves with the roles. They can either learn their roles by heart or read their text out loud.
2. Students perform – the performance is recorded.
3. The recording is edited – I usually integrate the dialogues in speech bubbles afterwards - as the video shows, and then add some explanations about new words, correction of intonation etc. at the end of the video.[10]

If you use machinima for self-directed learning sessions, it is a good idea to integrate quizzes or checking questions, where students get an immediate feedback to their responses.

The Camtasia Software allows to integrate quizzes with instant feedback. You can find an example with an integrated quiz in an introduction video that encourages learners of German to learn in Second Life. The quiz is optional. [11]

## 11. Summary

Teaching and learning experiences in virtual worlds have demonstrated how such way of learning can motivate students to learn, encourage them to engage themselves in role plays, visiting places and meet people speaking the target language and talk to them. Students can interact directly with experts to discuss issues [12]. Learning becomes enjoyable, situations and scenarios can be set up realistically as in shopping and buying, organising an exhibition, arranging business meetings and presentations. It encourages inhibited learners to engage themselves in the learning process.

Students can easily analyse their learning progress through machinima.

Machinima are a powerful and motivating tool to learn a language. There may be obstacles in some schools or organisations to get access to virtual worlds and sometimes technical problems could prevent a class or students to learn in virtual worlds. However, machinima produced in virtual worlds,



can easily be used in the real life classroom to enhance learning in a motivating way. They are easy to create and fun to watch.

## References

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